“To have a printer at hand”: Jesuits and the Dissemination of Printing in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth before 1620

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Abstract

In the second half of the sixteenth century, the Jesuits considered the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth a missionary territory. This perception was linked to the exceptional writing and publishing activity. The Jesuits not only had about seven hundred editions of their writings published before 1620, they also established their own printing presses. This article identifies the main purposes of Jesuit publishing activity, demonstrates the Society’s proficiency with various printed media and reflects on their role in the dissemination of printing craft throughout the Commonwealth.

Keywords


Although there is no doubt that the Jesuits were fully aware of the opportunities offered by the dissemination of the written word in print, there is still little discussion of the role of the printed book in the early decades of the Society of Jesus’ presence in the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth.1 For Jesuits, books were an extremely useful and effective tool for education, propaganda, and,
above all—for spreading *christianitas*. The Jesuits published their books wherever they established missions, thereby contributing to the global spread of European printing methods. The Commonwealth, a vast yet sparsely populated political entity, was multiethnic, multilingual, and multireligious long before Protestant ideas spread after 1517. Despite King Sigismund I the Old’s (1467–1548) attempts to suppress the spread of the Protestant Reformation, it developed gradually and gained momentum under the rule of his son, Sigismund II Augustus (1520–72). The Commonwealth’s rulers remained Catholic, but the country was known for a high degree of religious freedom, which was officially sanctioned in 1573 by the Warsaw Confederation. The Jesuits presented it a missionary territory and Piotr Skarga (1536–1612), one of the most prominent Polish Jesuits at the time, even compared Lithuania to the “Indies.” In a letter to a provincial in 1573, he wrote, “We do not need Indies in the East or in the West; this is the true Indies, Lithuania and the North.” Indeed, Jesuit activity in northern parts of Poland–Lithuania, despite obvious and fundamental differences, offers some striking similarities with the work of Jesuit missionaries in the Far East and the New World, most notably the use of books as tools for catechetical and pastoral work.

The correspondence of the Jesuit Antonio Possevino (1533–1611), active as papal diplomat in the region in the 1580s sheds some light on how the Jesuits understood the functions of their colleges in the region. These institutions were not just regarded as a means for educating and renewing Catholicism in the Commonwealth but were also considered as outposts from which to carry out missionary work directed further eastward (to unite Orthodox Christians with Rome and convert the Tatars) and northward (to convert Livonia and Sweden), with Catholic books being one of the tools. Possevino’s fervent belief in books as tools for education and propagation of the Catholic faith

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was unusual in the Polish–Lithuanian context only because of the forcefulness and flair with which he expressed it. He was obsessed with the idea of disseminating them in these territories, not only in Latin but also in Lithuanian, Latvian, Ruthenian, Hebrew, and Arabic. He set up a seminar for translators in Tartu (Dorpat) and imported books in Arabic and Hebrew printed in Rome to distribute them among Tatars and Jews. To enable book production on the spot, he took care of importing matrices and punches for Greek and Ruthenian characters into Poland. He was also concerned about printing Catholic books in Hungarian, had plans to establish a printing press for Wallachia and commissioned the printing of books in Ingolstadt and Vienna for the Society’s needs in the Commonwealth. He also admonished parochial priests and bishops to introduce Tridentine regulations in the field of book censorship.⁵ Possevino’s standing as a papal diplomat who worked with the Polish king Stephen Báthory (1533–86) was unique. His vision was much broader than the perspectives of the Jesuits resident in their own colleges and coping with everyday challenges, and there is some evidence that they did not always share his ideas. Possevino mentioned Polish vernacular publications only occasionally in his letters, although always approvingly. It seems he knew this field would be covered by his Polish brethren, whose output took off after the stage of settlement and the establishment of the first colleges in the 1560s and 1570s.⁶

The Jesuits residing in the Commonwealth turned out to be prolific writers and systematically provided the reading public with a great variety of Catholic

