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Karawaka (Caravaca Cross) and Its Synonyms, or Lexical Returns

In 1930 Stanisław Szober wrote: “Words, too, have their history, and this history consists not only of the moment they appear and disappear on the horizon of the linguistic life, but also of the various transformations which they undergo between their emergence and demise” [Szober 1930: 20]. The book from which the quote is taken is titled *Życie wyrazów (The Life of Words)*. This life includes, as noted by Kwiryna Handke, seven phases:

1. The “birth” of a word as leaving the state of non-existence in a variety of Polish [...] This moment is easier to register and observe than the moment of “death” of a word.
2. Adaptation period, i.e., adapting to the phonetic, phonological and morphological system of general Polish.
3. Entering the social circulation. Usually, the second and third phases partially coexist.
4. A period of complete stabilization, and the greatest functional activity.
5. **Decline of activity**, reduction in functional scope.
6. **A period of withering**, relegation to the periphery of language, i.e., persistence in certain social groups or the idiolect of individuals.
7. “Death”, or the **transition from the active vocabulary to the passive vocabulary – to the language archive**. When a word enters this phase of existence, it means its final or temporary dormancy (the language is known to have quite a few examples of the return of lexical units – lexemes or meanings, especially

in the case of object names). The moment of “death” of a word is much more difficult to capture than the moment of its “birth” because the period of wasting away is relatively long and the word falls into desuetude in all its functions, and also gradually all users eliminate it from their language. [Handke 1997: 56]¹

The interesting phenomenon of the way words come back from the “linguistic junkyard” (term used by Anna Piotrowicz [2005: 355]) to the communicative circulation, mentioned by the Warsaw researcher, sparked the interest of Bogdan Walczak, who in 1998 published an article entitled *Words That Come Back* [Walczak 1998]. His understanding of the expression *word comeback* was, as he noted himself, broad. He included lexical units and collocations that:

- a) have already functioned in the Polish language (according to lexicographic and textual evidence), but they have not managed to settle in it for good, and today they are returning as expansive units – such as *brandy*, *cocktail*, *lunch//lancz*, *sleeping//slipping*, *speech//spicz*, *whisky*, etc.;
- b) have fallen into disuse or moved to the category of historisms (names of old realities), and have now returned as names of contemporary Polish realities – such as *wojewoda* [province governor], *powiat* [district] or *Rzeczpospolita* [Commonwealth];
- c) have functioned in the Polish language for a long time as historisms, and are now returning (though often in altered meanings, with a different range of real-world reference) as names of today’s Polish realities – such as *sejmik* or *akcyza* [excise];
- d) after a period of “normal” functioning in the Polish language, they functioned in it during the communist period as historisms or xenisms (loanwords), i.e., they referred only to old Polish realities or to foreign realities, and now they are returning (or have already returned) as the names of today’s Polish realities – such as *prezydent* [president] ‘head of state’, *senate*, *nuncjusz apostolski* [papal nuncio], *makler* [stockbroker], etc.;
- e) after a period of “normal” functioning in the Polish language during the communist period (excluding its final years, i.e. the 1980s) they functioned as historisms or as “ideological” xenisms, i.e. in official Polish, subjected to ideological control from above, they referred only to old Polish realities or to foreign realities for ideological reasons, and not because of the lack of relevant Polish realities, and have now come back as names of today’s Polish realities – such as *inflacja* [inflation], *kryzys (gospodarczy)* [(economic) crisis], *recesja* [recession] or *strajk* [strike];

1 The emphases in the quote are made by the authors of this article.

- f) after a period of “normal” functioning in the Polish language during the communist period in the official register of Polish language their meaning was “doctored” (by infusing their meaning with positive or negative semantic connotations), and now they are regaining (or trying to regain, since the existing conceptual and terminological confusion this is not an easy feat) their original, proper meaning – such as *demokracja* [democracy], *konserwatyzm* [conservatism], *liberalizm* [liberalism], *rewolucja* [revolution], [*kontrrewolucja* [counter-revolution], *socjaldemokracja* [social democracy], *partia socjalistyczna* [socialist party], etc. [Walczak 1998: 109]

When analyzing the lexis making a comeback into the Polish language in the 1990s, Walczak distinguished and discussed in detail two main thematic-semantic groups: socio-political vocabulary and economic vocabulary. However, he also noted that

the other words returning to Polish today no longer form a uniform thematic-semantic group. They refer to everyday life, social life, civilization advances and amenities, etc. It is also difficult, in each case, to unquestionably state that we are dealing here with a return *sensu stricto* – perhaps some words, after a period of relative popularity, vegetated somewhere on the distant periphery of the Polish lexicon (hence the break in their lexicographic documentation), and have recently been “revived” and become frequent and expansive words. [Walczak 1998: 114]

In this article we shall look at the comeback of a synonymous sequence, albeit infrequent and non-expansive, associated with religious life. This sequence is formed by lexemes and expressions with the noun *karawaka* [Caravaca cross] as the core. Their return came, as we observed when collecting data on the impact of the coronavirus on the Polish language, during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the time, texts such as:

The faithful asked the parish priest to set up a **Caravaca cross** in connection [with] the pandemic that has been going on for a year. This is because they recognized the need for strength and support to keep fighting the disease. The cross was also set up as an intention on behalf of the hard-working health care workers. The cross was made, at the request of the pastor, by several parishioners along with the churchwarden. [Matys 2021]

The viability of the plague cross as a remedy against plagues is surprising. In May of this year, the residents of Wierzbica in the Lublin region set up a large **Caravaca cross** to protect them from coronavirus. [Przybylski 2020]

Let us begin with historical context. A Caravaca cross is a type of a double cross, one where the main vertical bar is intersected by two horizontal bars. Several articles and a comprehensive monograph, *Wizerunki podwójnego krzyża w kulturze Polski* [Images of the Double Cross in the Culture of Poland], have been devoted to this issue by Toruń archaeologist Marek Kołyszko [Kołyszko 1997, 1999, 2003, 2005a, 2005b, 2013, 2015]. The history of the Caravaca cross will be given here mainly on the basis of his works. The history of this cross begins in the Spanish province of Murcia, in the town of Caravaca, from which it takes its name. It was a reliquary dating to the 4th century A.D., and according to the legend, it belonged to the Patriarch of Jerusalem, Robert, and was brought to Spain during one of the Crusades.

