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Depictions of Catherine of Alexandria in Initial Miniatures on the Pages of Liturgical Chant Books

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Abstract

The analysis of the depictions of Saint Catherine of Alexandria is aimed at examining the choir books of the *Liturgy of the Hours* and potentially isolating artistic, historical and cultural connections in selected representations – miniatures and marginal decorations. The research was conducted through the lens of the hagiography of Saint Catherine in such a way as to capture scenes depicting crucial moments of her life and, above all, her martyrdom. This approach was meant to serve the primary purpose of the work, i.e. to present initial miniatures in liturgical chant books depicting images and scenes from the life of Saint Catherine and to attempt to typologize them in accordance with the hagiographic narrative. The choice of the subject matter resulted from the approaching 1000th anniversary of the organised cult of Saint Catherine of Alexandria. The text begins with an introduction to the topic, followed by a brief outline of the history of the Saint's worship in major centres in Europe and the hagiography of the Martyr, as well as a presentation of the depictions of Catherine of Alexandria preserved in the art of the Christian world. The closing chapter, which is of fundamental importance to the topic, constitutes an analysis of a selection of

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depictions of the Virgin of Sinai. The material collected therein contains lavish artwork – 18 miniatures depicting the Saint; these images were subsequently divided into several thematic groups according to hagiographic accounts. Antiphonaries and breviaries, two main types of books comprising the *Liturgy of the Hours*, were used as the primary sources for the work, as they are where miniatures depicting the Saint or – more often – scenes from her hagiography are most commonly found.

Keywords: initial miniatures, liturgical chants, Saint Catherine of Alexandria, hagiography.

Around the year 1030, near the capital of Normandy, Rouen, an event so ordinary took place that history did not record its exact date. It was, however, what soon led to an explosion of organised cult of Saint Catherine of Alexandria in Europe. Traces of the Great Martyr's veneration had, of course, been already visible elsewhere, yet they were isolated and did not directly affect the further development of her veneration. The event in question was the visit of a Greek monk from Sinai, who came to the ruler of Normandy to collect donations for the upkeep of his monastery. In exchange for the expected generosity, the monk presented the ruler with relics of Saint Catherine, which were then handed over to the recently consecrated Benedictine Abbey of the Holy Trinity. The abbey soon became famous thanks to miracles and various graces obtained from God through the intercession of the Virgin of Sinai. Shortly thereafter, as a result of its growing fame, the abbey became the European centre of the Great Martyr's cult and changed its name to that of the Saint.

The veneration given to the patron of the abbey (now defunct) is still evident today in countless works of art: paintings, sculptures, architecture, stained glass, seals, vestments and liturgical paraphernalia, including books. Christianity is, after all, a religion of the Word – liturgical texts are necessary to perform religious services. Books, especially ancient ones, containing recorded prayers and chants, serve not only as an inexhaustible fount of materials for the study of liturgical history, but are also a source of spiritual inspiration. Saint Catherine of Alexandria is a heavenly court figure who had a profound influence on the shaping of Europe's spirituality and remains its significant element to this day. The choice of the research topic was not only dictated by a passion for music, but also resulted from the approaching 1000th anniversary of the organised cult of Saint Catherine of Alexandria in Europe.

The Cult of Saint Catherine of Alexandria

The worship of Saint Catherine of Alexandria dates back to the Middle Ages, when the Martyr gradually became one of the most revered saints of the Christian world¹. The earliest mentions of the young Christian woman come from the 4th

¹ A. Paliouras, *The Monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai*, translated by H. Zigada, Sinai 1985, p. 28.

century and are found in the accounts of Eusebius of Caesarea². The oldest work describing her martyrdom is the 6th-century *Passio* by Symeon the Metaphrast³.

The scale of Saint Catherine's veneration is evidenced by numerous churches, chapels and monasteries dedicated to her name, as well as countless paintings, sculptures, stained glass windows⁴, seals, musical pieces, literary works⁵, treatises⁶ and sermons⁷. Many sacred art objects were also adorned with likenesses of the Saint⁸. More than a dozen breviary offices were composed in her honour by the second half of the 18th century⁹, and a number of hagiographic accounts of her life and martyrdom (e.g. the seventeen versions of *Passio Sanctae Catharinae*)¹⁰ were written. In late Middle Ages, the story of her life was popularized by mendicant orders¹¹.

Saint Catherine was worshipped as a martyr and a virgin both in the Eastern and Western Churches, with her liturgical feast always celebrated on the 25th of November. In the East, the centre of her veneration was Mount Sinai, where a monastery was founded by Justinian the Great. The Saint's relics, her head and

² K. Parzych-Blakiewicz, *Święta Katarzyna Aleksandryjska według źródeł leksykograficznych*, [in:] *Święta Katarzyna Aleksandryjska w wierze, pobożności, teologii i sztuce – dawniej i dziś. Perspektywa uniwersalna i regionalna*, ed. J. Jezierski, K. Parzych-Blakiewicz, P. Rabczyński, Olsztyn 2016, p. 32.

³ Ibidem, p. 33.

⁴ In England, for instance, the earliest stained glass depictions in the form of a hagiographic cycle have survived either in whole or in fragments in various locations, including St. Peter's Cathedral in York, the Church of St. Mary and St. Clement in Clavering (Essex), St. Mary's Church in Combs (Suffolk) and the chapel in Balliol College (Oxford).

