

Gutenberg and the Medici Gospels in Arabic

In the 1450s, in Mainz, Germany, Johannes Gutenberg printed the Christian scriptures using moveable type. Gutenberg's Bible, the first surviving European printed book made using moveable metal type, is dated to around 1454 or 1455. The Bible was not the first text printed by Gutenberg—that honor belongs to a Latin grammar for schoolchildren, of which no complete copy survives. His monumental Latin Bible came to symbolize moveable type's potential to reproduce texts quickly and accurately. Gutenberg printed about 180 copies, either on paper or vellum. Before coming to Yale, this copy of the Gutenberg Bible had been in the library of the Benedictine abbey at the Austrian city of Melk. Amid economic depression after World War I, the monks sold it to fund the abbey's restoration. It was acquired in 1926 by Mary Emma Stillman Harkness, who presented it to Yale in memory of her mother-in-law, Anna M. Richardson Harkness. The Yale copy is one of twenty-one complete Gutenberg Bibles known to survive.

Based on a manuscript of the Alexandrian Vulgate held in the Vatican, this Arabic translation of the Gospels was first printed between 1590 and 1591 at the *Typographia Medicea* (Medici Oriental Press), established in Rome under the patronage of Pope Gregory XIII. The head of the press, scholar Giovanni Battista Raimondi (d. 1614), commissioned the Arabic typeface from the noted French printer and type designer Robert Granjon (d. 1590). This edition also features lavish woodcut illustrations in Baroque style by the artist Antonio Tempesta (d. 1630). The aim of this expensively produced book was to assist in converting Muslims to Christianity and Eastern Orthodox Christians to Roman Catholicism. The original print run of four thousand copies was followed by reissues in several editions over the next two hundred years—including one with Latin interlinear translation, a copy of which is also held at Yale. The copy on view here was gifted to Yale by the university's first professor of Arabic, Edward Elbridge Salisbury (d. 1901), in 1870.