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⁵ Possevino’s letters worth mentioning in this context were written mainly in 1583 and include three letters referring to types (punches, matrices or type) for printing in Ruthenian and Slavonic exchanged by Possevino with Tolomeo Gallio in *Monumenta Poloniae Vaticana*, series 5, *Alberti Bolognetti Nuntii Apostolici in Polonia epistolae et acta 1581–1585*, vol. 2, 1583, ed. Edward Kuntze (Kraków: Academia Polona Litterarum et Scientiarum, 1938): Possevino to Gallio, Kraków, January 13, 1583, no. 12, p. 21; Gallio to Possevino, Rome, July 16, 1583, no. 241, p. 410; Possevino to Gallio, Košice, October 24, 1583, no. 356, p. 622. Another group of letters mentioned Possevino’s orders for books to be printed, mainly in Ingolstadt: Possevino to Gallio, Kraków, January 1, 1583, no. 1, p. 2; Possevino to Giovanni Francesco Bonomi, Niepolomice, February 10, 1583, no. 60, p. 114; Possevino to Gallio, Munich, May 27, 1583, no. 178, p. 320. Books for Wallachia, Moldova, Ruthenia etc. see e.g. Possevino to Gallio, Kraków, July 16, 1583, no. 242, p. 413; Possevino to Gallio, Košice, November 1, 1583, no. 359, p. 628. The very interesting question of a planned Domenico Basa’s bookshop in Kraków see *Monumenta Poloniae Vaticana*, series 4, *I.A. Caligarii Nuntii Apost. in Polonia Epistolae et Acta, 1578–1581*, vol. 1, ed. Ludwik Boratyński (Kraków: Academia Polona Litterarum et Scientiarum, 1915): Possevino to Gallio, May 5, 1579, Warsaw, no. 104, p. 186; Gallio to Giovanni Andrea Caligari, June 27, 1579, Rome, no. 124, p. 237; Gallio to Possevino, June 27, 1579, Rome, no. 125, p. 237. Possevino to Gallio, Kraków, January 1, 1583, no. 1, p. 2; Possevino to Giovanni Andrea Caligari, November 25, 1579, Trovesundi, in *Monumenta Poloniae Vaticana*, series 4, vol. 1, no. 177, pp. 326–27 and Appendix 20, which mention Skarga’s hagiographical collection (*Żywoty świętych*) and his polemic with the Orthodox Church.

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⁶ See e.g., Possevino to Giovanni Andrea Caligari, November 25, 1579, Trovesundi, in *Monumenta Poloniae Vaticana*, series 4, vol. 1, no. 177, pp. 326–27 and Appendix 20, which mention Skarga’s hagiographical collection (*Żywoty świętych*) and his polemic with the Orthodox Church.
books. Works written, translated, edited, otherwise inspired, or printed by the Jesuits who lived and worked in the Commonwealth constitute a substantial corpus that has largely been traced and recorded in bibliographies. (Hereafter, this diverse corpus will be referred to as “Jesuit books” for simplicity.) Jerzy Kochanowicz, who revised and supplemented the work of earlier Jesuit bibliographers, listed almost four hundred editions printed in the Commonwealth during the sixteenth century.\(^7\) My preliminary bibliographical survey of the first two decades of the seventeenth century has yielded around three hundred editions of Jesuit books.\(^8\)

Although this corpus of publications is extremely diverse and dynamic, its beginnings were modest. In the first five years after its arrival in Poland in 1564, the Society basically limited itself to republishing Peter Canisius’s (1521–97) catechism and Juan Alfonso de Polanco’s (1517–76) handbook for confessors (*Breve directorium ad confessarii...*); they also published some materials for colleges.\(^9\) But already in the 1570s, did the two most famous Jesuit writers of the era, namely Jakub Wujek (1541–97), whose first text appeared in print in 1570, and Skarga, whose first book came off the press six years later, begin to publish on a more regular basis. However, it was not until the last two decades of the sixteenth century that more Polish Jesuits became active in this field, especially as polemicists. An often-quoted memorandum to Superior General Claudio Acquaviva (1543–1615) written by Alonso de Pisa (1528–98), a Spanish Jesuit working in Poznań, was one possible reason for the increase of Jesuit publications at the time. Pisa urged his superiors to expand publishing efforts in Poland–Lithuania, which he saw as especially fruitful. An additional factor

\(^7\) See Carlos Sommervogel, *Bibliothèque de la Compagnie de Jésus, nouvelle édition*, 12 vols. (Louvain: Bibliothèque S.J., Collège philosophique et théologique, 1963); Józef Brown, *Biblioteka pisarzów assistencji polskiej Towarzystwa Jezusowego*, trans. Władysław Klejnówksi (Poznań: Ludwik Merzbach, 1862); Jerzy Kochanowicz, *Początki piśmiennictwa jezuickiego w Polsce: Studium z historii kultury* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Dolnośląskiej Szkoły Wyższej, 2012), 219–60. The actual number may be slightly higher because Kochanowicz did not include editions of, for example church fathers, that were clearly prepared by Jesuits, such as Vincent of Lérins (d.445–50), *Adversus prophanas haereson novationes libellus vere aureus* (Kraków: Andreas Petricovius, 1605) with a commentary by Franciscus Coster (1532–1619). This kind of Jesuit agency is difficult to trace because library catalogs rarely list editors.


