

Herberti De miraculis as a source to the history of religion of western Slavs

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The author presents the results of his research into one of forgotten source materials in the field of religion in Slavic studies, the story “Quomodo zabulus...” from the collection “De miraculis” (1178–1180) by Herbert of Clairvaux. The analysis of the copy leads to the conclusion that it shows the beliefs of the tribes of frontal Pomerania as well as their confrontation with Christianity on the eve of the battle of Dymino (1164) which put an end to Paganism in this faction of western Slavs.

Keywords: Herbert of Clairvaux, De miraculis, Slavs, paganism, religion.

The corpus of historic sources which was in recent years reintroduced or rather discovered for Slavic studies is supplemented by an unknown piece “Herberti turrium sardiniae archiepiscopi De miraculis libri tres,” entitled “Quomodo zabulus in scemate regio seipsum ydalatris ostendebat.”

That collection, published by Jacques Paul Migne in his “Patrologiae Latinae” series,¹ came into being in the years 1178–1180. Its author is Herbert, from the Cistercian Order, one of the disciples of St. Bernard of Clairvaux. “Liber de miraculum” is a collection of examples whose source were mainly the Clairvaux monks’ verbal reports. The purpose of the reports was to boost the morale of the novices. The texts represent a paranetic tendency and their purpose was propagating the model of piety and fulfilling didactic and moralistic function in the circle of the French Cistercian monks.

It is known that the author of that collection came from southern France and that he spent his probation years time 1153–1168 in Clairvaux. In the years 1168/9 and in 1178 he was an Abbot in Champagne. Then, in 1181 he arrived in Clairvaux again and he became Abbot Henry’s secretary. In the same year 1181, Herbert became the head of the bishopric in Torres in Sardinia, where he died in 1198.²

The most common edition of the work in question did not include the text “Quomodo zabulus...,” which is discussed here and which is included in three manuscripts only, stored in Munich, Paris and Vienna.

The first critical edition of the text, entitled “De paganis in regio scemate aparente Christianum, qui se consignaverat, indignante” is provided by Paul Joachim

¹ Herberti De miraculis.

² Kompatscher 2008.

Georg Lehmann in 1927.³ Later, that piece is cited several times by Weibull,⁴ Palm,⁵ and Szacherska.⁶ Recently, Kompatscher took on the task of collating the text.⁷ Moreover, it was mentioned in other texts.⁸ However, generally it is not in wider scientific circulation. Despite the fact that it is unique and it contains numerous details of the religious life of western Slavs in medieval times, not to be found in any literary sources on Slavic studies, that text was not the subject of interest of researchers on Slavic studies.

“Quomodo zabulus...” deals with Christianization on western-Slavic territories, during which the monks had an opportunity to have direct contact with the Slavic population. According to Szacherska, the plot of the story is based on the island of Rugia which, in the period under discussion, underwent intensive Danish missionary activity. Described in the text, rites, e.g. cult feasts on fixed days, drinking bouts, theatricalization elements in the official cult of the time (spectacular “revelations” of the deity), determine unquestionable cognitive qualities of the text.

The text is divided into three parts. It begins with indicating the informer (monk Henry Clairvaux) and it ends with a theological commentary. The focus is the report of one of the monks (cited after Henry) about his journey “in terram paganorum”, which was inserted by the hand of Danish Cistercian Order in the “Book of Miracles”. The biggest attention is drawn by those parts of the commentary that contain the information about theology and the organization of the cult in medieval Slavs, which carry interesting evidence in the context of the issue of theological interpretation of pagan beliefs.

However, the explicitly literary character of the text should be emphasized, closest to an exemplum as far as genre, whose aim is, first of all, ideological propaganda and, to a lesser degree, documentation of historic realities (essential for a medieval editor only if they were of use to didactics). However, first of all, pagan sacrum in “Quomodo zabulus” by Herbert is shown clearly under the influence of phraseology and representations taken from the Bible and from patristic literature. Theological determinants of the description occur as early as the information about cult objects in Slavs, e.g. temple, statue, cult organization, as well as annual festivities attended by numerous people. During the festivities, cult feasts were organized and a separate table for the deity with plenty of dishes and drinks was laid. Theological determinants of the description also occur as far as negative valorization of described events and characters, desired from the moralistic point of view of the text.

