

# ON GUTENBERG'S FOOTSTEPS

in Eltville am Rhein



ELTVILLE AM RHEIN  
WEIN-, SEKT- UND ROSENSTADT



# Johannes Gutenberg

The inventor of letterpress printing with movable type has influenced the history of mankind like no other. Gutenberg's lead type marked the beginning of the modern age in the 15th century, changing and forming the world. In 1999 the "Father of Media" was nominated "Man of the Millennium" by a team of American scientists. In their statement they explain: "Without Gutenberg, Columbus would not have discovered the sea route, Shakespeare's poetic genius would not have been disseminated and Martin Luther's 95 theses would have remained ineffective".

## The Printing Press

Gutenberg's printing press made it possible to disseminate knowledge, information and ideas among the world. His revolutionary inventions around the black art created the basis for reproducing writings in unprecedented numbers within a short period of time.

Gutenberg's masterpiece, the 42-line Bible  
Shuckburgh copy, Gutenberg Museum Mainz, ink. 129

Eltville am Rhein, the city of wine, sparkling wine and roses, is the sixth oldest printing town in the world and one of the cradles of letterpress printing. The black art had already made its mark here during Gutenberg's lifetime. Although his birth- and workplace is the nearby city of Mainz, he also left his mark on Eltville, the oldest town in the Rheingau region.

Historic Florentine  
Printing Press in the  
Electors' Castle



# Gutenberg's Vita

## Around 1400

As the second son of Friele Gensfleisch zur Laden, a respected patrician, and Else Wirich Johannes (in Mainz "Henne") Gensfleisch sees the light of the world in the courtyard "Zum Gutenberg" in Mainz between 1393 and 1404.

## 1411

When the disputes between Mainz patricians and guilds once again come to a head, 117 patricians leave the city in protest. It is presumed that the Gensfleisch family lives temporarily in Eltville, where they own a small property near the Electors' Castle. Henne, who probably attends the monastery school of St. Victor's Abbey near Weisenau (Mainz), is able to continue his studies in Eltville. Back then, the "common school" (community school) is located near the Catholic Church of St. Peter and Paul.

## 1418-1419

In these years, a *Johannes de Alta Villa* (Lat. *Alta Villa*, engl. "elevated town" = Eltville) is enrolled at the University of Erfurt, the alma mater of the Archbishop of Mainz. Possibly this student is Johannes Gutenberg.

## 1419-1420

Gutenberg's name is first mentioned in a court record in connection with inheritance disputes after the death of his father in 1419.

## 1428-1434

Renewed conflicts between the patriciate and the guilds cause Mainz patricians to turn their backs on the city once again. It is not known where Gutenberg lives during these years.

## 1434-1444

Gutenberg lives in St. Argobast, a suburb of Strasbourg, from 1434 to 1444. During these years, he emerges primarily as an astute businessman and master craftsman: he gives lessons in gemstone polishing and cutting, and also founds a cooperative for the production of pilgrimage mirrors. He certainly develops the art of printing there; however, there is no evidence of any print production.

Once again his name appears in a court document: In 1436/37 he is sued by Ennelin zu der Iserin Thüre and her mother Ellewibel for allegedly breaking a marriage vow. The outcome of the trial is not recorded. Another document proves that Gutenberg lives in Strasbourg at least until 1444.

In 1447 he litigates in Frankfurt am Main, but his whereabouts between 1444 and 1447 remain obscure.

## 1434-1447

Friele Gensfleisch, Gutenberg's older brother, is verified to have lived with his family in Burghofstraße in Eltville from 1434 until his death in 1447.

## 1448-1456

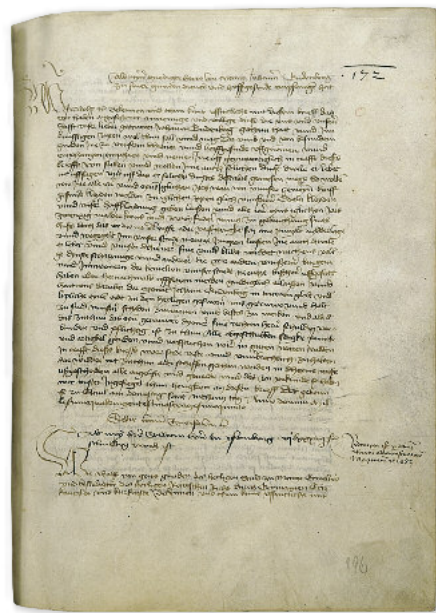
The inventor returns to Mainz and sets up his first print shop in his parents' house "Zum Gutenberg". He finds a financially strong investor in Johannes Fust.

