

Old printing houses

A brief historic overview of some famous printers' families

As early as 1454, Johannes Gutenberg¹, from Mainz, Germany, first used his new invention, the “printing press” to print his “B42”, the legendary “Gutenberg bible”. The mystery of his invention remains unclear, because Johannes Fust², or Faust, sued Gutenberg for his invention, and the use of it. What is known for sure, that Johann Fust gave money to Gutenberg so that he was able to construct his printing press and to start printing his “B42”. But maybe, it was even Fust himself, who was the mind behind the printing press itself. Some scholars see him as the one, who really acknowledged the value of the invention and the one, who promoted this project, so that it could be accomplished.

That first printing was the start of a technique that still is used today, with only some technical improvements. Many editorial houses have printed, some even quite early, prior to 1500, the date the early printings were referred as “incunabula”. Gutenberg himself lived in Mainz, Germany, a town that had a long history, dating back to early Romans, and one of the oldest cities in Germany.

Gutenberg himself had a network of printers that used his invention. Some settled in Venice, others in Nuremberg or Lyon, France, or, some decades later, in Basle, Switzerland. These were the early centers of incunabula printing.

First, to talk about, there is Anton Koberger, from Nuremberg, Germany. His origin and educational background are still in the dark. What is known for sure, that he started printing in 1470. His most famous printing is the Nuremberg Chronicle³, an incunable with many nice engravings that was originally printed in 1493, both in Latin and in German editions. Koberger was a kind of “godfather” for Albrecht Dürer, a famous printer and engraver himself. At his office’s peak, he had 24 printing presses and approximately 100 employees. With that, he became the most important printer within Germany at his time.

In Venice, Aldus Manutius had his printing press. The so-called “Aldine press” was established in 1494. He invented an own font, that was an Antiqua font, the “Italics⁴”, that differed from earlier printings that often used a kind of Textura, a gothic minuscule font. Also, Manutius was the first, who started to print Greek letters in his printing press. He, himself, was into Greek as well, because that was a major subject of his studies in Ferrara, Italy. His “Aldines”, the printings out of his printing house, are now a sought-after collector’s item worth quite a large amount of money.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johannes_Gutenberg

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johann_Fust

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuremberg_Chronicle

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italic_type



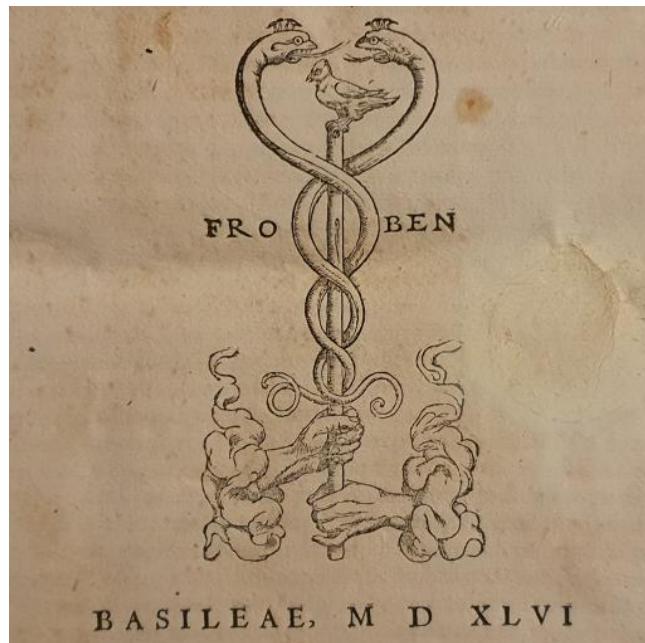
Another famous printer worth mentioning, that lived in Venice, as well, who had an impact in early printing, was Vincenzo Valgrisi⁵. But, since he was born in 1490, he did not print prior to 1500. Most of his work was published in Venice, but he had a brief period where he published in Rome, as well. Most of his works started in the mid of 16th century.

For example, he printed some works from Pietro Andrea Gregorio Mattioli⁶, an Italian doctor and botanist, like his “Compendium de plantis omnibus, una cum earum iconibus...” in 1571, a collection of herbal plants with a lot of nice engravings of those herbs.

A famous center of early printing was the town of Basle. There, a lot of famous printers started printing in the late 15th or early 16th century. First, to start with, is the Froben family, which had three generations working on the printers' press of their family. First, there was Johann Froben⁷, born around 1460, died in 1527. He learned printing techniques from Anton Koberger, for he was a Franconian, as well. He was a close friend to Erasmus of Rotterdam⁸, who was a Dutch polymath: theologian, philosopher, philologist, and priest. Froben himself cooperated with Erasmus publishing most of his works.

Even when Johann Froben died in 1527, his son, Hieronymus, kept that cooperation with Erasmus. Hieronymus took over his father's printing press, when he already had made Basle a renowned center for printing, science and culture within Europe of early modern age. And after Hieronymus, his sons Aurelius and Ambrosius⁹ took over the family's printing press.

An example for Froben printings is the “Opera” of St. Augustine, published in 10 or 11 tomes, that have been published in all generations of Froben. The first edition was printed in 1506, which was a collaboration of “the three Johannes” of early Basle printing: Johann Petri¹⁰, Johann Amerbach¹¹ und



⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vincenzo_Valgrisi

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pietro_Andrea_Mattioli

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johann_Froben

⁸ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erasmus>

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ambrosius_Frobenius

¹⁰ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johannes_Petri_\(printer\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johannes_Petri_(printer))

¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johann_Amerbach

Johann Froben. And even another Johann was working together with both Johann and Hieronymus Froben: Johannes Herwagen¹². Hieronymus' edition of the opera of St. Augustine was published in 1542, and Aurelius' (his son's) edition in 1569.

The entire Basle printers' history has always been a close network of cooperations and collaborations, which made Basle an important center for modern Renaissance and Humanism in early modern age.



Finally, another famous printers' family existed: The german Gryphius family. The father, Michael Greyff (or Greif) had three sons: Sebastian, Johann and Franz Gryphius (latinized for "Greif" or "Greyff"). In his travel years, Sebastian¹³, the oldest brother, went to Venice, to learn from Aldus Manutius. At Venice, he first started his printing office. In the year 1520, he moved to Lyon to settle down there. In his first printing years, he had a lot of contacts to Venice book traders that mainly were his clients. In the year 1536, he created the "Atelier du Griffon", together with Hugues de la Porte, a French businessman. He was a host for some persecuted writers at his time.

His two brothers also were printers: Johann lived and worked in Venice, where he had his printing house. The youngest brother, Franz, went to Paris to start his printing house in 1532. The family originally came from Reutlingen, Swabia, Germany, where Michael Greyff, their father, had his printing office, being the first printer of his town, starting his work as early as 1478.

Having printing houses in different towns, the family itself was a kind of early adopter of the idea of globalization.

All of these mentioned printers are some examples of some important printers of late 15th and early 16th century. They are all closely related to the invention of the printing press of Gutenberg.

To return to the aforementioned court decision in the Fust v. Gutenberg case: Gutenberg lost the case against Johannes Fust, who received the printing press and the stock of the already printed "B42's" from Gutenberg and subsequently began printing himself.

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¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johann_Herwagen

¹³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sebastian_Gryphius