An anonymous god is defined as spirit (Latin *spiritus*), deity (Latin *numen*) and demon (Latin *demon*). A typical literary measure is substituting a specific teonym, and replacing it with a definition, e.g. *devil* (*the angel of light*), *Satan*, etc., as well as multiplication *rulers* (*princes of*) *darkness*, derived from the biblical set of names and epithets referring to Evil. Moreover, we deal with axiological depreciation of pagan (strange) sacrum, which is achieved by the use of adjectives such as *evil*, *terrifying*, *wild*, *shameless*, also derived from clichés of biblical origin, similarly to other epithets

³ Lehmann 1927: 79–80; 1961: 272.

⁴ Weibull 1931: 288; 1948: 403.

⁵ Palm 1937: 44–48.

⁶ Szacherska 1968: 88–90.

⁷ Kompatscher 2005: 255–256.

⁸ Łowmiański 1979: 200; Caocci 2002: 252.

and similes belonging to a literary convention of biblical or patristic origins. Undoubtedly, they obscure the real image of pagan religion by laying on it a subjective filter of the author's (Christian) picture of the world.

The whole account concentrates on the participation of a young Christian diplomat in a pagan celebration, which included the speech of the deity to the gathered, among whom the Christian is hiding. In the speech, it is said about some other centre of cult from which the deity was superseded by Christianity further back and about the present centre of cult where the deity found "shelter" after "late return". A great deal of evidence indicates that transferring the cult to the new centre is the point here. However, there are no details about that.

"*Quomodo zabulus in scemate regio seipsum ydalatris ostendebat*" does not contain any information about the time and place of described events or the name of the deity in question. Comparing it with other texts from the "Book of Miracles" and with Latin biographies of St. Otto of Bamberg⁹, the text allows us to fill that gap.

The series came into being in the years 1178–1180 and it is gathered from the context that the described events took place before 1160, as the young Christian in question returned to his homeland (Denmark) to the abbey Vitae Schola set up in 1158 by Cistercian, Henry of Clarivaux. It proves that his diplomatic mission to a pagan land must have taken place at the end of the 1150s. Consequently, if we assume that adolescence means about 20 years of age, Herbert was about 50 while writing his work.

It is difficult to relate unequivocally the term 'terra paganorum' to a specific territory, based only on the text of the "Book", although the term appears several times alongside "regione Sclavoniae". The information from "Monk Herbert's Book of Miracles" corresponds partially with *The Life of St. Otto*, thanks to which the latter source may prove useful here. First of all, in both of them there is a record about the revelation of a god, who utters threats and who demands worship of himself. In the latter source, his Latin name Jarovit/Gerovit is mentioned.

In the light of the information from "The Life [...]", Wołogoszcz and Hobolin were the centres of the cult of Jarovit/Gerovit.¹⁰ In the reports about the cult of that deity in Wołogoszcz, the researchers suspect the reminiscence of the existence of the temple with his image in it, whereas in Hobolin, there is an explicit proof of the existence of the temple with the deity's gold shield and the rites worshipping him with the use of a flag. However, in the latter case, the mention of the statue is not explicit. It should be emphasized that it is Wołogoszcz, a seaside town or its vicinity that are the most real arenas of the events described in "Qomodo [...]". Moreover, in both of the texts, diplomatic measures connected with the preliminary phase of Christianity are discussed, which would support the above thesis. The events described in them happened in different periods of time (St. Otto's missions – the 1120s; alleged negotiations – the 1150s).

Perhaps the deity's speech about the deity's escape from the cross is a hint at Otto's activity which ended up with the baptism of Wołogoszcz in 1128. The vicinity of the sea also meant a great deal in that case, which is highlighted in the narration of Jarovit/Gerovit. Probably the "late return" of the Polabian deity is actually an unknown pagan reaction that took place in Wołogoszcz between the 1130s and the 1150s.

⁹ Vita Prieflingensis; Ebonis Vita S. Ottonis; Herbordi Dialogus de vita S. Ottonis.