As the legend has it, Christians were imprisoned in Spain when Caravaca was under Arab rule. The priest Gines was among the prisoners. When summoned from prison by the provincial governor Abu-Zeit and asked if he could perform any arts, he replied that he could bring down the almighty God from heaven and make living flesh out of bread. This intrigued the ruler who agreed to hold the service, and when the priest began to say Mass, he noticed that he had forgotten to include the cross in the list of liturgical equipment he needed. Then two angels came from heaven, bringing a beautiful cross made from the “true Tree of the Holy Cross.” They put it on the altar. [Kołyszko 2015: 124]

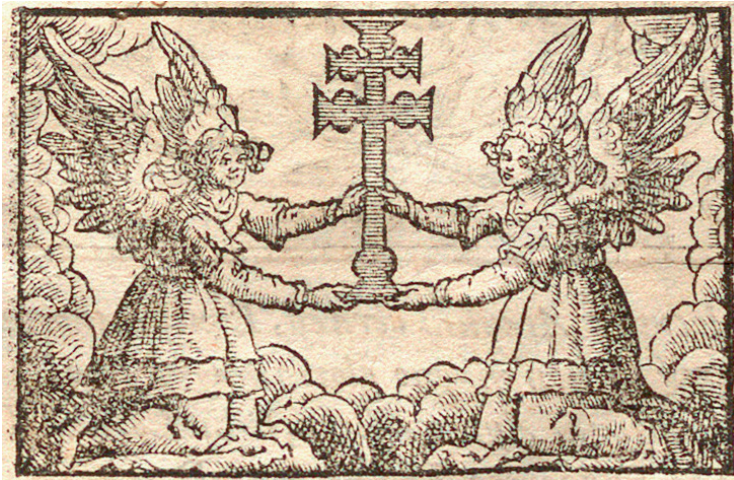


Fig. 1. A vignette from Melchior Treunino's work *Historia de Sanctissima Cruce Caravacensi...*, Augsburg 1616

Source: Kołyszko 2015: 125.

The reliquary contained a fragment of the Tree of the Holy Cross, the second largest piece after that found in Rome. This reliquary appeared in Caravaca around 1229. It was believed to be a protection from misfortunes, especially from the effects of natural disasters (hailstones, storms, floods) and epidemics. Metal copies of it began to be made in the form of crosses topped with a stylized corn-cockle and with a cup-shaped end on both horizontal bars, the lower one of which was longer than the upper.



Fig. 2. Caravaca cross with the mass of Gines and depiction of Immaculata

Source: Kołyszko 2015: 125.

The greatest power was attributed to these crosses when they touched the reliquary. Their popularity had been on the rise since the 16th century, when a plague broke out during the Council of Trent in 1547² and the effectiveness of defense against its effects was attributed to Caravaca crosses. The magicization to which they gradually succumbed (they began to be treated as amulets) was the reason Pope Innocent XI's banning their distribution and use in 1678.

2 The year 1547 is given by Kołyszko [2015: 126], while according to Sophia Walczy, the plague broke out in 1545 [Walczy 1987: 238].

Historical accounts, however, testify to frequent violations of this prohibition [Kołyško 2015: 123–127]. The history of the original medieval reliquary ended in the 20th century, as described by Kołyško:

The original reliquary from Caravaca was destroyed during the Spanish Civil War. In February 1934 a local priest was forced to hand over the reliquary. It was handed over to a group of rebels led by the local mayor. The original, which had been in Spain since the 13th century, was lost, and its further fate is unknown [...]. [Kołyško 2015: 127]

Imitations of the Caravaca reliquary were made from a variety of materials: initially as small-scale metal casts and, in the form of pictures, wood and copperplate prints, later also in stone and wood, and in the form of embroidery. The appearance of Caravaca crosses has changed many times. In Poland six types are known, which have different ends to the horizontal and vertical bars, as well as many varieties of lettering and iconography. Because of these ends, the most popular were crosses with bars referring to the original reliquary from Caravaca with ellipses and isosceles triangles at their center, giving them the shape of chalices. Caravaca crosses with straight-ended bars were also abundant. There were also crosses featuring horizontal beams of equal length, and very rarely, with three horizontal bars.



Fig. 3. A Caravaca cross with cup-ended horizontal bars

Source: Kołyško 2015: 130.



Fig. 4. A Caravaca cross with straight-ended horizontal bars in Włocławek

Source: Kołyszko 2015: 165.



Fig. 5. A Caravaca cross featuring horizontal bars of equal lengths in the Suwałki region

Source: Snarski 2020.



Fig. 6. A Caravaca cross with three horizontal bars in Kocudza Trzecia in the Janów district

Source: *Karawaka*, access 2023
(photography by Michał Zalewski).

The letterings and iconographic signs placed on the obverses and reverses of the Caravaca crosses may have originally featured representations of the legendary mass of Gines, Mary Immaculate (the Immaculata), and three six-pointed stars symbolizing Mary's virginity. Later crosses featured, in particular, seven crosses and eighteen letters (the so-called prayer of St. Zechariah), but also abbreviations from the St. Benedict's medal (in five versions)³, an image of St. Benedict, inscriptions referring to other saints, an image of the crucified Christ, the letters IHS. These letters and crosses are the origins of apotropaic prayers and invocations derived from the psalms or from a prayer modelled on them by the Patriarch of Jerusalem, Zechariah, in the 7th century A.D. The

3 They are: C S P B: *Crux Sancti Patris Benedicti* (The Cross of the Holy Father Benedict), C S S M L: *Crux Sancta Sit Mihi Lux* (May the Holy Cross be my Light), N D S M D: *Non Draco Sit Mihi Dux* (Let Not the Devil be My Guide), V R S N S M V: *Vade Retro Satana Non Suade Mihi Vana*, and S M Q L I V B: *Sunt Mala Que Libas Ipse Venena Bibas* (Never Suggest Vain Things to Me, What You Offer Me is Evil, Drink your own Poison) [cf.: Kołyszko 2015: 136; Walczy 1987: 244].

Caravaca cross is said to have been ordered by Antiochian Bishop Leonard in 1547 during the afore-mentioned plague at the time of the Council of Trent. The symbols are: +Z+CDIA+BIZ+SAB+Z+HGF+BFRS. It should be noted that their order and placement on the cross plane sometimes varied [Walczyk 1987: 238, Kołyszko 2015: 126–127]⁴.

In the second half of the 16th and 17th centuries, Caravaca crosses became widespread in many Western and Central European countries (throughout Spain, Portugal, the Spanish Netherlands, Italy, Austria, Germany and the Czech Republic), and, through the Jesuit order, even in Paraguay, India and Japan. In Poland there is no evidence of their presence in the 16th century, but there are numerous confirmations from the 17th and 18th centuries, including on liturgical paraments. Kołyszko's monograph states that by the end of the 18th century, Caravaca crosses had fallen into oblivion, and their renaissance came in the 19th century during the cholera epidemic [Walczyk 1987: 238, Kołyszko 2015: 140–151], when large double crosses began to be erected on the outskirts of towns and villages to protect residents from the plague. In the interwar period they were mistaken for Orthodox crosses and were often destroyed [Kołyszko 2005a: 116]. The second half of the 20th century pushed devotionals, including Caravaca crosses, to the margins of social life, and their renaissance in Poland came in 2020 with the coronavirus pandemic.

