



# Preface

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This is an important book which explores the relationship of text and image with special reference to printing in Renaissance Lyon, approaching it in the context of the latest research in Digital Humanities. With the second largest output of printed books in France in the Renaissance, a wide distribution throughout Europe and a pioneering role in illustration, Lyon offers a remarkable range of editions by which to measure the evolution of publishing strategies across the early modern period. The remarkable success of Lyonnais printing might seem surprising in a city without a university or a *parlement*, but can be explained by the city's strategic position on the frontiers of Italy, Germany and Switzerland, a focus of European fairs, and a crossroads of international trade routes, where wealthy cosmopolitan merchants diversified their business by investing in publishing.

The study of book illustration owes much to pioneering catalogues like those of the Prince d'Essling,<sup>1</sup> who traced how incunables and early sixteenth-century books were illustrated in Venice, the major centre of book production in Europe at the time. But before him a magistrate and bibliophile in Lyon, Henri Louis Baudrier (1815-1884) had compiled a detailed catalogue of Lyonnais imprints, many from his own collection, which was published posthumously from 1895, including close attention to illustration and numerous images of woodcuts and engravings. This rich catalogue has been supplemented by that of Sibylle von Gültlingen, *Bibliographie des livres imprimés à Lyon au seizième siècle* (1992-), and since then by the ongoing database of William Kemp, which lists over 22,000 imprints, indicating which ones

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<sup>1</sup> *Les livres à figures vénitiens de la fin du XV<sup>e</sup> Siècle et du Commencement du XVI<sup>e</sup>* (1907-14). Florence: Olschki; Paris: Librairie Henri Leclerc.

are illustrated. These databases have provided a platform for Dr Tramelli's project, generously funded by *Biblissima*, which focuses closely on the inclusion of images in editions published by Lyonnais printers and *libraires*.

The question posed was how to manage and to interrogate such a large corpus? Only a modest proportion of the Lyon imprints had been digitised and not always in a sufficiently high resolution. Dr Tramelli worked with major holdings in the Bibliothèque Municipale in Lyon, in the Bodleian Library in Oxford and the Bibliothèque de Sainte-Geneviève in Paris, who helped her to make high resolution photographs, some of which are included in her catalogue of examples of Lyon imprints. A key player in the project was the Warburg Institute in London, with its rich photographic collection, and more importantly its Iconographic Database, which provided sophisticated tools to analyse images in detail and to categorise them. A technological breakthrough was provided by the Visual Geometry Group in the Department of Engineering Science in Oxford, whose image retrieval software allows the automatic tracing of the reuse of images. By collating editions, this tool traces how images travelled, were reused or lent or adapted or repaired or reversed by printers, often in different contexts. This helps to explore the relationship between image and context, where a woodcut engraved for, say, a work of devotion, or a romance of chivalry, might migrate to reappear in a totally different context elsewhere. Competition between printers was intense, not least between Lyon and Paris: a case in point in the 1530s is the Lyon publisher, Denys de Harsy, some of whose abundant woodcuts were copied in Paris by the best-selling printer Denis Janot.<sup>2</sup>

The wealthy Lyonnais merchants who invested in printing and publishing also employed major local artists to illustrate their books, one of the earliest of whom was the illuminator Guillaume II Le Roy (ob. 1528). Dr Tramelli's

project makes instructive use of case studies of two major printer/publishers of the period 1540-60, de Tournes and Roville, who vied with each other in illustrating their books with images by Bernard Salomon, Pierre Eskrich, Georges Reverdy and others, with their contrasting styles. These case studies cast light on the strategies of these publishers, exploring how in their prefaces they viewed the place of illustration, whether in mass market editions or when aiming at the luxury market with folio bibles or richly illustrated emblem books, a speciality of Lyon.

Lyon is fortunate to have preserved an essential element of image production, the matrices (woodblocks or copperplates) from which prints were made. The remarkable Musée de l'Imprimerie in Lyon, whose collaboration in the *Biblissima* project was highly advantageous, contains an important collection of woodblocks, some with the original underdrawing, others engraved, which shed light on the process of illustration.

Dr Tramelli is an acknowledged art historian, a specialist on the Milanese painter and theorist Gian Paolo Lomazzo. She has in this project applied her professional skills to the art contained in book illustration, which ranges from the simplest mythological scenes to highly technical astronomical figuration, because Lyonnais book production covers a vast range of subjects, from Antiquities to Social Life, from Gods to Gestures. She has made available new digital resources in Lyon16ci and 1516, and has mapped new ways forward for planning and working with iconographic databases. This is all the more remarkable for having been achieved partly during the COVID pandemic. Her conclusions foresee the project continuing following the developments of on-going digitisation work, as well as developing a model which will integrate traditional and digital research in the iconography of book illustration, to which we can look forward with keen interest.

<sup>2</sup> See Rawles, R. (2017). *Denis Janot (Fl. 1529-1544), Parisian Printer and Bookseller: A Bibliography*. Leiden: Brill, which provides a parallel case study from Paris.