

The study of the early modern print culture often entails not only researching artistic phenomena, but also exploring the way in which visual information was created and conveyed. Following this trail, the project *Castles, Horses and Angels. Noble Patrons, Earthly Knowledge and Heavenly Wisdom in the Oeuvre of Tomasz Makowski (ca 1575 - ca 1630)* aims to explore the significant, but still neglected oeuvre of the Polish printmaker Tomasz Makowski. The objective is not only to elaborate on the rise of engraving in the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, but also to investigate the function of prints in the transmission of knowledge.

The project's general premises are:

– Focus on the informative – rather than persuasive or purely aesthetic – function of printed images as the transmitter of knowledge

– Focus on the relations between the printmaker's skills and his patrons' expectations

At the beginning of the 17th century, the production of engravings was exceptional in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. One of the pioneers of this technique was Tomasz Makowski. His prints cover a vast array of topics such as: geography, current events and political propaganda; horse breeding and equitation; religion. 'Earthly knowledge' in Makowski's prints is accessible for example in: the plan of Moscow, the celebrated map of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (The Radziwiłł Map) and illustrations for popular handbook on horse breeding *Hippica to iest o koniach Xsięgi*. 'Heavenly wisdom' in Makowski's oeuvre is disseminated in his illustrations for the book on the cult of angels, *De Sanctis Angelis Libellus*. Makowski's engravings represented, therefore, different areas and even dimensions of reality, and thus may be understood – to travesty the famous Leonardo's saying – as 'a rein and ruder' of knowledge. However, the reliability of the imparted knowledge in prints was dependent, similarly to good horse handling, on two factors: the quality of the equipment and the skills of printmaker. The former touches on the issue of the accessibility of copperplate presses, which were still rare in the region (in contrast to the letterpress or woodcut printing presses). Makowski's skills appear to have been average against the background of those of the most renowned printmakers of the period, but he was a local pioneer of the engraving technique.

Makowski's oeuvre, examined in terms of both production and reception, gives a unique insight not only into the issues that are specific to the rise and dissemination of engraving in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, but also into several broader questions that are pertinent to the role of prints in political propaganda and knowledge transfer in the early modern period. An exceptional benefit of studying Makowski's oeuvre will be an understanding of the mechanisms of implementation of the new technique – that is engraving – in the peripheral regions of Europe. Eastern Europe, as underexplored as it is, appears likely to bring a new perspective on the functions of prints and also to shed fresh light on criteria for the evaluation of artistic production. For instance, it seems plausible that Makowski's Polish patrons considered his works exceptional for the technique of engraving as much as for the quality or informative value of designs. Finally, the study of some Makowski's work will certainly bring various additions to the history of early modern geography and zoology, bearing in mind that hitherto researchers have elaborated on Polish contacts of the most renowned scholars of the mid and late sixteenth century, Conrad Gessner and Ulisse Aldrovandi, but paid much less attention to the early seventeenth century.