

URSZULA  
MAŁGORZATA  
MAZURCZAK

*Motywy  
inspiracji  
w średniowiecznych  
wizerunkach Ewangelistów*

**KATOLICKI UNIWERSYTET LUBELSKI**  

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**WYDZIAŁ NAUK HUMANISTYCZNYCH**

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## Motifs of inspiration in medieval portraits of evangelists

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#### SUMMARY

## SUMMARY

### Motifs of inspiration in medieval portraits of evangelists

Portraits of evangelists, of both the Eastern-Byzantine and Western-Latin type have been subject of investigations by outstanding scholars since the beginning of the 20th century (A.M. Frient, K. Weitzmann, E. Panofski, H. Buchthal, W. Kohrer). Conclusions have been reached about the origin and successive modifications made in the types of portraits of evangelists from the moment they appeared, i.e. the 3rd century till the end of the medieval art. The literature first of all has pointed to the formal connections between the ancient presentations of the poet, rhetor or philosopher-thinker on the one hand and the portraits of evangelists and prophets which constituted a link between the ancient prototypes and the portraits by also uncanonical authors painted in the Middle Age and in modern art.

The present book aims at showing portraits of evangelists in connection with the inspiring figures as well as compositional interdependencies in their presentation from the moment the oldest pictures appeared up to the late medieval portraits. The formal connection existing between the portrait of an evangelist and the inspiring figure also defines the contents of the process of inspiration. This is so because the inspiring figures not only visualize the very fact of their existence but also create the process of inspiration. Particular phases of this process can be watched on the basis of the sources: descriptions of inspiration given by prophets as well as patristic and medieval theological commentaries on the inspiration of the Holy Bible.

The inspiring figures have been chosen on the basis of the existing literature on the so called symbols of inspiration that have already been mentioned in particular works on evangelists. The point was however, that they had to be divided into types with respect to the criterion of their influence accepted by the author of the present book. Hence it was necessary to divide them into two groups: 1-the four symbols; 2-other figural inspiring subjects



like God the Father, Jesus Christ, Mary, Sophia, angel, the Apostles, etc. The presentation of the inspiring figures constitutes part I of the present book. Part II is devoted to an analysis of the process of inspiration which was presented in medieval paintings in three ways.

1. The subject of inspiration and the evangelist as the author subjected to the process were shown in a definite interrelation; it could be said that they jointly participated in the process. Taking the problem from the point of view of the artist, he had to choose a definite moment, a phase from the process of inspiration. He did it consciously which is proved by the accounts of processes of inspiration given by prophets. In the presented pictures some definite actions are repeated, like prayer for inspiration, consecration acts, transfer of the scroll, etc.

2. Many preserved medieval paintings show an active attitude of the inspiring subject whereas the evangelist is subjected to this power in various ways, which, however, does not mean that he is completely passive. Metamorphoses of the place and figures are result of this dominating action of the inspiring subject. If we look at the criterion of inspiration in a little different light, some composition types appear which are known in iconography, e.g. the "breaking evangelists", or evangelists shown with the heads of their symbols.

3. The third way of presenting inspiration in art brings into prominence the very author, already inspired, which has been effected by the inspiring power. The represented posture, frontal or profile, allows to see connections with ancient pictures of the authors: sages, poets, teachers, which connections have already been pointed to, but without referring them to the process of inspiration. The researchers' intuitions regarding the formal borrowing, have allowed to define it with respect to the contents. Referring only very generally to certain ancient concepts of inspiration - inspiration by the Muses - one can see clear differences between the ancient understanding of inspiration and the Christian one. An artist realized these differences when he was consciously undertaking various changes in the composition of portraits of evangelists. A detailed comparative analysis of the ancient portrait of the author and the Christian one was not aimed at in the present book although a paper of this kind based on research in history of art has not yet appeared.

Conclusions that may be drawn from a subject formulated in this way allow one to explain the differences that can be seen in an even superficial review of the portrait types and inspiring figures. The medieval artist was conscious of the role of the inspiring subject in creating the author of the text of the Gospel, and therefore using the models of authors created by the ancient art he transformed them after seriously considering the matter. Attempts at creating also new portrait types that had not existed in the ancient repertoire are seen as early as the early Christian period.