Johann Fust Encyclopedia Article

Johann Fust

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Johann Fust

c. 1400-1466

German Printer

Though he is much less famous than his sometime associate Johannes Gutenberg (c. 1395-1468), Johann Fust was also a pioneer of printing. His lesser stature is deserved, since it was Gutenberg's technology, seized in a legal action, that Fust used; nonetheless, Fust was responsible for a number of firsts in the history of the printed word.

Fust, whose surname is sometimes rendered as Faust, was born in Mainz, the town Gutenberg would later make famous. He was initially a goldsmith, and with the proceeds from that trade also became a moneylender. It was in this capacity that he first came into contact with Gutenberg, who had been experimenting with the idea of a movable-type printing machine for eight years before he moved to Mainz in about 1446.

The two men met, and Gutenberg so intrigued Fust with his idea that Fust agreed to loan him money to finance the realization of his dream. But when nine years passed and Gutenberg had still not paid back his debts to Fust, the latter brought suit against him. In the resulting settlement, Gutenberg was forced to hand over to Fust all claims to the invention, along with all tangible work he had put into it to that point—including his famous 42-line Bible.

Some scholars believe that it was Fust and not Gutenberg who printed the famous Gutenberg Bible in 1455. In any case, it is unquestioned that Fust printed the second book in history: Gutenberg's Psalter, or Book of Psalms, in 1457. The latter was the first printed book that included both a publication date and a colophon, a symbol to identify the printer.

By then Fust had gone into partnership with his son-in-law Peter Schöffer (1425?-1502), and the two had set up a printing office in Mainz. Among the other works they published were the *Constitutiones* of Pope Clement V in 1460 and, five years later, *De officiis* by the Roman orator Cicero. The latter was the first printed classic, and the first printed book to contain Greek letters.