

Max Planck Partner Group

“The Production of Knowledge of Normativity and the Early Modern Book Trade”

Setting Norms. Printing and Publishing Normative Knowledge in the Early Modern Period

(January 21-22, 2027 - Museum Plantin-Moretus, Antwerp)

PROPOSAL

ABSTRACT

The object of the two-day workshop will be the normative book in the printing shop in the early modern period, with a particular focus on the XVIth century. The idea is to look at different facets of the material production of normative books (actors, norms, technological factors, interests, conflicts, the passage from the manuscript to the printed book) to try to enrich our understanding of the processes of production of normative knowledge in the early modern period. In other words, we would like to look at the printing workshop as a place of knowledge production.

Place: **Museum Plantin-Moretus, Antwerp**

Date: January **21-22, 2027**

Publication: De Gulden Passer – The Golden Compasses, Journal for Book History (2.2027) with Introduction + 8 articles

Format of the workshop:

- Day one (afternoon): Intro + 4 presentations
- Day Two: 4 presentations + concluding remarks

Call for papers

The printing of laws and norms, was a technological challenge. This was due, in some cases, to the complexity of texts with multi-levelled hierarchized comments or, in other cases, because it required new solutions for the communication of the law, from updated treatises to a wide variety of printed matter displayed in public spaces in the form of posters. In European cities, the printing house played a decisive role in the dissemination of university knowledge on a continental scale, contributed to the

promotion of local legal traditions by printing norms in vernacular languages, and provided the most common way of displaying the regulations of everyday life in public spaces.

The printers had to adapt to their clientele: whether scholars from the universities, court officials, or the municipal administration, all turned to the printing workshop. But what could the printing workshop offer? How did the actors working in the printing workshops interact with the authorities (religious, political) and with the Universities? Which technical and practical solutions did they invent for communicating the law and the normative knowledge? How do the authorities and Universities integrate the printing workshop in the process of promulgating the law? In which way did the authorities and Universities themselves rely increasingly on the printing press? Which role did the actors who worked in the printing workshop have in the dissemination of normativity? If we look at the emergence of the Western style printing press in other continents (Asia or America) what can we say about the printing of laws, norms, and normative books? And finally did the printing workshop contribute to a new definition of the normativity of a book? In other words: what was a normative book in the early modern period?

In this two-day workshop we intend to analyse the daily proceedings in the workshop, composing, printing, and correcting texts. This will allow us to study the relationship between authors, customers, and the printer. We are interested in investigating the solutions found for each type of print and audience, as well as the relationship between editorial strategies, the workshop practices, and the readers. Following the normative books “under construction” in the workshop, we aim at detecting key specific aspects of the printing industry itself, and of the activity of the communities of readers who used these normative products, and also influenced their reception. The decisions of some buyers, the selection process of certain editions, and the buying and selling circuit provide further decisive clues as to which products were successful and reached the European book market.

By analysing social, material, technical and economic aspects related to the production of normative books in the printing workshop we expect to shed new light on the processes of production of knowledge in the early modern period, as well as on the possible specificities of the books about norms (and producing norms). In other words, we would like to look at the printing workshop as a place where normative knowledge was produced, and to discuss, from the printing workshop perspective, what was a normative book in the early modern period.

We invite submissions for 20-minute papers addressing, for instance, topics like the following:

- The different profiles of the actors involved in the production of normative books in the printing workshop (printers, authors, publishers, booksellers, editors, correctors, translators, businessmen, technicians, artists, etc.)
- The specific competences (technical, linguistic, etc.) needed by those involved in the printing of normative books
- The intellectual, technical, and material practices set up by the interaction of different actors who gathered together, cooperated, took decisions, and built communities in the printing workshop
- The production of normative knowledge in the workshop as a collective enterprise
- The network of book production, distribution and communication, etc. centered in the printing workshop
- The interdisciplinary encounters in the printing workshop
- How the legislation on book production and circulation influenced the printing practices
- The passage from the manuscript to the printed book
- The relationship between the authority and the printing of normative books
- The Interaction, dialogue, possible conflicts between the different actors involved (for instance, between authors and printers)

We expect the main focus to be on Europe, but we welcome papers dedicated to the printing workshops in other geographical areas.

Together with papers that would investigate the traditional field of legal books (canon and civil law; on legal procedure; traditional legal corpora or practical manuals), we welcome contributions dealing with the broader notion of “normative” - including the horizon of religious and “pragmatic” printed normativity on moral theology.

Practical Details

- **Deadline** for sending the paper proposals: **April 20, 2026**

- The workshop will be based on pre-circulating papers, that will have to be handed in by **December 21, 2026**
- Travel and hosting costs will be covered

ORGANISING COMMITTEE

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