A puzzling phenomenon: set-offs in early printing

Elena Fogolin
fogolin.elena@spes.uniud.it
PhD student, Università of Udine (Italy) / Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz (Germany)
What is a set-off?

It is a phenomenon observed in early printed books, caused by a freshly-printed sheet being pressed against another sheet.

The result is a shadowy, back-to-front image on the other sheet.

Cora, Ambrosius de, *Vita S. Augustini*, Roma, Georgius Herolt, 1481, Mainz, Gutenberg-Museum, leaf l7r. The set-off overlaps the text of the regular impression.
Rome, Georg Herolt, 1481/1482:

- Ambrosius de Cora, *Vita precellentissimi ecclesie doctoris diui Aurelii Augustini Iponensis* [ISTC ic00881000]

- Ambrosius de Cora, *Defensorium ordinis Heremitarum S. Augustini* [ISTC ic00877000]
Ink. 1176, Gutenberg Museum, Mainz, the *Vita* and the *Defensorium* are bound together in an original Fifteenth-century German binding.
Problems:

- set-offs are relatively rare

- it is unusual to find a high number of set-offs concentrated in one copy of a particular edition

- set-offs are, in general, very weak and difficult to make out or identify

Cora, Ambrosius de, Vita S. Augustini, Roma, Georgius Herolt, 1481, Mainz, Gutenberg-Museum, leaf l8v. Set-off of leaf l2r, completely overlapping the text of the regular impression.
Cora, Ambrosius de, *Defensorium ordinis Heremitarum S. Augustini*, Roma, Georgius Herolt, 1481-82, Mainz, Gutenberg-Museum, leaf q8r, i.e. the blank *recto* of the last leaf of the last quire, shows a set-off from leaf q1v.
Cora, Ambrosius de, Defensorium ordinis Heremitarum S. Augustini, Roma, Georgius Herolt, 1481-82, Mainz, Gutenberg-Museum, an upside-down set-off on leaf g5v.
Are there other traces of set-offs in the editions printed by Georg Herolt or attributed to him?

To answer this question, for my Ph.D. I intend to investigate:

- the other forty editions assigned to Georg Herolt in the GW and ISTC;

- the figure of Georg Herolt, his production and his role in the early printing of the 15th century in Rome;

- the ambiguity associated with his identity.