The list the words and phrases that form a synonymous sequence with the center in the form of the Polish lexeme *karawaka* (Caravaca cross) are: *karawaczka*, *karawatka*, *karawik*, *karawika*, *karawnika* // *karafinka*, *krzyż karawaka*,

4 The + sign stands for the *Cross* (e.g., “The Cross of Christ is mighty to repeal the evil air from this place and from my body”) or an inflected form of *the Cross* (e.g., “Defend us, the Cross of Christs, and repeal the evil air from this place and free Thy servant from the plague, for Thou art gracious and merciful”), while the letters mean, for example: A – *Ah* (“Ah the abyss calls, by Thy voice, oh God Thou hast cast out witchcraft, keep me from this air”) or A – *Above* (“Above Heaven and earth, God was and is mighty to deliver me from the evil air”), B – *Blissful* (“It is a blissful thing to expect Divine help in silence to nullify this evil air”) or *Blessed* (“Blessed is he who hopes [in] the Lord, and does not look to vanity and unreliable nonsense”; “He who has not looked to vanity for wickedness false, in the evil day the Lord will deliver him, O Lord! Thee I trust, deliver me from this evil air”), D – *Please* [*Daj*] (“Please God! My God, abrogate the evil air from me and from this place”), R – *Be kind* [*Racz*] (“Be kind and you look upon me Lord! My God Almighty from the Holy See of Thy Majesty, have mercy on me, may Thy mercy from the morose air save me!”), S – *Alone* [*Sam*] (“I alone am thy salvation, saith the Lord, cry unto me and I will hear thee and deliver thee from the evil air; thou art my healing, heal me! And I will be healed, save me! and I will be saved”) or *I will incline* (“I will incline my heart to do Thy righteousness, may I not be ashamed that I have called upon Thee Lord!”) [after: Piszczatowska 2011: 176–177].

krzyż karawakowy, krzyżyk karawakowy, krzyż choleryczny, krzyż epidemiczny, krzyż morowy, krzyż (św.) Zachariasza. The term *krzyż lotaryński* (*Cross of Lorraine*) is also used to designate this referent. This is the name of the Byzantine double cross adapted by Christians with horizontal bars with straight endings. This

the four-barred cross became the symbol of Lorraine, thanks to Prince René of Anjou, who featured it as his coat of arms on seals and coins. This sign became widespread in 1477, when René II, Duke of Lorraine, decorated his standards with it during the Battle of Nancy. After the victorious battle, the duke named it the Cross of Lorraine out of gratitude for helping him defeat his enemies. [*Krzyż lotaryński*, access 2023]

The Caravaca cross featuring straight-ended horizontal bars encountered in Poland is a hyperonymic expression that therefore belongs not to the indicated synonymic sequence.

Another term, *krzyż św. Benedykta* (*St. Benedict's Cross*), this time a misnomer, used to refer to the referent in question. The confusion stems from the fact that the Caravaca cross, stated above, featured abbreviations from the St. Benedict's medal. The holy medal of St. Benedict (see footnote 4) or his image, and the above-mentioned holy medal was also referred to as a cross.

The lexicographic recordings of the items listed in the lexicographic sequence above are the nouns *karawaka* and *karawika* and the adjectives derived from them. *Karawaka* was first noted by Samuel Bogumił Linde in his dictionary and illustrated with 17th-century quotes from texts by Waclaw Potocki and Jakub Haura:

karawaka, -i, ż., n. p. W sercu bóg krzyża patrzy; nasze karawaki jedne piętna, jedne są u chrześcijan znaki *Pot.* [Colloq.] *Zac.* 141. Nie pomogły paski, paciorki, karawaki, książki i obrazki [Belts, beads, Caravaca crosses, books and pictures did not help] *Pot.* [Colloq.] *Jow.* 123. Karawaka na to potrzebna, aby się na niej modlili [The caravaca cross is needed to pray on it] *Haur. Ek.* 167. [L]

Another lexicographic record is found in *Słownik warszawski* (the *Warsaw Dictionary*) with the following entries:

Karawaka, i, lm. i., Karawika 1. *krzyż o dwu poprzecznicach, mający na sobie 7 krzyżyków i 18 liter* [a cross with two crossbars, featuring 7 crosses and 18 letters on it]: W sercu Bóg krzyża patrzy; nasze karawaki jedne piętna, jedne

są u chrześcijan znaki. Pot. [Colloq.] Nie pomogły paski, paciorki, karawaki, książki i obrazki [Belts, beads, Caravaca crosses, books and pictures did not help]. Pot. [Colloq.] Król karawaką ten tuman zażegnał [The king prevented the mist with a Caravaca cross]. Pol. Królowna słała (= przysłała) karawakę z Kompostelli [The Queen sent a Caravaca cross from Compostella]. Pol. K. ma posiadać moc cudowną bronienia od zarazy [The Caravaca cross is supposed to have miraculous powers as a defense from pestilence]. 2. *książka do nabożeństwa, szczeg. zawierająca modlitwy, przywiązane do karawaki* [a devotional book with prayers tied to a Caravaca cross]: Miewały też niegdyś tytuł karawak książki do nabożeństwa [Devotional books used to be called Caravaca]. Jam. K. na to potrzebna, aby ś. na niej modlili [Caravaca is needed for prayer]. Haur <From the name of the city of Spain Caravaca, famous for its miraculous cross>.

Karawakowy adj. from **Karawaka**.

Karawika, i, lm i, p. Karawaka: Krzyżyki rysowane na karawice znaczą, że im odpowiadające modlitwy od wyrazu „krzyż” ś. zaczynają, a litery są początkowemi innych liter, do tekstu łacińskiego zastosowane [Crosses drawn on *karawika* mean that the corresponding prayers begin from the word “cross,” and the letters are the initials of other letters, applied to the Latin text]. Jam. Ciekawych znaczenia tych zagadkowych liter, t. j. modlitewek krzyżykom i literom odpowiadających, odsyłamy do pospolitych broszurek, karawikami zwanych, lubo małej autentyczności i powagi [Those curious about the meaning of these puzzling letters, i.e. prayers with crosses and letters corresponding to them, are referred to common pamphlets, called *karawiki*, but of little authenticity and seriousness]. Jam.

Karawikowy adj. from **Karawika:** U nas karawikowej formy krzyże, z napisem krzyżyków i liter, stawiają podczas cholery [In our country, *karawikowe* crosses, with the inscription of crosses and letters, are put up during cholera]. Jam. [SW]

At the beginning of the 20th century the words *karawaka* and *karawika* were used not only to mean a two-barred cross but also a prayer book containing texts related to it. According to excerpts obtained using the online search engine Odkrywka, for example: “The word ‘**Karawaka**’ (or **karawika**) you ask about denotes a cross with two names with 7 crosses and 18 letters of the initial Latin prayers on it. It also indicates a devotional booklet explaining the meaning of the cross” (O, “Ziarno. Pismo Tygodniowe Ilustrowane” 1909, no. 7), the second meaning was rare and present only in the early 20th century, as witnessed by the small number of citations supporting this.

Only two more general dictionaries, SJPDor and PSWP, record the lexeme *karawaka* as a historicism meaning a cross. They already lack both the meaning of a prayer book and the forms *karawika*, *karawakowy* and *karawikowy*. The historical nature of the *karawaka* in the second half of the 20th century is also confirmed by Władysław Kopaliński in his *Słownik mitów i tradycji kultury* (Dictionary of Cultural Myths and Traditions) [Kopaliński 1991]. Of the etymological dictionaries, only SEBrü includes *karawaka* as a word derived from “Spanish place of indulgence” and *karawika* only in the sense of a prayer booklet.