was the completion of the establishment of the first houses and colleges in Poland and Lithuania, which eased the burden of organizational matters. As a result, by the end of the century, Polish Jesuits with the authority to write books were actively fighting the Protestant Reformation with their pens, while also filling the gaps in Polish-language Catholic literature. Jesuit books in Polish, both translations and original texts, were among the most popular and influential of the time. They included texts of enormous importance for Polish culture, such as the translation of the Bible by Wujek, which has been regularly republished for almost four hundred years, and Żywoty świętych [The lives of saints], a bestselling hagiographical collection by Skarga, which remained in print and was widely read well into the twentieth century. Apart from that, the Jesuits published Polish catechisms, prayer books, postils, a translation of the Martyrologium Romanum and meditation books—all useful both for the clergy and religious orders as well as lay people. Polemical treatises also form a discernible subset, with its own internal dynamic which peaked during and immediately after the Sandomierz revolt (rokosz Zebrzydowskiego or rokosz sandomierski; 1606–7). This was followed, however, by a noticeable shift away from controversy in favor of reaffirming faith and fostering piety. It found its reflection in the publishing of cheaper, more accessible, and often translated religious literature, such as works of Thomas à Kempis (1380–1471), Luis de Granada (1504–88), Luca Pinelli (1542–1607), etc. The writings of these authors in Polish translations began to appear during the last quarter of the sixteenth century, but the number of editions increased significantly in the first decades of the following century. Jesuits from the Commonwealth also produced works renowned internationally, for example, Marcin Śmiglecki’s (1564–1618) Logica, used as a textbook in the seventeenth-century Oxford, and writings by Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski (1595–1640), a neo-Latin poet whose verse was celebrated across the continent. Finally, these publications also included schoolbooks and other printed materials for college use.

10 See Kochanowicz, Początki piśmiennictwa jezuickiego w Polsce, 41–44 and Bronisław Natoński, Humanizm jezuicki i teologia pozytywno-kontrowersyjna w Polsce od XVI do XVIII wieku: Nauczanie i piśmiennictwo (Kraków: WAM, 2003), 51–57.

11 The Jesuit translation culture is now being investigated by a team of Polish scholars as part of the project “Jezuicka kultura przekładu w Pierwszej Rzeczypospolitej” (Jesuit translation culture in the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth). The result of the project will be an encyclopedia of Jesuit translators (around three hundred) active in the Polish and Lithuanian provinces up to 1820 and their translations (several thousands of Polish and foreign titles).

This abundant textual heritage has been analyzed mainly from a cultural and literary perspective. However, the Jesuits’ persistent efforts to provide Polish Catholics with access to proper pastoral tools and devotional readings deserve closer attention as a publishing strategy that proved to be one of the most powerful impulses for the growth of printing in the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth between 1570 and 1620 more generally. The dates roughly coincide, on the one hand, with the intensified writing and publishing activity of the Society of Jesus in these territories and, on the other hand, with the issuing of a privilege by King Sigismund III Vasa (1566–1632) in 1619 preventing the publication and re-edition of writings by members of the Society without the consent of their superiors.

The same fifty-year period was also characterized by the rapid development of typography in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. New permanent printing houses were established in many urban centers, with a marked increase in the number of editions, and recent research has shown an upsurge in the volume of Polish-language printed output. The main factors that contributed to this development were the Catholic Reformation and, within this larger framework, the Jesuits. My estimate of c. seven hundred Jesuit books becomes still more significant when juxtaposed with the data on printed production in the Commonwealth in general. According to available statistics, between 1570 and 1600, there were about four thousand editions published, suggesting that the Jesuits were in one way or another responsible for about ten percent of this output. The data for the seventeenth century is less complete. When we set Jesuit figures for this period against an estimated 4,100 editions published, it becomes apparent that the Society continued to contribute significantly to the overall printed production. In the existing scholarship, this phenomenon itself, and above all its scale, remain virtually unnoticed, and the few existing studies of the Polish Jesuit connections with the printing press usually focus on the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Indeed, by the beginning of the

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eighteenth century, one-third of the Polish printing shops were run by the Jesuits, who took them out of private hands in the final decades of the previous century.\textsuperscript{17} Nevertheless, as I will demonstrate, the Society’s very effective use of printed media at the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries already bears the hallmark of a planned strategy. Given that Jesuit books included many of the bestsellers, textbooks, and popular devotional works of the time, it is worth asking who printed the books for the Jesuits in the Commonwealth, on what terms, and, more bluntly, who profited from them. Another important question is whether this high level of Jesuit publishing activity had any noticeable impact on the development of printing in the region.