¹⁰ Ebonis Vita S. Ottonis, op. cit., III 3, 8; Herbordi Dialogus de vita S. Ottonis, op. cit., III 4.

Pomerania was then the arena of turbulent political events. In 1147, a crusade against Baltic Slavs was initiated by Pope Eugene III and Bernard of Clairvaux. The course of the crusade was described in *Vincent of Prague's Annales* and in *The Chronicle of the Slavs* by Helmold. Pomerania was still considered pagan and, consequently, the Crusades were undertaken to spread Christianity.

Chronology, as well as general similarity to the description of the Świątowitz cult by Saxo Grammatyk had Szacherska assume that it was Rugia described by Herbert; it was there that the fights continued, whereas Pomerania had already been officially Christian. However, that similarity is general enough (a statue in the temple, oracles, ritual feasts), and the differences were significant enough. Consequently, identifying Rugia as the "pagan land" is not convincing. However, identifying the "pagan land" as one of the towns of the Wołogoszcz area is justified philologically (semantic identity of the deity described by St. Otto's hagiographers and by informer Herbert) and historically (possible reminiscences of St. Otto's mission). If such an interpretation proved correct, the confessors of Jarovit in the analysed text would have to be identified as the tribe of Doleńcy, who occupied the terrestrial part of Anterior Pomerania (the Dymin area).

The detailed analysis of the text "Quomodo zabulus..."¹¹ leads us to propose the following research hypotheses:

Semantically and functionally, the deity mentioned in the text is identical with the deity described by means of teonym Jarovit/Gerovit. It was placed in the third economic function in the Dumézil Indoeuropean three-functional theory. The analysed text describes one of the festivities of the spring cycle, which the mention of a cult feast suggests. Taking care of food, as well as the power over life and fertility (the deity could decide about diseases, plagues) were in the authority of the deity.

An ideological anti-Christian announcement including the reference to Christianization, to translation of the cult and to attempts of re-Christianization is the essence of a ritual speech.

For moralistic purposes, a primary oral report underwent editing measures consisting in transferring a group virtual addressee of a dialogue to an individual recipient, i.e. a "young and of weak faith" Christian.

The described events were set in one of the towns of Anterior Pomerania neighbouring the Wołogoszcz area (most certainly Dymin)

The described events happened before 1160, most certainly towards the end of the 1150s. One of the texts in the Slavic cycle "De miraculis" containing a clear chronological reference, mentions a big battle against the Slavs near Dymin in 1164. Except for that there is no further information about paganism of Pomeranian Slavs.

Conclusion: considering all the circumstances, the text of "Quomodo zabulus" seems one of the last, but, at the same time, one of the most interesting descriptions of still lively traditional spiritual culture of the Slavs in the early medieval period. The area of Dymin seems to be the most real arena of the events described in it, which is supported by philological and historical arguments.

Below there is a Latin original of the text, cited after Szacherska, as well as its translation into English.

¹¹ Introduced by the author more closely in the paper: Łuczyński 2010.

Annex

Herberti turrium sardiniae archiepiscopi De miraculis libri tres

Quomodo zabulus in scemate regio seipsum ydalatris ostendebat. XCIII.

