

POLISH MEDITATIVE EMBLEMS IN THE 16TH THROUGH 18TH CENTURY: SOURCES, REALISATIONS, AND AIMS

The project is aimed at describing meditative emblems – one branch of emblematics, a mixed-medium early modern print genre within the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. It will be the first monographic analysis and description of the Polish meditative emblem genre in whose development I date between years c. 1570 and c. 1750, that is from the time, when the *Symbolica vitae Christi meditatio* was designed by Tomasz Treter (c. 1570, printed in 1612) to *Pious demands* by Jan Turczyn (printed in 1753). It should be emphasized that a great part of the already chosen material (17 collections) have not been interpreted at all thus far. The main questions which I would like to pose are how and why printed images were used as a medium of Christian meditation and what the specificity of the realisations of this genre was in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. As the term for such a type of emblems, I use the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century category of *emblemata sacra* which according to Antonio Possevino and Claude-François Ménéstrier were to serve the development of personal piety and found their roots in “sacred texts”. In the genre of *emblemata sacra*, images call attention to their status as pictorial or figurative representations of transcendent phenomena. As the theological basis for such use of images, authors of meditative books referred to the epistemological notion of representing of religious ideas *per visibilia ad invisibilia*. The images also served as stimuli for the sensual, intellectual and emotional powers of the reader-viewer.

Apart from collecting my research material (old prints and manuscripts) and its introductory iconological and philological description, I will attempt to answer the question on the influence of these texts on the reader as it was intended by authors, as well as find theological, philosophical and aesthetic foundations of this genre. So far, Polish researchers have been interested in the genealogical analysis of the emblem genre (e.g. print devices, stemmata, panegyric emblems). Above all, I will emphasize the specificity of Polish realizations of examined genre whose sources I trace to the particular political and social situation of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. This proposition is linked with hypothesis that illustrative devotional books were used by Polish Jesuits to wage the confessional war whose aim was to gather the widest audience possible. Therefore, Jesuit persuasive methods included acculturation techniques such as the accommodation (*accomodatio*) of themes and motifs (from biblical and ancient sources) to the readers’ habits.

This project aspires to broadly characterize the genre of “sacred emblems”. It will be necessary to give context for this research with an analysis of the development of spirituality in early modern Poland. Thanks to the Jesuit order, meditation became a way to develop personal piety available to the average lay reader. Books of illustrated meditations played a great role in that development, suggesting to the reader what she or he should think and how to imagine it. A special category of reader-viewer (*lector et inspector*) was coined to define such a reading experience. The investigation of this phenomenon would require the tools of aesthetics, literary theory, theology and book history alike.

Polish collections will be analysed in the context of realizations of the genre (as the most influential ones at that time) in the Netherlands as well as French and Italian theoretical treatises devoted to the *emblemata sacra*. The key to studying these international relationships will be the finding of graphic sources for Polish emblems in foreign collections. The discovery of the precise trajectories of engraving migration would allow me not to merely compare collections, but rather reconstruct the historical book market and analyse individual cases in the context of activities by particular artists, printers, and customers. Apart from collecting material for literary and art historians, the examination of the genre of meditative emblems allows the researcher to look into historical opinions on the intimate contact with a book (which, in this case, was dedicated to laypeople, usually not educated in theology) and on the attempts on using the visual medium in a book while surpassing its purely illustrative function. While conducting the research on graphic patterns, I will collaborate with the international project *Emblematica Online* in order to enter Polish emblems into its Internet database and examine their both Polish and transnational characteristics.