

Giambattista Bodoni

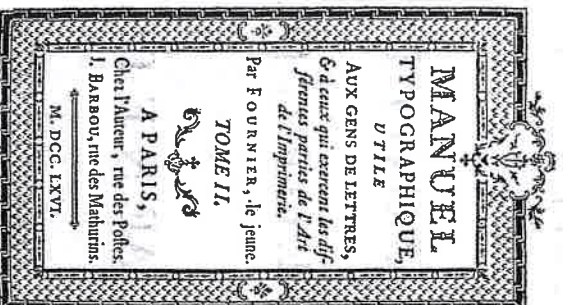
Manual of Typography

Manuale tipografico

1818

Edited by Stephan Füssel

TASCHEN



Bodoni's work in the 1770s and 1780s

Bodoni's typographical *œuvre* can be divided into three main groupings: showy occasional writings for reigning houses, editions of Greek and Latin classics and contemporary works written in the classical spirit, as well as his type-face specimen books, for which he personally cut some 55,000 matrices.

By 1771 Bodoni had published his first specimen book, *Fregi e majuscole* (*Ornaments and Majuscules*, see Fig. 8), in which he presented several founts that still borrowed heavily from Fournier, as well as over four hundred vignettes. This publication can be viewed as an advertisement for his typographical work, to be disseminated throughout Europe. Only two years after establishing his typefoundry, Bodoni was proudly resorting to comparative advertising: "I leave it up to the judgement of experts to evaluate the beauty and regularity of my founts, which in all respects are superior to the letters of the few rundown printing presses in Italy today." His borrowings from Fournier's *Manuel typographique* included the latter's lavish title-page design (see Fig. 9). These roman founts and the unbalanced italics with ornamental squiggles are still a far cry from the harmony of his later type designs. Despite these shortcomings, Bodoni was offered a Habsburg commission to set up a *stampereia* [printing press] in Milan. Although he refused that offer – and all subsequent ones – his type matter was used in Milan from then on.

Surprisingly, Bodoni took advantage of court festivities in particular to introduce his speciality, oriental type specimens, to the highest circles. On the occasion of the marriage of Clotilde of France (Marie Adélaïde Clotilde Xavière) to Charles-Ernest of Savoy in 1775, Bodoni dedicated a collection of oriental epithalamia (bridal poems) entitled *Epithalamia Exoticis Linguis Reddita* (see Fig. 11) to the couple with a Latin translation that he realised in twenty-five North African and Asian languages. He cut 3,200 punches and matrices for this work.

On the occasion of a visit to Parma in 1782 by Prince Pavel of Russia and his wife, Bodoni published a typographical essay on his Russian founts, *Essai de caractères Russes gravés et fondus par Jean Baptiste Bodoni*. In 1784 he presented a paean to Gustave III of Sweden on his visit to

FIG. 8
Gianbattista Bodoni
Fregi E Majuscole Incise E Fuse
Parma: Bodoni 1771

FIG. 9
Pierre Simon Fournier
*Manuel typographique, utile aux gens
de lettres et à ceux qui exercent les dif-
férentes parties de l'Art de l'imprimerie*
Paris: Fournier 1764–1766

Parma. Finally, in 1788 Bodoni published a lavish *Manuale tipografico*, in which he presented 150 Latin founts (including 50 italic) and 28 Greek founts.

Bodoni was particularly interested in chancery rolls from the manuscript era, which he published in the same year (1788) as *Serie di Majuscole e caratteri cancellereschi* [*Series of Majuscles and Chancery Characters*]. One of the most remarkable documents in the history of the response to Bodoni's *Manuali* is a thank-you letter sent to him from Philadelphia by Benjamin Franklin, who had lived in Paris from 1776 until 1786 as commissioner for the "thirteen United States of America." Franklin, who had been a printer and newspaper publisher until 1746, wrote to Bodoni expressing his recognition of his colleague's achievements: "I have had the very great pleasure of receiving and perusing your excellent 'Essai des caracteres de l'imprimerie.' It is one of the most beautiful that Art has hitherto produced."

"Printer to Kings – King of Printers"

An important patron of Bodoni's who exerted a noticeable influence on what his *Stamperia* printed was José Nicolás de Azara (1730–1804), the King of Spain's agent at the Vatican. One of the greatest art lovers among late 18th-century diplomats, Azara shared a predilection for antiquity, especially all things Greek, with Anton Raphael Mengs (1728–1779) and Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–1768) and was a solicitous patron to both of them. In 1780 Azara had the *Opere di Antonio Raffaello Mengs, primo pittore Maestà di Carlo III Re di Spagna* [...] printed by Bodoni in a deluxe edition, which was funded by the Spanish court. Bodoni's reward for printing this typographical masterpiece was the title *Tipografo di Camera* (Court Typographer), bestowed on him in 1783.

In 1788 Azara arranged for Bodoni to go to Rome, where he was received by Pope Pius VI in a private audience and his services were requested. Bodoni's itinerary took him on to the King of Naples as well and although he was invited to remain there, Bodoni, as always, returned to Parma.

Competition among typographers

By the 1790s, Bodoni had attained mastery as a typographer. Now permitted to open a private printing press in Parma apart from the official ducal one, he used his private establishment to publish editions of the Classics commissioned by Azara. The idea of reviving Greco-Roman antiquity in both content and form prompted a reversion to the monumentality of Roman inscriptions, with the result that roman founts were preferred, as the type believed to be closest to ancient Roman epigraphy, while all illustrations and ornament in printing yielded to an emphasis on elegance of design and the primacy of type faces. This trend in publishing made Bodoni, who already enjoyed privileged status as the celebrated “printer to kings”, serious competition for leading 18th-century typographers such as Baskerville, Fournier, and the Didot family.

François-Ambroise Didot (1730–1803) and his sons, Pierre-François (1761–1853) and Firmin (1764–1836), are famous as the French exponents of a Neo-Classical typography. Like Baskerville, the Didots preferred generous line-spacing, broad margins, and an economical use of decoration. At first they, too, were biased towards Garamond roman but in the 1770s Firmin Didot designed and cut roman founts that were perfected by the 1780s, culminating in the Didot *Édition du Louvre* (1799) featuring strong thick strokes, fine hair-line strokes (cf. the “U”), and an extremely precise cut (see Fig. 13). The type face was calculated with mathematical exactness and the style of the individual letters was standardised. The Didot Louvre editions of Virgil, Horace, and the French classics, including Racine, set a trend in stylish typography.

Bodoni's 1790s editions of the Classics

Compared to Didot's 1780s tomes, Bodoni's 1791 edition of Horace is notable for its monumental simplicity (see Fig. 12, particularly in relation to the 1769 *description*, cp. Fig. 7 above). Bodoni proceeded to print editions of the Classics, ordered by Azara, one after the other in close sequence at his private Parma press: Callimachus and Theocritus (1792); the works of Virgil