



Background

The invention of printing with moveable type in mid-15th-century Europe is one of the most important developments in the history of western culture and civilization. The printing of a Latin Bible (c.1455) by Johann Gutenberg (c.1400–68) in Mainz, Germany, from a forme of metal type, marked the beginning of a process that scarcely changed in its essentials for 400 years.

Gutenberg's great achievement was in bringing together and perfecting the combination of moveable metal type, printing ink, and a wooden screw-press in order to make printing from type – as opposed to through the use of woodcut blocks – possible for the first time in the western world. The chief advantage of the printing press over manuscript production was its ability to produce in a short period of time a large number of identical copies of any given work. This led to the rapid dissemination of knowledge, to the forming of new communities of learning and scholarship, and eventually to the literate mass culture we know today.

In the Beginning: Gutenberg's Bible

on view in the
Baillieu Library

18–27 July 2014

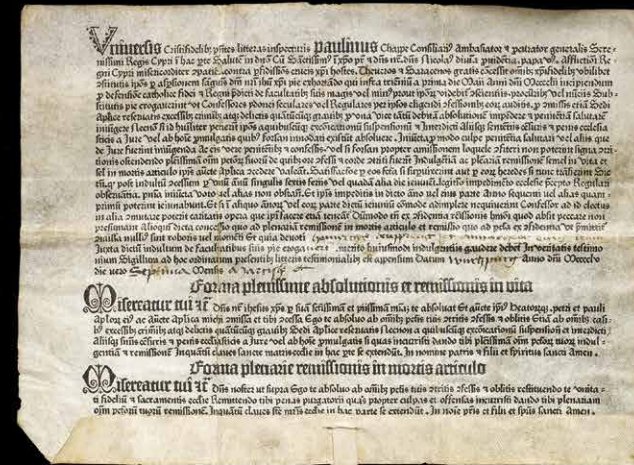


Decorated initial 'P' at the opening of Paul's Epistle to the Romans, courtesy of The University of Manchester

By 1501, less than fifty years after printing began, between 29,000 and 30,000 editions were produced. Press runs varied based on the amount of capital invested and market demand. The number of copies printed in an edition, however, steadily increased from around 175 in the 1450s to over 1,000 by the 1490s. No fewer than 280 towns all over Europe had seen printing presses installed during this period. A revolution had indeed taken place, one that paved the way to the democratisation of knowledge, freedom of expression, and many other values now held dear in Australia, the United Kingdom, and much of the world beyond.

Who was Gutenberg?

Johann Gutenberg (c.1400–68) was born in Mainz to Friele Gensfleisch and Else Wyrich, the daughter of a local burgher. 'Gutenberg' comes from the name of the house of his father and paternal ancestors. Sometime before 1430, Gutenberg left Mainz for Strasbourg due to political strife. There he initiated a partnership for the mass production of pilgrim's souvenirs using a stamping process. He returned to Mainz by 1448, where, in about 1450, entered into a partnership with the wealthy Johann Fust, and began the production of a 42-line Latin Bible. The Bible is known today not only for being the first substantial book printed in Europe using the new technology of moveable type as perfected by Gutenberg, but also for its aesthetic and technical quality. To gain further revenue, he also did some jobbing printing of shorter or single-sheet items, such as calendars, school books and indulgences, at the same time the Bible was being printed.



Indulgence (Mainz, 1454–5), courtesy of The University of Manchester

According to a document known as the Helmasperger Instrument (6 November 1455), a lawsuit was brought by Fust against Gutenberg for monies owed. The funds were most likely instrumental in the development of Gutenberg's printing press, which was probably modelled after large screw presses used for making wine. The court evidently decided in Fust's favour, and it is presumed that Gutenberg was ordered to give up some or all of his printing equipment in the verdict (Fust went on to establish a successful printing shop with the partnership's leading assistant, the calligrapher Peter Schöffer).

filio scientiū leges ac iura maiorum:
erant autē primi et p̄imi charlena et
zethar et admatha et tharlis ⁊ mare
et marfana et mamucha septē duces

Text from the Book of Esther, courtesy of The University of Manchester

Approximately five years after the Helmasperger Instrument, Gutenberg entered into a new partnership with the lawyer Conrad Humery. In 1460, an edition of the *Catholicon* (a Latin dictionary) was published in Mainz. While Gutenberg's name is suggested as its possible printer, there is much debate about whether or not he was actually involved in printing the *Catholicon*, or anything else for that matter, after the 1450s. In 1465, Gutenberg was granted a pension as a courtier of the prince-archbishop of Mainz, which kept him from want. He died three years later in February 1468 and was buried in a Franciscan church. Sadly, the church, along with Gutenberg's grave, were destroyed in the Siege of 1793. Although Gutenberg's name was little-known after his death, the rediscovery of specimens of his 42-line Bible during the eighteenth century has led to worldwide admiration and interest in his invention.