⁵ J. Locher, *Carmen de sancta Catharina*, [in:] *Ad lectorem epigramma de diva Katherina*, printed by Johann Bergmann de Olpe, Basel 1496; P. Chalybs, *Dive Catharine virginis heroici vitae descriptio...*, printed by Fridericus Peypus, Nürnberg 1511.

⁶ G. Mansi, *De sancta Catharina virgine et martyre discursus quinque*, [in:] *Promptuarium sacrum ac morale*, vol. 4, printed by Ioannes & Ioseph Huisch, Coloniae 1720, pp. 193–211.

⁷ In the *Holy Cross Sermons*, the oldest pieces of prose written entirely in Polish (13th/14th century), the first text is a sermon for the feast day of Saint Catherine; A. Rzymyska, *Święta Katarzyna Aleksandryjska w literaturze polskiej*, [in:] *Święta Katarzyna Aleksandryjska w wierze, pobożności, teologii i sztuce...*, p. 180.

⁸ E.g. Vercelli, Museo del Tesoro del Duomo – a reliquary from a goldsmith workshop in Limoges, (ca. 1220–1225); Lüneburg, Museum für sakrale Textilkunst, St. Michaeliskloster – a tapestry depicting scenes from the Saint's hagiography, inventory number DI 24 (1500).

⁹ *Analecta Hymnica* contains the texts of only a few rhymed offices in honour of Saint Catherine: *Inclita sanctae virginis* (XII w.); *Benedicta sit immensa* (13th century); *Ave virgo speciosa* (13th century); *Gratulemur in honore* (13th century); *Virginis eximiae* (13th century); *Triumphandi concordando* (14th century); *lucundare superna patria* (16th century) and two offices without the first antiphon. Cf. vol. 18, ed. G.M. Dreves, Leipzig 1894, no. 37–39; vol. 26, ed. Cl. Blume, G.M. Dreves, Leipzig 1897, no. 69–74.

¹⁰ *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina antiquae et mediae aetatis*, vol. A-I, ed. Socii Bollandiani, Bruxellis 1898–1899, pp. 251–254.

¹¹ K. Parzych-Blakiewicz, op. cit., p. 37.

left hand, discovered in Egypt, were placed there¹². Pilgrims worshipping the Saint would receive monogrammed rings with the letter “K”, as well as medallions¹³. In Russia, her cult grew stronger after Catherine II ascended the throne¹⁴.

For the Western world, the Martyr’s cult began with the efforts of Benedictine monks from the Monte Cassino monastery¹⁵. It started as early as in the 8th century and over time flourished in France in the Benedictine abbey in Rouen, which was in possession of the Saint’s relics¹⁶. Numerous churches under the patronage of Saint Catherine of Alexandria were founded as a result¹⁷. Aside from regarding the Martyr as the patron saint of girls, the French also held her in special esteem due to the fact that Joan of Arc deemed Saint Catherine to be one of her heavenly advisors¹⁸. In some Western centres, the liturgical celebrations dedicated to Saint Catherine of Alexandria were more prominent than even the feast days of certain Apostles¹⁹.

Hagiography

Catherine of Alexandria lived at the turn of the 3rd century and probably died on 24 or 25 November 305²⁰. Details regarding her life and martyrdom come from hagiographies (*Passio*) and *Legenda aurea*, which was written on their basis²¹. She was born in Egypt²² to a wealthy family – according to some sources of aristocratic or royal descent²³. Her father, named Kustos²⁴, was either a king or a scholar. Catherine was also regarded as one due to the extensive and compre-

¹² *Encyklopedia katolicka*, ed. A. Bednarek et al., vol. 8: *Język–kino*, Lublin 2000, p. 986.

¹³ K. Parzych-Blakiewicz, op. cit., p. 39; the official website of Saint Catherine’s Monastery on Mount Sinai, *Saint Catherine*, <http://www.sinaimonastery.com/index.php/en/history/saint-catherine> [access: 5.04.2023].

¹⁴ H. Paprocki, *Św. Katarzyna Aleksandryjska. Kult*, [in:] *Encyklopedia katolicka*, vol. 8, col. 986.

¹⁵ K. Parzych-Blakiewicz, op. cit., p. 39.

¹⁶ V. Gazeau, *Normannia monastica*, vol. 2: *Prosopographie des abbés bénédictins*, Caen 2007, pp. 263–265.

¹⁷ K. Parzych-Blakiewicz, op. cit., p. 40.

¹⁸ *St. Catherine of Alexandria*, <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03445a.htm> [access: 4.04.2023].

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

²⁰ J. Zbiciak, *Św. Katarzyna Aleksandryjska. Życie*, [in:] *Encyklopedia katolicka*, vol. 8, col. 986.

²¹ Edition used by the author: Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda aurea*, printed by Johann Koelhoff de Lubeck, Coloniae 1479, f. 258v–261r.

²² P. Schill, *Ikographie und Kult der hl. Katharina von Alexandrien im Mittelalter. Studien zu den szenischen Darstellungen aus der Katharinenlegende*, München 2005 (doctoral dissertation, Ludwig-Maxymilian-Universität, München), p. 12.

²³ J. Zbiciak, op. cit., col. 986.

