THE MAINZ INDULGENCES OF 1454/5: A REVIEW OF RECENT SCHOLARSHIP

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The earliest extant piece of European printing from movable type with which an absolute date can be associated is a Papal Letter of Indulgence which bears the printed date 1454 and the handwritten purchase date 22 October 1454. Forty-nine other printed copies of this Indulgence are known, some unsold and thus lacking purchase dates; the rest have dates ranging from 25 October 1454 to 30 April 1455. The Gesamtkatalog der Wiegeindrucke distinguishes thirteen variants, grouped under two editions: the 30-line Indulgence (GW 6555), hereafter called I 30 (fig. 1), and the 31-line Indulgence (GW 6556), hereafter called I 31 (fig. 2). Neither form of the Indulgence gives any indication as to printer or place of printing. In the Gesamtkatalog, I 30 is assigned to the ‘Printer of the 42-line Bible’ and I 31 to the ‘Printer of the 36-line Bible’; little added information concerning the printer(s) of the Indulgences is provided by the Gesamtkatalog entries for the 42-line Bible (GW 4201), assigned to the ‘Printer of the 42-line Bible (Johann Gutenberg)’, or the 36-line Bible (GW 4202), assigned to the ‘Printer of the 36-line Bible’.

I 30 and I 31 contain the same text with only minor variations, but different text and heading types were used in setting the two editions. This circumstance, together with the association of at least one of the editions with the name of Gutenberg, has been of great interest to researchers attempting to unravel the history of the earliest European printing. Speculations concerning the Indulgences have centred around three major questions: (1) which edition was printed first? (2) did they both come from the same workshop? and (3) who printed them and what was the role of Gutenberg in their production? The starting-point for all modern research on the 1454/5 Indulgences has been Gottfried Zedler’s monograph of 1913, in which he described in detail all copies then known and presented his conclusions (later substantially revised) concerning their production. Although a more exhaustive description of the Indulgences has yet to appear, Zedler’s interpretation of the typographical evidence has been questioned by subsequent researchers. Three investigators in particular—Albert Kapr, George Painter, and Ferdinand Geldner—have concerned themselves in the last fifteen years with the 1454/5 Indulgences, and several other researchers, working primarily in Germany, have touched on the problem of the Indulgences in their investigations of other early printed works. Unfortunately, the German studies by Kapr, Geldner, and others have been little mentioned in English-language surveys of early printing, including Painter’s essay of
SOMMAE PLURALIS ABSOLUTIO \(\text{SOMMAE PLURALIS ABSOLUTIO} \)

**Fig. 1.** The 30-line Indulgence. IA.53
Fig. 2. The 31-line Indulgence. IA.62
1970, and may be unfamiliar to the majority of non-specialists. In the present article an attempt is made to correct this situation through a review and discussion of a number of recent theories concerning the production of the Mainz Indulgences of 1454/5 and their relationship to other early printed works.

The Mainz Indulgences, like several other pieces of the earliest printing in Europe, are associated with the Western European struggle against the Turks. On 12 August 1451 Pope Nicolas V announced that during the period from 1 May 1452 to 30 April 1455 a general Indulgence would be granted for those contributing money to aid in the defence of Cyprus. The work of organizing the collection of contributions and the distribution of the Letters of Indulgence — receipts specifying the nature of the Indulgence and the name of the purchaser — was delegated to the Cypriot noble Paulinus Zappe (or Chappe), who in turn arranged for Archbishop Diether of Mainz to organize the collection from that city. Priests were ordered to travel from town to town, proclaiming the Indulgence, collecting contributions, and issuing Letters of Indulgence. Prior to the advent of printing in Europe, each Letter of Indulgence had to be written by hand, necessitating the employment of large numbers of scribes whose wages consumed part of the proceeds from the sales. That this procedure was also followed with Zappe’s Indulgence is shown by the nineteen manuscript copies of the Indulgence listed by Zedler, ranging in purchase date from 4 January 1454 up to the end of the Indulgence period, 30 April 1455. At some time before the autumn of 1454, however, the Indulgence promoters negotiated with the earliest Mainz printers for a supply of Indulgence blanks, forms textually similar to the handwritten Indulgences, but with space left for the name of the purchaser and the place and date of purchase. By providing the travelling priests with these printed forms, the promoters could dispense with the army of scribes whose wages cut into the Church’s profits, and simultaneously reduce the time needed for the preparation of each Indulgence, making it possible for the priests to distribute more of them in far less time than before; furthermore, the use of the printed forms, all closely similar in content and appearance, would ensure that each Indulgence issued would be legible and textually correct. It has recently been suggested by H. D. L. Vervliet that the recognition of this need for large numbers of identical documents may have provided the stimulus for Gutenberg’s first experiments with printing; following his failure to set up a scheme for the mass production of pilgrim badges to be sold at the Aachen pilgrimage, Gutenberg may have turned to printing in order to ‘do something about the laborious manual copying of the indulgences which were sold at such places in such vast numbers’.