Based on the data from the lexicographical sources indicated, online search engines and text corpora (Google, NKJP, Monco PL and Odkrywka⁵)⁶, it should be noted that the names of the cross offering protection against the plague have been in the language archive at least since the mid-20th century. They appeared in texts in which they referred only to monuments or historical aspects in general, i.e. in scientific publications, popular science texts, museum guides, e.g.:

a) **karawaka:**

It was common practice to display special crosses with double crossbars. These were known as **karawaki (Caravaca crosses)**. Prayers addressed to St. Benedict were placed on them. They were erected at the exit of the main streets of villages and towns. With their fronts facing the road, they were a sort of barrier against the oncoming plague. **Karawaki (Caravaca crosses)** were mostly wooden, so they were destroyed relatively quickly. Nowadays, they are no longer encountered. It seems that today the tradition is continued with the roadside crosses erected in the past and today. [NKJP: “Gazeta Radomszczańska”, 2 November 2009]⁷

b) **karawaczka:**

During epidemics, villagers were not allowed to go beyond such a cross, and its protective power was contained in the second - now forgotten - part of a popular saying: Krzyżyk na drogę, a na popas **karawaczka** [A cross for the road, and **karawaczka** for a stopover]. [MPL: “Tygodnik Ostrołęcki”]

5 About the Odkrywka system see: Graliński 2019.

6 Whenever we cite from NKJP, Monco PL (M) or Odkrywka (O), we use a sign of corpora and shortened bibliographical description. When we refer to the records from Google, we use the sign G and abbreviations of the sources found there or – if the author and date of publication are known – a typical note.

7 Quotations are translated from original language into English; emphases in bold are by the authors of the article.

c) **karawatka**⁸:

Crosses, so-called **karawatki**, in the collection of the National Museum in Kraków. [G: ZWZM]

d) **karawik**:

Prayers from the 19th century. In the related Turbański and Bzodek families, an extremely rare pamphlet print in the form of a 12-page, 9 × 13 cm format foldout containing prayers related to the plague has been preserved with great reverence from generation to generation. The cover page shows a two-barred cross of the same shape as the central one among the wooden crosses. From the name of the town of Caravaca in Spanish Murcia, where it originated, it is called a karawaka, karawika, **karawik**, cholera cross. [O: "Rzecz Krotoszyńska" 2014, no. 8]

e) **karawika**:

The cemetery still contains a well-preserved two-barred cross put up as a votive offering for freeing the city from the plague in 1892. It is made of cast iron and bears the following inscription: A two-barred cross, **Karawika**, took its own name from the capital city in Spain Caravia, so called because, when first displayed, it freed that city from the air. [O: "Białystok" 1999, no. 53]

f) **karawinka // karafinka**:

Karawinka Pleszew [...]. On Kaliska Street stands a large wooden cross with double crossbars, commonly referred to in Pleszew as *karawika* or *karafinka* (from the Spanish town of Caravaca). [G: KP]

g) **krzyż karawaka (caravaca cross)**:

Amber Gold's logo has not disappeared from TV reports in recent weeks. However, no one has so far pointed out that the strange mark placed on it is the **Caravaca cross**. [...] There is no longer any doubt that the company Amber Gold actually enjoyed miraculous protection, guaranteeing its owners impunity. [G: Lisiewicz 2012]

h) **krzyż karawakowy**:

On a golden (yellow) Spanish-type Gothic shield is a blue cross with two crossbars. The ends of the bars and the vertical bars are closed with an

8 This extremely rare name was, however, included in the title of the entry *Karawaka, karawika, karawatka* found in the *Catholic Encyclopedia* (Kopeć 2000).

oval-trapezoid motif. The proportions of the 10/12 plate are adapted to the vertically composed emblem. Identical proportions are used in the Pomeranian municipal heraldry. In the gold field of the plate there is a blue **krzyż karawakowy**. [O: *Kartki z historii gminy Rzeczników. Tradycje i współczesność*, Rzeczników 2013]

i) **krzyżyk karawakowy:**

The cross with two horizontal bars, the ends of which have a peculiar shape, described as cup-shaped, bell-shaped or resembling a stylized corn cockle flower, was classified by Kołyszko as Type III, the so-called **krzyżyk karawakowy**. [O: "Rocznik Chełmski" 2014, vol. 18]

j) **krzyż choleryczny (cholera cross):**

Patrycja Chołuj, a student at Władysław Jagiełło Gymnasium in Czerwińsk-on-Vistula, wrote about the **cholera cross** from Radzików. "The cross was erected in 1867 to commemorate the passage of the cholera plague through the village. The residents, putting up this cross, wanted to ensure that the tragic history of their small homeland was not forgotten". [G: ZKIZS]

k) **krzyż epidemiczny (epidemic cross):**

Epidemic cross in Nadwiśle. The cross is located at the intersection of Strzygłowska and Wał Miedzeszyński Streets. It has stood here since 1904 and was erected as a thanksgiving votive offering after the epidemic. On the cross there is the inscription "JESUS I TRUST IN THEE". [G: Czerwonka 2016]

l) **krzyż morowy (plague cross):**

The area around the church was surrounded by a high wall built of fieldstones and the only entrance there is through a gate tower, at which a **krzyż morowy** [plague cross], sometimes called a cholera cross, was placed. This small object formerly marked the boundary of the area taken by the plague. Today it's just a curiosity. [O: *Nowe życie kościółka w Bukowcu*, 2016]

m) **krzyż (św.) Zachariasza – St. Zechariah's cross:**

At the entry to Wolaniny there stands a tall, wooden cross with three crossbars. Referred to as *karawaka*, *karawik*, **St. Zechariah's Cross** or **krzyż morowy** (plague cross). It was thought to protect against pestilence like plague, cholera and typhoid. It was erected at both ends of the village, and residents were not allowed to go beyond it. [...] The one in Wolaniny was erected in 1848. There are not many of these left in Poland. [G: KKM]

With the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic and fears of the spread of the unknown but deadly COVID-19 virus, religious practices celebrated to stop the plague have returned to churches. New plague crosses began to be erected on the outskirts of some villages and towns, and the production of devotional items to protect against the effects of the pandemic increased. This was quickly reflected in the Polish language. The lexeme *karawaka* and some of its synonyms have returned from the language archives. We present the material documenting this in the form of quotes taken from the Monco PL corpus. After individual one-word terms and expressions, we provide the number of occurrences of a given element in this corpus in parentheses: after the abbreviation M, the number of occurrences of a given unit in this corpus, and after the abbreviation MT (Monco Trendy), while the timeline data indicates the moment of highest textual frequency⁹. We illustrate the excerpts with graphs of the increase in the frequency of use of the word/expression since 2020 and downloaded using the tools available in the Odkrywka search engine.