**Printing of Jesuit Books**

One of the reasons why we can justifiably speak of Jesuit publications as a distinct group reflecting a fairly consistent publishing strategy is the high degree of institutionalization of the Society’s writing activities. Every Jesuit author first had to obtain permission from his local superiors to write a book and then again to publish it. The order’s internal censorship ensured that published texts were in conformity with the Catholic doctrine and that they were also a means to maintain unanimity, which was so important for the Society. The Jesuits were supposed to agree with one another even on issues in which other Catholic theologians sometimes took different positions. All Jesuit books, regardless of their genre or purpose, were to convey a uniform message, and the rule was to be observed not only in the writings against dissenters. Therefore, activities of the censors, increasingly regulated over the years, facilitated a coherent publishing policy, while also guaranteeing high quality of published works.\textsuperscript{18} These rules were followed in the Polish–Lithuanian context, although it seems that at first the censorship took a form of a knowledgeable friendly exchange, especially when it came to approving Polish-language books. Later, however, it became tighter, and many important works that were repeatedly re-published...
were modified to conform to changing standards.\textsuperscript{19} In addition to controlling the content and quality of texts, Jesuit censorship undoubtedly provided publications with a kind of institutional branding, a distinct identity. On the title pages of books, it was usually manifested by various versions of the formula “Cum licentia superiorum” and the acronym SJ (\textit{Societatis Jesu}, of the Society of Jesus) after the author’s name.

Given the scope of the Jesuit writing and publishing activity in the Commonwealth, the question of who printed their books and profited from them is particularly important. Unlike overseas missions, publishing in a European country required participation in an already established market and book culture. Moreover, the Institute of the Society of Jesus and its early rules forbade any kind of commercial activity. Later, printing would be given as an example of the type of commercial activity that should be avoided in order to evade accusations of avarice.\textsuperscript{20} Nevertheless, if it was in the best interests of a specific mission, the superior general could agree to such an activity. Polish Jesuits, it appears, were reluctant to seize this opportunity, despite the urgent need to disseminate Catholic literature, both in Polish and Latin, when Protestant books were published and circulated freely from the 1550s. They had three options: to publish their texts with existing printing houses; to support the establishment of new ones in the vicinity of their colleges; or to set up their own workshops. Printing a book was not easy in the Commonwealth, as Kraków, the capital, was its only major printing center. Although in the course of the sixteenth century printing houses were established in various other locations, they either served particular wealthy owners or religious communities for a limited period of time or quickly faded. Nevertheless, hiring Kraków printers and supporting new printing houses in smaller cities were apparently


preferable to establishing Jesuit-run workshops that were not allowed to bring the Society any financial gain. During the period in question, there was one such printing house, in Vilnius, and maintaining and running it was, as we shall see, sometimes problematic.

Cooperation with Kraków Printers

Kraków printing houses played a significant role in publishing Jesuit books during the first fifty years of the Society’s activity in the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth. The number of Jesuit titles published by Kraków printers was initially low and increased only with the establishment of the Jesuit residence in the city in the early 1580s. The first Kraków printers to publish Jesuit books were Łazarz Andryssowic (d.1577), the publisher of the oldest recorded Polish edition of Canisius’s *Parvus catechismus*, and Mateusz Siebeneicher (d.1582), who curated later editions. This work, which was initially published only in Latin, was quite literally ahead of the Jesuits themselves, as it was published in Kraków as early as 1560, four years before their arrival to Royal Prussia and the foundation of their first college there in Braniowo (Braunsberg).

