

## NOTES ON SUBIACO INCUNABLES

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We have some interesting clues to how the financial partnership which backed the first printing press in Subiaco may have worked. Given that the Latin and Greek types were cast onsite in the monastery and also that the printing shop remained in Subiaco in 1467 when Sweynheym and Pannartz moved to Rome, where they had new types made, it seems a plausible hypothesis that the printing shop was set up at the monastery's expense. The possible location where printing took place in the monastery has recently been tentatively identified with the 13<sup>th</sup>-century ambulatory on the basis of an examination of the architectural structures which pre-dated the 18<sup>th</sup>-century interventions carried out by Niccolo Maria Tedeschi.

The three editions produced in Subiaco – Cicero's *De oratore*, the works of Lactantius and St Augustine's *De civitate Dei* – were each printed in 275 copies, as Sweynheym and Pannartz themselves tell us as well as the humanist Leon Battista Alberti in the preface to his work *De componendis cyfris*, perhaps in connection with a possible visit he made to the printers in Subiaco between 1466 and 1467.

From an analysis of the incunable editions produced in Subiaco it seems certain that a printing press together with moveable type was used, though for the last edition they printed while there, St Augustine's *De civitate Dei* (dated in the colophon 12 June 1467) it has been shown that two presses were used.

The first work they printed, as testified by historical sources, was the *Donato pro puerulis*, of which no copy survives today. It is unclear whether this might have been printed using woodblocks, a method of printing which we know was practised in Subiaco. The subsequent editions which were certainly produced in Subiaco – Cicero's *De oratore*, printed in the early months of 1465, and the works of Lactantius, in an edition dated 29 October 1465 (although, according to Cherubino Mirzio, an earlier edition dated 30 October 1464, may have existed) – reveal that they were produced on a printing press.

It is always fascinating and significant to identify, where possible, the manuscripts which were used by printers and compositors as the sources for the editions they were producing, since they can tell us much about the way the printers worked and how long they took. For the edition of Augustine's *De civitate Dei*, the manuscript Sweynheym and Pannartz used is still in the Subiaco collection (MS. XLII). It is filled with marks and other handwritten notes, which are still visible today and which have allowed us to reconstruct the process of printing the edition and calculate that it took them twenty months to produce. The monks in Subiaco were used as assistants.

As far as the types made and used by Sweynheym and Pannartz in Subiaco are concerned, the notable innovation lay in their abandonment of the gothic style of lettering common in Germany and their adoption of the rounded and clear script which humanists used to write in – the so-called ‘Subiaco type’. The types the two printers went on to use after they moved to Rome are generally considered to be less beautiful than their Subiaco types (Pastor 1932, p. 330). The models which inspired the characteristically Roman form of the capital or majuscule letters were monumental epigraphs and the ancient manuscripts found in the Subiaco library. The source for the minuscule letters, on the other hand, can be traced to a specific manuscript in the monastic library: MS. XXXIV, dating from between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries and containing Origen’s *Homilies*.

The Subiaco editions are well-made books. They use good quality paper with clear watermarks. The page layout is carefully done and the printing is clean and sharp. The manuscript initial letters, either in red or using several colours, which are found in surviving copies show the influence of manuscript production. The insertion of some Greek type in the Lactantius edition is noteworthy as the first such use of Greek letters. A collation and comparison of surviving copies reveal the inevitable differences in the way copies were finished off by hand – in the way running titles at the top of the pages were added, for example, or initial letters, red, black or in variously coloured, in varying stages of completion, sometimes just outlined in pencil or omitted completely.

There are various outside contemporary testimonies to the activities of Sweynheym and Pannartz in Subiaco and Rome, including Gaspare da Verona’s reference, in his *De gestis Pauli secondi*, to their arrival in Rome in the third year of Paul II’s pontificate (1464-1471). We know that they were based in Subiaco until 1467 when they left for Rome. In the same year Torquemada also stepped down as the monastery’s commendatory abbot, a post he had held since 1456 (he died in 1468).

The reasons for their departure for Rome have been the subject of much conjecture. The sources in Subiaco are entirely silent on the matter but there are numerous testimonies to the two printers’ activity in Rome. It seems most probable that they were attracted away from the monastery by the idea of exploiting the commercial openings for printing in the Papal city, which was in that period a hive of cultural activity.