

Giambattista Bodoni

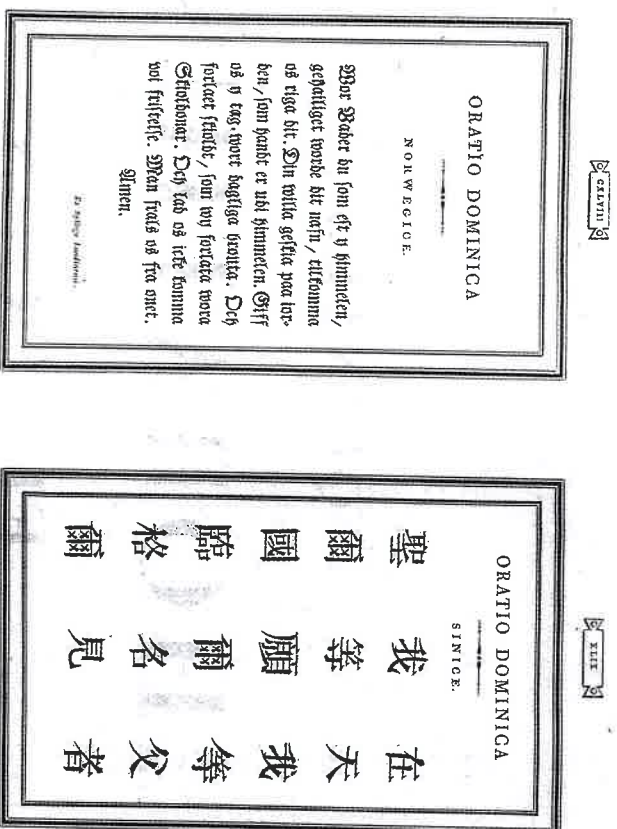
Manual of Typography

Manuale tipografico

1818

Edited by Stephan Füssel

TASCHEN



exactly with [the letters] epsilon, iota, and rho do not fit properly with alpha, eta, upsilon, and omega. Finally, I ask the connoisseurs to note that the exotic type faces which have been used in the four editions of the *Oratio dominica* known to me have, for the most part, been cut in copper to save time and avoid the considerable expense that would have been required to make the punches and matrices and that, on the contrary, in my edition, all letters are movable and separable [...]. It is the task of the academies of Europe and impartial bibliophiles to do justice to my work and to decide whether I have surpassed the above mentioned editions or whether I have remained behind my antecedents, be it in the diversity, elegance, and crisp cut of the type faces or be it in the accuracy of the editing.”

Bodoni, who was suffering from gout and the ravages of old age so that by now he was only able to give instructions from his bed, devoted most of his flagging strength to the *Oratio dominica* and subsequently to his most important work, the *Manuale tipografica*, which he did not live to see completed. Bodoni died in Parma on November 30, 1813 and was buried with all the honours in the cathedral on 2 December.

It was left to his widow, Margherita, and Luigi Orsi, who for many years had been the workshop foreman of the private Stamperia Bodoniana, to complete both the edition of the French classics and, in 1818, the *Manuale tipografica*. Fortunately, Maria Luisa, Duchess of Parma, acquired Bodoni’s whole workshop in 1843, including 22,618 punches and 42,148 matrices from 289 different type faces, which are to be found in the Museo Bodoni in Parma today (see Fig. 19).

Bodoni’s prefazione to his *Manuale tipografico*

“All the more must typography seek fame in showing what it can achieve, even without further book decoration. Without it, the intention underlying luxury in books is even more clearly revealed: to establish love for science and scholarship and esteem for authors.” The *Manuale*

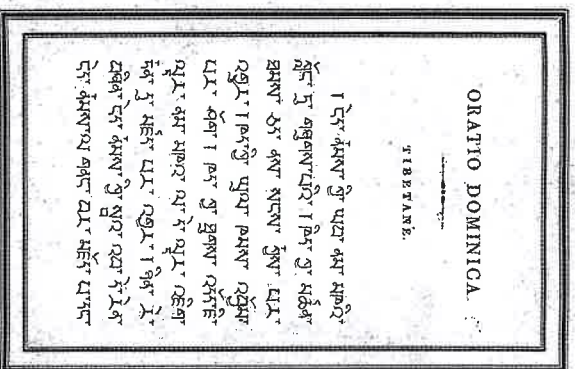


FIG. 14, 15, 16
*Oratio dominica in CLV linguis versata et
exoticis characteribus plerumque expressa*
Parma: Bodoni, 1806
Bonn, Universitäts- und
Landesbibliothek;
Sign.: Ca 2° 17/70