²⁴ P. Schill, op. cit., p. 12.

hensive education she had received²⁵. Accounts portray her as a beautiful young girl²⁶. Having encountered a hermit, the Saint converted to Christianity under the influence of his teachings. It was then that she experienced a mystical vision in which Christ appeared as her betrothed, symbolically placing a ring on her finger²⁷. The 18-year-old girl set out to strengthen the faith of other Christians who were suffering under persecution²⁸.

Another event in her life was the appearance before Emperor Maxentius in defence of Christians persecuted in his empire²⁹. Maxentius ordered his subjects to worship and offer sacrifices to pagan deities. Catherine refused to obey the emperor's command, for which she was persecuted along with other followers of Christianity. The Saint tried to prove the veracity of Christ's teachings to the emperor; unconvinced, Maxentius held a debate with pagan scholars intended to disprove the truths preached by Catherine and cause her to abandon her faith. The debate with philosophers and rhetoricians, yet another significant event in the Martyr's life, concluded with a victory of the young Christian woman, whose wisdom and bravery overcame the arguments of pagan sages and defended the Christian faith. In the wake of her speech, some of the assembled philosophers decided to convert to Christianity. The defeat of pagan scholars angered the emperor greatly. Displeased with the outcome of the debate, he imprisoned the young woman and subjected her to gruesome torture.

Starved and flogged, Catherine endured terrible suffering. She was tortured by having her body stretched out on a spiked wheel. The torment inflicted on the Saint failed to make her renounce her faith, however. Despite all the pain and suffering, she remained steadfast in her devotion to Christ's teachings. Her testimony led to the conversion of several guards who watched over her prison. In addition, liturgical texts compiled on the basis of *Passio Sanctae Catharinae*, particularly by Symeon the Metaphrast, mention two hundred imperial guards led by Porphyrius, who were martyred after accepting the faith through Catherine's teachings. The same texts also recount the conversion of Emperor Maxentius's wife³⁰. Intrigued by the Martyr's bravery and wisdom, the empress visited Catherine's cell in the company of her guards. A conversation with the prisoner caused the ruler herself to believe the Saint's teachings. This prompted the disgruntled

²⁵ M.M. Baker, *Piety and Politics. John Capgrave's The Life of Saint Katherine as Yorkist Propaganda*, Knoxville 2005, (master's thesis, University of Tennessee), p. 6.

²⁶ *Nobilis et pulchra*. The first nocturnal responsory – the beginning of a rhymed story about Saint Catherine, which is the basis for several offices, e.g.: *Analecta Hymnica*, vol. 26, no. 69.

²⁷ A. Paliouras, op. cit., p. 28.

²⁸ *Encyklopedia katolicka*, vol. 8, p. 986.

²⁹ J. Zbiciak, op. cit., col. 986.

³⁰ *Cum duce Porphyrio fit martyr Caesaris uxor*, II nocturn, 1 responsory. Cf.: *Analecta Hymnica*, vol. 18, no. 39.

emperor to sentence Catherine to death. A similar fate befell all who converted to Christianity due to the Martyr's testimony. Accounts also speak of Catherine's miraculous escape from the breaking wheel. According to the legend, an angel sent from the heaven intervened and destroyed the instrument of torture, rescuing the Saint, but harming the onlookers in the process. Ultimately, the Saint's life was brought to an end by beheading, and milk – a symbol of purity – is said to have flowed from the wound. Historians often date these events back to the year 305³¹. The legend also mentions the translocation of the Saint's body to Mount Sinai, which became a characteristic feature of offices for Saint Catherine³².

A proposal of marriage to Emperor Maxentius also appears in the hagiography of Catherine of Alexandria. The Saint rejected the offer, which, according to some accounts, resulted in her being exiled; other sources state that she was sentenced to death and torture as a consequence. Some anonymous authors suggest that the emperor's proposal was brought about by a desire to deliver a beautiful girl from a martyr's death. Each version, however, highlights the motif of the Saint's mystical marriage as a reason for the rejection of the marriage proposal.



Figure 1. The beginning of the *Qui colere* office. The scene of the discovery of Saint Catherine's body by the monks of the Sinai monastery. Den Haag, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, ms. 76 E 18 (Parisian manuscript, ca. 1450), f. 95r.

³¹ J. Zbiciak, op. cit., col. 986.

³² *Videntes autem populi sanctissimae Catherinae ab angelis deportari glorificaverunt Deum et crediderunt in eum* ("Then the people saw the body of blessed Catherine being carried away by angels singing God's praises, and believed in Him"). B. Mombrizio, *Sanctuarium seu vitae sanctorum novam hanc* editionem, vol. 1, Paris 1910, p. 287.

Catherine of Alexandria in the Art of the Christian World

In Christian iconography, there exist two main modes of depicting Catherine of Alexandria. She is portrayed as a young and beautiful maiden with loose, wavy hair and a crown on her head, wearing a richly adorned gown and holding a book in her hand. Alternatively, Catherine is presented as a martyr, accompanied by attributes of martyrdom such as a spiked wheel and a sword. The head or the entire figure of Emperor Maxentius is also visible at her feet. Another attribute of the Saint is a ring that is being placed on her finger by Child Jesus, symbolizing her mystical marriage to Christ.