Forty-one copies of I 31 have been discovered to date, while I 30 is known through only nine copies. As early as 1856, Georg Heinrich Pertz observed that the majority of the known copies of I 31 were purchased in the Archdiocese of Mainz, while I 30 seemed to have been sold primarily in the Archdiocese of Cologne, and subsequent discoveries have not altered this finding. The two editions can be distinguished from each other by their length (thirty versus thirty-one lines), the text and heading types used, and the ornamental initial, U or V, used to begin the first word of the Indulgence. All extant printed copies are on vellum, but both vellum and paper manuscript copies of this Indulgence are known.
The type area, without the projecting initials, has been measured by Ferdinand Geldner as 143 × 225 mm for I 30 and 168 × 227 mm for I 31. The size of the vellum leaf used for I 30 ranges from 193 to 198 mm in height and from 260 to 276 mm in width; that used for I 31 ranges from 193 to 205 mm in height and from 257 to 268 mm in width.8

The greater length of I 31 results from the larger size of text and heading type used in its setting. Geldner has measured twenty lines of the I 31 text type as 96 mm and twenty lines of the I 30 text type as 90 mm.9 Both text types are bastardas. George Painter has claimed that the two founts display a 'strong family likeness', but comparison of the individual sorts reveals marked differences between the two.10 A larger textura type is used in each Indulgence as a heading type. That used with the smaller I 30 text type is identical with the type of the 42-line Bible (B 42), except for four letters which take slightly different forms. Painter has attributed these minor differences to the use of a 'rejected and early case' of B 42 type; Albert Kapr has noted that they could result from different strikes or a different positioning of the matrix in the casting mould.11 The heading type used with the I 31 text type is an early state of the type used in the printing of the 36-line Bible (B 36), and is generally referred to as the Donatus–Kalender (DK) type, because of its use both in early Mainz editions of calendars and in the Latin grammar of Aelius Donatus. According to Geldner, the state seen in I 31 is that of the 'roughly contemporary' Turkish Calendar (Hain *10741); this state corresponds to the first of the six stages in the development of the DK/B 36 type distinguished by Carl Wehmer.12

Three ornamental initials, thought to be metal cuts rather than cast type, are used in each Indulgence. The 30-line Indulgence is sometimes referred to as the ‘U-form’ because in it the first word, ‘Universis’, begins with an ornamental U; similarly, I 31 is known as the ‘V-form’ from the use of an ornamental V in this position. Two ornamental versions of M are also used in each Indulgence, but although all six initials are stylistically related, no two of them are identical.

No further use of the I 30 text type is known, but the I 30 initials were used in Mainz by Peter Schoeffer in 1489.13 Two abbreviations, for ‘et’ and ‘us’, from the I 31 text type were identified in 1905 by Zedler in the Indulgences granted in 1461/2 for contributions to the rebuilding of the church of St. Ciriacus in Neuhausen (GW 76 and 78); the main type used in these editions of the Neuhausen Indulgence is that of the 1460 Mainz Catholicon of Johannes Balbus (GW 3182).14 These same two abbreviations, and the initial V used in I 31, have also been identified by Leonhard Hoffmann in a recently discovered Indulgence of 1464 issued by Frater Radulphus for the benefit of the Trinitarian Order; again, the main type used in this unique copy is that of the Catholicon.15 The abbreviations next appeared in the first edition of the Vocabularius ex quo printed by the brothers Heinrich and Nikolaus Bechtermünze in Eltville in 1467, and in the second edition of the same work, printed by Nikolaus alone in 1469 (Copinger 6311 and 6312); both editions are otherwise set in the Catholicon type. In 1472 Nikolaus Bechtermünze printed a third edition of the Vocabularius (Copinger 6313) in a new casting of the I 31 text type augmented by a few new characters. This fount was also used by Bechtermünze for an edition of the Summa de articolis fidei of Thomas Aquinas (Hain *1426) which appeared at approximately the same
time as the third edition of the *Vocabularius*.\textsuperscript{16} Two further broadsides printed in the I 31 text type are known, an Indulgence of 1480 and an invitation to a Mainz crossbow shoot, printed in the same year.\textsuperscript{17}

The *Gesamtkatalog der Wiegendrucke* (vol. vi, 1934) distinguishes six variants of I 30 and seven of I 31. These variants do not represent separate settings of the Indulgence, but are the result of minor changes made in the standing type during the printing of the two editions. By means of an analysis of textual change and type wear, Zedler arrived at a chronological ordering of the variants of each edition, and his scheme has been accepted, with some modification, by both the *Gesamtkatalog* and later investigators. The most important of the textual changes was the substitution of the date 1455 for 1454. Of the six I 30 variants, only the first has the printed date 1454, but of the seven I 31 variants, the first five have the printed date 1454. This double-dating of the Indulgences does not conclusively show that batches of both editions were printed in both years; it is possible, as Painter has stated, that all were printed in 1454 and that 'the purpose of the dual dating was . . . to adapt the Indulgences for sale in two successive years'.\textsuperscript{18}

The total number of copies printed is unknown, but has been estimated as several thousand.\textsuperscript{19} Because the number of copies known today may correspond to such a small fraction of the total edition, it is very well possible that the extant copies do not represent all the variant states.

