

Bibliographical Exercise: INC 54

Part I

Biblia Sacra Latina, Ven: Jenson, 1476.

Title Page

[This incunable has no title page]

The Colophon

[Colophon on Q12] Biblia impreſſa Venetiiſ ope-ſra atque impenſa Nicolai Jen-ſon Gallici.
M.cccc.lrrvi.

Format

This text mostly follows the decimo (10^o) format with the exception of one novena (9^o) quire and two duodecimo (12^o) quires. No missing leaves were found in the novena quire: all subchapters within this chapter were present.

Collation/Registration

Statement of Signing:

a-f¹⁰, g⁹, h-z¹⁰, et¹⁰, con¹⁰, uia¹⁰, A-L¹⁰, M¹², N-P¹⁰, Q¹².

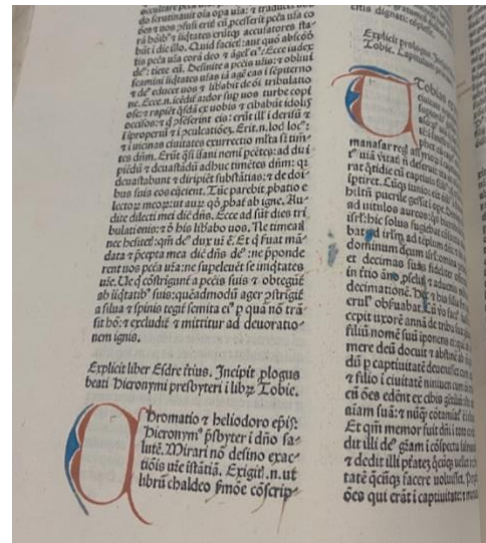
Pagination

[This incunable has no page numbers]

Part II

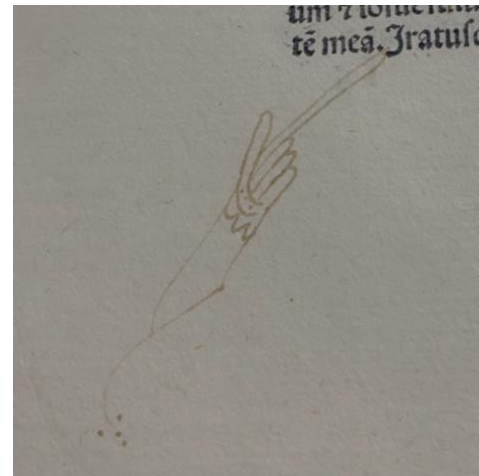
JENSON'S *BIBLIA LATINA*, 1476

Birthered in the 'cradle of printing', this incunable 'INC 54' typifies numerous features found in the earliest printed books; including a lack of title page, no pagination, rubricated pages (using red and blue ink, see right) and use of large initials to initiate sections. These features are all resemblant of the 'manuscript predecessors' available before the transition to movable type printing.¹ These features serve as reminders that incunables were the first products of printing and thus lack the familiar title page and pagination attributes adapted in the sixteenth century.²



Chloe McGartland, *Rubrications in INC 54*, 2026.

The *Biblia Latina*, along with over 150 other incunables, was printed by the French printer and engraver Nicolas Jenson before his death in 1480.³ It was the first bible title printed on Jenson's press, and epitomises the large theological works in folio format which Jenson concentrated on, due to persistent demand.⁴ Jenson has been compared to the equally successful renaissance printer Peter Schœffer for 'the quality of their presentation and their typography, as well as the care for the illumination and decoration of part of the copies after they had left



Chloe McGartland, *Manicule I in INC 54*, 2026.

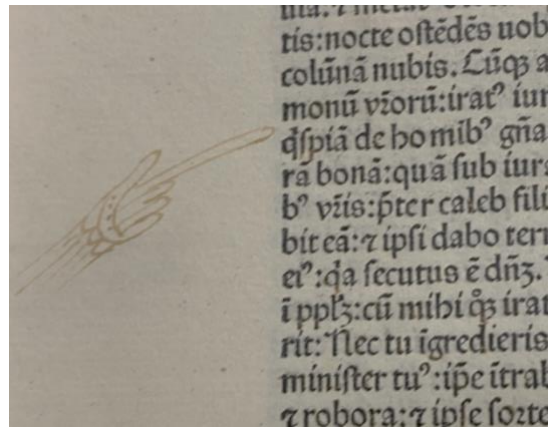
¹ Laura Hartman, 'Fifteenth Century Books: From The Cradle of Printing In The West', National Library of Medicine, 11 October 2018 <<https://circulatingnow.nlm.nih.gov/2018/10/11/fifteenth-century-books-from-the-cradle-of-printing-in-the-west/>> [accessed 16 February 2026] (para. 4 of 7).