Gutenberg receives two loans from him - a total of 1,600 guilders - and moves his print shop to the more spacious "Hof zum Humbrecht" where he finally begins the "work of books". Fust is already a partner in the venture at this point.

## 1452-1455

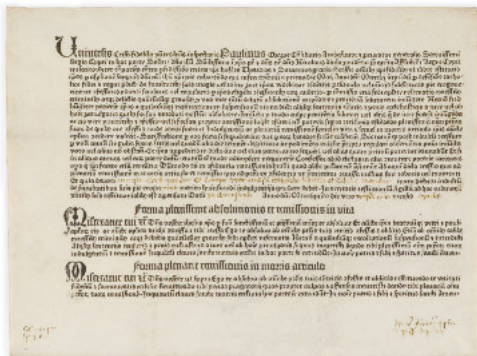
During these years Gutenberg devotes himself intensively to his masterpiece, the 42-line Bible. The work proceeds well, for the first copies of the Bible are offered for sale as early as during the Frankfurt Imperial Diet in the autumn of 1454. However, Fust demands that Gutenberg repays the loan shortly before the work was completed, and the inventor is sued for misappropriation of the money. A report about this trial is documented in the so-called "Helmaspersgersche Notariatsinstrument" of November 6, 1455. Gutenberg is defeated in court and the workshop in the Humbrechtshof is mortgaged to Fust along with the equipment and some of the Bibles.

Johannes returns to his parents' house and from then on, in the modest, poorly equipped workshop, produces mainly smaller print works which promise reliable sales, such as the "Cypriot Indulgence Letters" (1454/1455) with a print run of about 2,000 copies.



**Deed of appointment: It was in Eltville that Gutenberg received the only honour of his lifetime. Prince Elector Adolf von Nassau appointed him a courtier in 1465.**

Würzburg State Archives, Mz. Ingrossaturbücher 30, fol.196



**Cypriot Indulgence Letters 1454**  
Herzog August Library Wolfenbüttel

## 1461/1462

As a result of the Mainz Collegiate Feud, numerous Mainz patrician families who had sympathised with the defeated Archbishop Diether of Isenburg are expelled from the city by the victorious Adolf of Nassau. It is assumed that during that time Gutenberg temporarily lives with his relatives in Eltville.

## January 17, 1465

Prince Elector Adolf von Nassau, who resides in Eltville Castle, appoints Johannes Gutenberg a courtier for his "respected, acceptable and willing service" in a deed on January 17, 1465. The famous inventor receives an annuity. In addition to clothing, he is entitled to an annual allowance of twenty measures of grain (2,180 litres) and two barrels of wine (2,000 litres), and becomes exempt from all services, burdens and taxes. A copy of the appointment document is on display in the Electors' Castle.

## February 3, 1468

The Eltville priest Leonhard Mengois later notes in his confession book that Henne Gensfleisch died "uff sant blasius tag" - that is on February 3, 1468. Historians assume that he is buried in the Franciscan church in Mainz, which today no longer exists. Gutenberg's inheritance is verifiably transferred on February 26, 1468.

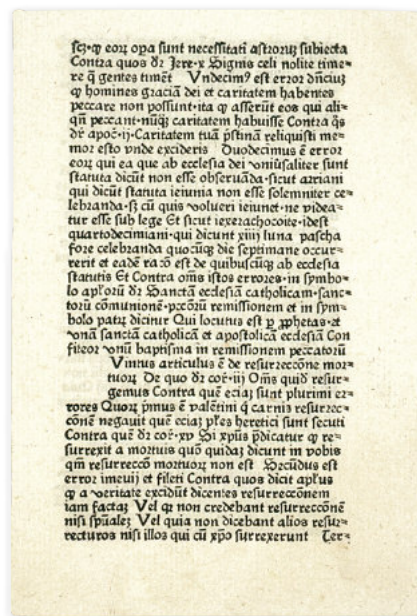


# Eltville Early Prints

Whether Gutenberg supported the Bechtermünze brothers with his know-how in their printshop cannot be verified by historical sources. However, the Eltville prints attest to the fact that there must have been closer relations and contacts. The typeface of the first two editions of the "Vocabularius" largely corresponds to the typeface of the "Catholicon", which was probably printed by Gutenberg.