The first question to be considered in an attempt to understand the relationship between I 30 and I 31 is that of priority: which edition was printed first, if the two were not printed simultaneously? Although there is general agreement today that I 31 was printed before I 30, Gottfried Zedler argued in 1913 that the text type of I 30 had been designed first, and concluded from this that I 30 had been printed first.\textsuperscript{20} In later examinations of the Indulgences, however, he altered his opinion and claimed that I 31 was the first to be printed.\textsuperscript{21} More recently, George Painter has also stated that the type of I 30 is older than that of I 31, which he has called 'manifestly a conscious improvement of the former',\textsuperscript{22} but his conclusion that the printing of I 31 was begun first places him with Zedler in the somewhat awkward position of maintaining that the later type was the first to be used. Ferdinand Geldner, in discussing the views of Zedler and Painter, has declared that it is difficult to state on typographical grounds which type was designed first, but has inclined to the 'simplest and most logical' conclusion, that the type with which the earliest copies of the Indulgence were printed was also the first to be cast.\textsuperscript{23}

The pattern of purchase dates for the Indulgences known to have been sold strongly suggests that I 31 was in circulation first. At least seven copies of I 31 bearing the printed date 1454 had been purchased by the end of that year (one of the second variant and six of the fourth variant), but only the unique first variant of I 30 has the printed date 1454, and its purchase date of 27 February 1455 is the earliest known for I 30. Because the copy of I 31 purchased by Margarethe Kremer at Erfurt on 22 October 1454 corresponds to the fourth variant of that edition, it can be stated with assurance that the printing of I 31 was well under way by the end of October. Painter, arguing that 'immediate delivery from the press and speedy distribution can be assumed, for each copy represented money, but had
to be cashed within seven months' (i.e., before the end of the Indulgence period on 30 April 1455), has allowed 'a week or two' for the 240 km journey from Mainz to Erfurt and concluded that 'I 31 was no doubt printed in September or early October 1454'. He has further argued that all copies of I 31 were printed 'within a few hours or days of one another', and that at some point during the printing the date was altered 'to adapt the Indulgences for sale in two successive years'.

Geldner has also assigned the beginning of the I 31 printing to September or, at the latest, early October 1454. But where Painter has envisioned a single print run of at most a few days' duration, Geldner has proposed several smaller runs which followed the pattern of demand for forms by the priests responsible for their dissemination. In support of this theory he has noted that between the earliest purchase date of a fourth variant copy (22 October 1454) and the earliest purchase date of a sixth variant copy (7 March 1455) there is a gap of over four months. This circumstance, he has argued, could lead one to conclude that variant six, bearing the printed date 1455, was indeed not printed until late January or February of that year. In presenting this possibility he has offered the persuasive argument that because of printing costs—especially the cost of the vellum, which he has estimated at one pfennig per copy—it is likely that only as many copies as were thought necessary would be printed at any one time. The type would remain standing, and as more orders were received another batch of Indulgences would leave the workshop.

The evidence of the purchase dates also suggests that sales of the Indulgence were heavier in 1455 than in 1454, and especially brisk during the last few days of the period of validity. Approximately half the extant copies of I 31 (twenty-one out of a total of forty-one) bear the printed date 1454, but of the fourteen of these known to have been purchased, only seven were sold in 1454; the remaining seven were sold in the following year, with the printed date being altered in manuscript to conform to the year of sale. Painter has concluded from this that 'the original order was for an approximately equal number of copies for either year' and that 'at a moment when it had been realised that I 31 . . . would not suffice' to meet the anticipated demands of 1455, I 30 went to press, 'before the close of 1454, but later than I 31'. However, Painter’s conclusion that I 30 was printed to meet the heavier demands of 1455 is predicated on the assumption that a need for more copies was foreseen by the Indulgence promoters 'before the close of 1454'. This assumption, if combined with Painter’s theory that all copies of I 31 had been printed by October 1454, would not appear to be justified: if sales were light in 1454, a large stock of I 31 must have still been on hand at the end of the year, with the greater portion already bearing the date 1455.

The issuing of one variant of I 30 with the printed date 1454 has been seen by most researchers as proof that the printing of I 30 was begun before the end of that year, and Painter has concluded that all copies of I 30 were printed either while I 31 was still in the press (i.e., September or early October 1454) or 'towards December 1454'. Geldner, however, has offered the surprising theory that this first variant of I 30 probably did not leave the press until January or February 1455; according to his hypothesis, the date 1454
resulted from carelessness or the ‘mechanical copying’ of I 31. Geldner has further concluded from the pattern of sales seen in the extant copies (one in February, two in March, five in April) that the production of I 30 was modest in January and February and at its peak in March and the first half of April. Although this interpretation relies perhaps too heavily on the evidence of a very small number of copies, it is consistent with Geldner’s idea that the Indulgences were printed on demand over a period of several months.

Because the heading types used in I 30 and I 31 have both long been associated with Johann Gutenberg, the printing of one or both of the editions has often been credited to him, but the use of two similar, yet distinct, text types in the two editions has raised the question of whether or not both editions were printed in the same workshop: if so, why did the printer cut and cast two founts of type when one would have sufficed? The appearance in I 30 of the type used in the printing of the 42-line Bible has led to general agreement that I 30 issued from the same workshop as the B 42, and Gutenberg can convincingly be associated with the early development of that shop. His connection with I 31 is less clear, and the question of who printed I 31 has been further complicated by the Gesamtkatalog’s assignment to the ‘Printer of the 36-line Bible’. Although George Painter has claimed that Gutenberg ‘achieved the height of his ambition by printing at Bamberg in 1458–9 his own 36-line Bible’, others have doubted that Gutenberg ever worked in Bamberg, where the B 36 was almost certainly printed. What, then, was Gutenberg’s role in the printing of the Mainz Indulgences, and what theories have been put forward concerning the shop or shops in which they were printed?

