

The research project *Matrix of Confusion. The Production of Woodcut Illustration in Poland-Lithuania and Prussia until the Early 17<sup>th</sup> Century* aims to generate a middle range theory explaining practices of use of woodcut illustrations in multi-ethnic, multi-confessional and multi-linguistic milieux. The project's **general premises** are:

- Focus on the matrix regarded both as the outset of an image and a material object, with particular emphasis on tensions between identical images and their various, occasionally surprising or confusing, contexts.
- Focus on the beginnings of print culture in Poland-Lithuania and Prussia in respect to both complex networks of local printers and ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity of local public, unique in Europe.

Poland-Lithuania and Prussia are an underexplored region in the research on early prints in general and in the research on early printed images in particular. And yet this region is likely to challenge some established views and reveal new aspects of the early modern print cultures in Europe.

The project addresses **no preconceived hypotheses**. Instead, consistently with the Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM), it starts with a comprehensive **list of research questions**. Preliminary **descriptive research** will touch on basic questions concerning the number and origins of matrices, and frequency and contexts of their use in the early modern Poland-Lithuania and Prussia. **Explanatory research** will aim to elucidate various mechanisms and motivations behind reuse of matrices, changing functions of illustrations, significance of ethnic, linguistic and religious factors, efficacy of legal regulations.

Many scholars who have dealt with early printed images hitherto emphasize the prominent role of woodcuts in popular devotion, propaganda and transmission of knowledge. However, the initial research has shown that woodcut illustrations also appeared in less predictable or even surprising contexts and thus are a suitable point of departure for tackling the seemingly simple question that reads: what was the rule (and routine) and what was the exception – with regard to the use of woodcuts – in the practice of printers active in Poland-Lithuania and Prussia? Particularly, how consistently were certain woodcuts placed in similar contexts, how often were they confused and how often – and why – were matrices deliberately reused in less obvious or even surprising manner (e.g. in books intended for adherents of various religious denominations). To answer such questions representative material must be collected, described, analyzed and contextualized.

Three to some extent overlapping **categories of data** include: (1) preserved matrices, (2) matrices that can be identified on the comparative basis i.e. analysis of preserved impressions, and (3) matrices recorded in written sources. Altogether, the material will plausibly run into a few thousands of blocks (imported and produced locally) used (often a number of times each) to impress several thousands of illustrations in hundreds of books produced by various printers. The data will be entered into the database conceived as a reliable and user-friendly tool that will enable scholars to easily find both all illustrations of each particular edition of a book (considering various origins of the matrices), and all instances of use of each particular matrix (considering various contexts of the respective impressions).

In line with the premises of the GTM, **a multitude of constantly analyzed and contextualized data** from Poland-Lithuania and Prussia **will serve to generate a theory**. Depending on how systematic pattern may appear from the data, a synthesis of the results will be presented in either a multifaceted book monograph or a comprehensive introductory essay to a collection of analytical studies. Regardless of the above, particular cases or aspects (answers to specific research questions) will also be investigated and presented in articles submitted to international journals or edited volumes.