

Paper, type and the supply chain

*Dr Alexander Ressos, TEP
Attorney-at-Law (Switzerland), Solicitor (Hong Kong),
Solicitor (England & Wales)*

The printing industry depended on a supply chain that extended beyond the city. The paper mills of the St. Alban valley supplied a large part of the paper used by Basel printers. The Galliziani and other papermaking families prospered with the printing industry. But the demand of the printers exceeded local production, so paper was also imported from Alsace, Lorraine, Burgundy and Italy. Since the purchase of paper in large quantities required credit, the papermakers were among the principal creditors of the printers.¹

Type was produced by type founders, who cut punches, struck matrices and cast type. Basel had its own type founders. Its printers developed typefaces, in particular roman and Greek types, that were admired throughout Europe. The Greek types of Froben, which allowed the printing of Erasmus's New Testament and of the Greek classics, required specialists with a knowledge of Greek, and their development was a significant investment.

The supply chain also included the artists and woodcutters who produced illustrations and decoration, the binders who bound books for sale or for customers, and the carriers who transported books to the fairs. Books were usually shipped unbound, in barrels or bales, to reduce weight and to allow buyers to choose their own bindings. The transport to Frankfurt followed the Rhine, which gave Basel a cost advantage over printing centres without river access.

The Basel printing industry thus formed an industrial cluster, in the modern sense of the term: a concentration of interconnected businesses, suppliers, skilled workers and institutions in a particular location. The cluster included printers, papermakers, type founders, artists, binders, correctors, editors, the university that supplied authors and readers, and the merchants who financed and distributed the books. The pharmaceutical cluster of modern Basel, with its companies, suppliers, research

institutions, start-ups and investors, which Part G examines, is a distant successor of the printing cluster of the sixteenth century.

1 Notes

1. On the paper supply of the Basel printers, the St. Alban paper mills and imports, see the publications of the Basler Papiermühle; the Amerbach correspondence. To be verified. ↩

For general information only. This article does not constitute legal or tax advice, does not replace advice on an individual case and creates no lawyer-client relationship. It reflects the legal position as of September 2026.

Online version: helveticaregister.com/basel-paper-type-and-the-supply-chain