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ab eo: ⁊ colles desol

How many?

It is estimated that Gutenberg printed 180 copies of the Bible, with around 140 copies printed on paper and another 40 on vellum. Of these, just 48 have survived as partial or complete copies, along with numerous fragments and single leaves scattered all over the world. The majority of copies are kept by institutions in Europe, the United Kingdom and the United States. The nearest bound copy to Australia is the single volume held by Keio University in Tokyo, Japan.

The first and only time the Gutenberg Bible visited Australia until now was as part of a National Library of Australia exhibition in 2001. In fact, it was the very same copy, kindly lent by The University of Manchester's John Rylands Library, presently on display in the Baillieu Library.

Illuminated initial 'O': opening of the Book of Nahum, courtesy of The University of Manchester



Illuminated initial 'P'; opening of the Book of Judges, courtesy of The University of Manchester

Provenance of the copy at The John Rylands Library

Until recently, the earliest information about the copy of the Gutenberg Bible held by The John Rylands Library was that it was first described in a catalogue of the marvelous book collection owned by George Spencer, 2nd Earl Spencer (1758–1834), in 1814. Although the first leaf of the Bible bears an early ownership inscription, it is heavily erased and has always proved impossible to read. However, in 2013, multi-spectral digital imaging of the inscription rendered it legible, revealing the Bible was owned by the Augustinian friars near Colmar in Alsace, France, located about 274 km south of Mainz. There the copy remained until 1790, when the monastery was plundered by French revolutionaries and dissolved the following year.

These events in Colmar coincided with the newly discovered date of Lord Spencer's purchase of his Gutenberg Bible. Among Lord Spencer's papers at the British Library is a receipt dated 29 October 1790 for the total of £370 that he paid to the London bookseller Thomas Payne, Jr., for the 'Mazarine Bible 2v' (the French nickname for the Gutenberg Bible) and other early printed books.

The copy remained in the Spencer family library until 1892, when Lord Spencer's book collection was purchased *en bloc* from the Fifth Earl Spencer by Enriqueta Rylands (1843–1908), who founded The John Rylands Library in memory of her late husband. The John Rylands Library opened in 1900 and merged with The University of Manchester Library in 1972. Its collection of rare printed books (including 4,000 incunables), manuscripts, and archives is counted among the finest such collections in the world.

[Our thanks to Eric White, Southern Methodist University, for allowing the Baillieu Library to quote from his findings regarding the Augustinian inscription and discovery of the 1790 acquisition date]

Items displayed from Baillieu Special Collections

Jacobus Philippus Bergomenis. *Ordinis Fratrum[m] Eremitarum Diui Augustini, In omnimoda historia nouissima congesta, Supplementum cronicarum[m] appellata.* Venice: Bernardinum de Benalijs Bergomensem, 15 December 1486.

One of the few 15th-century texts to mention Gutenberg and the invention of printing.

Biblia latina. Mainz: Peter Schöffer, 23 February 1472.

This 1472 Latin Bible is a reprint of the edition printed a decade earlier by Gutenberg's former partners Johann Fust and Peter Schöffer.

Columella, Cato the Elder, Palladius and Varro. *Scriptores rei rusticae.* Venice: Nicolas Jenson, 1472.

A collection of Classical texts on agriculture; the Baillieu copy is decorated with an illuminated, white vine initial 'E'.

The Holy Bible: containing all the books of the Old and New Testaments ... North Hatfield, Mass; New York: Pennyroyal Caxton Press, 1999.

Two-volume illustrated Bible produced by the artist Barry Moser, who was influenced by the Gutenberg Bible.

Hortus sanitatis. Mainz: Jacob Meydenbach, 23 June 1491.

