

The partnership of the three Johns

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Amerbach's most ambitious project was a complete edition of the works of Jerome, the translator of the Latin Bible and one of the four Latin Fathers of the Church. Because the project was too large for a single printing house, Amerbach formed a partnership with two other Basel printers: Johann Petri, a printer from Franconia who had worked in Basel since the 1480s, and Johann Froben, a younger printer from Hammelburg in Franconia who had come to Basel around 1490. The three partners, sometimes called the three Johns, pooled their capital, their presses and their workers for the edition.¹

The partnership was a characteristic form of business organisation in early printing. It allowed the partners to share the risk of a large project, to combine their resources and to benefit from each other's skills and networks. It was governed by a contract that defined the contributions of each partner, the division of profits and losses and the rules for the sale of the books. The partners remained independent for their other business.

Amerbach died in 1513, before the Jerome edition was completed, whereupon Froben took over the project. He engaged Erasmus of Rotterdam, the most famous humanist of his time, as editor of the letters of Jerome. The edition appeared in 1516 in nine folio volumes. In the same year, Froben printed Erasmus's edition of the New Testament in Greek with a new Latin translation, the *Novum Instrumentum*, which became one of the most influential books of the century.² The partnership of the three Johns had produced, through Froben, the collaboration between Basel printing and Erasmus that made the city the capital of humanist publishing. Chapter II examines this collaboration.

The partnership of the three Johns

1 Notes

1. On the partnership of Johann Amerbach, Johann Petri and Johann Froben for the edition of Jerome, and the completion of the edition by Froben in 1516 with Erasmus as editor, see HLS, articles "Amerbach, Johann", "Froben, Johann" and "Petri"; Die Amerbachkorrespondenz. To be verified. ↩
2. Erasmus, Novum Instrumentum omne, Basel: Johann Froben, 1516 (February/March), the first published edition of the Greek New Testament; the edition of Jerome (Omnia opera divi Eusebii Hieronymi), Basel: Froben, 1516. To be verified. ↩

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