Wujek printed his first texts in Kraków with Siebeneicher: in 1570, *Maluczki katechizm* (The little catechism), which was a translation of Canisius’s *Parvus catechismus*, and *Iudicium abo rozsądek* (*Iudicium or a trial*), which set the tone for Jesuit polemics in Poland. This publishing house was also responsible for the *editio princeps* of Wujek’s famous postil (*Postilla więtsza*) in 1573–75. From the early 1580s, the Jesuits published their books through various printers: the Piotrkowczyks, the heirs of the Siebeneichers, Jan Januszowski (1550–1613) and his heirs, Mikołaj Lob (d.1617), Szymon Kempini (d. after 1635), and later also the Cezarys. The proportion of Jesuit editions printed by these printers varied from over fifty percent of their overall production (for Lob) to a handful (Januszowski). The Piotrkowczyk print shop, which was one of the two largest print shops in the country during the period, deserves special

attention. Andrzej Piotrkowczyk senior (d. 1620) started printing in the mid-1570s, and his collaboration with the Jesuits began in 1583, when he printed a Polish translation of Jerome Bolsec’s (d. c. 1585) *Histoire de la vie, des moeurs ... de Jean Calvin.* The first Kraków edition of Skarga’s hagiographical bestseller was published in 1585, and from 1588 until his death in 1620, Piotrkowczyk published at least one book a year for the Jesuits. Considering all the available data, between 1574 and 1620, the workshop produced 420 editions in 11,800 sheets, of which around 110 (over 25%) editions in 6,760 (over 50%) sheets were Jesuit publications. It can be safely assumed that the rapid growth of the workshop in the 1590s and its subsequent twenty-year prosperity owed much to Jesuit books. Piotrkowczyk was lucky to have access to the Jesuit bestsellers of the era: writings by Skarga (40 editions), Marcin Laterna’s (1552–98) *The Spiritual Harp* (Harfa duchowna; 16 editions), postil by Wujek (4 editions) and his translation of the *New Testament*, and pericopes and epistles for Sundays and feasts collected from this translation and reprinted repeatedly throughout the seventeenth century (ten editions). Many of these books were bulky folios, often accompanied by detailed indices, and thus required a great deal of capital and work as well as a certain amount of skill on the part of the printer. Piotrkowczyk admirably handled these tasks, and the books he printed—especially Jesuit postils—helped to establish editorial and typographical conventions for similar publications in seventeenth-century Polish printing.

Unfortunately, no archival records survive that would provide details on how the Jesuits cooperated with these secular printers. More circumstantial evidence, however, suggests that Piotrkowczyk financed at least some of the publications himself. For example, the surviving royal privileges for printing Laterna’s prayer book and Wujek’s biblical translations explicitly state that

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25 See Komorowska, *Piotrkowczykowie*.


Piotrkowczyk would print them at his own expense. He most probably also self-financed Álvarez’s popular *Institutiones grammaticae*. Other publications might have been funded by the Catholic hierarchy, such as the Polish primate Stanislaw Karnkowski (1520–1603), who, according to Possevino, planned to fund the printing of catechisms and the aforementioned Jesuit translation of Calvin’s biography.

Otherwise, the terms of Piotrkowczyk’s collaboration with the Jesuits are unclear. Jan Wielewicki (1566–1639), the chronicler of the Jesuits in Kraków, noted that they received donations from the printer in the form of books. The gifts were substantial—described as one hundred copies or books worth one hundred zlotys, for example—which may suggest that they were a form of settlement. Relations were not always easy, however. The same chronicler mentioned Piotrkowczyk’s cool demeanor in the face of an awkward situation: when he arrived at the Jesuits with correction sheets of Álvarez’s grammar, it turned out that the provincial had recently allowed the book to be published by another printer in the city. Nevertheless, Piotrkowczyk, described by the chronicler as an old benefactor of the Jesuits, appears to have held no grudge. Given that producing and selling Jesuit books were one of his main sources of income, his desire to maintain good relations seems understandable.

In this context, we should also mention the presence of Jesuit titles amongst the publications of an Antitrinitarian printing press, as it may lead to the assumption that the Jesuits did not really question the orthodoxy of their printers. At the end of the sixteenth century, two works of Jesuit provenance appeared, which have since been recognized as the possible products of a collaboration between the Jesuits and Aleksy Rodecki (1540–1606), an Antitrinitarian printer active in Kraków during the last quarter of the sixteenth century. The evidence for any active form of collaboration is slight, however. One text appeared with a false place of publication and without the printer’s name and might simply be an illegal reprint of a schoolbook. If the Jesuits had commissioned the publication, there would have been no need to hide the place of printing. On the other hand, the typographical material in the second