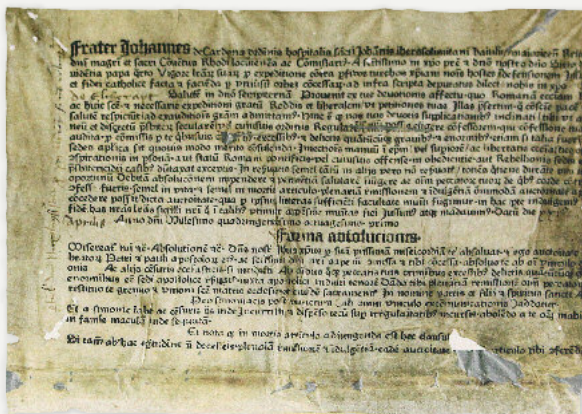
The "black artist" also produced a letter of indulgence in Mainz in 1454/1455, the proceeds of which were to be used to finance a crusade against the Turks.

A typeface very similar, in part even identical, to this print is used in the Vocabularius edition of 1472. In the same year, Nikolaus Bechtermünze used this presumably newly-moulded type for another project: he printed the "Summa de articulis fidei" by Thomas Aquinas (ca. 1225-1274) in his Eltville workshop.



"Summa de articulis fidei"  
Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274)

Bavarian State Library Munich, 4 Inc.s.a.1792 fol.



31-line indulgence letter for funding of the war  
against the Turks and defence of Rhodes (1480)

Trier City Library

A lucrative business for the first printers was also the so-called single-sheet-prints, such as notebooks, conductors and lax calendars, because thanks to Gutenberg's ingenious invention large print runs could be produced within a very short time.

Two such broadsheets have survived from the Eltville Offizin (printing house): an invitation to crossbow shooting in the city of Mainz from 1480 and a 31-line "letter of indulgence for funding of the war against the Turks and defence of Rhodes" (1480).

The typeface of this broadsheet is reminiscent of that used by Gutenberg to print his masterpiece - the 42-line Bible.

## On Gutenberg's footsteps

# Historical Tour

### of Eltville am Rhein

- 1 Hof Bechtermünz
- 2 Catholic Parish Church
- 3 Old School
- 4 Gensfleisch Houses
- 5 Electors' Castle
- 6 Historic Wine Press Burgstraße

## Hof Bechtermünz

### Kirchgasse 5

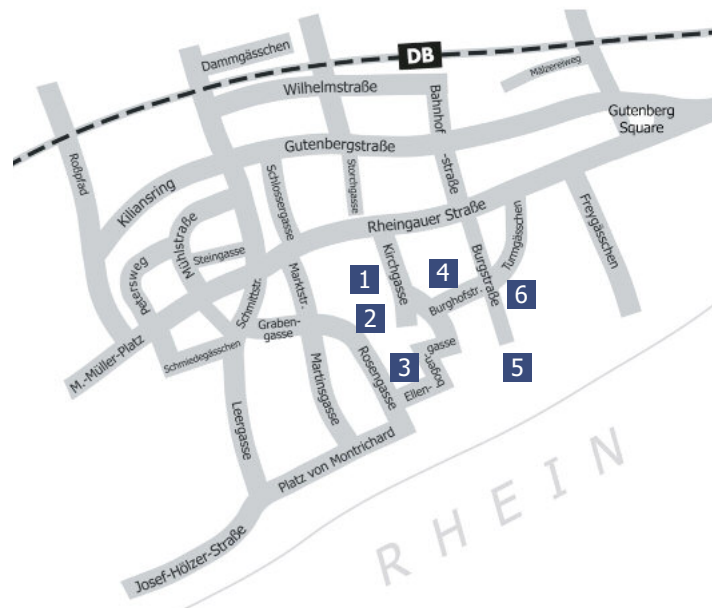
Eltville is the sixth-oldest printing site in the world. Even before the first printing presses started up in Venice, Nuremberg, Paris or Florence, the brothers Heinrich and Nikolaus Bechtermünze were already running a small print shop in Eltville's Kirchgasse.

It is assumed that Gutenberg was of assistance to the two printers - at least for a limited period of time. The first book produced in the "Hof Bechtermünze" was the "Vocabularius ex quo" (1467).

Two broadsheets dating from 1480 are the last evidence of the Bechtermünze printing workshop. Sources have not revealed when and why the printing workshop ceased operations, or where it might have moved to.



Hof Bechtermünz





The coat of arms on the epitaph of Jakob Gensfleisch von Sorgenloch



Catholic Church St. Peter and Paul, North facade

### Old School Rosengasse 3

The Gensfleisch family probably moved to Eltville for a short period of time after the disputes with the guilds when some of Mainz's patrician families left the city in 1411. Research presumes that Gutenberg was a student at the "gemein Schul" (community school) near the Catholic Parish Church.