Vir venerabilis Henricus, quondam monachus Claraeuallis et nunc iam per annos plurimos abbatizans in regione Danensi, de quodam honesto monasterii sui converso tale aliquid nobis significavit. Predictus itaque frater dum adhuc secularem habitum gereret, in iuvenili aetate perrexit ad negociandum in supradictam terram paganorum. Est autem in illis locis simulacrum inmundum, in quo demon atrocissimus habitans et responsa plurima prestans pro solo timore ab illis incolis excolebatur. Siquidem interdum visibiliter seipsum ostendens, quasi tyrannus aliquis vultu et voce terribilis apparebat atque miserrimos homines illos minis ac verberibus illatis ad suam reverenciam imperiose cogebat. Preterea morbos, clades, sterilitates atque similia ex divina permissione inducens frequenter, terrorem suum super infidelibus populis incutiebat. Si quando vero ab huiusmodi malignacionibus cessare aut micus agere videbatur, magni beneficii largitor tenebatur. Statutis quoque diebus in anno soliti erant undique ad phanum ipsius sollempniter convenire et pollutis sacrificiis participando convirare. Aliam vero e regione mensam laucioribus epulis copiose refertam seorsum apponebant, que videlicet omnia spiritus ille gulosus plerumque adveniens avida voracitate invisibiliter absorbebat. Cumque universa consumpta conspicerent, tunc et ipsi letanter epulabantur, quia crapulanti numinis gratiam iam secure prestolabantur. Quadam itaque die, convenientibus in unum, contigit et interesse prefatum illum iuvenem christianum. Et ecce repente apparuit ibi notifer ille spiritus imperialibus ornamentis fantastice redimitus, qui residens in throno suo in superbia et in abusione concionabatur ad illos. Porro miserandi homines illi tanta demonis impudencia ludificati in aspectu eius obstupescebant et execrando prodigio divinitatis honorem impendebant. At vero iuvenis christianus cum talia cerneret, intelligens esse diabolum in angelum lucis transfiguratum, exhorruit a facie maligni et invocans nomen Christi adhibita pectori suo manu signum crucis latenter impressit. Neque enim audebat se propter gentilium multitudinem in fronte signare. Ferum tamten spiritus nequam quae facta fuerant in abscondito linceis oculis deprehendens materna iuvenis lingua allocutus est eum dicens: Eia, perfide christiane, decito mihi, quid est, quod in abscondito machinaris? Ut quid nunc in pectore tuo operiente te pallio crucem illam idibilem figurasti? Numquid etiam de phano meo eicere me queris? Ex quo venisti ad terram meam, ego inde exivi ac fugiendo crucem tuam usque nunc in pelago latitavi et nunc tandem sero reversus, ne pateris me a facie crucis tue saltem in delubris meis habere refugium? Nunc enim saturatus epulis meis armatus es contra me signaculis tuis iterumque me de statione mea tanquam proditor impius violenter expellis. Cum ergo barbari illi homines hanc vocem demonis audirent et minime loquelam intelligerent, satis superque mirabantur, quid diceret aut cui loqueretur. At vero iuvenis audiens et intelligens pavidus in turba latitabat, quia fragilis adhuc et fide tenellus teneri ab infidelibus atque ad supplicium protrahi metuebat. Disparente autem demone solutoque conventu cum grandi admiratione recessit et ex hiis, quae viderat et audierat, multum in fide christiana profecit. Postmodum autem cum ad natalem patriam repedasset, in supradicto monasterio se convertit, ubi religiose conversando domino militare curavit et ea, quae sibi acciderant, ad multorum edificacionem abbati et fratribus indicavit. Si

quid nos ad ista dicemus: Si tanta est virtus et gloria crucifixi, ut ante pusillanimum et modice fidei christianum propter signum crucis et trepide et latenter inpressit, principes tenebrarum ita diffugerent, quid putamus fieret, si viri virtutum et fortes in fide predicatorum cum gladio spiritus, quid est verbum Dei, accederent. Et quantas hostium strages darent, quantas gentilium turbas in brevi acquirerent, vere cito cognoscerent de verbo veritatis, quid legitur in psalmo: Cadent a latere tuo mille et d[ecem] m[ilia] a[d] d[exteris] tuis. Et in Levitico: Persequentur quinque de vobis - centum alienos, et centum ex vobis - decem milia. Pro huiusmodi ergo rogandus est dominus messis, ut mittat operarios in messem suam. Messis est enim multa et operarii autem pauci. Verum tamen ipsi pauci, immo ut verius dicam, paucissimi, qui in partibus illis reperiuntur in missis undique; falcibus predicationis cum tanta benedictionis habundantia et animarum fruges Domino colligunt et ut nimia paganorum milia nuper in brevi tempore baptizata cottidie magis ac magis multiplicentur et adeo ut episcopi atque metropolitani in civitatibus plurimis nunc de novo creentur et vinea domini Sabbaoth in populis barbaris, qui vini forsitan nomen antea audierant, vinum tamen non biberant, hodie longe lateque propagetur.