KARAWAKA (Caravaca cross) (M 202, MT November 2021)

Meaning: ‘krzyż wbijany w ziemię’ i ‘krzyżyk’ (‘cross driven into the ground’ and ‘little cross’)¹⁰

In recent months, **karawaki** [**Caravaca crosses**], distinctive crosses with two or three transverse bars, have been erected in many places in Poland. Until recently they were doomed to oblivion and slowly disappeared from the Polish landscape. The older generation associates Caravaca cross with the cholera cross, plague cross, erected for protection against epidemics, calamities, misfortune; put up at the edges of villages, toll booths, at crossroads, on hills, over epidemic graves. [OBP]

Caravaca cross is not an amulet and should not be attributed magical powers. Wearing a **Caravaca cross**, or any other cross or medallion, is a kind of confession of faith and a sign of trust and refuge in God in times when epidemics or natural disasters afflict us. [KKZR]

9 It should be noted that these data include uses of lexical units in relation to both recent and past realities.

10 Occasionally as the title of an art project: “**Karawaka** is a painting project by Robert Sokółowski, inspired by folk art and sacred artifacts of the Polish countryside. The subjects of the paintings are the world’s matter, marked by transience, behind which we see the epiphanies experienced by people. [...] The project is also an attempt to ask the question whether there is still a place for religious art in modern art, in a situation where the commonly used tool for valuing religious motifs is irony?” [Świąszkowska 2020].

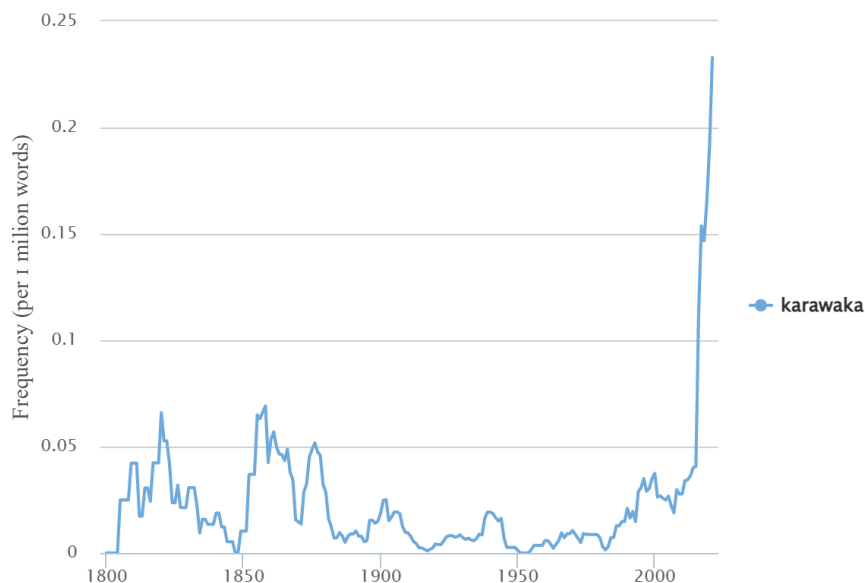


Chart 1. The frequency of use of the lexeme *karawaka* in Polish texts since 1800 – based on data from the Odkrywka search engine

Source: own work.

KARAWIKA (M 2, MT November 2020)¹¹

KARAWIK (M o)

KARAWINKA (M o) – only in a single sale offer on Allegro e-commerce platform

Karawaka, **karawika**, **karawik**, **karawinka**, cholera cross, plague cross, St. Zechariah's Cross. St. Benedict's Cross, a cross with two transverse bars, the upper of which is shorter. Considered to protect against "pestilence" or epidemics of plague, smallpox, cholera, typhoid and others, as well as tuberculosis, weather anomalies, misfortunes and sudden deaths. In Poland the transverse bars are often equal. In the Biłgoraj region, the plague cross, called **karawika**, has as many as three transverse bars – the length of the chain is 60 cm. [AL]

¹¹ Both instances of the use of the lexeme in Monco PL concern historical realities.

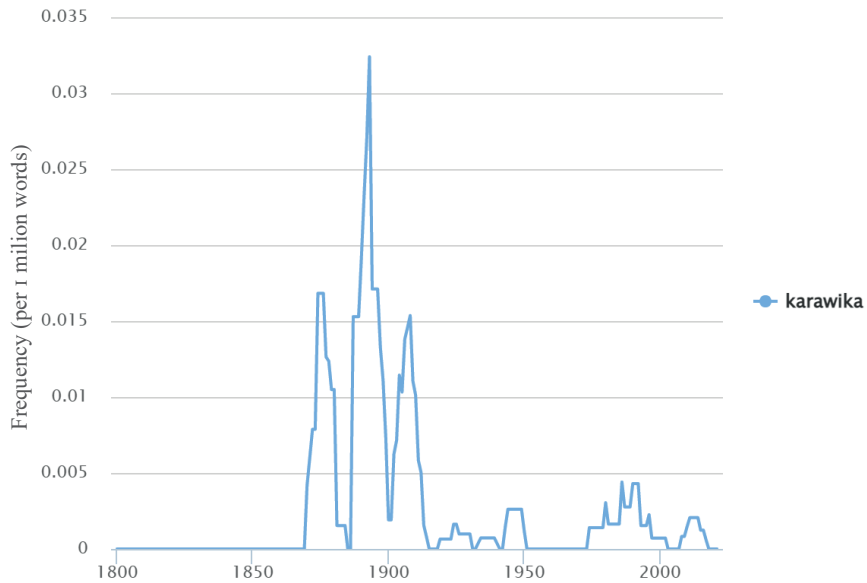


Chart 2. The frequency of use of the lexeme *karawika* in Polish texts since 1800 – based on data from the Odkrywka search engine

Source: own work.

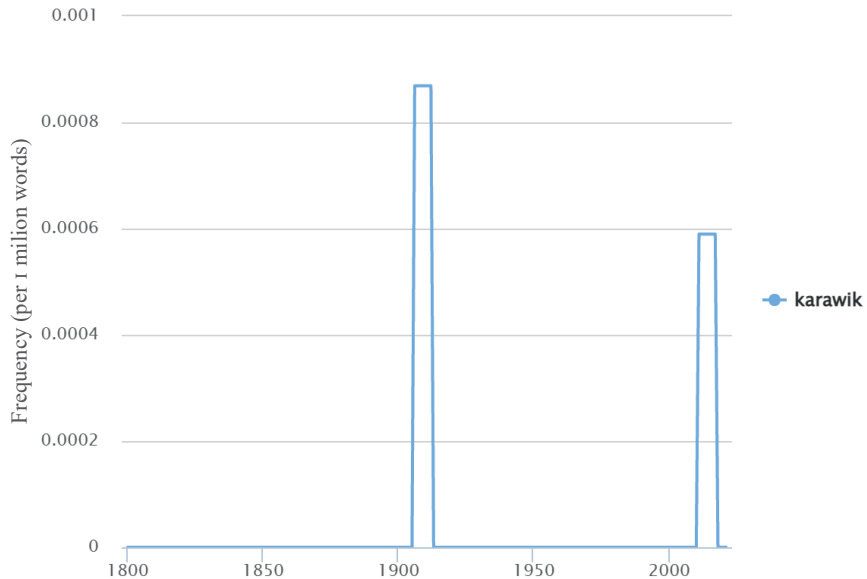


Chart 3. The frequency of use of the lexeme *karawik* in Polish texts since 1800 – based on data from the Odkrywka search engine

Source: own work.