### Gensfleisch Houses Burghofstraße 1

The patrician estate of the Gensfleisch family from Mainz once stood on this site. Gutenberg's eldest brother, Friele Gensfleisch zur Laden, lived here from 1434 to 1447. According to a date on the corner post of the half-timbered house, however, the present building was not erected until around 1681.

It is assumed that the former estate - like the nearby Electors' Castle - was destroyed by a fire in 1635 and that it was rebuilt at about the same time as the east wing of the castle. Parts of the old foundation walls presumably date from the 15th century.

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### Catholic Parish Church St. Peter and Paul, Kirchgasse

Built between 1353 and 1435, the Catholic Parish Church of St. Peter and Paul is a treasure trove of late Gothic art. Special gems are the magnificent wall and vault paintings (1405, 1410 and 1522) in addition to a precious baptismal font made in 1517 in the Mainz workshop of Hans Backoffen.

On the south wall of the side aisle is a rather inconspicuous gravestone commemorating the death of Jakob Gensfleisch von Sorgenloch in 1478.

The Sorgenloch patricians of Mainz were distant relatives of Johannes Gutenberg. This is also shown by the epitaph: the alliance coat of arms of the late Jakob von Sorgenloch and his wife Elsgin Bechtermünze, like the coat of arms of the Gensfleisch zum Gutenberg family, shows a pilgrim striding sideways, dressed in a short frock coat and long-capped cap. In one hand he holds a shell, in the other a walking stick. However, the coat of arms on the gravestone is carved laterally reversed into the sandstone.



Old School  
Rosengasse 4



Gensfleisch Houses with North wall  
of the Electors' Castle moat

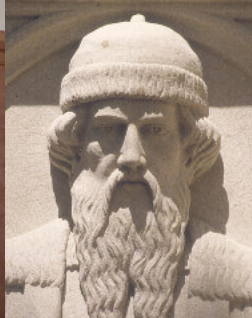
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4





Gutenberg Exhibition in the castle tower



Gutenberg relief in the castle courtyard



Electors' Castle, South facade

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## Electors' Castle with Gutenberg-Exhibition, Burgstraße

Eltville's landmark, the Electors' Castle, was assessed in 1987 by the State Office for the Preservation of Monuments as an "architectural monument of national cultural importance".

Balduin of Trier had begun the construction of this stately building around 1330, and it was completed by Heinrich von Virneburg who then moved the residence of the archbishops of Mainz to Eltville, where it remained for 150 years. Johannes Gutenberg received the only honour during his lifetime in the Electors' Castle, when Elector Adolf of Nassau appointed him a courtier in 1465. During the Thirty Years' War, Swedish troops destroyed the castle along with the surrounding residential and commercial buildings; only the tower defied the attack.

The Eltville Castle Society has set up a permanent Gutenberg exhibition in the tower to commemorate the inventor of printing with movable type. In addition to a page of the *Vocabularius* edition from 1472, the small museum exhibits not only the facsimile editions of all the early Eltville prints and a copy of the deed of Gutenberg's appointment, but also historical printing utensils. The Gutenberg painting by the artist Ernst Zoberbier (1958) supplements the exhibition. The showpiece of the collection is an old Florentine Printing Press from 1927. Printing days are held here several times a year. Then visitors can experience how the printing craft worked in the past. The large wooden Gutenberg artwork "Eltvil 1468" by the Rheingau artists Apitz and Hofmann is located in the castle dungeon. Another huge Gutenberg piece of art by Sitta Derstroff can be viewed in the little museum "Collection Alta Villa" in the tower's Domherrenkammer.



**Historic Wine Press Burgstraße**

Such presses served Gutenberg as a model for the construction of his printing press.

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## Historic Wine Press Burgstraße

Printing with movable type required a whole series of inventions: Gutenberg first broke down texts into individual elements, such as lowercase and uppercase letters, punctuation marks, abbreviations and ligatures (connection of letters on a typeface). These were then casted as reversed letters from a lead alloy. Gutenberg had developed a manual casting instrument for this purpose. When the letters were finally assembled into texts, they had to be transferred onto the moistened paper or parchment with even pressure. For this purpose Gutenberg made use of the physical laws applicable to wine or paper presses.

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Gutenberg Museum Mainz

Württemberg State Library Stuttgart

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www.eltville.de/freizeit-tourismus/  
erleben-entdecken/  
stadtportrait/gutenberg/



Gutenberg-Monument, sandstone, 1880, Eltville, Schwalbacher Straße



We look forward  
to your visit.

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