Saint Catherine is often portrayed in Christian art. The oldest depictions include wall paintings from the 8th century in the catacombs of San Gennaro in Naples and San Sebastiano in Rome, in which she is shown holding a cross and a crown. Also common are her images with a book – an attribute symbolizing extensive education and erudition. They include a 12th-century relief from the portal of the Church of Our Lady in Aschaffenburg³³. From the 13th century onwards, Catherine was presented as a martyr with a wheel and a sword. The fresco from St. Mary's Church in Reutlingen dates back to the 14th century and portrays her as a martyr. In group depictions, she is often placed next to Virgin Mary and Child. Catherine is also counted among the four capital virgins – alongside Saints Dorothy, Barbara and Margaret, and is portrayed in altars dedicated to them.

Cycles depicting Saint Catherine of Alexandria typically illustrate the various stages of her martyrdom. An example of this can be found in 1425 frescos from San Clemente in Rome. In an altarpiece from the years 1475–1479, Hans Memling depicted a scene from the Saint's hagiography referencing the mystical marriage to the Christ Child. In Eastern art, Catherine is most commonly portrayed standing as an empress, with a crown on her head and wearing a richly embroidered gown³⁴. An icon from the monastery in Sinai, dating back to late 12th or early 13th century, presents Catherine with the Christ Child in the Hodegetria iconographic pose – depicted frontally in half-figure, with the Child on her right shoulder. The figures are set against a decorative background with geometric and floral ornamentation³⁵. In Polish art, Catherine was also frequently depicted from the early Middle Ages. Noteworthy here is an iconographic cycle of six scenes from a triptych by Hans von Suess, created in the years 1514–1515 and housed in a prelate's house near St. Mary's Basilica in Cracow. It includes scenes

³³ *Encyklopedia katolicka*, vol. 8, p. 986.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 988.

³⁵ *The dictionary of art*, vol. 34, ed. J. Turner, London 1998, p. 763.

from the Saint's life such as *The Conversion of Saint Catherine by a Hermit*, *Saint Catherine's Disputation with the Philosophers*, *The Flagellation of Saint Catherine* and *The Burial of Saint Catherine*³⁶.

Depictions of Saint Catherine in Liturgical Books

Depictions of Saint Catherine of Alexandria are an interesting element of liturgical book decorations. The role of initials, miniatures and floral embellishments may be likened to that of musical notes bringing life to a sung text. Ornamentation has a similar effect on written texts, lending them magnificent splendour and emphasizing their importance.

The depictions in question can be divided into several groups in accordance with the chronology of events found in the Saint's hagiography. The depictions discovered in manuscript sources do not exhaust all possible situations; Peter Schill distinguished several dozen artistic motifs corresponding to particular moments or situations from the Saint's hagiography³⁷. The following scenes, grouped to form a hagiographic cycle, have been isolated from the extensive iconographic material:

- group I: aristocratic descent of Saint Catherine;
- group II: Saint Catherine of Alexandria as a scholar;
- group III: mystical marriage to Jesus;
- group IV: appearance before the emperor in defence of Christians;
- group V: refusal to make a sacrifice to pagan gods;
- group VI: debate with the philosophers;
- group VII: imprisonment and torture;
- group VIII: death sentence;
- group IX: the Saint with attributes, no connection to a specific hagiographic scene.

The first group of depictions concerns the aristocratic descent of the Saint. The main attributes pointing to her noble birth are a gold crown and a decorative gown. Figure 2 shows a half-figure of the Saint incorporated into the blue ornamental initial *D(eus qui dedisti)*. This is the verse opening the so-called *Book of Hours (Horae)*, and hence the initial is placed directly next to the title *Incipit officium ad honorem beatissime Catharinae virginis*. The melody was not included for practical reasons – the verses were sung to a fixed, widely known melody.

³⁶ *Encyklopedia katolicka*, vol. 8, p. 989.

³⁷ P. Schill, op. cit., pp. 8–9.



Figure 2. Image of Saint Catherine with attributes incorporated into the initial *D* (*eus qui dedisti*). Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, ms. NAL 3255. Dominican breviary of Louis X (1st quarter of the 14th century), f. 540r.



Figure 3. Image of Saint Catherine with attributes incorporated into the initial *V* (*irginis eximiae*). Graz, Universitätsbibliothek, ms. 789. Benedictine breviary from Seckau (14th century), f. 333r.

Catherine is dressed in a pink gown, holding a green branch in her right hand, while her left hand is slightly raised. She has golden hair and a crown, as well as a halo of the same colour. The full figure of the Saint was depicted against a golden background in Figure 3, which is part of the initial composition *V* (*irginis eximiae*). It is a very popular antiphon opening the office for Saint Catherine. In this case, there is no written melody since the source is a breviary. Surrounded by a red halo, her head is adorned with a crown of the same colour. A golden braid falls over her right shoulder, and in her left hand, the Saint holds a sketched branch. She is dressed in a long gown with wide sleeves.



Figure 4. Image of Saint Catherine with attributes incorporated into the initial *V* (*irginis eximiae*). Freiburg, Adelhausenstiftung, ms. A 1206. Adelhausen antiphony (1461), f. 244v.

