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Not for the Poor The *Biblia Pauperum* on Medieval and Renaissance Tiled Stoves in Poland

Nie dla biedaków
Biblia pauperum na średniowiecznych
i renesansowych kaflach piecowych z Polski

Abstract: As *Biblia pauperum*, we define not only books with an abbreviated text of Sacred Scripture, which were dominated by illustrations, but also cycles of artistic representations, e.g. painted on the walls of churches or decorating window stained-glass windows. However, other iconographic sources, such as stove tiles, are much less known. As archaeological monuments, most of

ten preserved in fragments, they have not yet been thoroughly analysed. The article discusses medieval and Renaissance tiles with figural scenes with biblical motifs. As the archaeological sites most often feature several tiles decorated with similar thematic motifs, they should be treated as evidence of a conscious decision to show the cycle of events described in the Bible on the stove.

Keywords: *Biblia pauperum*, Middle Ages, Renaissance, stove tiles, biblical motifs, material culture, archaeology

The term *Biblia pauperum* should mostly be referred to a certain type of illustrated books¹, however, it was also commonly used to describe wall paintings in churches (polychrome paintings and frescoes), sculptures, and stained-glass windows (Trzos 2010: 235–237; Przybyłok 2016: 145–162; Hyland 2018; Wardzyński 2018: 28–31).

1 In the European literature, there are three types of publications dominated by illustrations: the *Bibles moralisées*, the *Bibles historiales*, and the *Biblia pauperum*. In Poland, however, the last term is definitely most frequently used to describe visualised biblical content in the fine arts. The first attempts at interpretation can be found in: R. Fawtier, *La Bible historiée toute figurée de la John Rylands Library. Reproduction intégrale de manuscrit French 5 accompagnée d'une étude*, Paris 1924.



Fig. 1. A tile with a representation of Baby Jesus, Gniezno, 15th century. Discovered in 1994 during excavation conducted on the shoreline of the former Święte Lake (Museum of the Origins of the Polish State in Gniezno).



Fig. 2. Samson Fighting a Lion, Gniezno, 15th century. Discovered in 1993 during excavation conducted on the shoreline of the former Święte Lake (Museum of the Origins of the Polish State in Gniezno).



Fig. 3. A tile with the scene of Satan tempting Jesus, Gniezno, 15th century. Discovered in 1993 during excavation conducted on the shoreline of the former Święte Lake (Museum of the Origins of the Polish State in Gniezno).



Fig. 4. The Head of Christ in the Crown of Thorns, Gniezno, 15th century. Discovered in 1993 during excavation conducted on the shoreline of the former Święte Lake (Museum of the Origins of the Polish State in Gniezno).

They all served a similar function: introducing people who did not know the Holy Bible to religious content, particularly the events described in the Bible. I will not elaborate in this paper on the style or form of such representations as it was already done a long time ago by art historians, even though they mostly based their inquiries on analysis of individual works of art visualising biblical issues. Unfortunately, the issue of the *Biblia pauperum* as a kind of a pictographic narrative is not very popular among researchers and there are not many publications about it. Even at a conference with a promising title *Wizualizacja wiedzy. Od Biblia Pauperum do hipertekstu*² (*Knowledge Visualisation. From the Biblia Pauperum to Hypertext*) only one paper dealt with this issue (Knapiński 2011). Moreover, a vast majority of works are devoted to the preserved manuscripts and xylographic books. In the Polish literature, the most recent discussion about narrative visual representations I am interested in, along with a collection of a considerable part of the literature, was published in 2014. It was a work by Joanna Utzig on stained-glass windows (Utzig 2014).

In this paper, I would like to draw attention to the existence of another way of presenting biblical content, which has not been discussed in greater detail yet, i.e. ornaments of Gothic and Renaissance tiled stoves. They are objects of interest of mostly archaeologists, and information about them relatively rarely reach the wider audience of people interested in art history and religion. Very few well-preserved collections of such tiles found in museum are analysed by art historians, while it has to be noted that it is a grossly underestimated iconographic source that might provide significant data for research into the material, artistic, and spiritual culture of past generations. I hope that this paper contains information about a great majority of archaeological artefacts from the territory of Poland.