KRZYŻ KARAWAKA (Caravaca cross) (M 26, MT November 2021)

meaning: 'krzyż wbijany w ziemię' i 'krzyżyk' ('cross driven into the ground' and 'little cross')

The Publishing House of the Diocese of Sandomierz prepared a **Caravaca cross**, or the so-called "plague cross", for this difficult time of the epidemic, along with a prayer that was customarily recited under the cross, asking for the cessation of the epidemic or pestilence. [Lis 2020a]

A unique rosary finished with a **Caravaca cross** with the original medallion of St. Benedict. [KMT]

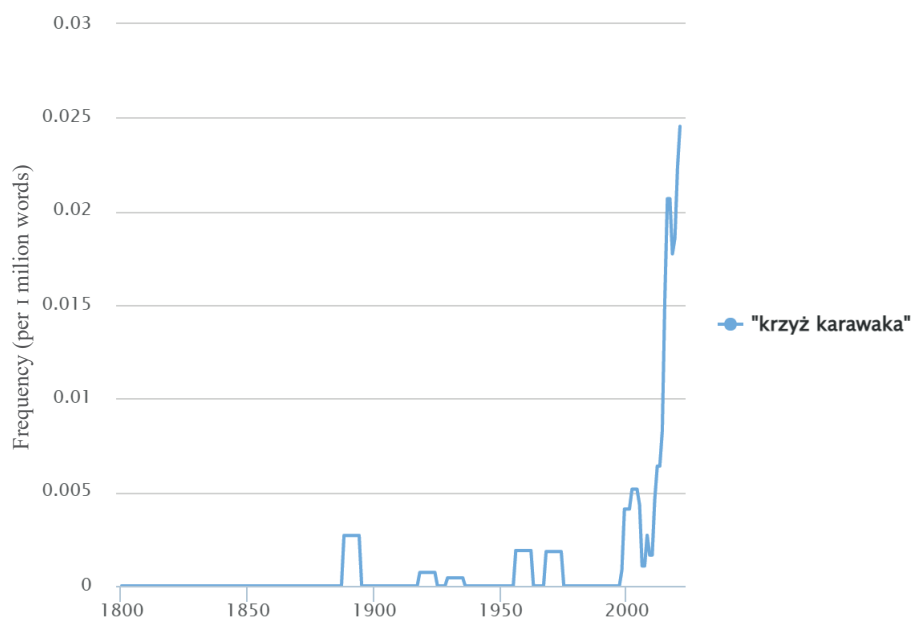


Chart 4. The frequency of use of the phrase *krzyż karawaka* in Polish texts since 1800 – based on data from the Odkrywka search engine

Source: own work.

KRZYŻ KARAWAKOWY (M O)

Parishioners from Grabowiec put up **krzyż karawakowy**. A group of believers from St. Nicholas' parish in Grabowiec has erected a two-barred **krzyż karawakowy**. Such crosses used to be erected during epidemics and pestilence. The cross is located near the parish boundary. The cross has been set up when coronavirus pandemic spread throughout the world and our homeland. It is to stimulate faith and love for God, to be a hope to overcome fear, suffering and evil. [Deka 2020]

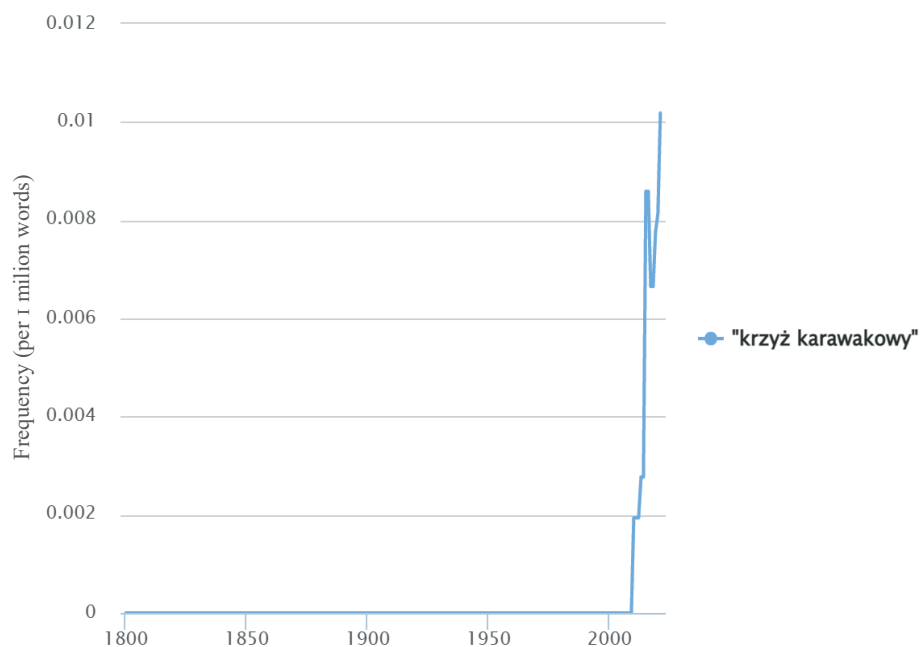


Chart 5. The frequency of use of the phrase *krzyż karawakowy* in Polish texts since 1800 – based on data from the Odkrywka search engine

Source: own work.

KRZYŻ CHOLERYCZNY (CHOLERA CROSS) (M 41, MT July 2020)

Because of the coronavirus karawaki (Caravaca crosses), also known as **cholera crosses** or krzyże morowe (plague crosses), are “in vogue” again. [Pajuro 2020]

Karawaka in Kadzidło is related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Karawaka, or plague cross or **cholera cross**, has a long-standing tradition. It is put up to protect against pestilence, misfortune, accidents, sudden deaths, theft, storms and lightning. Karawaka in Kadzidło was erected at the avenue of Sergeant Wincenty Kamiński. [Jaroszevska 2021]