According to the hagiography, Catherine received a comprehensive education and was regarded as a scholar. In miniatures referencing her early life, the attribute of a book appears as a symbol of wisdom and knowledge. The miniature reproduced in Figure 4 shows the full figure of Catherine dressed in a long red gown adorned with a white floral ornament. The Saint is part of the initial composition of the letter *V(irginis eximiae)*. It is analogous to Figure 3 except for the fact that it is found in an antiphony – a book with musical notation. In her right hand, she wields a sword, a symbol of martyrdom, while in her left hand, a book with golden pages. The Saint has golden hair and a crown on her head, again surrounded by a halo. The background is rendered in the same colour as the book, and additionally embellished with a golden ornament and a red and golden decorative border.



Figure 5. Upper panel: the scene of refusal to make a sacrifice to pagan gods; lower panel: the scene of the mystical marriage. Frauenfeld, Historisches Museum Thurgau, ms. T 44414. Fragment of a page from a Cistercian antiphony (1310–1320), f. 1v.

The story of Catherine's mystical marriage is referenced by the image in the lower panel, as shown in Figure 5. The miniature is not part of an initial, yet it can be associated with the verse *Caritate vulnerata* from the responsory *Sponsa*

Christi gloriosa, which it was painted next to. Saint Catherine is depicted against a blue background with a crown and a halo, standing opposite Jesus, who is shooting arrows at her. One arrow is already visible in the Saint's body, near her heart. While this depiction is undoubtedly intriguing and rare, it is not the only one of its kind³⁸. An explanation for the use of such a motif may lie in the idea of the mystical marriage, implying a spiritual union of the betrothed. It can also be interpreted as an example of courtly love, i.e. pure love based on spiritual connection³⁹. It should be noted, however, that in Christian iconography, courtly love, celebrated by troubadours in the 12th–14th century, was symbolized by a lute, not a bow or another type of weapon. Therefore, it can be assumed that the aforementioned bow would be more apt for the mythological Cupid, whose attribute is the arrow of love⁴⁰. This is how antique motifs were incorporated into Christian art, which was not a rare occurrence in the Middle Ages. Recognizing this depiction (which is very original and unusual) as a variant of the mystical marriage is a concept put forward by the author of this article. Nevertheless, it would be worthwhile to explore this issue further, which is a research proposal for the future.



Figure 6. The scene of appearing before the emperor in defence of Christians incorporated into the initial *V*(*irginis eximiae*). Zürich, Schweizerisches Nationalmuseum, LM 4624-2. Breuiary (pars aestivalis) of Jost von Silenen, the bishop of Sion. (1493). f. 398v.

³⁸ Cz. Grajewski, *Caritate vulnerata. Wizerunki i śpiewy brewiarzowe o św. Katarzynie na karcie T 4441 z Historisches Museum Thurgau w Frauenfeld*, "Teologia i Człowiek" 2023, vol. 62, no. 2, p. 15.

³⁹ Ibidem, p. 17.

⁴⁰ Ibidem, pp. 17–18.

The appearance of Saint Catherine of Alexandria before Emperor Maxentius in defence of persecuted Christians was depicted in a miniature (Figure 6) comprising the initial composition *V(irginis eximiae)*. This antiphon appears very frequently at the beginning of the office (as the first chant in First Vespers) for Saint Catherine. In this case, the miniature is found in a Dominican antiphony.

The foreground depicts the scene of the speech delivered before the emperor. Dressed in a golden gown with a crown on her head and a halo, Catherine is addressing the emperor, who is seated on a throne on the left side of the illustration. On the right, there is a burning pyre foreshadowing later events – the breaking on the wheel and the miraculous burning of the instrument of torture. Behind the Saint and the emperor, there is a group of scholars – a portent of the upcoming disputation with Catherine on the matters of faith. The composition's background features a landscape depicting medieval walls, a river (moat) and a town.

The upper panel of the miniature – presented as Figure 5 – depicts the scene of Catherine's refusal to make a sacrifice to pagan gods. On the left, Emperor Maxentius is seated on a throne. He extends his hand towards a golden statue of an idol, commanding his subjects to worship it. Kneeling at his feet, they face the deity with obedience. On the opposite side of the illustration stands Saint Catherine, dressed in a green gown and covered by a red cloak. She holds a wooden wheel – the attribute of her later ordeal – and wears a golden crown atop her head, with a halo around it. Obedient to God's commandment, she turns towards Jesus and worships him, defying the emperor's will. The refusal to bow before the idol was emphasized with the position of the figures – the kneeling courtiers and the holy martyr facing away from the scene of honouring the pagan god⁴¹.



Figure 7. The scene of the disputation with scholars at the beginning of the office. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, ms. lat. 757. Franciscan missal and Book of Hours (14th century), f. 424v, 430r.

⁴¹ Ibidem, p. 15.

Another event from Saint Catherine's hagiography, the philosophical dispute with pagan scholars, was depicted in Figure 7. While not incorporated into an initial, it was painted at the beginning of the office. The actual chant – the first antiphon of Vespers – has its own ornamental initial, though it is non-figured.

The miniature presents the figure of the Saint standing on the left side and facing the debating philosophers, who are portrayed as old men with grey beards, wearing colourful robes. The martyr is dressed in a green gown underneath a pink shawl. In her left hand, she holds a red and golden book, and the index finger of her right hand is pointed at the interlocutors. Her head, adorned with a golden crown, is surrounded by a halo of the same colour. Between the Saint and the elders, there is a burning pile of pagan books, symbolizing the triumph of Catherine's faith and wisdom. The background is dark blue, with a golden geometric ornament.