The Middle Ages and the Renaissance were periods in which religion played a particularly significant role in people's lives. Unfortunately, knowledge of the principles of faith and the possibility to read biblical texts were beyond the reach of most people at the time. This predominantly resulted from the fact that only the richest could afford the Holy Bible. Manuscripts, usually richly illuminated, were extremely expensive. This only changed a little after the printed Bible got popularised as the whole process required time. The first, and in a way mass, publication was probably the so-called 42-line version created by Johannes Gutenberg in 1452–1454/1455. It had 1,286 pages and, according to estimates, it was published in approx. 135 copies on paper and 45 on parchment (Pirożyński 2002: 89–90). At the end of the fifteenth century, many printing shops were established in Europe, using the press improved by Gutenberg and manufacturing books on an

2 The conference took place in the National Museum in Warsaw in 2011.

unprecedented scale. However, this is where another important factor hindering access to the Bible came into play. A considerable percentage of the society at the time consisted of people called *idiotae* as opposed to *homo literatus*, meaning people who could not read or write. We know that in the second half of the sixteenth century, in the Kraków urban complex (Kraków, Kazimierz, Kleparz), approx. 80% men and more than 30% women were literate (Bartoszewicz 1999). In all likelihood, it can be assumed that in smaller towns and villages these numbers were far less optimistic. However, even literacy was not enough. The Bible was written in Latin, a language known to a relatively small part of the contemporary society.

A different way to present the content of the Holy Bible was to show it in illustrations. R. Knapieński noted that the original compilation of biblical texts, later called the *Biblia pauperum*, was created c 1250 in the south of Germany, among the Benedictines, and it was a manuscript version. The researcher put forward an interesting hypothesis that these abridged and richly illuminated versions of the Bible were a kind of templates for artists creating religious works of art (Knapieński 2000: 228, 223–241; 2004; 2005).

There is no doubt that the most popular *Biblia pauperum* in Europe were xylographic books, created by copying pages with wooden matrices. Depending on the edition, they had forty or fifty pages including the obligatory, abridged interpretation of mostly, but not exclusively, the New Testament (Kocowski 1974: 49–52). It is commonly believed that the term *pauperum* indicated that these works were addressed to the poor. It is sometimes claimed that the poverty did not necessarily concern the material sphere but the spiritual sphere – poor in spirit – meaning the uneducated. Today, both these suggestions are questioned and disputed in the academic circles (Utzig 2014: 74).

Let us now move on to the tile stoves. In our part of Europe, stoves made of tiles that could be decorated with bas-reliefs appeared most probably in Bohemia in the first half of the fourteenth century (Smetánka 1983: 150). According to the research conducted by K. Dymek, stoves made of such tiles were first made in Silesia in the first half of the fifteenth century, which was earlier than in Germany, where they appeared only in the second half of this century (Dymek 1995: 270).

In the Middle Ages and at the beginning of the modern era, tiles for such stoves were made by imprinting clay plates in wooden matrices. The first ones, referred to as Gothic, had rather shallow bas-reliefs. The representation on a single tile formed a closed composition. In some cases, the motif was surrounded with a thin and low frame. Most tiles were covered with lead glaze. It was transparent and did not fully cover the ceramic background. The most popular pigments were iron oxides and copper oxide, so the glaze came in different shades of green and brown (Dąbrowska 1987: 67–69, 98–100). However, the number of colours obtained was surprisingly large. This allowed to create varied compositions, however, groups of artefacts

