

# THE PRINTERS

TOPIC

## SALLE 6: IMAGE OF THE TOWN, PRINTING - 16<sup>TH</sup> C.

### History of characters

#### Invention of printing

Before Gutenberg, printing was carried out using wooden plaques on which the image or the text to be reproduced was engraved, inked and subsequently pressed on paper or on vellum. Around 1440, the Gutenberg, German,... invented the modern printing press: the moving characters in a lead alloy, longer lasting than wood, which was assembled depending on the texts to be printed; the printing press was faster for larger quantities. These improvements considerably increased the circulation of books. In 1501, Italian humanist printer, Aldus Manutius, invented italic characters, which allowed more words to be inscribed on the same page, thus launching the printing of smaller, accessible works.

Printing arrived in France in the late 15<sup>th</sup> c.: printing houses opened in Paris in 1470 and in Lyons in 1472. Both locations covered 80 % of France's book production. Lyons had about fifty printing houses.

#### The Golden Age of printing in Lyons

En 1472, Barthélémy Buyer opened the first printing workshop in Lyons, on the left bank of the Saône. Together with Guillaume Leroy, he published legal reference works for the international market, illustrated volumes of religious popularisation in French as well as books on chivalry and medical treaties. He made Lyons the focal point for the circulation of printed Venetian works throughout the rest of Europe (Paris, Basle and the Netherlands, etc.). In the early 16<sup>th</sup> c., Lyons, with 181 printing houses, was the third printing centre after Venice and Paris. Many foreign printers (Germans, Italians, Spanish, Dalmatians and Flemish, etc.) settled here. The town exported as far as Mexico, Peru and the Far East! Around 1550, Lyon became the European printing capital. The first signs of decline came in 1560: due to the wars of religion, many Protestant printers and workers fled to the future printing capitals of Europe: Geneva and Bruges, etc.

#### Quite the character!

In 1545, character engravers invented modern typography in Lyons. Robert Granjon invented the "civility character". Claude Garamond created the series of "Royal Greek" fonts and the Roman character that bears his name, and which is still used to this day: the Garamond!

#### Literary Prize

- Prize for the first book printed in Lyons: "*Compendium Breve*", by Cardinal Lothaire, printed by Barthélémy Buyer on 17 September 1473
- Prize for the first book printed in French: "*La légende dorée*", by Jacques de Voragine, printed by Barthélémy Buyer in 1476 in Lyons!

### Printer: prestige rather than money

#### Professional hierarchy

Dominating the profession, the printer merchants, who were few in number, reigned supreme from their workshops where they printed, published and circulated works of their choice. They adopted an editor role such as humanists Sébastien Gryphe and Jean de Tournes (**Inv. instrument of the first notary of J. Papon, printer Jean de Tournes**). They gave orders to the master printers who managed the workshops without leading their own editorial policy. Three types of printing employees (or journeymen) could be found in these establishments: the typesetters, who composed the pages (words and lines) with mobile characters; the proof-readers re-read the text and the press operators activated the press. Finally, the apprentices were the Jacks of all trades. The salaries were low but the work was prestigious because employees rubbed shoulders with the well-read. The journeymen were seldom illiterate. Even apprentices had to be able to read Latin and Greek... and printers were privileged to carry a sword.



Printer in front of his press and statue of Apollo, business card, lithograph on sepia-coloured paper, anonymous, Inv. 2059.6

### The “Griffarins” Company

Printer journeymen belonged to this secret brotherhood with rites of initiation. Its name alludes to the griffin, a legendary creature which became their most celebrated hallmark: Sébastien Gryphe (*Inv. N.2203.1 memoir of the history of Lyon by G. Paradin, printer Antoine Gryphe*). The company codified entitlements and duties: the editorial policy of the workshop, domain reserved for the master-printer; salaries, opening or closing of the workshop, free time and types of food, which the journeymen were entitled to discuss. The latter worked more than 12 hours a day but, on the other hand, could take a rest day when appropriate, “*without taking a wage but simply food*”. They demanded the same type of food as that of the master, washed down with an uncut wine!



The griffin – emblem of the Sébastien Gryphe printing house, frontispiece, 16<sup>th</sup> c., Inv. 38.247.7

### On strike!

The masters found it difficult to tolerate freedom for the workers. The gap widened and in the spring of 1539, the workers launched a massive TRIC\* (strike) which lasted for over three months. Armed with swords and batons, they fled the workshops and ran through the town, preventing the masters from recruiting staff to replace those on strike. This was the first workers’ strike in the history of France! Punishments were severe: Associations were prohibited and authorisation from bosses to separate themselves from the “blasphemers”. However, according to the royal edit of Fontainebleau dated 28 December 1541, masters always had to give their journeymen “*la dépense de bouche raisonnable et suffisamment selon leurs qualités*”...[a reasonable, adequate wage commensurate with their qualities...]

#### glossary

**Griffin:** mythical creature – half eagle (head, wings and claws), half lion (hindquarters).

**tric:** synonym for strike. The signal “tric, tric!” amongst the printing house workforce invited them to leave work in droves and go for a drink.

**typesetter:** in printing, the person who puts the characters together to form the words on the pages.

### Printers’ territory

#### At the printer’s

The printing house was generally accommodated in two areas. The shop, on the ground floor, comprised the book-shop counter and the single or connecting shelves of books. The workshops on the floor above were divided into the typesetters’\* section near the windows, and the presses, located more in the centre of the room (1 to 6 presses per workshop in the 16<sup>th</sup> c.). Disguised as warehouses for their stock, the printers hired shops in the

convents, especially those at Cordeliers and Jacobins. The printing houses/ bookshops were mainly located in rue Saint-Nizier and rue Mercière (about fifteen or so were housed here throughout the 16<sup>th</sup> c.).



House at 68 rue mercière, with the symbol of the Giraud printing house, artist Charles Tournier, 19<sup>th</sup> c., Inv. 1337.4

### Traffic of books!

In the warehouses rent from the convents, the printers stored legal works...as well as counterfeit Latin and Greek versions or illicit printed documents mainly criticising religion. They even opened private warehouses in the establishments of certain accomplices where they stored the riskiest of material...and compiled inventories to facilitate the circulation of extramural works without any control procedures: La Guillotière created a route towards southern France, and La Croix-Rousse and Vaise towards Paris and the North... Books were also trafficked via the inns...

The punishment was severe if caught: printers were robbed of their status and even banned.

#### TO READ:

Topic data sheet  
*The humanists  
of Lyons,  
& the humanist  
printers*