² Library of Congress| Research Guides, 'Medieval and Renaissance Facsimiles and Incunables: A Resource Guide', [n.d.] <<https://guides.loc.gov/manuscript-facsimiles/differences-manuscripts-incunables>> [accessed 16 February 2026] (para. 1 of 1).

³ Michel Wlassikoff, 'Jenson and the First Roman Types', Typofonderie, 03 July 2024 <<https://typofonderie.com/gazette/jenson-first-roman-types>> [accessed 16 February 2026] (para. 4 of 6).

⁴ Lotte Hellings, 'Nicolas Jenson, Peter Schœffer and the Development of Printing Types' in *Incunabula In Transit* (Leiden: The Netherlands, 2018), pp. 40- 88 (pp. 49- 50), doi: https://doi-org.uwtsd.idm.oclc.org/10.1163/9789004340367_005

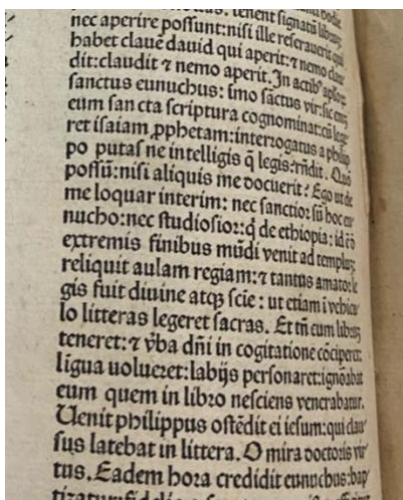
their presses'.⁵ The *Biblia Latina* demonstrates Jenson's scrupulous illumination and decoration in initials carefully added by hand after the printing process; and multiple 'manicules' throughout the text (as demonstrated above and right). These decorative 'pointing forefingers' were noted for their popularity by the early printers and can be found in many early printed texts. They are another way in which incunables resemble their medieval predecessors, with scribes originally inking them to highlight important text.⁶



Chloe McGartland, *Manicule II in INC 54*, 2026.

NICOLAS JENSON'S ROLE IN THE PRINTING REVOLUTION

Jenson was a prominent figure in the printing revolution happening in Venice in the late 15th century and is well-known for developing the roman typeface. His work is still significant today; cutting 'a roman type around 1470 that was so well assembled, so definitive in its



Chloe McGartland, *Type in INC 54*, 2026.

forms, that it still represents a reference point for contemporary typeface design'.⁷ His career additionally saw success of 'his rotunda types (the Italian style of blackletter)' showing his 'letterform innovations'.⁸ Jenson's rotunda can be seen in this *Biblia Latina* (left), 'rounder than Textura' and deriving from 'the handwritten script Carolingian miniscule, a standard calligraphic script in medieval Europe'.⁹ Significantly, Jenson's lowercase letters were 'the very beginning of the lowercase letterforms', becoming 'the

⁵ Hellinga, 'Nicolas Jenson, Peter Schöeffer and the Development of Printing Types', pp. 49- 50.

⁶ Simon Cummings, 'Things Found in a Rare Bookshop: Towards a History of Manicules', Peter Harrington London, 18 November 2025 < <https://www.peterharrington.co.uk/blog/things-found-in-a-rare-bookshop-towards-a-history-of-manicules/> > [accessed 18 February 2026] (para. 8 of 17).

⁷ The Cooper Union, 'Nicolas Jenson and the Establishment of Roman Type in 15th Century Venice', 9 November 2020 < <https://cooper.edu/events-and-exhibitions/events/nicolas-jenson-and-establishment-roman-type-15th-century-venice/> > [accessed 17 February 2026] (para. 1 of 1).

⁸ The Cooper Union, 'Nicolas Jenson and the Establishment', para 1.

