Gutenberg

(From Wikipedia)

Johannes Gensfleisch zur Laden zum Gutenberg (c. 1395 – February 3, 1468) was a German blacksmith, goldsmith, printer, and publisher who introduced printing to Europe. His invention of mechanical movable type printing started the Printing Revolution and is widely regarded as the most important event of the modern period. It played a key role in the development of the Renaissance, Reformation, the Age of Enlightenment, and the Scientific Revolution and laid the material basis for the modern knowledge-based economy and the spread of learning to the masses.

Gutenberg was the first European to use movable type printing, in around 1439. Among his many contributions to printing are: the invention of a process for mass-producing movable type; the use of oil-based ink; and the use of a wooden printing press similar to the agricultural screw presses of the period. His truly epochal invention was the combination of these elements into a practical system which allowed the mass production of printed books and was economically viable for printers and readers alike. Gutenberg's method for making type is traditionally considered to have included a type metal alloy and a hand mould for casting type.

In Renaissance Europe, the arrival of mechanical movable type printing introduced the era of mass communication which permanently altered the structure of society. The relatively unrestricted circulation of information — including revolutionary ideas — transcended borders, captured the masses in the Reformation and threatened the power of political and religious authorities; the sharp increase in literacy broke the monopoly of the literate elite on education and learning and bolstered the emerging middle class.

Across Europe, the increasing cultural self-awareness of its people led to the rise of proto-nationalism, accelerated by the flowering of the European vernacular languages to the detriment of Latin's status as lingua franca. In the 19th century, the replacement of the hand-operated Gutenberg-style press by steam-powered rotary presses allowed printing on an industrial scale, while Western-style printing was adopted all over the world, becoming practically the sole medium for modern bulk printing.

The use of movable type was a marked improvement on the handwritten manuscript, which was the existing method of book production in Europe, and upon woodblock printing, and revolutionized European book-making. Gutenberg's printing technology
spread rapidly throughout Europe and later the world.

His major work, the Gutenberg Bible (also known as the 42-line Bible), has been acclaimed for its high aesthetic and technical quality.

In March 1434, a letter by him indicates that he was living in Strasbourg, where he had some relatives on his mother's side. He also appears to have been a goldsmith member enrolled in the Strasbourg militia. In 1437, there is evidence that he was instructing a wealthy tradesman on polishing gems, but where he had acquired this knowledge is unknown.

Until at least 1444 he lived in Strasbourg, most likely in the St. Arbogast parish. It was in Strasbourg in 1440 that Gutenberg is said to have perfected and unveiled the secret of printing based on his research, mysteriously entitled Kunst und Aventur (art and enterprise). It is not clear what work he was engaged in, or whether some early trials with printing from movable type may have been conducted there. After this, there is a gap of four years in the record.

By 1450, the press was in operation, and a German poem had been printed, possibly the first item to be printed there. In 1455 Gutenberg completed his 42-line Bible, known as the Gutenberg Bible. About 180 copies were printed, most on paper and some on vellum.

A November 1455 legal document records that there was a partnership for a "project of the books," the funds for which Gutenberg had used for other purposes, according to Fust. The court decided in favor of Fust, giving him control over the Bible printing workshop and half of all printed Bibles.

Thus Gutenberg was effectively bankrupt, but it appears he retained (or re-started) a small printing shop, and participated in the printing of a Bible in the town of Bamberg around 1459, for which he seems at least to have supplied the type. But since his printed books never carry his name or a date, it is difficult to be certain, and there is consequently a considerable scholarly debate on this subject. It is also possible that the large Catholicon dictionary, 300 copies of 754 pages, printed in Mainz in 1460, may have been executed in his workshop.

Meanwhile, the Fust–Schöffer shop was the first in Europe to bring out a book with the printer's name and date, the Mainz Psalter of August 1457, and while proudly proclaiming the mechanical process by which it had been produced, it made no mention of Gutenberg.

In January 1465, Gutenberg's achievements were recognized and he was given the title
Hofmann (gentleman of the court) by von Nassau. This honor included a stipend, an annual court outfit, as well as 2,180 litres of grain and 2,000 litres of wine tax-free.

Gutenberg died in 1468 and was buried in the Franciscan church at Mainz, his contributions largely unknown. This church and the cemetery were later destroyed, and Gutenberg's grave is now lost.

Between 1450 and 1455, Gutenberg printed several texts, some of which remain unidentified; his texts did not bear the printer's name or date, so attribution is possible only from typographical evidence and external references. Certainly several church documents including a papal letter and two indulgences were printed, one of which was issued in Mainz. Realizing the value of printing in quantity, seven editions in two styles were ordered, resulting in several thousand copies being printed. Some printed editions of Ars Minor, a schoolbook on Latin grammar by Aelius Donatus may have been printed by Gutenberg; these have been dated either 1451–52 or 1455.

In 1455, Gutenberg completed copies of a beautifully executed folio Bible (Biblia Sacra), with 42 lines on each page. Copies sold for 30 florins each, which was roughly three years' wages for an average clerk. Nonetheless, it was significantly cheaper than a manuscript Bible that could take a single scribe over a year to prepare. After printing, some copies were rubricated or hand-illuminated in the same elegant way as manuscript Bibles from the same period.

48 substantially complete copies are known to survive, including two at the British Library that can be viewed and compared online. The text lacks modern features such as pagination, indentations, and paragraph breaks.

An undated 36-line edition of the Bible was printed, probably in Bamberg in 1458-1460, possibly by Gutenberg. A large part of it was shown to have been set from a copy of Gutenberg's Bible, thus disproving earlier speculation that it may have been the earlier of the two.

Movable metal type, and composing stick, descended from Gutenberg's press.

"What the world is today, good and bad, it owes to Gutenberg. Everything can be traced to this source, but we are bound to bring him homage, ... for the bad that his colossal invention has brought about is overshadowed a thousand times by the good with which mankind has been favored.” – Mark Twain.
Although Gutenberg was financially unsuccessful in his lifetime, the printing technologies spread quickly, and news and books began to travel across Europe much faster than before. It fed the growing Renaissance, and since it greatly facilitated scientific publishing, it was a major catalyst for the later scientific revolution.

The capital of printing in Europe shifted to Venice, where visionary printers like Aldus Manutius ensured widespread availability of the major Greek and Latin texts.

Printing was also a factor in the Reformation. Martin Luther's 95 Theses were printed and circulated widely; subsequently he issued broadsheets outlining his anti-indulgences position (certificates of indulgences were one of the first items Gutenberg had printed). The broadsheet contributed to development of the newspaper.