Proofreading and Printing in Mainz in 1459

Among the earliest monumental works to come from the printing presses in Mainz is the edition of Gulielmus Duranti, *Rationale divinorum officiorum*, published by Johann Fust and Peter Schoeffer with the date 6 October 1459.\(^1\) Its publication followed immediately the second of their two Psalter editions, the *Psalterium Benedictinum*, which was completed a good five weeks earlier, on 29 August.\(^2\) The production of the *Rationale*, a book of 160 large-folio leaves, must have started well before that of the Psalter of 1459 was finished.

The *Rationale* was an extensive and much-used handbook on the rituals of the mass and their symbolism, written by Gulielmus Duranti between 1285 and 1291. Duranti was one of the learned men of his age, an ecclesiastical administrator and a renowned liturgist who also taught in Bologna and Modena before he became bishop of Mende.\(^3\) He died in 1296. His *Rationale* was an explanatory work but was also prescriptive, and the impetus for its early publication in print may have been to promote unity in the observance of the liturgy, as has been surmised for the major Mainz printing enterprises which preceded the *Rationale*: the first Bible (c. 1455), the two Psalters (1457 and 1459), and the Canon Missae (c. 1458).\(^4\) The general demand for the *Rationale* is evident from

\(^{1}\) gw 9101; ISTC id00403000. Seymour de Ricci, *Catalogue raisonné des premières impressions de Mayence (1445–1467)* [Veröffentlichungen der Gutenberg-Gesellschaft VIII–IX] (Mainz, 1911), no. 65. The copies discussed in the present study are nos. 65.1, 65.2, and 65.26 in De Ricci’s census.

\(^{2}\) gw m36286, ISTC ip01062000; De Ricci (*Mayence*) no. 55.

\(^{3}\) Duranti’s name is also found as Durand, Durandi, and Durandus. Instead of preferring any of these forms I have referred in this study to the text as ‘the *Rationale*’, although in incunabulists’ parlance the Mainz edition is commonly ‘the *Durandus*’.

\(^{4}\) This was first mooted by Eberhard König in his studies of the dissemination of the Gutenberg Bible, ‘Möglichkeiten kunstgeschichtlicher Beiträge zur Gutenberg-Forschung’, in *Gutenberg Jahrbuch* 1984, pp. 82–102 (pp. 98 sqq.), where he discussed the possibility that the reform movement in Benedictine abbeys in southern Germany, notably Melk, stimulated the beginning of printing. Similarly, he considered the influence of the monastic reform of the Bursfeld congregation and its requirements for unified liturgy and refectory reading in his ‘New Perspectives on the History of Mainz Printing’, in Sandra Hindman (ed.), *Printing the Written Word: The Social History of Books circa 1450–1520* (Ithaca and London, 1991), pp. 143–173 (pp. 149–157).
the fact that in the fifteenth century alone it was reprinted at least 43 times, and reprints continued until early in the seventeenth century. The Mainz edition of 1459 is the first time the medium of print was used for the publication of what we would call a reference work. The printers introduced for its production a new fount of type that was much smaller than the founts used for the Bible, the Psalters, and the Canon Missae, but its dimensions were close to those of the founts used for the Mainz indulgences, ascribed to Gutenberg’s press. Even with the new economical type, the work occupied 317 pages of large-folio format; all known copies were printed on vellum, with the size of the sheets the equivalent of Royal folio paper, and all copies were printed in two columns, usually 63 lines long. ISTC records no fewer than 53 more or less complete copies of this book (more than the number that survive of the Gutenberg Bible), as well as a considerable number of collections which own only one or a few leaves. It has long been noted that there is a great deal of variation between the copies, in particular the presence or absence of two-colour initials and red-printed Lombard initials. There are copies where the large initials are completely absent and spaces were left open for painting in initials. Some of these spaces are larger than those required for the printed initials, which led to some resetting. The Gesamtkatalog der Wiegendrucke listed a few examples of the resulting variants, without attempting to describe in full the features of each individual copy.

The exception that stands out among the copies of this spectacular book is the copy in the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek (from here on ‘bsb’) in Munich which, unlike all other known copies, is printed on paper. It is not surprising that it has always been recorded as a copy of the edition. Like the vellum copies it consists of 160 leaves, and at first sight its most striking feature is likewise the presence of initials printed in red and blue along with the red Lombards which Fust and Schoeffer had previously used in the Psalters and in the Canon Missae. The volume is bound in a heavy, blind-stamped pigskin binding, made by a binder who is known to have been active in Mainz between

---

5 GW 9102–9144.
6 Fust and Schoeffer Type 3: 916.
7 The sizes of the two short-lived founts of the Mainz indulgences (GW 6555–6556. ISTC ic00422400, –ic00422600) were, respectively, 90 mm and 96 mm for 20 lines, both approximate measurements, since all copies were printed on vellum with variable shrinkage.
8 Of the 320 pages, three are blank.
9 bsb-Ink d-324, shelf mark 2Inc. c. a. 2. A digital version of the bsb copy (or document) is freely available online, conveniently accessible via ISTC id00403000, which also provides a link to the digitised images of the vellum copy at the Bibliothèque Sainte Geneviève in Paris.