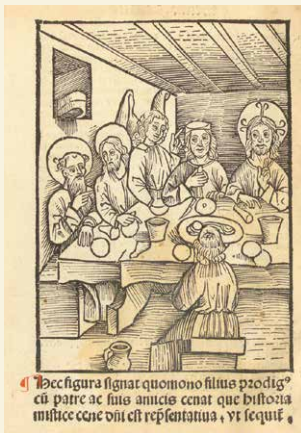
A modified Latin translation of a Greek text, which functioned as an herbal and an encyclopedia of real and mythological plants, animals, and minerals.

Abraham Lichtstein (ed.). *Torat ha-temimah ... Lask, Poland: [s.n.], c.1828.*

Vocalised text of the Torah printed in Hebrew and Aramaic with commentary.

Johannes Meder. *Quadragesimale de filio prodigo.* Basel: Michael Furter, 1495.

A collection of sermons written for Lent. Each sermon opens with a dialogue between an angel and the Prodigal Son.



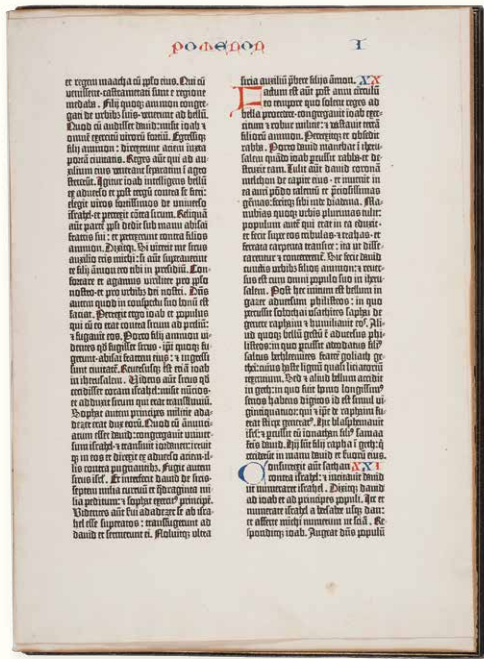
Woodcut from Johannes Meder's *Quadragesimale de filio prodigo* (Basel, 1495), Special Collections, Baillieu Library, The University of Melbourne

A noble fragment: being a leaf from the Gutenberg Bible , 1450–1455 ... New York: Gabriel Wells, 1921.

A single leaf of the Gutenberg Bible (c.1455) acquired by the Baillieu Library in 2011.

Novum Testamentum graece ... Lipsiae: B. Tauchnitz, 1884.

The New Testament printed in Greek.



[Biblia latina c.1455], Special Collections, Baillieu Library, The University of Melbourne

Psalmi Davidis regis, & prophetae, lingva syriaca ... Lugduni Batavorum: Ex typographia Erpeniana, Linguarum Orientalium; prostant apud Iohannem Maire, & Elzevirios, 1625.

The Book of Psalms printed in Syriac and Latin.

[Robertus de Tumbalena]. *Expositio super Cantica canticorum.* Paris: Ulrich Gering and Berthold Rembolt, 16 January 1498.

A well-known commentary on the Song of Songs, also known as the Song of Solomon or Canticles, one of the books of the Old Testament.

Hartmann Schedel. *Liber chronicarum* [Nuremberg Chronicle]. Nuremberg: Anton Koberger, for Sebald Schreyer and Sebastian Kammermeister, 12 July 1493.



Woodcut depicting the city of Mainz from the Nuremberg Chronicle (Nuremberg, 1493), Special Collections, Baillieu Library, The University of Melbourne



Above: Initial 'R' at the start of the prologue to Paul's Epistle to the Romans, courtesy of The University of Manchester, Front cover: Decorated initial 'P' at the opening of Paul's Epistle to the Romans, courtesy of The University of Manchester; Woodcut depicting the city of Mainz from the Nuremberg Chronicle (Nuremberg, 1493), Special Collections, Baillieu Library, The University of Melbourne



Location
Ground Floor
Baillieu Library
The University of Melbourne
Victoria 3010

Viewing hours are 11am to 5pm daily, including weekends. The final day is **Sunday 27 July 2014**

Admission is free

No bags permitted in gallery

The Baillieu Library Executive wishes to thank The John Rylands Library at The University of Manchester for the generous loan of its Gutenberg Bible for the 2014 Melbourne Rare Book Week and Cultural Treasures Festival.

For more information: library.unimelb.edu.au/gutenberg