⁹ Ransom Center Magazine, 'The Jenson Bible Joins The Gutenberg Bible's Page Turning', 12 July 2016 < <https://sites.utexas.edu/ransomcentermagazine/2016/07/12/gutenberg-bible-page-turning-biblia-latina/#:~:text=Nicholas%20Jenson%2C%201476.,Genesis%2C%20Chapter%20I,call%20number:%20Incun%201471%20c534.> > [accessed 19 February 2026] (para. 2 of 5).

basis of all roman types to this day'.¹⁰ Similar to Johannes de Spira, Jenson 'designed his own Venetian typeface based on a local manuscript handwriting for his first book, Eusebius's *De Praeparatione Evangelica*'.¹¹ He and de Spira 'mark the first "roman" typefaces and started the gradual shift from 'Gothic to humanistic, or roman, typeface across Europe'.¹²

JENSON'S LIFE AS A PRINTER

Jenson mastered an apprenticeship as a minter before becoming a master engraver at the Royal Coin Workshop in Tours.¹³ According to the typography historian Michel Wlassikoff, this represented a typical professional journey of coin and medal engravers and goldsmiths in this printing renaissance before becoming 'renowned punchcutters' and type designers.¹⁴ In 1458, King Charles VII sent Jenson to Mainz to study movable-type printing.¹⁵ He wanted Jenson to 'discover the "secrets" of printing with mobile type' and master it for the kingdom's benefit, demonstrating the predominant humanist motives which surrounded the printing revolution during this era; in the desire to benefit all through accessible information.¹⁶

Little is known about Jenson's life during the decade following Charles' request, besides his introduction to the 'nascent typography in the workshop of Johann Fust and Peter Schœffer', and his potential involvement in developing the 'first works composed in Roman type in Subiaco'.¹⁷ Interestingly, the enduring typefaces 'heavily used in many large books' first appeared in the year after Jenson arrived in Mainz, something early-printing historian Lotte Hellinga considers a typography phenomenon.¹⁸ It was during the 1460s that 'the humanistic Roman type- the model for Jenson's type- was developed'.¹⁹ These occurrences suggest Jenson's focus on type-development during this undocumented decade, especially when considering Fust and Schœffer's completion of Guilelmus Duranti's *Rationale Divinorum Officiorum* exactly a year after Jenson was sent to Mainz: a book which featured a typeface in 'a style entirely different from their own two liturgical types used in their Psalters

¹⁰ The Cooper Union, 'Nicolas Jenson and the Establishment', tdc, para. 1.

¹¹ Alex W. White, 'Nicolas Jenson's Typographic Contributions', 3 May 2010 <<https://archive.tdc.org/articles/nicolas-jensons-typographic-contributions/>> [accessed 18 February 2026] (para. 2 of 13).

¹² White, 'Nicolas Jenson's Typographic Contributions' para. 2.

¹³ Wlassikoff, 'Jenson and the First Roman Types' para. 1.

¹⁴ Wlassikoff, 'Jenson and the First Roman Types' para. 1.

¹⁵ White, 'Nicolas Jenson's Typographic Contributions' para. 1.

¹⁶ Wlassikoff, 'Jenson and the First Roman Types' para. 1.

¹⁷ Wlassikoff, 'Jenson and the First Roman Types' paras. 1-2.

¹⁸ Hellinga, 'Nicolas Jenson, Peter Schœffer and the Development of Printing Types', pp. 73- 79.

¹⁹ Wlassikoff, 'Jenson and the First Roman Types' para. 2.

of 1457 and 1459 and from Gutenberg's Bible type'.²⁰ Gros de Boze's argument that Jenson influenced Schœffer's type production seems noteworthy here.²¹ This new typeface was designated as Fust & Schœffer Type 3: 91G' and considered economical, 'with great fluency and clarity', thus bearing characteristics of Jenson's humanistic typeface.²² Another case of a typeface being used in the 1460s which reflected Jenson's work was the roman type first used in 1469 by the newly-established printers- the de Spira brothers.²³ Typographer Harry Carter observes similarities between the de Spira type with the- one year subsequent- Jenson roman type, commenting that Jenson's was the improved version of 'exactly the same design'.²⁴ Thus, 'Jenson's famous roman type was possibly not his first attempt at creating a type to reproduce humanist script'.²⁵ Fust & Schœffer's Type 3 is suggestive of Jenson's influence on the early development of humanist script. Overall, during the 1460s it appears that Jenson devoted himself to type innovations as well as learning, as Charles instructed, the secrets of printing.