FIG. 14:
p. CXLVIII: Norwegian (Norwegian)

FIG. 15:
p. XLIX: Sinice (Chinese)

FIG. 16:
p. LVII: Tibetane (Tibetan)

tipografia, published in 1818, five years after Giambattista Bodoni's death, sings the praises of the special importance of typography. The latter half of the 18th century recalled the harmony and beauty that constituted the stylistic ideals of antiquity, hence the choice of commensurate proportions was to ensure an appearance that was as simple as it was elegant, as precise as it was graceful. And, for all his pride in his typographical skills, in the work that was to be his legacy to posterity, Bodoni presented himself as an unselfish transmitter of precious content at the service of the authors whose work he printed. At the end of a productive life spent advancing the cause of typography, Bodoni summarised the conclusions of his maturity in the *prefazione*, his preface outlining the principles informing his *Manuale tipografia*, as follows:

"A book becomes all the more exemplary the more the simple beauty of the type faces used in it is allowed to shine in all its purity. From it speaks, in it rests, in a word, the renown of the art of publishing. And rightly so: for, after all, the type faces are of necessity entirely self-sufficient since everything else only exists through them."

To Bodoni, the secret of typography was grounded in the following:

1. in the "regolarità", the uniformity of the type faces,
2. in "nettezza e forbitura", crispness and smoothness premised on the quality of the punches,
3. in the choice of the most beautiful formes ("il sceglie le forme più vaghe"), and, finally,
4. in the "grazia", the graceful elegance of the type.

He sums up: "A type face will, therefore, be all the more beautiful the more uniformity, crispness, good taste, and elegance it possesses." ("Tanto più bello sarà dunque un carattere, quanto avrà più regolarità, nettezza, buon gusto, e grazia", *Prefazione*, p. XXVII f.). The qualities of what constitutes good typography – taken for granted today – are formulated here for the first time, with compelling cogency. At the same time, Bodoni describes what technical demands must be made on the material and the tools, what must be taken into consideration in advance and what conclusions are then to be drawn for the work process. The criteria of type face and print uniformity raise the quality standards of the first design for a type face on the drawing board.



According to Bodoni, a type face should not be forced into a static “geometric strait-jacket” like the widespread *romain du roi* cut c. 1702 by Philippe Grandjean de Fouchy (1666–1714) on commission from Louis XIV, which was in the thrall to the circle and the square (see Fig. 4). Instead, characters should be pleasingly proportioned and always appropriate to the fount size and style. Crispness and smoothness represent a challenge to both typefounding and printing. The “best formes” are supposed to “produce an attractive light-and-shade contrast” (*chiaroscuro*), which in turn affects type-face design, the execution of casting, and the precision of printing. Finally, graceful elegance implies lack of all artificiality and constraint and instead “freedom, boldness, and fluency” of line.

Those requirements made on the individual letters (the type, it goes without saying, should be neither damaged nor dirty) are enhanced by the overall print quality. It should be exemplified by lines of regular length with identical spaces between words and precise distances between letters and reinforced by the uniform and precise design of double pages, with the type face on the opposite pages of the same weight, that is, of the same degree of blackness, and symmetry observed in both the body and the footnotes.

Numerous individual examples provided in the *Manuale* indicate how, over the course of his career, Bodoni came to abandon Baroque roman and to develop a style of his own through his study of both Didot and Baskerville. Although the thick and hair-line strokes were clearly differentiated in Didot, Bodoni designed them to show less contrast. Bold serifs were no longer drawn straight with a ruler; instead, being slightly concave, Bodoni’s serifs look more curvilinear. In short, Bodoni’s type faces are most effective with the generous line-spacing he used in his deluxe folio editions. In continuous text, on the other hand, his body type may sometimes tend to look rather heavy.