

## The Gutenberg Bible

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*by Yale University Library*

The Gutenberg Bible, produced by Johann Gutenberg in Mainz, Germany, about 1455, is usually regarded as the first substantial book printed from movable type in the western world. It marks the beginning of the general application of the art of printing and the wide dissemination of knowledge by this means. Previously, hand copying was the main method of book production. This copy of the Gutenberg Bible demonstrates the transition from copying to printing, for rubrics, initials, and decoration were added by hand after the text was printed. It is remarkable that this landmark of civilization is also one of the most handsome books ever produced. Its typography and design are still admired and imitated by printers today.

The book is sometimes called the Mazarin Bible, after the French cardinal in whose library a copy was first recognized, or the Forty-two Line Bible owing to the number of lines in each column. The work contains 1,286 pages. The text, which is the Latin Vulgate version, is not divided into chapters and verses as in modern Bibles.

It is estimated that Gutenberg printed about 180 copies, about 150 on handmade paper, the rest on vellum (prepared animal skin). Of the 22 complete copies that are known, 5 are in the United States. In addition, 26 incomplete copies and numerous fragments have survived. This is a complete copy on paper, bound in two volumes.

The Yale copy was for many years in the library of the Benedictine abbey at Melk in Austria. During the economic depression after the First World War, it was sold by the monks and later acquired by Mrs. Edward S. Harkness for presentation to Yale University.

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