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28 Juda, *Privilegia*, no. 69, 76.
29 Antonio Possevino to Alberto Bolognetti, May 30, 1582, Skierniewice. It is possible that Karnkowski’s plan to finance catechisms was fulfilled with the publication of two editions of Canisius’s *Catechism* along with Possevino’s *Epistola de necessitate* in 1583. The editions were printed in Kraków (typographical features suggest Drukarnia Łazarzowa) and Ingolstadt, and both have information on the title page that they were printed at the expense of Karnkowski.
book, a translation of Diego de Ledesma’s (1519–75) catechism, can hardly be considered conclusive and may have been printed by someone other than Rodecki. Nevertheless, if the Jesuits indeed wanted to support Rodecki, whose religious sympathies were shifting and who could barely make ends meet, their collaboration can hardly be considered a long-term venture.31

Jesuit Colleges and the Spread of Printing

Kraków printers were certainly not the only ones to benefit from the Jesuits’ publishing zeal. Around sixty percent of all sixteenth-century editions of Jesuit books published in the Commonwealth were printed in other cities, especially Vilnius, where the Society ran its own university and owned the print shop (mentioned below), and in Poznań, where one of the largest colleges in the Commonwealth was located. The latter was one of the places where the Society encouraged, if not directly attracted, secular printers. The Jesuits undoubtedly contributed to the establishment of new, enduring print shops not only in Poznań but also in Kalisz, Braniewo, and, later, Lublin and Lwów (Lviv). Unfortunately, the terms and conditions of these printers’ cooperation with the Society are even less clear than in the case of Kraków competitors. It is only possible to state that the new workshops were privately owned, maintained, and run by commercial printers, with the colleges serving as their main clients. The production of these workshops was modest, on average no more than seventy sheets per year, ensuring minimal profitability in the Polish context.32 Cooperation was not always seamless. In Poznań, the first person to publish for the Jesuits, Melchior Nehring (d.1587), soon enough turned out to be an eager Protestant willing to print and disseminate anti-Catholic books for a profit.33

31 See Alodia Kawecka-Gryczowa, Les imprimeurs de antitrinitaires Polonais Rodecki et Sternacki (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1973), 39–40, 43–44, 92. In her Polish introduction on page 40 (the French version is abbreviated) Kawecka-Gryczowa mentions the Institutiones grammaticae by Emmanuel Álvarez, but she does not include this title in her inventory of Rodecki’s editions. The list includes only Diego de Ledesma’s Nauka chrześcijańska albo katechizik dla dziatek (no. 35) and Sententiae et loci quidam insigniores... (no. 59bis), a collection of aphorisms and poems for use in Jesuit colleges. See also Mirosława Hanusiewicz-Lavalée and Robert Aleksander Maryks, “The Earliest Polish Translation of a Jesuit Catechism,” in Early Modern Catholicism and the Book, ed. Justyna Kiliańczyk-Zięba and Magdalena Komorowska (Brill: Leiden, 2023 [in print]).

32 See articles on Hieronim Wietor, Łazarz Andrýsowic, and Mikołaj Szarfenberger in Kawecka-Gryczowa, Drukarze 1/1.

After his expulsion from the city, the collaboration with the next printer, Jan Wolrab (d. c.1592), ran more smoothly and his son, Jan Wolrab Junior (1583–1629), later set up a press in Kalisz in cooperation with the Jesuits. They financially supported the establishment of his press on the condition that it should not be removed from Kalisz. And it remained there, having been sold by the younger Wolrab to Wojciech Gedeliusz (d.1632) and his wife Anna in 1605, and after Wojciech’s death it was purchased by the Jesuits and printing was moved in-house. The printing houses in Poznań and Kalisz mostly met the needs of respective colleges, printing textbooks, theses, panegyrics, and occasional publications. In addition, these shops published Jesuit authors (mainly Polish-language polemics and devotional texts), as well as catechisms, rubrics, and other, usually small, publications for the local bishop or Primate Karnkowski.

The printing house in Braniewo had a similar purpose, although it was originally intended to serve a more ambitious agenda. In 1565, the first Jesuit college in Poland–Lithuania was established in the city, and in 1578, a papal seminar was founded with the goal of educating missionaries for Sweden. Possevino, who was in charge of the establishment of the seminar, envisioned it having a printing press so that it could publish Catholic books for Sweden.34 However, this vision was only partially fulfilled: in 1589, after Possevino had returned to Italy, Johannes Sachs (Jan Saxo, d. c.1592) opened a print shop in the city, with the Jesuits as his main clients, but no evidence exists that he printed any books with the intention of sending them across the Baltic.35

For Lviv, where various print shops have operated since the 1570s, the situation is less clear, as there are some indications that the Jesuit print shop was funded as early as 1615, but there are no records of its operation before 1642.36 Lublin was another city where regular Catholic printing was established at a later date. While several Jewish print shops had operated there throughout the sixteenth century, it was only in 1630 that the first book in Polish was published.

