

Follow-up report

Friends of Gutenberg – Jour Fixe on 23 June 2022

Topic: The Gutenberg Museum in the Electoral Palace of Mainz – the birth of the World Museum of the Printing Arts

Speaker: Prof. Dr. Stephan Füssel

Our evening lecture series "Friends of Gutenberg – Jour Fixe" followed by a wine tasting at the Kulturei Mainz took place again on Thursday 23 June 2022. In summery temperatures, the Kulturei was an excellent venue to listen inquisitively to the lecture by Prof. Dr Stephan Füssel. Speaker Prof. Füssel dived into the history of the Gutenberg Museum and the Gutenberg Society with the numerous friends of Gutenberg and presented the beginnings of the museum and the society in the Electoral Palace from 1900 to 1912.

Prof. Füssel entitled his lecture a "search for traces" and used it to construct an overall picture of the museum's early history. The starting point of his presentation was the Electoral Palace in Mainz. Based on the Paris World's Fair and the "world of printing" there, where printing presses were made tangible, the idea arose to implement such a project in Mainz, the birthplace of Johannes Gutenberg. Rooms in the Electoral Palace, which at the time belonged to the Mainz City Library, were made available for the project. A first large Gutenberg exhibition was set up there. On the occasion of the celebrations of the 500th birthday of Johannes Gutenberg in 1900, this exhibition was opened by Grand Duke Ernst Ludwig of Hesse in June.

The exhibition showed the most outstanding incunabula in three sections, including the 42-line Gutenberg Bible from Frankfurt, the 36-line Bible from Jena and the Psalter of 1457 from Darmstadt, as well as other important early prints from the city library. Furthermore, the contemporary typographic work around 1900 was exhibited, for example, some important European printers presented their sample sheets, splendour albums, chromolithographs, graphic sample prints, security prints, collections of modern woodcuts and coloured cuts. The third section, with historical and contemporary printing presses, was furnished by the leading press manufacturers of the day. It was a great concern that the history of Gutenberg and modern typesetting and printing technology should be shown equally and especially in exercise in the future museum. Thus "everything that belongs to printing" was represented: High-speed presses, typesetting machines, printing inks, varnishes, papers and rolling compounds. In addition, the art of the type founders could be marvelled at, who provided type samples, lithographic accents and chromolithographic sample prints in a graphic exhibition.

Most of the exhibits from this initial exhibition were donated to the Gutenberg Museum, which was housed in the Electoral Palace until 1912. It then moved to the new library building in Rheinallee, the extension of which was decided on 26 June 1912 with the help of the Gutenberg Society. Prof. Füssel accompanied his fascinating lecture with pictures and illustrations from his own postcard collection on the festivities of the Gutenberg anniversary, such as the decorative elements for and during the parade, as well as contemporary donation documents on the support of the Gutenberg Museum in its early days.

Prof. Füssel concluded his lecture with a list of the development of the Gutenberg Society and the presentation of influential personalities, emphasising the continued importance of the Gutenberg Society and its work for the Gutenberg Museum. Special tribute was paid to Prof. Dr. Aloys Ruppel who, among other things, founded the Gutenberg Yearbook in 1926, which

has been published annually by the Gutenberg Society almost without interruption ever since. The look back at the early history of the Gutenberg Museum in Mainz revealed, among other things, the founding idea of showing the history of Gutenberg and modern typesetting and printing techniques on an equal footing, a claim that is still important for the museum today.

At the end of the successful evening, the guests enjoyed two wines from the Engel winery in Flörsheim-Dalsheim, which were presented during the wine tasting. We would like to thank our speaker for the interesting insight into our earliest history and all participants and guests for the wonderful evening!