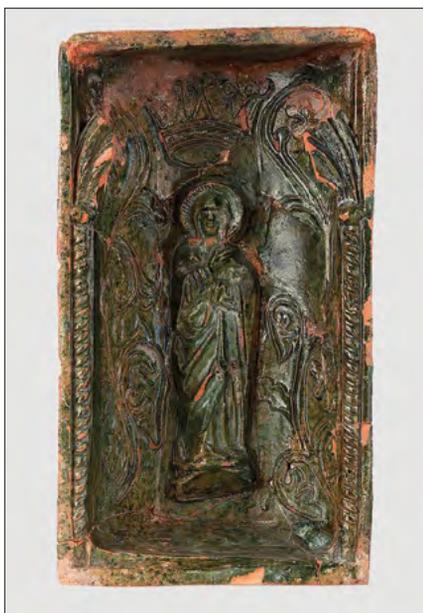


Fig. 5. A tile with a representation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, 16th century. Discovered in 1994 during excavation conducted on the shoreline of the former Święte Lake (Museum of the Origins of the Polish State in Gniezno).



Fig. 6. The Last Supper, Stargard, 16th century. A tile from Hans Berman's shop (Museum of Archaeology and History in Stargard).

found by archaeologists at one site are usually dominated by two or three colours. Whereas Gothic tiles were always monochromatic, in the sixteenth century people started covering them with glaze in different colours. This was also the time when bas-reliefs became deeper and the frames became more sophisticated.

The topics of the representations that appeared on medieval and Renaissance tiles differed. Heraldic representations were very popular. They were highly diverse, from a simple shield with an emblem to full representations with mantling in the form of stylised branches and a gem set in the helmet. There were also many cases of national emblems: the Polish Eagle and the Lithuanian Vytis (Kajzer 2007: 22–30). Other popular motifs included court scenes and symbolic images, fantastic animals, and genre scenes, however, there were also many religious representations and images of saints. One can also find pictures of angels, mostly Archangel Michael. These have been uncovered in such places as the castle in Bolesławiec (Żemigala 1987: Photo 93), and knight's manors in Jarocin (Grygiel 1989: Fig. 2) and Jankowo Dolne (Janiak 2003: 72, 86), where also an image of a shield-bearing angel has been found, holding a shield with the Bojczy coat of arms. The most popular

religious symbols were the Lamb and the Dove, while the most frequently portrayed saint was St. George killing the dragon. We also have images of St. Hedwig from Jankowo Dolne (Janiak 2003: 88), and St. Catherine and St. Barbara from Wrocław (Dymek 1995: 31). There are also some ludic narrative scenes referring to known parables and customs.

Let us now have a closer look at the representations connected with the events described in the Holy Bible. Old Testament motifs included some of the most popular images of Adam and Eve in Paradise. Archaeologists describe them differently. The most frequent phrases used are: *Adam and Eve in Paradise*, *Adam and Eve at the Tree of Life*, and *The Temptation of Eve*. Despite varying captions, graphic representations do not differ significantly, referring to original paintings and drawings. These are usually symmetrical compositions with a tree in the middle, two figures on both sides, and a serpent coiled around the trunk. Such tiles dated to the fifteenth century are known from Gniezno (Janiak 2003: 85), castles in Bolesławiec nad Prosną (Żemigala 1987: Photo 93), Wleń (Dymek 1995: 31), and Lipowiec (Dąbrowska 1987: 125), and the knight's manor in Jarocin (Grygiel 1989: Fig. 19).

However, there are also other representations of Adam and Eve. I have managed to find a tile with a scene interpreted by the authors of the publication as *The Exile from Paradise*. It is a tile from research conducted in Kraków, dated to the sixteenth century (*Kraków...* 2007: 411). Another example is an artefact with a scene described as *Adoration of the Tree of Life by Adam and Eve*. Unlike in the case of the representations discussed earlier, this tile depicts Adam and Eve in a schematic manner on both sides of the tree, however, the tree itself is presented in a symbolic way. Moreover, there is no serpent. The tile was discovered during excavation at the castle in Chudów and dated to the middle of the fifteenth century (Tarasiński 2007: 45–49).

