

*The circulation of incunabula in early modern Warsaw. A case study of the Metropolitan Seminary Library's collection*

The main goal of the proposed research is to investigate the circulation of fifteenth-century books (incunabula) in early modern Warsaw and identify their owners and readers. To accomplish this objective, one hundred and fifty-one volumes preserved in the Metropolitan Seminary Library in Warsaw will undergo an in-depth analysis.

Incunabula (lat. *incunabula*: the beginning, the cradle) were the first, still imperfect products of the era of print. The spread of the new technology occurred gradually in the late 1400s and early 1500s. Though not a single printing house existed in Warsaw at that time, it did not mean that there was no demand for books in the city before the rather late (1624) establishment of the first stationary printing office. Itinerant bookbinders regularly visited Warsaw, not only to bind, but also to sell the products of printing presses. Warsaw residents themselves regularly purchased books abroad or in other Polish cities as well. The planned research will answer the questions about who the first owners of fifteenth-century books held in the Metropolitan Seminary Library were, where and by whom these books were used, and how they reached Warsaw. One of the aims of the project will be to demonstrate how the invention of print affected early modern societies east of the Oder River and how knowledge, information and ideas were spread by the medium of printed volumes, eventually reaching consumers who often resided in countries very distant from the place where their book had been produced.

The Metropolitan Seminary Library's incunabula collection was chosen as the subject of this research based on the hypothesis that it contains a large number of volumes which belonged to persons and institutions with ties to Warsaw in the 1400s–1600s. Assumptions regarding the content of that corpus were derived from the fact that the Seminary Library's early printed books, unlike Warsaw's other collections, suffered no major losses between 1700 and 1945. It is also worth mentioning that although the Seminary Library holds the second largest corpus of incunabula in Warsaw today (after the National Library), provenance information on these books has never been published, neither in the form of a printed catalogue nor online. Due to this fact, one projected activity is to upload the collected data to international open access databases managed by the Consortium of European Research Libraries (CERL): *Material Evidence of Incunabula* (MEI), *Owners of Incunabula* and *Provenance Digital Archive* (PDA).

The proposed research will focus on the book as a material object, that is on the copy-specific characteristics of every analyzed volume. Therefore, provenance research will be the key activity. The main method used in this kind of research is an in-depth analysis of all the traces (such as ownership marks, marginalia, or manuscript notes) left on the books by its successive readers. Their registration combined with adding geographical and chronological tags to all evidence found will allow me to trace the circulation of the volumes from the time they were printed to the time they reached their current owner. Moreover, bibliographical analysis will serve as a supplementary method to help follow text transmission in the early modern period and provide relevant socio-historical contexts.