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by Paweł Konrad (d.1636): Albrycht Stanisław Radziwiłł’s (1593–1656) translation of *Heliotropium* by the German Jesuit Jeremias Drexel (1581–1638).³⁷

One of the likely incentives for their support of the development of printing in the smaller cities of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth was the lower overall cost of books. Printing close to the intended recipient reduced transportation costs, which was especially true and important in the case of textbooks.³⁸ It is also apparent that Polish Jesuits found it both practical and advantageous to be able to personally supervise the publishing process of their works, so they usually chose to publish close to where they resided. This is proven by the editions of the works by, for example, Wysocki, Śmiglecki, and Wujek, as well as by Skarga’s early writings. In a dedication to the second edition of his hagiographical collection, Skarga explained the delay in reissuing the popular work by the fact that, bound by obedience to his superiors, he was engaged in organizing new colleges in the eastern territories of the Commonwealth. Only after his return to Kraków in 1585, where he finally “had a printer at hand,” could he begin to continue his publishing engagement.³⁹

Jesuit Print Shop in Vilnius

The only print shop the Jesuits owned and operated before 1642 was located in Vilnius. It was a gift from Duke Mikołaj Krzysztof Radziwiłł the Orphan (1549–1616), who became a great benefactor of the Jesuits after his conversion from Calvinism around 1570.⁴⁰ Radziwiłł inherited his father’s printing press, which

³⁹ Piotr Skarga, *Żywoty świętych* (Kraków: Andrzej Piotrkowczyk, 1585), fol.) (2r. “Aż gdy mię tu do Krakowa posłali starszy moj, mając w ręku drukarnię, przyszedłem z pomocy Bożej do tego, iżem te żywoty świętych znów przejźrzał, rozszerzył i ostrożniej, jako słabość moja zniosła, wydał i wydrukować za dozwolenim starszych dopuścił.”
in the 1560s was used to print Calvinist publications in Brest Litovsk.\[^{41}\] In 1575, it was transported to Vilnius, and a printing house was established near the Jesuit college. One year later, the first book, Skarga’s polemical work *Pro sacratissima eucharistia*, was printed.\[^{42}\]

The press had been renovated, and new tools and types had been bought. Initially, Radziwiłł remained the owner of the printing house, and his coat of arms was to be included in the books, but it was the Jesuits who were supposed to find a printer and maintain the workshop. They were also required to hand over any eventual profits to the duke, who had funded their print runs. The responsibility of the press was at times a considerable burden. The Jesuits not only had trouble finding a skilled printer but also had to deal with a manager who stole their matrices and ran off with them to a Protestant workshop.\[^{43}\]

The Radziwiłł workshop became the property of the Jesuits around 1585. Filip Widmanstadt (c.1541–88), the chancellor of the Vilnius Academy, became its administrator and refurnished it with the help of Possevino himself. The latter expressed his interest in 1581, when he informed the papal nuncio in Poland, Giovanni Antonio Caligari (1527–1613), that the college had received matrices of “Ruthenian characters” and that, at least in Possevino’s opinion, the Jesuits in Vilnius could cheaply publish Ruthenian catechisms.\[^{44}\] It seems, however, that few shared Possevino’s enthusiasm. After assuming ownership of the Radziwiłł print shop, the Jesuits in Vilnius faced the challenge of integrating it into the college’s structure. Jesuits in Europe had very little experience in running their own printing houses, and some early attempts, such as those in Rome (see Lorenzo Mancini’s contribution in this special issue) and in Vienna, ended in failure: printing was time-consuming, expensive, and required skilled workers.\[^{45}\]

In the late 1580s, García Alabiano (1549–1624), one of the Spanish Jesuits residing in Vilnius, made similar observations. The printers, who were mostly Protestants, were unskilled and known for their bad conduct, which included being loud and often drunk, and disturbing the college. Moreover, in Alabiano’s opinion, books published by the Jesuits in Vilnius were ugly. Their

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[^41]: Among the most important achievements of this printing house is the so-called Brest Bible, the first Protestant Polish Bible translated from Greek and Hebrew: *Biblia święta, to jest, księgi Starego i Nowego Zakonu, właśnie z żydowskiego, greckiego, i łacińskiego, nowo na polski język z pilnością i wiernie wyłożone* (Brześć Litewski: Mikołaj Krzysztof Radziwiłł, 1563).


