

UT PICTURA POESIS AND ORBIS POLONUS:
EKPHRASEIS IN OLD POLISH LITERARY WORKS GLORIFYING
RULERS¹

By

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ABSTRACT: The paper focuses on the connections between literary descriptions and the fine arts exemplified by selected Polish texts from the 16th and 17th centuries. The author analyses them in the context of rhetoric tradition (*ekphrasis, evidentia, ars memoriae*). The discussed descriptions of imaginary works of art and architecture come from texts (by Mikołaj Rej, Jan Kochanowski, Samuel Twardowski, Andrzej Maksymilian Fredro) referring to the symbolism and hierarchy of power in the 16th- and 17th-century Commonwealth.

The problem of mutual relationships between the mimetic arts – painting and literature – has for centuries attracted the attention and inspired the imagination of artists and theoreticians, with painting treated as representative of all fine arts². In Antiquity intentions of poets, painters and musicians were viewed as basically similar, the approach embodied by Orpheus, the mythical creator of “sacred poetry” (*sacra poesis*)³ who was at the same time an inspired singer, poet, and musician. The idea is echoed in the writings of Plato (*Leg.* X 605), Aristotle (*Poetics* and *Rhetoric*), and Cicero (*Tusc.* V 114).

To Plato, poetry reflects a divine inspiration and is a supreme activity and thus could not be treated as an art. If, however, poetry may be regarded as a mimetic art, it follows that the connections between poetry and the fine arts may be identified in similar structures and hierarchies of elements in both arts. This is

¹ The article is an abbreviated version of ch. IV of my book *Caelum et regnum. Studia nad symboliką państwa i władcy w polskiej literaturze i sztuce XVI i XVII stulecia*, Zielona Góra 2002.

² Literature on mutual relations between literature and painting is vast. Markiewicz 1984 quotes basic positions. See also: Praz 1981; Lee 1940; Spencer 1957 (Polish translation by M.B. Fedewicz, *Pamiętnik Literacki* LXXVI 1985, fasc. 3, pp. 197–218 – here also other articles on relation between painting and literature); Pelc 1982; Komorowski 1982.

³ In this manner Antonio Possevino described the work of Orpheus, Musaios and other “ancient Greeks”, *Bibliotheca selecta*, ch. XVII: *De poesi et pictura ethnica*; see Sarnowska-Temierusz 1969: 93 f. See also Bieńkowski 1970.