Images of Adam alone are far less frequent. Artefacts that need to be mentioned include tiles with a scene of *The Creation of Adam* from the Cistercian monastery in Kołbacz and a burgher tenement house in Kołobrzeg (Kamiński 2007: 80). A representation entitled *Adam Naming the Animals in Paradise* found on a tile from Gniezno should be treated as unique (Janiak 2003: 80). Renaissance tiles from Kołbacz and Międzyrzecze show scenes of *The Creation of Eve* (Kamiński 2007: 82). They depict God taking Eve out of the chest of sleeping Adam. This motif is drawn from representations in graphic art, frequently found on the pages of xylographic bibles.

On tiles discovered in Myślibórz, Kalisz Pomorski, and Stare Drawsko, one can see a representation of the scene *Cain Kills Abel*, however, M. Majewski does not exclude a different interpretation as this might be *The Sacrifice of Isaac* (Majewski 2015: 146–147).

Other scenes illustrating the Old Testament include *Daniel and the Babylonian Dragon* on a Gothic tile discovered in Silesia in Romanów near Strzelin (Dymek 1995: 31), and *Judith Holding the Head of Holofernes*, which is a representation from a Renaissance tile found during excavation at the castle in Chojnów (Dymek 1995: 31). In Gniezno, images of *Samson Fighting a Lion* and *Jonah in the Mouth of the Fish* have also been uncovered. Two similar representations of Samson's fight and Jonah can be seen on tiles from Jarocin (Grygiel 1989: Fig. 22, 24). Old Testament events are also referred to by a tile dated to the end of the sixteenth century, found in Myślubórz, with a representation of *Rebecca*, who can be recognised thanks to her attribute – a pitcher (Majewski 2015: 145).

Representations on tiles with scenes from the New Testament are much more frequent. *The Annunciation* is one of the most popular scenes in panel painting and medieval visual art, so it is not surprising that it is also found on tiles. Such artefacts were discovered, for example, during the study of the ruins of knight's manors in Jankowo Dolne (Janiak 2003: 81) and Jarocin (Grygiel 1989: Fig. 18), in the Cistercian monastery in Kołbacz, in the Old Town in Stargard, and in Głogów (Kamiński 2007: 81–82), and at the castle in Czersk (Dąbrowska 1987: 125). A tile from the beginning of the sixteenth century, uncovered in Gniezno and depicting the *The Massacre of the Innocents* should be treated as a unique find (Janiak 2003: 85). Unfortunately, only a part of the tile has been preserved, with a fragment of a figure on a horse holding a child in one hand and a sword in the other, ready to deal the lethal blow.

The motif of the Nativity was popular in the medieval art, however, mostly in manuscript illuminations rather than panel painting. No such representation has been found on tiles so far. A scene closest in thematic terms is *The Bow of Three Wise Men*. The iconographic pattern of this event was developed in the Middle Ages. Usually, the first to be presented was kneeling Caspar, followed by standing Melchior and Balthazar. Two slightly different types of tiles with such images were discovered in the ruins of the knight's manor in Jankowo Dolne (Janiak 2003: 81–85).

One of the most popular religious representations, not only in the Middle Ages but also in the early modern era, was *Madonna and Child*. Thus, I was quite surprised to discover that there are only a few such images on stove tiles, including tiles dated to the middle of the sixteenth century from Pułtusk and Kruszwica (Dąbrowska 1987: 129) and Gdańsk (*Archeologiczne...* 2013: 6). A tile with the Blessed Virgin in the central part with figures in haloes on her sides is difficult to interpret. Researchers who described it interpreted the scene as *The Blessed Virgin in Paradise Surrounded by Saints* (Janiak 2003: 29, Fig. 152). Another representation from a tile found in Gniezno is unique. It depicts standing Blessed Virgin in a crown, holding Baby Jesus. The figure is surrounded by sunlight and set against a half-moon. To the right, there is a head on a spike, and to the left, there is a tree

with a bird sitting on it. Authors of the publication, referring to the bas-relief on one of the panels of the Gniezno Doors, interpret this scene as *The Apocalyptic Blessed Virgin*, with the head of St. Adalbert and a vigilant eagle. As the same collection of tiles included a tile most probably with the coat of arms of Pope Innocent VIII, whose pontificate lasted from 1484 to 1492, it is possible to quite precisely date the stove built using these tiles to the end of the fifteenth century (Janiak 2003: 29, Fig. 130).

