

# Arnold Pannartz and Konrad Sweynheim: Bringing Gutenberg to Italy

BY LUCY GORDAN • PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY LUCY GORDAN

Utilizing Gutenberg's methods of printing, a German and a Czech introduced Italy to the printed word.

The first four books printed in Italy date to 1465-67. Their typographers were Arnold Pannartz (?-1476), a Czech from Prague or a German from Cologne, and Konrad Sweynheim (?-1477), a German from Eltville, the birthplace of Gutenberg's mother near Mainz. Both lay brothers, they were possibly disciples of Gutenberg, but more likely of his creditor, the moneylender Johann Fust, and of scribe Peter Schoeffer.

Fust had taken control over Gutenberg's press in Mainz when the goldsmith/printer couldn't pay back Fust's loan of 800 guilders. Schoeffer was Fust's son-in-law; he'd dabbled in the new invention of printing with moveable type and had helped to design Gutenberg's typeface. In 1457 he and Fust had printed the *Mainz Psalter*, which is the second oldest book printed with moveable type in Europe. Gutenberg had printed his 42-line Bible two years earlier.

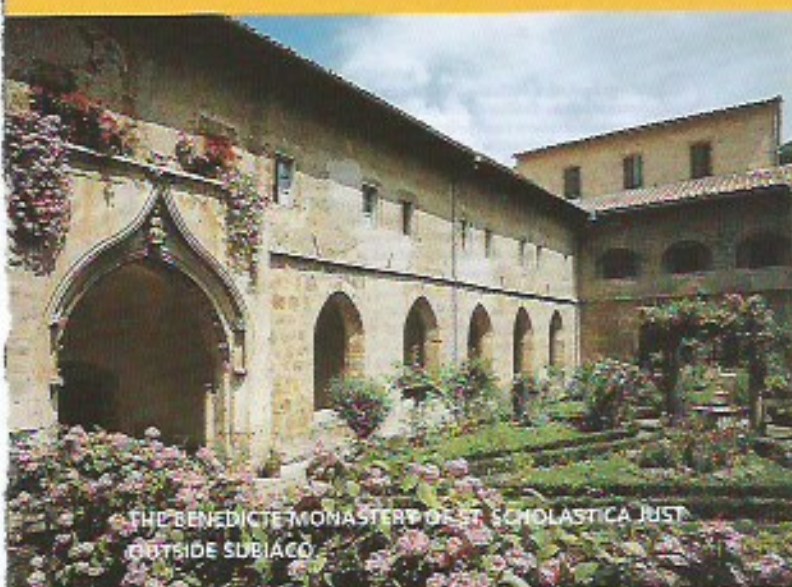
It isn't clear why Pannartz and Sweynheim chose to leave Mainz for the Benedictine Monastery of St. Scholastica just outside Subiaco, some 45 miles east of Rome. It seems to be for a combination of reasons: 1) as refugees from the political unrest in Mainz between two Archbishops, one

chosen by the people, the other appointed by the pope; 2) many German typographers were going abroad to earn their living by practicing this new trade; 3) the majority of monks at Santa Scholastica were German or from German-speaking northern European countries; 4) Santa Scholastica had an extensive library with texts to print as well as a scriptorium; 5) the typographers were invited there by two great humanists, the prolific writer Spanish Dominican cardinal Juan de Turrecremata (1388-1468), appointed Abbot of Subiaco in *commendam* by Pope Callixtus III in 1456 and uncle of the Inquisitor Tomás, and/or by German born Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464), philosopher, theologian, jurist and astronomer.

Pannartz and Sweynheim arrived in Subiaco in 1464, the year Nicholas of Cusa died; they moved to Rome in 1467. Although they introduced moveable type to Subiaco, according to [www.graphicdesign.com](http://www.graphicdesign.com)'s article about them and early printers in Rome, several German typographers -- Ulrich Han, his brother Wolf Han, his nephew Heinrich Han, Georg Lauer, Leonhard Pflugl, Adam Rot, and Stephan Planck -- arrived in Rome earlier or at the same time.

During their three years in Subiaco, Pannartz and Sweynheim taught the monks how to make moveable type, set up their press, and printed four books: *Donatus pro puerulis*, a Q&A Latin grammar book for children of which no copies survive; Cicero's *De Oratore*, undated but certainly printed before September 30, 1465; an anthology of the works of Church Father Lactantius, dated October 29th, 1465,





THE BENEDICTINE MONASTERY OF ST. SCHOLASTICA JUST OUTSIDE SUBIACO



THE FACADE OF PALAZZO MASSIMO IN ROME

which is considered the birthdate of printing in Italy; and St. Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*, completed on June 12th, 1467. They printed 275 copies of each text.

The surviving texts of these latter three volumes (in American, British, French, German, Italian and Swiss libraries and private collections) are of particular importance because, in Subiaco, Pannartz and Sweynheim abandoned the Blackletter or Textura of early German printed books and used what's called a "half Roman" typeface with Blackletter-like characteristics, but more rounded and less "spiky". "Half-Roman" was modeled on formal Italian handwriting known as humanist script, in particular that of a 13th century manuscript of Origen's *Homilies*, which the printers had access to in St. Scholastica's *scriptorium*. Its capital letters are like those of Imperial Roman inscriptions; its small letters Gothic.