*The book of miracles by monk Herbert
How did the devil in regal gowns appear to idolaters*

This is what dignified-looking Henry, once monk Claraevallis, now an abbot residing in Denmark for many years, announced to us about a noble monk from his abbey. The monk in question, now still wearing holly gowns, in his youthful years went to the pagan land mentioned above for the purpose of negotiations. However, on that territory there is an unclean statue in which the most frightening god inhabits who gives a lot of responses and who is worshipped by the local inhabitants only because they fear it. Sometimes he made himself visible and appeared as if a tyrant with a terrifying countenance and voice and he made the unhappiest people worship him by means of threats and beating. Besides that, on God's order, he frequently sent diseases, disasters, infertility and other plagues and aroused fear in the unfaithful. If it had ever seemed that he was giving up those criminal acts or that he was acting more gently, he was regarded as the minister of benefits. Every year, on fixed days they used to arrive festively to his temple from everywhere and they used to feast together although their participation was dishonor. They used to put a separate table and set it lavishly with delicious dishes, and all that used to be devoured in an invisible way by the glutinous spirit. Then, when they saw everything had been eaten, they themselves ate joyfully because they thought the tipsy deity would be favourable to them. One day, when they gathered in one place, the young Christian mentioned before happened to be there. Suddenly, the well-known spirit appeared, decorated with royal ornamentation, sat down on his throne and spoke to them in a proud and contemptuous way. Yet, those lamentable people mocked at by that shameless deity stood terrified at the sight of him and worshipped him. When the young Christian saw it, he understood that it was the devil turned into the angel of light. He felt fear of Satan and, calling the name of Christ, made a sign of cross secretly. He did not dare, however, to make the sign of cross openly on his forehead due to a great number of people. Having noticed what

he did secretly, the wild deity spoke to him in his native language. "Hey, you deceitful Christian, tell me what you are plotting in secrecy. Hiding under the cloak, you have made the hateful sign of cross on your chest. Are you also making an attempt to throw me out of my temple? I had left the place from which you came to my land, I hid in the sea escaping from your cross and now that I have returned, you do not allow me to find shelter from your cross in my own temples. You have eaten my food, you have armed against me with your signs and once again you are expelling me against my will from my domicile like ungodly traitor". When the pagans heard the demon's voice, they hardly understood the conversation and they were very surprised at who participated in the conversation and what it was about. The alarmed young Christian who heard and who understood the speech, hid in the crowd because he was weak and young in his faith to such a degree that he was afraid he would be captured by the unfaithful and punished with death. However, when the demon disappeared, the crowd dispersed, the young man receded in astonishment and what he saw and heard helped him to deepen his Christian faith. Soon, when he returned to his native land, he went to the abbey mentioned above, where he was in the service of God, and he revealed to the abbot and to other monks what had happened to him, in order to strengthen them spiritually. What else can be said: if the power of the Cross is so big that a Christian of small faith secretly and fearfully made the sign of cross and as a result the rulers of darkness escaped, what do you think happens if men of virtue and missionaries strong in faith arrive, and what is word of God? How many piles of corpses they made, what big crowds of pagans they gained in a short time, they found it out from the words of truth which are in the Psalm: a thousand fall by your side, and ten thousand to your right. And in the Ministerial Book: Five of you will chase a hundred, and a hundred will chase ten thousand. God is desirable for this kind of harvest in order to send harvesters to reap. Harvest is plentiful, but very few harvesters. However, those very few harvesters who came from everywhere are blessed profusely and they reap the harvest of souls for God. As a result, thousands of pagans only just baptized, in a short time grow in number more and more to such a degree that the bishops and metropolitans are appointed in many towns and God's grape-vine is spread far and wide among barbaric people, who may have heard the name of wine but they did not taste the wine.

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Herberti De miraculis как источник для истории религии западных славян

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Автор представляет результаты исследований одного из забытых славистических религиоведческих источников – рассказа „Quomodo zabulus...” из сборника “De miraculis” (1178-1180) Герберта. Анализ памятника позволяет сделать вывод, что в нем представлены верования племен Предней Померании, а также их столкновения с христианством накануне сражения под Дымино (1164), которое положило конец язычеству этой ветви западных славян.