Kapr, Painter, and Geldner are in agreement with the majority of researchers that I 30 issued from the workshop responsible for the B 42. In addition to the use of the B 42 type for headings, the design and setting of the I 30 text type (particularly the treatment of the so-called abutting letters) has been cited as proof that I 30 was printed in the same workshop as the 42-line Bible. Ferdinand Geldner has seen in the setting of the I 30 heading type complete agreement with the setting practice of the B 42, and Albert Kapr has also detected similarities in the setting practice of I 30 and of the B 42, pointing in particular to the attempt in both to obtain justified lines. Any differences in the setting of the two, Kapr has maintained, can be explained by the fact that one was a piece of ephemeral printing while the other was a monumental Bible.

That Gutenberg was involved in some capacity in a partnership with Johann Fust which resulted in the printing of the B 42 is now generally accepted, but the particulars of Gutenberg’s role remain one of the unsolved (and perhaps unsolvable) problems to which Gutenberg scholars have applied themselves with widely differing results. It is not certain whether Gutenberg was still associated with Fust in the Bible workshop in late 1454 or early 1455 when I 30 must have been printed; the evidence of the Helmasperger Instrument of 6 November 1455, summarizing the action taken by Fust to obtain repayment of monies lent to Gutenberg, indicates that the partnership had broken up by that date, but the exact date of the break is not known. Kapr, Painter, and Geldner have all concluded that the break occurred sometime in 1455, after the printing of I 30, but in a recent analysis of the production of the B 42, Severin Corsten, who has also claimed I 30 as
a product of the 42-line Bible workshop, has suggested that Gutenberg and Fust parted company sometime in 1454, and were in competition with each other by the time I 30 was printed. 36

It would appear most likely that the break-up of the partnership came at a time when the Bible had been finished or was nearing completion, but again we lack a firm date, although the rubricator’s notation dated 15 August 1456 in the copy now in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris provides a terminus ad quem. An early dating of the B 42 would point to an early dissolution of the partnership, and while it has generally been accepted that the Bible was completed sometime in 1455, Corsten has argued for a much earlier date, claiming that work was finished around the turn of the year 1453/4. Corsten’s dating is based in part on his acceptance as genuine of the controversial manuscript date of 1453 in the copy formerly in the Buch- und Schriftmuseum at Leipzig, 37 but a recently rediscovered letter from Enea Silvio Piccolomini (later Pope Pius II) to the Spanish cardinal Juan de Carvajal also provides support for an early date. 38 The fact that in late October 1454 Enea Silvio was able to examine several quires of a Bible being offered for sale in Frankfurt in an unusually large edition suggests that the B 42 may have been completed before the end of 1454; if so, it is not inconceivable that Gutenberg had indeed left Fust’s shop before I 30 was printed there. At best we can say that Gutenberg is known to have been associated with the 42-line Bible workshop, and may still have been working there when I 30 was printed.

Gutenberg’s role in the printing of I 31 is even less clear. Both Zedler and Gutenberg’s biographer, Aloys Ruppel, have claimed I 31 as Gutenberg’s work because of their belief that the DK type used in the Indulgence headings had been cut and cast no later than 1447; no one other than the inventor himself, they argued, could have created a fount of type at that early date. 39 The key piece of evidence which led Zedler, Ruppel, and others to assign the first use of the DK type to 1447 or earlier was the so-called ‘Astronomical Calendar for 1448’ (GW 1283), two fragments of which were discovered by Zedler in 1901. 40 Having received an opinion from the Berlin Astronomisches Recheninstitut that the text of the fragments described the movements of the heavenly bodies for the months January to April 1448, Zedler claimed that the ‘Calendar’ must have been printed before the beginning of that year; his conclusion was accepted by nearly all Gutenberg scholars, and for over forty years the date 1448 was regarded as an immovable point in the chronology of the earliest printing. In 1948, however, Carl Wehmer showed that although the ‘Astronomical Calendar’ was indeed calculated for 1448, it would still have been useful to astrologers for twenty or thirty years after that date. Furthermore, by comparing the type of the ‘Calendar’, more correctly called a Planet Table, with that of other pieces printed in the DK type (including several previously unknown proof-sheets), Wehmer constructed a picture of the development of the DK type which indicated that the Planet Table should, on typographical grounds, be assigned to around 1458. 41 This new dating has not been disputed.

With the assignment of the Planet Table to 1458, the purchase date of 22 October 1454 appearing on a copy of I 31 became the earliest certain date in the history of European
printing. There was no longer any basis for maintaining that the DK type had been made in the 1440s, and, according to Wehmer, no longer any obligation to assign the making of the type to Gutenberg himself. Wehmer rejected Zedler’s assertion that no printing office had existed in the 1450s which was not connected with Gutenberg or his successors Johann Fust and Peter Schoeffer; at least one such shop did exist, he claimed, that of the ‘Printer of the Turkish Calendar’, responsible for all the works printed in Mainz in the DK type. Wehmer argued that if Gutenberg were identified as the printer of the B 42, he could not be identified as the printer of the Turkish Calendar, because the printer of the ‘textually and typographically accurate’ B 42 could not be the same man who was responsible for the ‘technically primitive and textually inferior’ popular works printed in the DK type. Wehmer’s analysis of the evolution of the DK type and his new dating of the Planet Table were recognized by other scholars as important contributions to Gutenberg research, although not all were willing to accept Wehmer’s conclusions regarding the non-identity of Gutenberg and the DK printer. In 1970 Wehmer himself modified his opinion on the matter, saying that ‘both Indulgences may have been produced by Gutenberg’.