Figure 8. A cycle of hagiographic depictions of Saint Catherine placed before the title of the office. Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, ms. 17820. Cistercian breviary *El Antiguo* from Santo Domingo de Silos (1246 r.), f. 1r.

The depiction of Saint Catherine's imprisonment and torture is shown in the first image of Figure 8. It is a cycle of hagiographic images found before the title of the office *Ave virginum gemma*, and is unrelated to the initial letter.

Visible against a yellow background is the instrument of torture – the wheel to which the body of the Martyr is tied. It is the only image showing the Saint being tortured on the wheel in the source material. It should be noted that this depiction does not correspond with the hagiography. According to the description, the Saint was ultimately not subjected to this torture, in spite of Emperor Maxentius's plans.

The subsequent depictions are devoted to the miraculous deliverance from torture on the wheel. Figure 9 is a fragment of a leaf in a Dominican breviary. The scene was painted on the lower margin, which is noteworthy because it does not appear at the beginning of the *Virginis eximiae* office, but during the

readings and responsories of the first nocturn. The illustration is not part of an initial. It depicts the Saint in a dark blue gown with a golden crown and a halo, kneeling and raising her hands towards the sky. Flames rain down from blue clouds in the heavens, destroying the instrument of torture behind Catherine. A hand symbolizing God appears among the clouds. Next to the broken wheels, human figures are watching the scene in terror.



Figure 9. The scene of Saint Catherine's miraculous deliverance from torture. Praha, Národní knihovna České Republiky, ms. XII.E.1. Breviary from Prague, pars aestivalis (1366–1385), f. 204r.



Figure 10. The scene of beheading incorporated into the initial *V*(*irginis eximiae*). Gand, Universiteitsbibliotheek, ms. BKT. 6. Brabantine antiphonary (1522), f. 329r.

The scene of sentencing Saint Catherine to death by beheading is shown in Figure 10. The miniature was incorporated into the initial *V*(*irginis eximiae*). It is an opening antiphon found at the beginning of the office for Saint Catherine in

a Norbertine antiphony from Brabant. The initial consists of golden and brown floral and faunal motifs; the composition is closed and exhibits linear perspective.



Figure 11. The scene of beheading incorporated into the initial *A* (*ve virgo speciosa*). Nürnberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, ms. 4984. Premonstratensian antiphony from Varlar (2nd half of the 13th century), p. 524.

The miniature depicts a genre scene; in the foreground, the martyr is kneeling in a white and gold gown and a blue cloak, with her hands folded and neck exposed, waiting to be struck with a sword by the executioner standing over her. The man is dressed in noble attire and a white turban. He is shown in the act of drawing his sword from its sheath. In the middle ground, there are two men wearing colourful, ornate garments. They are likely to be scholars, and the scene references an event from the hagiography – the disputation with pagan philosophers. In the background, the instrument of torture – a pair of wheels – is being consumed by fire. An angel appears on the right, shown in the act of saving Catherine. This is a reference to another event in the hagiography – the miraculous deliverance of the Saint from torture. The setting features a green forest on the left and a mountainous landscape with a river on the right, stretching out as far as the distant horizon.

The subsequent miniatures (Figure 11 and 12) depict the scenes of Saint Catherine's beheading against a golden background; these compositions are fragments of the following initials: *A* (*ve virgo speciosa*) – a figured initial which

begins the chant of First Vespers, and thus the entire office in the Premonstratensian antiphonary – and *V(irginis eximiae)*. This is again a figured initial that opens Vespers (the first antiphon) in an antiphonary created in southern Germany.

In Figure 11, a man bends over the reclining Martyr, who has golden hair and a blue gown, holding out a shining sword towards her. A ribbon with an inscription stretches out from Catherine to the heavens, symbolizing submission to God's will. The words on the ribbon are addressed to Jesus, whose head emerges from the clouds. The prayer reads: *Expecto pro te gladium, Jesu Re(x)* – “For your sake, King Jesus, I await the sword”; this is the third antiphon of Lauds (Figure 20) from the office *Ave virgo speciosa*, whose beginning (*initium*) in manuscript 4984 (Nürnberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, 1st half of the 13th century) is decorated by the illustration in question.



Figure 12. The scene of beheading incorporated into the initial *V(irginis eximiae)*. Karlsruhe, Badische Landesbibliothek, ms. St Peter 49. Antiphonary, pars de sanctis from southern Germany (ca. 1300 r.), f. 181r.

In the centre of the initial *V(irginis eximiae)*, Figure 12), the golden-haired martyr is shown kneeling with her hands raised upwards in a gesture of prayer. To her right is the emperor, dressed in a red robe with a crown of the same colour on his head. To the left stands the executioner, with his hand raised, holding a sword pointed at Catherine. Above the Saint, there is a green-winged angel, holding a crown meant for the Martyr. The scene of the beheading was also depicted in the third image of Figure 8. Despite the damage to the page, it is possible to see a knight holding a sword and the decapitated head of Catherine; the headless body of the woman, with her hands likely tied, is still standing before the executioner.



Figure 13. Image of Saint Catherine with attributes in the first nocturn. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, ms. lat. 1052. Parisian breviary of Charles V (1340–1380), f. 576v.



Figure 14. Image of Saint Catherine with attributes incorporated into the initial *P(assionem gloriosae)*. Private collection. Antiphonary of Elisabeth von Gemmingen, prioress of the Dominican convent of St. Mary Magdalene in Hasenpühl (ca. 1504), f. 171r.