There are only a few representations of events from the life of Jesus. One can mention tiles discovered in the Old Town in Stargard depicting *12-Year-Old Jesus in the Temple* and *The Raising of Lazarus* (Kamiński 2007: 82–84). In Międzyrzecze, a tile was found with a scene described as *Jesus with a Samaritan Woman at a Well* (Kamiński 2007: 79). Gniezno tiles include scenes described as *Mary Magdalene with a Mirror at the Gate of the Magdala Castle* and *The Temptation of Christ* (Janiak 2003: 82, 86). Among other sources, one can mention the motif interpreted as *The Head of John the Baptist on a Plate* (Grygiel 1989: Fig. 23). We also know its fuller version described as *Salome Holding the Head of St. John the Baptist*. Such tiles have been discovered in Kołbacz and Stargard (Majewski 2015: 145).

Representations on tiles frequently depict Passion scenes, usually composed in accordance with the medieval art canon. There are a few interesting archaeological finds worth mentioning in this category. Tiles with the image of *The Crucifixion* are definitely most popular. They come from different types of residences, from knight's manors, through cities, to monasteries. They include, for example, artefacts from Silesia (Bestwina, Głogów, Witków), Greater Poland (Jankowo Dolne, Kruszwica), and Western Pomerania (Kołbacz, Stargard) and Gdańsk (Dymek 1995: 29–30; Janiak 2003: 86; Dąbrowska 1987: 129; Kamiński 2007: 85; *Archeologiczne...* 2013: 7). They usually present a scene with a cross in the centre and two figures on its sides: Blessed Virgin Mary and John the Apostle.

At a few sites, also tiles depicting *Resurrection* were found. This motif offers a variety of forms of representation. On a tile from Wenecja, it is a group scene, with an angel next to Jesus and guards below him. On a tile from Lipowiec, there is only a half of the figure of Jesus framed by a grave. This representation is described in painting as *Christ in a Well* (Dąbrowska 1987: 24). As tiles have only been partially preserved, it is impossible to describe in greater detail the scene of *Resurrection* depicted on a tile from Kalisz Pomorski (Majewski 2015: 148).

Another interesting scene is *The Prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane*. Tiles with this image were uncovered during excavation at the castles in Bolesławiec nad Prosną (Żemigala 1987: Photo 9) and Raciążek (Nadolska 1988: 104), and in the ruins of the knight's manor in Bąkowa Góra (Głosek 1998: 104).

Other Passion scenes are only known from isolated artefacts. In Gniezno, a tile with the image of *The Head of Christ in the Crown of Thorns* (Janiak 2003: 101)

was discovered. Another two motifs come from tiles obtained during excavation in Wrocław in Więzienna Street. They depict *The Scourging* and *The Descent from the Cross* (Dymek 1995: 249). What is highly interesting is the fact that there are also inscriptions on these tiles, which was extremely rare in ornamentation of such items. In both cases, the central motif is surrounded by an inscription. On account of the state of preservation of the artefacts, only fragments of these inscriptions can be read. On the tile depicting *The Scourging*, the inscription reads: *...usa iuber misere [re] milit vir nostros ...orts [...] qui hora viri...s nobis ...pacie't* (Dymek 1995: 29 Table XIIIa). In the case of the tile with *The Descent from the Cross*, only a small fragment of the inscription can be read: *nobis cum ipi gen's s...s dne [...]* (Dymek 1995: 29 Table XIIIb).

Excavation in the Old Town in Kołobrzeg uncovered a tile with a representation of *The Crowning with Thorns* (Kamiński 2007: 83–84). In the central part, there is sitting Jesus, with two people on his sides, one of whom is holding two branches (?). The whole is framed by a stylised arcade.