All three of the researchers who have published major studies of the Indulgences since Wehmer’s redating of the Planet Table—Kapr, Painter, and Geldner—have reasoned on the assumption that the DK printer was none other than Gutenberg himself, and that he was responsible for the printing of I 31 as well as I 30. To prove his case that both I 30 and I 31 were printed by Gutenberg, Painter has attempted to show that they were both printed in the same workshop, that in which the 42-line Bible was produced. Geldner and Kapr, on the other hand, have concluded that while both Indulgences were printed by Gutenberg or under his direction, they were not produced in the same shop. This theory was first proposed by Geldner in 1955, when he suggested that at the time Gutenberg was working on the B 42 in Fust’s printing shop he was also printing on his own account in his original workshop, or Urdruckerei. Kapr took up Geldner’s position in his 1968 study of the Indulgences, and most recently Severin Corsten has claimed that ‘the arguments which speak for two workshops are so compelling that the majority of researchers have agreed with this view’; Painter, however, has not commented on Geldner’s hypothesis.

Any theory which assigns the printing of both Indulgences to the same printing shop must include an explanation for the use of two different text types for the two editions, as it would appear that one type would have sufficed for both. Some early researchers, such as Karl Dziatzko, linked the production of two Indulgences which differed slightly in appearance to the fact that I 31 was sold primarily in the Archdiocese of Mainz and I 30 in that of Cologne. Zedler developed a highly complicated theory which would account for the use of the two text types and still allow him to associate Gutenberg with the production of both Indulgences. In 1971 Carl Wehmer, having come to the conclusion that both Indulgences were produced in the Gutenberg-Fust 42-line Bible workshop, put forth a theory based on printing house economy to explain the use of two different types: just as Gutenberg had started printing the B 42 with forty-line pages, changing soon to a slightly
smaller body of type which allowed forty-two lines to the page and thus saved vellum and paper, he had started to print the Indulgences with a larger type, the I 31 text type, and then switched to a smaller one which enabled him to use slightly smaller pieces of vellum. Because of the large edition, claimed Wehmer, ‘economies that seem trifling in terms of individual cases were still of considerable importance in the production costs’.48 Wehmer’s argument, however, does not take into account the fact that the cost of designing and producing a second font of type might well have absorbed any money saved on vellum. Yet another explanation for the use of two types has recently been proposed by Nicolas Barker, who has accepted the conclusions drawn by Painter in his 1970 essay. Barker has suggested that from the beginning Fust and Gutenberg planned an eventual division of the printing shop equipment, and with that in mind manufactured two sets of similar textura types (the DK and the B 42) and the two sets of bastarda types used in the Indulgences.49 Barker’s theory is consistent with the evidence of the later use of the types, which strongly suggests that such a division did take place and that Fust and his partner Peter Schoeffer acquired the material used in the printing of I 30 but not that used in I 31; there is, unfortunately, no documentary evidence for such a division.

George Painter’s theory that Gutenberg was the DK printer (in Painter’s terms, the B 36 printer) and that both Indulgences were printed in the Gutenberg–Fust 42-line Bible workshop also includes an explanation for the use of two similar yet different types by one printer. In developing his argument, Painter has concentrated on the similarities between the two text types and the design of the two editions of the Indulgence. He has argued that both text types show ‘the work of a single mind in a single printing-office’, with the I 31 type being a ‘conscious improvement’ of the I 30 type: how, he has asked, could a ‘separate and ex hypothesi inferior B 36 printer have made this brilliant improvement of a type he did not possess and presumably had never seen used?’ Other features of the two editions cited by Painter as evidence for their origin in a single printing house are the similarity of layout, the use of the large initials which are ‘clearly the work of one and the same designer’, and the ‘ingenious device of printing with alternative year-dates’, which is ‘unusual, perhaps unique’.50 Painter has also seen in the treatment of the combination of long ı and i in the setting of the I 31 headings conformity not with other pieces printed in the DK type but with the B 42 and I 30.51

Painter has concluded that the printing of I 31 was begun and ended in September or early October 1454, and that the printing of I 30 was begun sometime after that of I 31. He has further suggested that ‘the curious fact that the width of the setting, with or without the projecting initials, is almost identical in each Indulgence’ points to their having been produced in the same forme, and has theorized that ‘for economy of presswork’ two settings were printed on each leaf:

If so, the need for a further supply was realised while I 31 was still in the press, when the greater part of the edition had already been printed off on half leaves. I 30 was then added to the same forme, and the two Indulgences were run off together on whole leaves. This would account more satisfactorily for such twin features as the two year-dates, the double set of initials, and the exact resemblance of lay-out.
Even if the two were not printed together, Painter concluded, "it would still appear that the
forme used for I 31 was re-utilized for I 30, which would prove equally well that both were
produced in the same office". 52