dissemination was also complicated as the college was too poor to give the books away for free and could not simply sell them because the Jesuits were not supposed to trade anything. Booksellers, on the other hand, often cheated.\textsuperscript{46}

For the next few years, the print shop operated intermittently, and in 1593, the Vilnius Jesuits, despite the difficulties, asked the general for permission to run it on a regular basis. They claimed that there was nowhere else in Lithuania for them to publish their polemical works. As a result, they planned to print Catholic books and sell them at a low cost for a marginal profit which they could invest in the printing of new titles. They intended for one of the fathers to manage the print shop and hire other workers. The plan was sound, but Superior General Acquaviva opposed it. He wanted the college to hire a lay manager and print only Jesuit books with the financial support of wealthy patrons—a solution similar to the one adopted by the Jesuit university in Dillingen.\textsuperscript{47} In 1595, the Vilnius Jesuits wrote to the general again, explaining that skilled printers did not want to come to Vilnius to print only Jesuit books, which were difficult to sell in Lithuania. It was also extremely challenging to find patrons to finance these operations. The closure of the printing house, on the other hand, would force the Jesuits to send their own works for publication in Poznań or Kraków (both over 750 km away from Vilnius). The general's response is unknown. Printing continued although the first known official license came only in 1616 from the new superior general Muzio Vitelleschi (1563–1645; in office 1615–45).\textsuperscript{48}

Conclusion

Although the Society had finally set up a college in Kraków in 1622, the number of Jesuit books published in the city fell gradually during that decade. The number of editions of the greatest bestsellers further highlights this trend: after 1618, the printing of editions of the famous postils by Wujek and Skarga ceased abruptly for more than a century, and the famous prayer book by Laterna as well as Skarga's hagiographical collection were reissued far less frequently. The reasons for this change have yet to be discovered. According to the current state of research, in 1620, after more than over fifty years of activity in the Commonwealth, the Jesuits concentrated more on education, ensuring the operation of existing schools, rather than establishing new ones, and on

\textsuperscript{46} Kochanowicz, \textit{Początki piśmiennictwa jezuickiego}, 57–58.
\textsuperscript{48} Kochanowicz, \textit{Początki piśmiennictwa jezuickiego}, 62.
ministry, rather than religious controversies. The market for Catholic books in the Commonwealth also looked very different. Thanks, in large part, to the Jesuits, Polish catechisms, prayer books, translations of devotional literature, officially approved biblical texts, numerous postils, and polemics were readily available for those who needed them. Perhaps it was the market and apparent success of the Catholic Reformation that prompted the Jesuits to shift production of their books gradually from printing houses in Kraków to those more tightly controlled, and from the second half of the century onward, mostly owned and operated by the Society.\textsuperscript{49} It is unclear what role the royal privilege of 1619 played in this process. In addition, the role of Jesuit books in shaping Catholic culture and devotion after Trent, as well as in the developments in the book trade in the Commonwealth, requires a much more detailed investigation than can be presented in this article. However, it is clear that the growing network of Jesuit colleges and houses fostered the printing industry. Not only did they provide work for the printers, Jesuits were also among their most important customers, using printed books to help educate the readers of the future. It should also be noted that printers who settled near Jesuit colleges in the Commonwealth’s smaller cities published not only for the Society but also for local bishops, other religious orders, and, eventually, secular authors. It is difficult to find a better example of Peter Burke’s claim that “the Jesuit contribution to the cultural history of East-Central and indeed to that of Eastern Europe was much more important than to that of the West.”\textsuperscript{50} It certainly is impossible to deny the importance of the Jesuit contribution to the development of printing in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

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\textsuperscript{49} However, the production of the Jesuit print shop in Vilnius did not increase until the 1630s, see Konstancija Čepienė and Irena Petrauskiene, \textit{Vilniaus akademijos spaustuvės leidiniai 1576–1805: Bibliografija} (Vilnius: Lietuvos TSR Mokslų Akademijos, 1979).

\textsuperscript{50} See Peter Burke, “The Jesuits and the Art of Translation in Early Modern Europe,” in \textit{The Jesuits ii: Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts, 1540–1773}, ed. John W. O’Malley et al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019), 24–32. The findings of the above-mentioned project on the translation culture of the Jesuits in the Poland–Lithuania Commonwealth challenge many of Burke’s observations.