Before the vague traces in two copies of the Gutenberg Bible were recognised as compositors’ marks by Mayumi Ikeda in 2012, the manuscript used by the printers which is still at the Benedictine monastery of Santa Scholastica in Subiaco was known as the earliest known example of marked-up printer’s copy. In the abbey’s library it can be seen alongside a copy of the printed edition. In an exemplary and very detailed study published in 1980, Carla Frova and Massimo Miglio compared the two sources, both in relation to the tradition of the text and in the context of other works known to be printed by Sweynheym and Pannartz. After providing a codicological description of the manuscript, they demonstrated that before it was handed to compositors the text was extensively and carefully corrected throughout; apart from substantive corrections, punctuation was revised, and there were marks to indicate the need for space for rubrics, initials and Lombards, which were all to be filled in by hand once the book was printed. Frova-Miglio then described the markings in the manuscript, which were made by compositors at more than one phase of the production process. They distinguished different hands, and hence
drew the conclusion that copy had been divided and that at least part of the work was carried out concurrently by different individuals. They noted several corrections and muddles in the annotation, implying that the work had not always been as regular and smooth as one might expect from the very regular result. They drew attention to one type of marking which is unique to this document and occurs in about 100 pages of the manuscript, corresponding to about 75 in the printed book: notes which in abbreviated form indicate days of the week with the addition ‘a.p.’ or ‘p.p.’ for ‘ante prandium’ and ‘post prandium’. Without going into detail, the authors surmised that the notes identified compositors’ stints and that progress had been very slow. Finally, they noted some manuscript corrections to the printed text, which were uniform in the seven copies they examined at the Vatican Library and in libraries in Rome. They discussed the long-standing tradition that the book was printed by monks of the abbey who had been taught by Sweynheym and Pannartz. By the time the Augustine was completed in June 1467 the two printers might have already departed for Rome, where their presence is documented in November of the same year. They found confirmation that monks at the abbey had indeed learned to print, and that printing materials remained there after the departure of Sweynheym and Pannartz, in a letter written from Subiaco in 1471 by Benedetto Zwink de Ettal to Lorenzo Grüber, abbot of Göttweig, in which he proposed to print a breviary for the Benedictine congregation, making use of the skills and experience as well as the materials still available at Subiaco.

To this well-documented and illustrated study I had very little to add when I paid an all-too-brief visit to the monastery in 1985, but I sought clarification on two points: the order of typesetting, and whether from the notes of the weekdays on which the compositors worked on about a quarter of the book, the actual time it took to produce this section might be calculated. The mechanics