Based on her hagiography, the main attributes of the Saint include: the sword, the wheel, the crown and the book. The first, as previously mentioned, symbolizes the martyrdom, the second – torture, the third – aristocratic descent, and the fourth – wisdom. There are numerous similar depictions of Saint Catherine, portraying the martyr with her attributes as fragments of figured initials. The most common type of depiction is the full-figure image of Catherine with a golden crown on her head, dressed in a colourful gown and a cloak. Her right hand, holding a wheel, is slightly raised upwards, while the left supports a sword which rests on the ground. Such a portrayal of the Saint is featured in Figure 13. This miniature is not part of an initial; it was painted in the first nocturn, just before the reading of the first lesson – the beginning of the so-called History. The emperor is also seen lying at Catherine's feet, and the martyr is pointing the sword at him. A similar full-figure depiction of the Saint is found in Figure 14 – the initial *P(assionem gloriosae)* is painted at the beginning of the office for Saint Catherine – the first antiphon of First Vespers, characteristic, for instance, of the traditions of the Canons Regular of Žagań. As in previous images, Catherine is holding a wheel in her left hand, and a sword in her right. However, the sword is not buried in the ground, but raised and resting on the Saint's arm. A golden crown adorns her head.

The half-figure of the Martyr holding a wheel was depicted in Figure 15. The Saint, wearing a red gown and a dark blue cloak, has golden hair, a crown and a halo of the same colour. The dark blue background inside the initial letter

D(eus qui dedisti legem Moysi) is complemented by golden ornaments. This is a figured initial beginning the oration performed at the end of First Vespers. In this case, it belongs to the office *Inclita sanctae virginis*.



Figure 15. Image of Saint Catherine with attributes incorporated into the initial *D(eus qui dedisti legem Moysi)*. Wrocław, Biblioteka Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, ms. IF 396. Breviary of the Canons Regular of Żagań (1446), f. 206v.



Figure 16. Image of Saint Catherine with attributes at the beginning of the office. Zürich, Schweizerisches Nationalmuseum, LM 4624-2. Breviary (pars aestivalis) of Jost von Silenen, the bishop of Sion (1493), f. 398v.



Figure 17. Image of Saint Catherine of Alexandria with attributes incorporated into the initial *D(eus qui dedisti legem Moysi)*. Clermont-Ferrand, Bibliothèque Municipale, ms. 69. Roman breviary (before 1482), f. 611v.

The attribute which references the miraculous deliverance is the broken wheel. Depictions of such kind are shown in Figures 16 and 17. Figure 16 is not an initial; it is found at the beginning of the office which – unusually – begins with a *capitulum*. Unfortunately, the absence of an opening antiphon makes it impossible to determine which office it is. The miniature presents the fair-haired Saint standing in a golden gown decorated with green floral ornamentation, over which she wears a pink cloak. In her left hand, she is holding a green branch, and in her right – a sword driven into a broken wheel at her feet. The background features a forest landscape with hills and a vertical golden ornamental band behind the Saint. A similar scene is visible in Figure 17, a miniature incorporated into the letter *D* (*eus qui dedisti legem Moysi*). The oration is performed at the end of First Vespers, and in this case, the office begins with the aforementioned inscription, so the initial is visible directly under the title *Catharinae virginis et martyris*. The golden-haired Catherine, with a crown atop her head and a halo, stands dressed in a decorative gown and a cloak, holding a sword in her left hand and a branch in her right. The background features a hilly landscape and the broken wheel on the right, burning from flames raining down from the sky. Depicted below the torture device are the injured witnesses of the ordeal.



Figure 18. Image of Saint Catherine with attributes and the initial *V* (*irginis eximiae*). Darmstadt, Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek, ms. 29. Cantatorium from a Benedictine monastery, probably in Stein am Bodensee (1558), f. 36v.

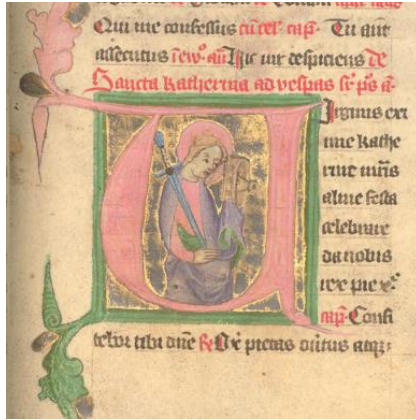


Figure 19. Image of Saint Catherine with attributes incorporated into the initial *V(irginis eximiae)*. Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica, Arch. Cap. S. Pietro, ms. B. 82. Florentine breviary (1423), f. 384r.

Figure 18 is an intriguing depiction. The standing figure of Catherine is shown behind the golden letter *V(irginis eximiae)*, which is a figured initial beginning First Vespers in a cantatorium likely from the Benedictine monastery in Stein am Bodensee. The Saint is dressed in an ornate pink gown, has a crown on her head and props a nearby wheel with her left hand, while her right hand wields her attribute – a sword buried in the ground through the folds of her gown. The background of the composition is blue, with green grass painted at the bottom.