The representation of *Jesus Falling beneath the Cross* from the monastery in Kołbacz is also unique (Kamiński 2007: 85), while *The Last Supper* was depicted on two tiles discovered in Stargard (Majewski 2015: 156).

Excavation conducted in Namysłów before the Second World War yielded a tile with a head of Christ surrounded by three stylised lilies. The whole image is rather primitive; however, the motif is most probably based on *The Veil of Veronica*, which is popular in iconography (Dymek 1995: 29–30).

Other representations I would like to discuss here should be classified as symbolic. The first group includes symbolic representations of Jesus. One of the most popular medieval images is *A Pelican Feeding her Young*. During archaeological research in the knight's manor in Jankowo Dolne, two versions of this representation were found (Janiak 2003: 94, 95). Similarly decorated tiles were revealed by excavations at the castle in Bolesławiec (Żemigala 1987: Photo 93), the manor in Bestwina (Dymek 1995: 31), and in Oświęcim (Dąbrowska 1987: 129–130).

Other symbolic representations of Christ include images known as *Lamb of God*, which were popular in visual art at the time. On a tile discovered in Jankowo Dolne there is *The Lamb in a Crown* (Janiak 2003: 94, 95), whereas a tile uncovered in Poznań depicts *The Lamb with a Banner*, above which there is *The Dove*, a symbol of the Holy Spirit (Dąbrowska 1987: 125).

A different, quite unusual image can be seen on a tile from Gniezno, with a motif described as *Baby Jesus with a Cross* (Janiak 2003: 23, 31). This representation shows Jesus in a halo, holding a cross with a crown of thorns, resting against his right arm. Next to him, there is a dove, and above him there is the solar disc.

Representations of angles on tiles are not very frequent. They sometimes take the form of the so-called shield-bearing angels. In such cases, they are depicted

en face, holding a shield with an emblem or a coat of arms in front of them. With respect to biblical issues, one representation should be mentioned: it was found on a tile in Jankowo Dolne and depicts *Archangel Michael Defeating Satan* (Janiak: 2003, Fig. 86).

Stove tiles are usually anonymous works, which is true for all Gothic tiles. In the case of Renaissance tiles, there are some with known authors or at least owners of shops that manufactured them. One of the few Polish tile manufacturers, whose shop operated at the beginning of the sixteenth century in Kazimierz near Kraków and whose name we know, was a certain Bartosz (Piątkiewicz-Dereniowa 1960: 362–363). However, the artefacts mentioned above do not include his products. Religious issues were popular on tiles manufactured in Hesse in the shop of Hans Berman. Roman Kamiński (2007) identified more than ten tiles from this shop, discovered in such places as Międzyrzecze (*Jesus With a Samaritan Woman at a Well, The Creation of Eve*), Stargard (*The Annunciation, 12-Year-Old Jesus in the Temple, The Raising of Lazarus*), Kołbacz (*The Annunciation, Jesus Falling Beneath the Cross, The Crucifixion*), and Kołobrzeg (*The Crowning with Thorns*).

Hans Berman's shop also manufactured other tiles depicting biblical issues. They cannot be found in the collections of Polish museums, however, tiles with such scenes as: *Christ's Sermon on the Boat, Jesus with the Harlot, Jesus Healing the Bleeding Woman, The Prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, The Last Supper*, and *Jesus before Herod*, have been uncovered in Germany (Majewski 2015: 154).

The Gothic and Renaissance stove tiles described in this paper come from the territory of today's Poland. However, the Silesian and Western Pomeranian tiles mentioned did not differ considerably from the tiles found at sites located in the territory of the medieval Crown of the Kingdom of Poland. Comparison with artefacts from Europe would go far beyond the scope of this paper. However, let us have a look at finds from the territory of Bohemia, Moravia, and the historic part of Silesia that is now located beyond Polish borders. Such a selection of analogies is justified by the fact that a catalogue of iconographic patterns found on Gothic and Renaissance tiles in these territories has been published, offering a perfect reference material. If we take a closer look at these finds, one obvious conclusion can be drawn: in the territories listed above, far more illustrations referring to biblical motifs have been discovered. For example, in the case of Old Testament themes, our southern neighbours have as many as twenty-six different representations, while in Poland there are only twelve such representations. The Polish collection does not include scenes referred to as: *God the Father, Noah's Ark, The Tower of Babel, Lot and his Daughters, Moses, Crossing the Red Sea, Samson and Delilah*, and *David and Goliath*.