In the late 1460s Jenson appeared to make significant contributions in establishing printeries: opening his own in 1468 in Venice, making it the city's second printery.²⁶ Additionally, he allegedly contributed 'to the installation of the Sorbonne workshop in 1469'.²⁷ Inarguably, the 1460s put Jenson on the path to becoming 'an accomplished printer and businessman', establishing contacts, including Peter Schœffer, in Mainz ensuring his success when establishing his press. Mainz is considered to be the 'life-changing experience' which introduced Jenson to the potential and possibilities of the 'new art of publishing and marketing books', including the development of humanist types.²⁸

Jenson's Venetian address 'in the Sestiere de Cannaregio' explains his ability to produce accurate and meticulous type punches. The region's foundries and 'superior steel alloy', famously capable of producing 'lasting sharp edges', ensured punches could be cut for the 'technically perfect roman type, and later for the rotunda types on which his enduring fame is founded'.²⁹ Between 1470-73 Jenson exclusively used his roman type when

²⁰ Hellinga, 'Nicolas Jenson, Peter Schœffer and the Development of Printing Types', pp. 73- 79.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid, pp. 84- 86.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ White, 'Nicolas Jenson's Typographic Contributions' para. 2.

²⁷ Wlassikoff, 'Jenson and the First Roman Types' para. 2.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid, pp. 84- 86.

publishing ‘mainly classical authors and some small devotional texts in Italian’.³⁰ Eventually he started publishing legal works, which required ‘a commentary type; printed in what are classified as gothic types, and might more properly be called *rotunda*’ - as is used in his *Biblia Latina*.³¹ Even though Jenson’s roman type had gained great popularity, it is possible that rotunda was used, as opposed to roman, as a marketing strategy, church expectations or for aesthetic purposes: gothic type resembled the scribe script people were familiar seeing the bible in). This is further suggested in the evidence that Latin and vernacular bibles only started appearing more commonly in roman type following the Reformation.³²

JENSON’S LEGACY

Jenson died a ‘prosperous man, in the autumn of 1480’.³³ By the time of his death, ‘his roman type, was already used by at least 15 printers, ten in Venice and five outside’ with ‘at least 11 more’ postmortem; demonstrating the success he garnered during and after his lifetime.³⁴ Jenson likely recognised his type punches as ‘his greatest legacy of all’, trusting them to his ‘compater’ - the merchant Messer Peter Ugelheymer.³⁵ His roman type innovations became immersed in society as technical and stylistic normalities; continuously used since 1470 with multiple reinterpretations including ‘Golden (Morris, 1890), Kennerly (Goudy, 1911), Cloister Old Style (Benton, 1913), Centaur (Rogers, 1915), and Berkeley Oldstyle (Goudy, 1938)’.^{36 37} Though less popular, Jenson’s other designs are still considered ‘influential achievements, both technically and aesthetically’ demonstrating his innovative craftsmanship.³⁸

Overall, Jenson was, and is, a crucial figure in print history. If not for his innovative desire to design a more comprehensive and spatially efficient type, he would not have subverted conventions to create the humanist type and establish the subsequent foundation of the typefaces we are familiar with today. The *Biblia Latina* greatly exemplifies Jenson’s skills as a printer and engraver and is historically informative of its era. For instance, Jenson’s

³⁰ Ibid, pp. 84- 86.

³¹ Ibid.

³² I Love Typography, ‘The First Bible Set in Roman Type’, [n.d.] <<https://ilovetypography.com/2014/12/10/first-bible-set-roman-type/>> [accessed 17 February 2026] (para. 4 of 4).

³³ Ibid, pp. 73-79.

³⁴ Ibid, pp. 49-50.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid, pp. 84-86.

³⁷ White, ‘Nicolas Jenson’s Typographic Contributions’ para. 3.

³⁸ Ibid.

development of roman typeface in 1470, but use of rotunda in this 1476 biblia demonstrates the constrictions and expectations on religious texts, despite a reformed printing process.

Decorative elements are all reminders of the meticulous decorative post-printing processes Jenson used to further the quality and appearance of his incunables (seen below in the *Biblia Latina* INC 54).



Chloe McGartland, t3- t4 in INC 54, 2026.

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