In 1467 the two printers left Subiaco and settled in Rome, almost certainly for financial reasons—in Rome they would be close to the Vatican and have greater exposure. The brothers Pietro and Francesco Massimo, the papal suppliers of parchment and paper, placed a house at their disposal. The large Renaissance Palazzo Massimo with its rounded façade still exists on Corso Vittorio Emanuele near Campo dei Fiori. Since the Middle Ages, this market square was already home to numerous hotels for pilgrims and dignitaries visiting the Vatican, which is not far away, just across the Tiber. The Palazzo still houses the Massimo family archives. On its backwall, located on Via Mercatoria, a plaque commemorates the workshop of Pannartz and Sweynheim. That same year they printed Cicero's *Letters to his Family* in yet again a more rounded typeface that gave its name to the typeface Cicero, which is similar to Pica. This typeface is based on the beautiful

handwriting of Tuscan humanist and personal secretary to several popes, Poggio Bracciolini (1380-1459), who was responsible for rediscovering and recovering a great number of classical Latin manuscripts, mostly decaying and forgotten in German, Swiss, and French monastic libraries. His most celebrated find in 1417, probably in Fulda, was *De rerum natura*, the only surviving work by Lucretius. The Pulitzer Prize-winning 2011 book *The Swerve*:

*How the World Became Modern* by Harvard Professor Stephen Greenblatt is a narrative of this discovery.

The year before finding Lucretius, during a break of the Council of Constance, which he was, of course, attending, Poggio had some leisure time and visited the spa at Baden. In a long letter to his fellow humanist friend Niccolò de' Niccoli in Florence, he wrote: "I have related enough to give you an idea what a numerous school of Epicureans is established in Baden. I think this must be the place where the first man was created, which the Hebrews call the garden of pleasure. If pleasure can make a man happy, this place is certainly possessed of every requisite for the promotion of felicity."



ENGRAVING OF GUTENBERG.

According to two inventories they printed in 1470 and 1472, up to then Pannartz and Sweynheim had published 28 theological and classical texts: the Bible, Lactantius, Cyprian, St. Augustine, St. Jerome, Leo the Great, Thomas Aquinas, Cicero, Apuleius, Caesar, Gellius, Lucan, Virgil, Livy, Strabo, Pliny, Quintilian, Suetonius, Ovid to name a selection, in editions varying from 275 to 300 copies each, for a total of some 12,475 volumes.

Although prolific, they shared the fate of their perhaps mentor Gutenberg: they could not sell their books. According to the website [www.historygraphicdesign.com](http://www.historygraphicdesign.com), "in 1472 they sent their assistant, Bernhard von Merdin-



(a) *Handwritten text in a cursive script, likely a letter or document, with some words underlined.*

[illegible][illegible]

#### PANNARTZ AND SWEYNHEIM'S "LACTANTIUS" BEFORE ILLUMINATION

gen, with a shipment of books to sell at the Nuremberg fair. In that same year, encouraged by their editor, Johannes Andreas de Bussi, librarian at the Vatican, they addressed an unsuccessful suppliant letter to Pope Paul II." Further research uncovered that their letter was written on March 20, 1472 to Pope Sixtus IV, the founder of the Vatican Library, in the Preface of the 5th book of a theological text they had recently printed. The text was *Postillae perpetuae in universam S. Scripturam*, the first printed commentary of the Bible, by Jewish-born Franciscan teacher and head of Franciscan order in France, Nicholas of Lyra (1270-1349). Their letter couldn't have been for Pope Paul II as he died in 1471.

In contrast, although in 1473 Sweynheim dissolved their partnership, *Wikipedia* gives a more optimistic report: "The pope had a reversion drawn up for them, a proof of his great interest in printing. In 1474 Sweynheim was made canon at St. Victor at Mainz. It is not known whether Pannartz also obtained benefice." Perhaps the Pope also aided them professionally because in 1472 and 1473, they printed 18 more titles.

After their separation Pannartz printed thirteen more titles, including Sallust, Seneca, and Statius, Niccolò Pe-



MODEL OF GUTENBERG'S PRESS.

rotti's *Rudimenta grammatices* and Lorenzo Valla's *De Elegantiss linguae latinae*, by himself. The press remained active until 1479 when another German printer in Rome, Georg Lauer, finished Pannartz's last endeavor, the second volume of St. Jerome's *Letters*. Sweynheim returned to his original profession as an engraver and executed fine maps for *Cosmography* by Ptolemy, the first work of this kind, but died before finishing the project. Another German, Arnold Buckinck, completed its publication which contained 27 maps, each printed on two separate, facing leaves.

Ironically Ptolemy's *Cosmography* included major inaccuracies by the author, in part attributable to his miscalculating the size of the Earth, which he believed was smaller than it is. One effect of this miscalculation caused Columbus to underestimate the time it would take to reach what he thought was Asia by sailing westward.

Anyone interested in the history of printing must visit The Gutenberg Museum in Mainz. Founded by the citizens of Mainz in 1900 to commemorate the 500th anniversary of Gutenberg's birth, Gutenberg's 42 line Bible and a functional model of his press are two of the many gems on display. **GL**