International Conference
Books and Society in Latvia until 1945

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The activities of the first publishing house in Riga provide extensive opportunities for intercultural studies. An image, similarly to a printed work, serves as an efficient and multiplied means of transfer of ideas.

A good example of the transfer of ideas and symbols is the first in situ large-scale panorama of Riga created jointly by printer Nicolaus Mollyn and engraver Heinrich Thum in 1612, where the view of the city was visualized accurately and in fine details in terms of topography. However, the documentation of the authentic Riga in the 17th century as portrayed in the engraving is illusory. The inhabitants of Riga that can be seen in the panorama view (staffage figures) are travelling images. They have been appropriated from the repertoire of Amsterdam city views created by Dutch and Flemish engravers between 1599 and 1611. It can be concluded that Thum was inspired and based his work on Pieter Bast’s view of Amsterdam in 1599, as well as Hans Rem and Jan Pieterszon Saenredam’s panorama of Amsterdam in 1606 and Pieter Bast and Claes Janszoon Visscher II’s view of Amsterdam in 1611. Thus the panorama of Riga indirectly fits in the traditions of the Dutch Golden Age of graphic art.

The iconographic and ideological programme of the panorama of Riga revealed that a graphic drawing could serve for representative and political aims, too.