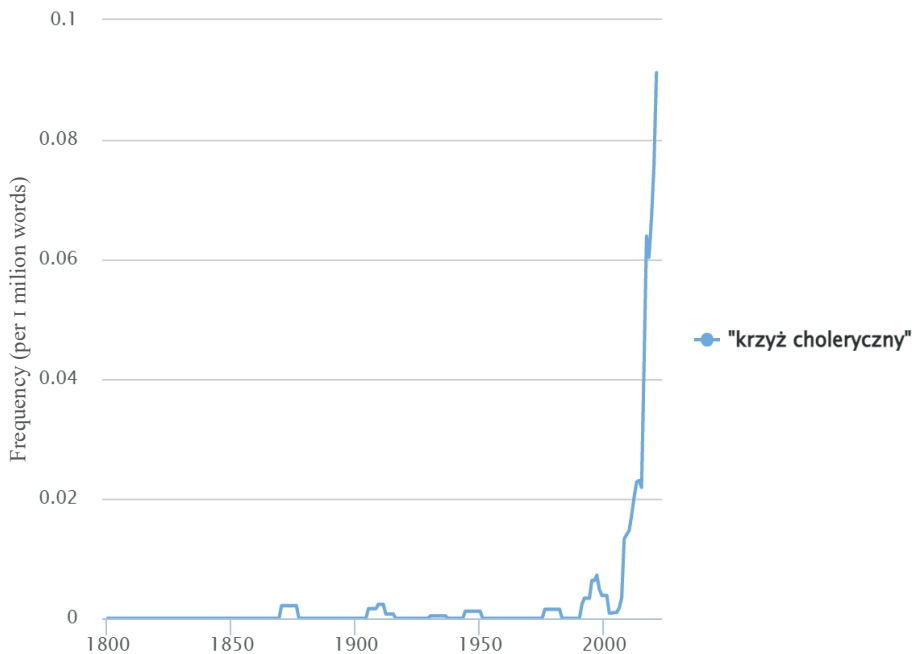


Chart 6. The frequency of use of the phrase *krzyż choleryczny* in Polish texts since 1800 – based on data from the Odkrywka search engine

Source: own work.

KRZYŻ EPIDEMICZNY (EPIDEMIC CROSS) (M 42, MT April 2020)

Dylewo. **Epidemic cross**. It will be consecrated on May 3, 2020. In accordance with the tradition of our ancestors, we put up the Epidemic Cross as a sign of our unwavering faith in God's providence over us, our parish, our loved ones, Poland and the whole world. [Ossowski 2020a]

Baranowo Commune. A new **epidemic cross** in Ramiona. The previous one has stood in the village for nearly 200 years. Scouts from the VFB in Ramiona (Baranowo commune) erected a new **epidemic cross** in their village. The previous one, already heavily damaged, had stood there for more than 180 years. [Ossowski 2020b]

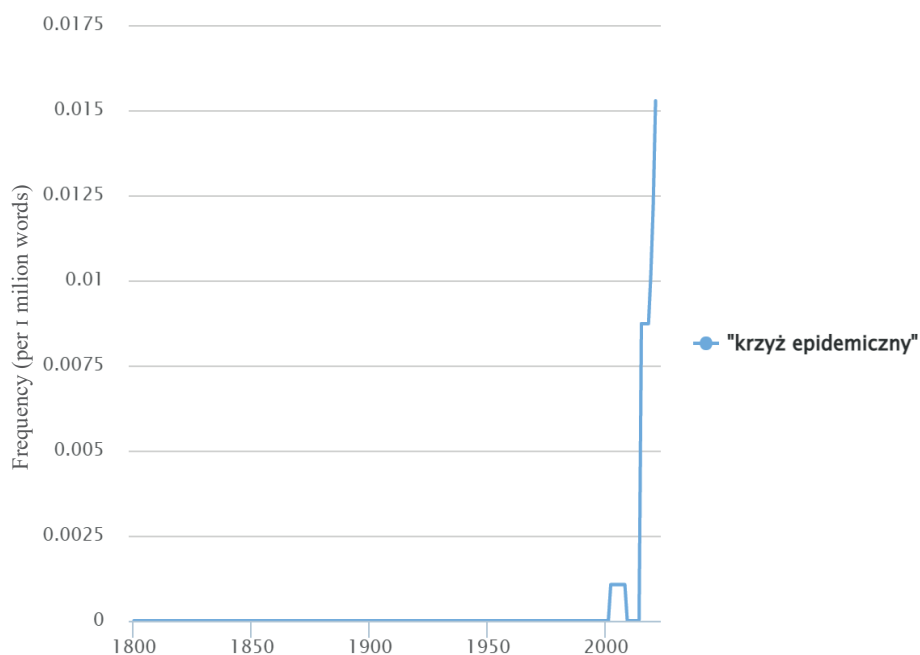


Chart 7. The frequency of use of the lexeme *krzyż epidemiczny* in Polish texts since 1800 – based on data from the Odkrywka search engine

Source: own work.

KRZYŻ MOROWY (PLAGUE CROSS) (M 161, MT October 2021)

In the current difficult time we are looking for support, help and protection from the epidemic. The **plague cross**, St. Zechariah's cross, or Caravaca cross, was used in the Catholic Church as protection against pestilence, plague or epidemics. Let us return to this beneficiary habit and cling even more closely to the cross in this difficult time for all. [Lis 2020b]

MONDAY, 25 OCTOBER 2021. A **PLAGUE CROSS** STANDS AT THE SANCTUARY AT ŚWIĘTY KRZYŻ. [...] a **plague cross** – karawaka – stood at the shrine at Święty Krzyż 24 on October. The ceremony was attended by Andrzej Pruś, chairman of the Sejmik of the Świetokrzyskie Province, Marshal Andrzej Bętkowski and Deputy Marshal Marek Bogusławski. [UM]

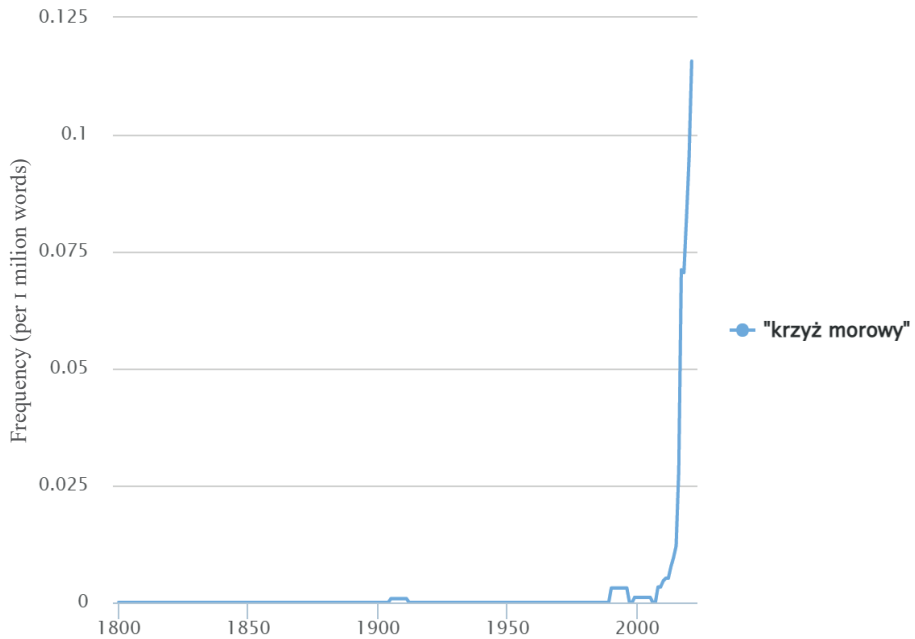


Chart 8. The frequency of use of the lexeme *krzyż morowy* in Polish texts since 1800 – based on data from the Odkrywka search engine

Source: own work.