According to Painter, the simultaneous printing of two settings could "explain the use of
two text-types, for the stock of 96G [the I 31 text type] may well have been insufficient for
setting this lengthy text twice over". 53 He has further remarked that the use of two different
text types by one printer could also convincingly be explained "either by the old idea that
the use of different types in I 30 was intended to distinguish the two editions . . ., or by the
printer's desire to display his full repertoire of types". 54 However, besides his argument
that the I 31 text type is an 'improvement' over the I 30 type, Painter has not offered any
explanation for why a single printer would produce at approximately the same time two
such similar types. If one follows his reasoning that the I 30 type was designed before the
I 31 type, one must conclude that both types were completed before the printing of I 31 was
begun in October 1454, and that work on them had commenced several months earlier. If
the type were being designed specifically for the printing of the Indulgences, however (and
we know of no other printing for which either of the text types was used until the
1460s), it would seem more likely that the printer would want to complete it as quickly as
possible in order to get on with the job and realize a profit on his investment, than that he
would take the time to design and cut a second type. Furthermore, it scarcely seems likely
that a perfectionist of the kind described by Painter—someone who would reject an
adequate type in favour of a refined version—would print with the rejected type in order to
'display his full repertoire of types'; neither would it seem likely that such a printer, in
need of more type in order to print a double setting of the Indulgences, would use what he
considered to be an inferior type in preference to casting more sorts from the I 31 matrices
to fill in as needed.

As early as 1955 Ferdinand Geldner confronted the problem of the two text types,
saying that 'in a single printing shop the cutting and casting of two types for this
unimportant piece of printing would have been a more than improbable luxury'. 55 In
proposing two separate printing offices, staffed by different workers but both run by
Gutenberg, Geldner was taking over an idea first proposed in 1900 by Karl Dziatzko, 56 but
whereas Dziatzko had assigned the management of the shop which was not connected with
Fust, Schoeffer, and the printing of the 42-line Bible to Albrecht Pfister, Geldner has
thought it more likely that the men associated with this shop were the Heinrich Keffer and
Bechtolf von Hanau (Berthold Ruppel) named in the Helmasperger Instrument as
Gutenberg's workmen. Geldner has followed Aloys Ruppel's deductions concerning the
location of Gutenberg's earliest workshops: his first shop in Mainz, where he worked from
the time of his return to the city until 1451/2, was located in his ancestral home, the 'Hof
zum Gutenberg'; a second workshop was established together with Fust around 1452
and located in the 'Hof zum Humbrecht', rented from Henne Salman. 57 According to
Geldner's theory, Gutenberg continued to direct the printing activities of his first shop
after he had established a second shop with Fust, and it was from this Urdruckerei that the
works printed in the DK type, including I 31, issued.

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Geldner has speculated that the lower case of the DK type may have already existed as early as 1450/2, and that Gutenberg did not take this type with him when he made the move to the 42-line Bible workshop; on the contrary, he and his associates used it to print such easily sold works as calendars and copies of Donatus's grammar. Because Gutenberg was forced to devote much of his own time to work on the 42-line Bible after the formation of the partnership with Fust, the day-to-day operation of Gutenberg's Urdruckerei fell to his assistants, and the work completed by them did not attain the high degree of competence seen in the 42-line Bible produced under the direct supervision of Gutenberg in association with Peter Schoeffer. After the break with Fust, Gutenberg returned to his first shop and devoted himself to the perfection of the DK type, eventually bringing it to the state in which it was used to print the 36-line Bible.  

Whereas Painter has stressed the similarities between the type and design of I 30 and I 31, Geldner has emphasized the differences between them. In terms of setting practice, he has pointed to the fact that the two differ in their use of abbreviations, the greater use in I 31 of the abutting r, and the more successful attempt in I 30 to obtain justified lines; this could, he has admitted, be indicative not of two separate shops but merely of two compositors working in the same shop.  

Geldner has also undertaken a detailed comparison of the I 30 and I 31 text types with other early Mainz types of a similar grade, in an attempt to show the relationships between the various types and to strengthen his theory that the I 30 and I 31 types did not originate in the same shop. He has traced two distinct stylistic lines of type, one consisting of the I 30 majuscules, the majuscules of the 1459 Fust and Schoeffer Durandus, and the majuscules of the 1462 48-line Bible (B 48) of Fust and Schoeffer (GW 4204), and the other consisting of the I 31 majuscules and the Catholicon majuscules. Because it can be said with a fair degree of certainty that both the Durandus type and the B 48 type were designed by Peter Schoeffer, Geldner has found it reasonable to attribute the design of the I 30 text type, which he has seen as having close affinities with the two later types, to Schoeffer as well. Similarly, he has concluded that the majuscules of the 1460 Catholicon (which he believes was printed by Gutenberg) show such a close resemblance to those of the I 31 text type that they must have been designed either by the same person or by someone strongly influenced by the I 31 type.