A half-figure of the Saint with the attributes of martyrdom is depicted in Figure 19 – a miniature incorporated into the letter *V(irginis eximiae)*, which is a figured initial beginning the office of the same title. In this case, it is a breviary, so it does not contain musical notation. In the illustration, Catherine – wearing a pink gown and a purple gown – holds a wooden wheel in her left hand, and a silver sword in her right. A rare detail is that the Saint holds the sword not by the hilt, but by the tip of the blade. A golden crown rests on her head as a symbol of royal descent.

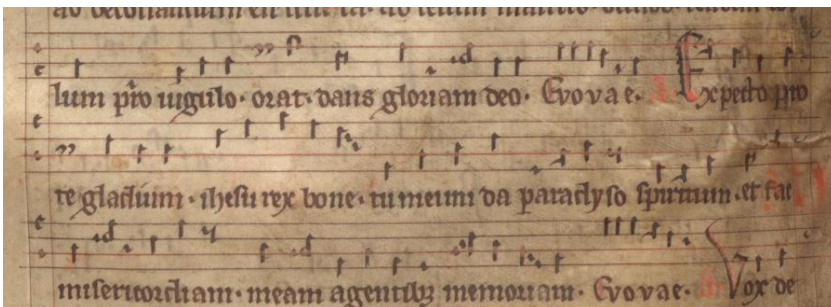


Figure 20. Antiphon *Expecto pro te gladium*. Nürnberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, ms. 4984, p. 524.

The vast majority of depictions discussed above are figured initials. The miniatures predominantly include those with the letters “V” and “D” with images of the Saint or scenes related to her hagiography. This is an obvious consequence of the existence of the first antiphons of the respective offices: *Virginis eximiae Catharinae, Ave virgo speciosa*, or the beginning of the widespread oration in her honour: *Deus qui dedisti*, (alternative version: *Omnipotens sempiternus Deus qui dedisti*)⁴². An exception is the depiction in Figure 17, in which the letter “V” is distinctly set apart in the composition and appears before the figure of Catherine herself. Apart from the figured initials, there also exist marginal illuminations, yet they are far less common. Their artistic value is no less significant, though some ornaments – seemingly added later, over the course of using the manuscript – are of a lesser artistic value or even unfinished. Notably, the most poignant detail of Saint Catherine’s hagiography – the translocation of her body to Mount Sinai by angels – was not included in any of the miniatures. While it remained relevant in European panel painting until the Reformation, this motif has been virtually ignored by painters after 1517⁴³. Nevertheless, it is a unique scene in hagiology and is essentially only associated with Saint Catherine of Alexandria.

The information extracted from literature on the propagation of the Saint’s cult and her depictions in Christian art made it possible to place the painting in question within a broader cultural and historical context. The study of illuminations also resulted in formulating the hypothesis that the depiction of Jesus shooting arrows at the Saint in a fragment of a Swiss antiphonary may be attributed to one of the scenes from the hagiography – the mystical marriage. Incidentally, it is a very unusual approach to the idea of nuptial love in Christian art, and possibly the only one found in manuscript painting. A more in-depth analysis of this artistic phenomenon is a research proposal worth pursuing in the future, especially considering the imminent 1000th anniversary of the organized cult of Saint Catherine of Alexandria.

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Wizerunki Katarzyny Aleksandryjskiej w miniaturach inicjałowych na kartach ksiąg śpiewów liturgicznych

Streszczenie

Analiza wizerunków św. Katarzyny Aleksandryjskiej ukierunkowana została na przebadanie ksiąg chórowych *Liturgii godzin* oraz ewentualne wyizolowanie związków artystycznych, historycznych i kulturowych w wybranych przedstawieniach – miniaturach i zdobieniach marginalnych. Postępowanie badawcze przeprowadzono przez pryzmat hagiografii Świętej tak, aby uchwycić sceny przedstawiające węzłowe momenty życia i – przede wszystkim – męczeństwa św. Katarzyny. Ten zabieg miał posłużyć zasadniczemu celowi pracy, jakim było ukazanie miniatur inicjałowych w księgach śpiewów liturgicznych, przedstawiających wizerunki i sceny z życia Świętej Katarzyny, oraz próba ich typologii zgodnie z narracją hagiograficzną. Wybór tematu wynikał ze zbliżającego się jubileuszu 1000-lecia zorganizowanego kultu św. Katarzyny z Aleksandrii. Tekst rozpoczyna wstęp wprowadzający do tematu. Następnie skrótkowo przedstawiono historię kultu Świętej sprawowanego w najważniejszych ośrodkach w Europie, hagiografię Męczennicy oraz zaprezentowano wizerunki Katarzyny Aleksandryjskiej utrwalone w sztuce chrześcijańskiego świata. Ostatni rozdział, zasadniczy dla tematu, jest analizą wyselekcjonowanych wizerunków Dziewicy Synajskiej. Zebrany w nim materiał zawiera bogatą szatę graficzną – 18 miniatur z obrazami Świętej; przedstawienia te zostały następnie podzielone na kilka grup tematycznych, zgodnie z przekazami hagiograficznymi. Podstawą źródłową pracy były dwa podstawowe typy muzycznych ksiąg *Liturgii godzin* – antyfonarze i brewiarze, gdyż to w nich najczęściej obserwuje się miniatury ukazujące samą Świętą lub – częściej – momenty z Jej hagiografii.

Słowa kluczowe: miniatury inicjałowe, śpiewy liturgiczne, św. Katarzyna Aleksandryjska, hagiografia.