In the case of New Testament, tiles from the territory of today's Poland offer approximately twenty-four motifs referring to the events described in the Bible.

The most important differences that can be identified when inspecting the tiles from Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia, include the presence of other biblical motifs such as: *Flight into Egypt*, *The Baptism of Jesus*, *The Wedding at Cana*, *Entry into Jerusalem*, *The Kiss of Judas*, *The Descent from the Cross*, and *The Holy Trinity*.

Images of, for example, Evangelists can also be classified as representations referring to biblical motifs. They are more frequently found in the European territories where the Protestant movement was the strongest. However, due to the limited scope of this paper, I decided to omit this topic and perhaps explore it in a separate publication.

Comparison with tiles of our southern neighbours allowed to draw another conclusion. In the area where the Hussite Heresy originated, there are far more Marian representations and images of the Host and the chalice, directly referring to religious differences. However, discussion on these issues also goes beyond the scope of this paper (Pavlík, Vitanovský 2004: 57).

Let us now return to the title *Biblia pauperum*. No discussion on medieval images and narratives can start without mentioning frequently quoted Pope Gregory I (590–604), who thought visual representations to be “the bible for the illiterate”. One can cite his criticism of the doings of Bishop of Marseilles Serenus, who destroyed paintings in his church c 599:

Pictures are used in churches so that those who are ignorant of letters may at least read by seeing on the walls [of churches] what they cannot read in books (*codicibus*). What writing (*scriptura*) does for the literate, a picture does for the illiterate looking at it, because the ignorant see in it what they ought to do; those who do not know letters read in it. Thus, especially for the nations (*gentibus*), a picture takes the place of reading. [...] Therefore you ought not to have broken that which was placed in the church not in order to be adored but solely in order to instruct the minds of the ignorant (Duggan 2005: 63).

Artistic visualisations of the events described in the Bible enjoy continued popularity among researchers who make attempts to define the medieval theory of a visual narrative (Hoche 2015: 68–96). However, the objects of analysis are definitely more frequently paintings on church walls, and the way they were received by the faithful is compared to the way comic books are read today. What is emphasised is lack of a language barrier and the fact that the audience is left with the task of combining individual images to form a coherent narrative, which requires greater involvement than perception of an isolated image.

I do not find these comments accurate with regard to representations on stove tiles. Most of all, owning a stove in the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance demonstrated a high material status, which usually went hand in hand with literacy.

Therefore, stoves appeared in the houses of the wealthiest members of the society, meaning people who could also afford a Bible. Furthermore, they were probably more familiar with the content of both Old and New Testament than the rest of the society. Thus, the educational role of such images should not be considered, but it should be noted that other images of significance to the owners, such as family coats of arms, were presented on stoves. It can be thus assumed that the purpose of biblical representations was mostly to emphasise one's own religiousness. Unfortunately, as the artefacts uncovered during excavations are usually fragmentary, no dominant sets of scenes presented on a single stove and forming a coherent narrative can be recreated. Above, I only presented motifs that have been found in the territory of Poland and indicated those that were most probably rare there. However, our main aim was to draw attention to an interesting iconographic source that can be dated within a rather limited chronological framework, but has been omitted in the discussion by art and religion historians so far. Tiles decorated with narrative scenes first appeared in Poland only in the fifteenth century and disappeared at the end of the sixteenth century along with the change in style and fashion.

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Słowa kluczowe: *Biblia pauperum*, średniowiecze, renesans, kafle piecowe, motywy biblijne, kultura materialna, archeologia

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