This combination of differences in setting practice and type design constitutes, for Geldner, evidence that the two Indulgences were not printed in the same shop: I 30 was printed in the 42-line Bible workshop, and I 31 in Gutenberg's Urdruckerei. Severin Corsten, in his recent discussion of the 42-line Bible, has agreed that two shops were involved, but has argued that at the time the Indulgences were printed Gutenberg was associated only with that in which I 31 was produced. Albert Kapr, however, is in complete agreement with Geldner's arguments concerning the two printing houses under Gutenberg's direction, and has further offered two possible explanations for why copies of the Indulgence were printed in more than one shop. In 1969 Kapr suggested that, in view of the newness of the printing art, the Indulgence promoter, Paulinus Zappe, may have taken what seemed to be the prudent course and assigned the printing to two different shops. The practice of giving similar commissions to more than one printer seems to be
evident both in the production of the Neuhausen Indulgences of 1461/2 and the printing of the Indulgence issued by Frater Radulphus in 1464, and it is possible that we see the first instance of this strategy in the printing of the Mainz Indulgences of 1454/5. More recently, Kapr has speculated that after Gutenberg had secured the commission for printing the Indulgences in his URDruckerei, Fust used his influence to have part of the work (probably the copies destined for Cologne) transferred to the 42-line Bible workshop. Both Kapr and Painter have connected the printing of the Indulgences with the break-up of the partnership between Gutenberg and Fust, suggesting that Fust objected to Gutenberg’s use of money intended for the ‘work of the books’ to produce ephemeral works for his own profit.

While it is logical to assume that Gutenberg was already working in a shop of his own before entering into a partnership with Fust, it must be noted that Aloys Ruppel’s reconstruction of the location of the shops is highly conjectural, and that there is no documentary evidence to support either the conclusion that Gutenberg and Fust moved to a new location or the claim that the 42-line Bible workshop was located in the ‘Hof zum Humbrecht’. The earliest reference to this house as the ‘Druckhof’ or ‘Druckhaus’ is given by Ruppel as occurring in 1481; it was at that time in the possession of Peter Schoeffer. Ruppel, however, speculated that Gutenberg and Fust had earlier rented the house from Gutenberg’s distant relation, Henne Salman (then living in Frankfurt), and that until the partnership was dissolved the work of printing the 42-line Bible was carried out there. It is perhaps also plausible to speculate that when the partnership was formed Gutenberg and Fust continued to work in Gutenberg’s already-equipped first shop (possibly located in the ‘Hof zum Gutenberg’). Because of the lack of evidence which would enable us to pin-point the location of any shop in which Gutenberg worked, the theory that he had more than one shop in the mid 1450s must rest on the contention of Geldner, Kapr, and Corsten that Gutenberg was the printer of I 31 and that the two editions of the Indulgences were not produced in the same printing office.

Although no further use of the I 30 text type is known after the printing of the 1454/5 Indulgences, the metal-cut initials used in I 30 reappeared in 1489 in works printed by Peter Schoeffer, strengthening the association of I 30 with the 42-line Bible workshop. There is no evidence, however, that Fust or Schoeffer came into possession of any of the material used in the printing of I 31. The DK type was used in Mainz around 1458 to print the proofs for a never-completed edition of a 40-line Bible; in its next state it was used to print the 36-line Bible, probably in Bamberg and probably around 1460. The B 36 type remained thereafter in Bamberg, where it was used from 1461 by Albrecht Pflister. The only known use of any of the I 31 initials is in a copy of the 1464 Indulgence issued by Frater Radulphus, printed in the Catholicon type and attributed by Leonhard Hoffmann to Heinrich and Nikolaus Bechtermünze of Eltville. Similarly, the appearance of two abbreviations from the I 31 text type in the 1464 Indulgence, the Neuhausen Indulgences of 1461/2, and the Vocabularius ex quo of 1467 and 1469 is connected with the use of the Catholicon type. The association of this type with material used in the printing of I 31 strongly suggests that the printer of the Catholicon was at one time in possession of the I 31
text type and initials, and that the material was acquired by the Bechtermünze brothers together with the Catholicon type.

It can indeed be argued that I 31 should be assigned not to the ‘Printer of the 36-line Bible’ but to the ‘Printer of the Catholicon’, though such a step might result merely in the exchange of one unknown for another. Because Heinrich and Nikolaus Bechtermünze are named in the colophon of the first edition of the Vocabularius ex quo, completed in Eltville on 4 November 1467, there can be no doubt that the Catholicon type, or at least some portion of it, had passed to them by mid 1467, but it is impossible to determine the precise date on which they acquired it or to trace the ownership of the type from the time it was first used. Geldner, who has stressed the close relationship of the design of the I 31 text type to that of the Catholicon type, has concluded that Johann Gutenberg, backed by Konrad Humery, was the printer of the Catholicon, and has speculated that either Humery gave part of the Catholicon type to the Bechtermünze brothers before Gutenberg’s death or that Gutenberg himself, ageing and in need of money, allowed part of the type to be sold to them. Kapr has agreed that Gutenberg was the printer of the Catholicon, and has also assigned to him the printing of the editions of the Neuhausen Indulgences of 1461/2 in the Catholicon type. Recently Kapr has further attempted to prove a close connection between Gutenberg and Eltville, suggesting that in his old age Gutenberg lived in Eltville and assisted the Bechtermünze brothers in the establishment of their printing shop, but his arguments, like those of Hoffmann who has speculated that Gutenberg earlier taught the Bechtermünze brothers to print in his Mainz Urdruckerei, must be regarded as mere conjecture in the absence of any supporting evidence. For several years the date of the Catholicon itself, given in the colophon as 1460, has been questioned, and the continuing scholarly discussion on this topic will certainly affect any new theories put forward concerning the printing of the Indulgences.