KRZYŻ (ŚW.) ZACHARISZA – (ST.) ZECHARIAH’S CROSS (M 2, MT April 2020)

St. Zechariah’s cross, which protects against pestilence and epidemics **St. Zechariah’s cross** is different from those traditionally found in Poland. Two transverse bars and engraved letters are supposed to protect against pestilence and epidemics. Recently [September 2021 – A.P. and M.W.S.] a pandemic cross was erected at a cemetery in Nakło at the Noteć River. [S7]

St. Zechariah’s cross plague cross/protection against pestilence. [AA]

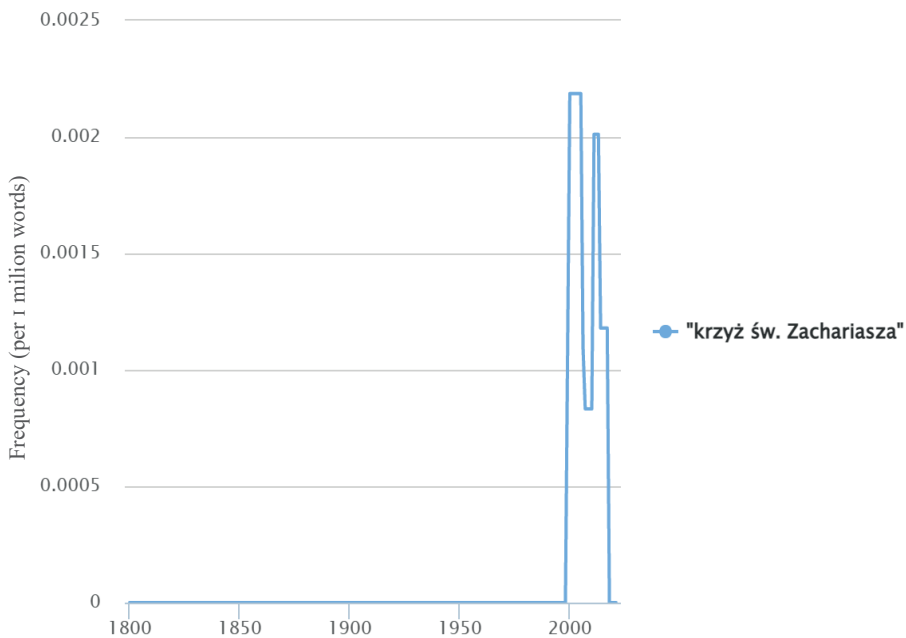


Chart 9. The frequency of use of the phrase *krzyż św. Zachariasza* in Polish texts since 1800 – based on data from the Odkrywka search engine

Source: own work.

The analysis of historically recorded synonymous terms of *karawaka* allows us to observe that the lexeme *karawaka* and the expressions *krzyż karawaka*, *krzyż choleryczny*, *krzyż epidemiczny* i *krzyż morowy* have returned from the linguistic archives, not in relation to monuments, but to modern devotional items and crosses erected by the roadside. The most commonly used terms are *karawaka* (M 202, including from January 2020: 75) and *krzyż morowy* (M 161, including from January 2020: 160). More rare, but also found on the Internet are the expressions: *krzyż epidemiczny* (M 42, from January 2020 only), *krzyż choleryczny* (M 41, including from January 2020: 27), *krzyż karawaka* (M 26, from January 2020 only). All of them have a wide textual extension. They appear in newspaper articles, journalistic texts, websites (mainly parish websites) and commercial offers. Occasionally (found once or twice in the sources searched) the following expressions appear: *karawik*, *karawika*, *karawinka*, *krzyż karawakowy* i *krzyż (św.) Zachariasza*. The terms *karawaczka*, *karawatka* and *krzyżyk karawakowy* are missing, however, as names related to coronavirus realities.

The expression *krzyż pandemiczny* is a new element. It is not yet found in texts sought with Odkrywka, but may be found in online texts, and according to data from the Monco PL corpus has occurred 32 times since September 2020, reaching a peak in frequency in September 2021. Here are sample quotes:

The **pandemic cross** stood at Ostra Brama in Skarżysko

It was consecrated by Bishop Marek Solarczyk after a Mass celebrated for those affected by the coronavirus pandemic and those caring for the sick. [Niemirski 2021]

In Kadzidło a plaque commemorating the dead, suffering, and orphaned during the COVID-19 plague was features on the recently erected **pandemic cross**. [EO]

Pandemic cross in Myszyniec. A **pandemic cross** has been erected at the Basilica in Myszyniec. [TO]

Finally, it is worth mentioning the word-combination *różaniec karawaka* (Caravaca rosary) which is neither recorded in Old Polish (no finds in Odkrywka) nor registered contemporaneously in the Monco PL corpus but is found via Google search. For example:

Caravaca rosary – wooden. [...] A unique rosary ending in a Caravaca cross with an original St. Benedict's medallion. [KMT]

CARAVACA rosary crystal transparent St. Benedict (5 × 10 beads). [RKK]

CARAVACA rosary wooden oval I. St. Benedict (5 × 10 beads). [RKD]

Caravaca rosary – hematite. A unique rosary finished with a Caravaca cross with the original medallion of St. Benedict. [WDS]

Summarizing the remarks about the resurgence of the lexeme *karawaka* and some of its synonyms, i.e., terms that have only functioned as terms in scientific and popular science texts since the second half of the 20th century, let us emphasize that such an emotionally extreme phenomenon as the pandemic of a deadly disease has triggered, in certain circles of society, the need to resume old religious practices and, consequently, the production of items related to such practices. The renewed production of devotional crosses in the form of two-barred crosses and crosses to protect against the plague, after almost a century, has seen the return of their names, especially *krzyż morowy* i *karawaka*, from the linguistic archives to modern general Polish.

Translated by Magdalena Perdek

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Karawaka (Caravaca Cross) and Its Synonyms, or Lexical Returns

The authors, referring to the article *Words That Come Back* by Bogdan Walczak from 1998, present the history of the word *karawaka* in Polish. It is the name of the cross with two horizontal beams protecting against various disasters, especially against epidemics. Originally, it was a reliquary from the 4th century AD with a piece of the Holy Cross Tree, brought in the 13th century during the Crusades from Jerusalem to the Spanish city of Caravaca (from which its name comes). The custom of erecting such crosses and wearing these types of small crosses disappeared in the 20th century, and returned with the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus pandemic. The lexeme *karawaka* was recorded for the first time in Samuel Bogumił Linde’s *Polish Language Dictionary*, and in the *Polish Language Dictionary* edited by Witold Doroszewski it already had the status of historicism. This word and its synonyms (*krzyż karawaka, krzyż choleryczny, krzyż epidemiczny, krzyż morowy, krzyż epidemiczny, krzyż choleryczny, krzyż karawaka*) returned to Polish in 2020, and the lexical novelty during the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus pandemic is *krzyż pandemiczny*.

KEYWORDS: lexicology; lexicography; the life of words; corpus research; the names of the cross protecting against the epidemic.

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