To appreciate fully the place of the Mainz Indulgences of 1454/5 in the history of the earliest printing in Europe it is necessary to go beyond the simple associations of I 30–B 42 and I 31–B 36, and investigate the more complex relationships which exist between the Indulgences and other early pieces of printing. Because it is not known whether the printing of I 30 preceded or followed the completion of the 42-line Bible, we cannot say with certainty that Gutenberg should be identified as the printer of I 30, but only that he can be associated with the shop in which it was printed, that from which the B 42 issued. Arguments have been put forth which suggest that I 31 is also a product of the 42-line Bible workshop, but other evidence points to the existence of a separate printing office, possibly under Gutenberg’s management. The Gesamtkatalog’s assignment of I 31 to the ‘Printer of the 36-line Bible’ has directed attention to the fact that the printer of the B 36 had access to a late state of the I 31 heading type, but perhaps a better course would now be to focus on the circumstance that the Catholicon printer appears to have been in possession of both the I 31 text type and initials. Through the investigation of questions such as these, researchers have in the past few decades greatly expanded our knowledge concerning the production of the Mainz Indulgences and the many relationships between the Indulgences and other early printed works. Awareness of their findings, and continued
study of the available evidence, can only further increase our understanding of the beginning of printing in Europe.

1 Gottfried Zedler, *Die Mainzer Abläßbriefe der Jahre 1454 und 1455* (Mainz, 1913).
2 Gottfried Zedler, *Die sogenannte Gutenbergbibel; sowie die mit der 42zeiligen Biblietaufgeführt kleineren Drucke* (Mainz, 1929); idem, *Gutenbergs älteste Typen und die mit ihr hergestellten Drucke* (Mainz, 1934).
9 Ibid., pp. 174-5.
12 F. Geldner, ‘Die ersten typographischen Drucke’, p. 174; Carl Wehmer, *Mainzer Probe-

**Note:** The text is from a larger work, and includes references and additional information that is not provided in the image. The text continues with further details and citations. The numbers 1-12 refer to specific sources or citations.
has variously estimated ‘perhaps ten thousand or more’ (‘Die ersten typographischen Drucke’, p. 173) and ‘nearly 20,000’ (‘Mainzer Ablaffbriefe’, col. 595).

20 G. Zedler, Mainzer Ablaffbriefe, pp. 66–76.

21 Idem., Die sogenannte Gutenbergbibel, p. 33; Gutenbergs älteste Type, p. 65.

22 G. Painter, op. cit., p. 303.


24 G. Painter, op. cit., p. 300.


26 The two extant copies of variant five, which was the last variant to bear the printed date 1454, were never sold.


29 Ibid., pp. 303–4.


31 The ninth copy of I 30, discovered after Geldner’s analysis, brings the April total to six; see L. Peters, Mainzer Ablaffbriefe, p. 115; Aloys Ruppel, Johannes Gutenberg, sein Leben und Werk (Nieuwkoop, 1967; reprint of 1947 edition), p. 115.

32 G. Painter, op. cit., p. 300.


40 Gottfried Zedler, Die älteste Gutenbergsdrucke (Mainz, 1902), pp. 4–14.

41 C. Wehmer, op. cit., passim.

42 Ibid., pp. 42–3.

43 G. Painter’s comment (op. cit., p. 293) that Wehmer’s separatist hypothesis has now held the field for twenty years, and has not yet been systematically questioned is not accurate. In 1950 Ferdinand Geldner praised Wehmer’s work, but noted that the existence of a second shop could still not be satisfactorily proved (‘Heinrich Keffer’, p. 107); by 1955 Geldner had concluded that the DK printer was indeed Gutenberg (‘Gutenberg, der Erfinder und Druckherr’, Börsenblatt für den deutschen Buchhandel, xi (1955), pp. 745–6), and he has held to this opinion since. Wehmer’s conclusion was also questioned in 1950 by Walter Menn, who asked on what grounds it was possible to claim that the B 42 printer would not also have printed popular, and likely profitable, works (‘Ein neues Dogma um Gutenberg?’, Aus der Welt des Buches: Festgabe zum 70. Geburtstag von Georg Leyh (Leipzig, 1950), pp. 65–9). Albert Kapr has also rejected the separatist hypothesis, noting in 1968 that there was no reason for not supposing that Gutenberg, like many modern printers, worked on more than one project at a time—in this case, a major edition of the Bible and ephemeral pieces such as calendars, Indulgences, and copies of Donatus’s grammar (Johannes Gutenberg, the Inventor of Printing (London, 1963), p. 20).

44 Carl Wehmer, ‘Gutenbergs Typographie und die

45 S. Corsten, 'Die Drucklegung', p. 61.

46 Karl Dziatzko, Beiträge zur Gutenbergfrage (Berlin, 1889), pp. 56-86.

47 G. Zedler, Die sogenannte Gutenbergbibel, pp. 30-4; idem, Gutenberg's älteste Typo, pp. 65-7.


50 G. Painter, op. cit., p. 303.

51 Ibid., p. 302.

52 Ibid., pp. 303-4.

53 Ibid., p. 304.

54 Ibid., p. 318.


57 A. Ruppel, op. cit., p. 63.


59 Ibid., pp. 177-8.

60 Ibid., pp. 179-81.

61 S. Corsten, 'Die Drucklegung', pp. 61-2.


64 A. Kapr, Johannes Gutenberg, pp. 15-16; G. Painter, op. cit., pp. 311-12.


66 C. Wehmer, Mainzer Probedrucke, pp. 41-2.

67 L. Hoffmann, art. cit., p. 204.


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