

Letter Forms

Typographic and Scriptorial

TWO ESSAYS ON THEIR CLASSIFICATION,
HISTORY AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Continent at the end of the seventeenth century the Garamond design was already regarded as requiring revision. The Paris style which had dominated Europe for a century and a half was deemed out of date. The humanists of the reign of Francis I had been succeeded by the scientists under Louis XIV.

THE PARIS SCIENTIFIC TYPE, 1702

In 1692 Louis XIV authorized the creation of a new series of types for the exclusive use of the Imprimerie Royale. It is probable that security reasons contributed most powerfully to the decision; but, even so, the disciples of Descartes and Mersenne were pressing forward a programme to rationalize everything and, with the rest, the forms that record and transmit thought. This involved a revolution in the types of the Royal Printing House. These included the Romans and Italics originated by Jannon at Sedan, and other older faces available to the general trade. The committee charged by the Académie des Sciences engaged in the construction of all the letters to be used in Richelieu's foundation upon a basis that might have astonished him. The patterns for the punch-cutter to follow were engraved on copper plates, each letter on a field divided into 2,304 squares.

The work was begun in 1692 and occupied years. The first specimen, in 16 point, was proofed in 1699 but the first book to be composed in the fount for which it was engraved did not appear until 1702. The 'Romain du Roi Louis XIV' was then publicly exhibited in a historical text. It was superbly composed, illustrated, printed and produced. The whole of the work on the *Médailles sur les principaux événements du règne de Louis le Grand* was superintended by the Académie des Inscriptions. The medals were from the hand of the greatest of French portrait engravers, Gérard Edelinck (a Fleming from Antwerp), and the borders were by Jean Berain, 'dessinateur de la Chambre et du cabinet du Roi'. No book between the 'Gutenberg' Bible, the 1457 Psalter, and the Kelmscott Chaucer, is comparable with the *Médailles*. The objection

that Aldus was not greatly interested in presswork is, unfortunately true. The *Polyfilo* of 1499 is superb in illustration, but miserable in presswork, when compared, for example, with the best of Jenson.

Simultaneously with the *Médailles* there appeared the *Epreuve d'un nouveau caractère pour l'Imprimerie Royale. A Paris Gravé par Grandjean, graveur de l'Imprimerie Royale, Février 1702*. Unfortunately the only evidence of the existence of this specimen is a type-facsimile executed (for what reason one cannot say) after 1750 or so. It is printed on wove paper, which was hardly possible in 1702.

THE NEW PARIS SERIF

The principal graphic novelty in the 'Romain du Roi' is the serif. Its horizontal and unbracketed structure symbolizes a complete break with the humanist calligraphic tradition. Also, the main strokes are thicker and the sub-strokes thinner than in the Aldine-Garamond-Granjon-Jannon design. While these two innovations are of great importance and vitally affected future typographical design, they are, by themselves, of no more than artistic significance. More important is the fact that in the 'Romain du Roi' some of the characters, when compared with the Aldine Romans, are slightly condensed; the projectors are proportionately reduced and, correspondingly, the height of a, c, e, and the rest of the normal lower case, is slightly increased. Briefly, therefore, the Paris type of 1699-1702 presents the first of a style that departed from the humanistic design that had dominated the Roman letter since 1495. It set a new style, that of a rationalist and economic design which went far to compromise the accepted theoretical basis of typography, which was that Roman lettering was a regularized, mechanized and disciplined aspect of calligraphy, in favour of the theory that printed lettering is so regularized, so mechanized and so disciplined as not rightly to be regarded as an aspect of calligraphy, but more truly as an aspect of epigraphy or chalcography. The presence in Paris of the greatest school of portrait engraving, and of the craftsmen

who worked for the great writing-masters, naturally assisted this transition to the theory that a print of lettering should ostensibly be an engraved and not a written form. This view of the artistic status of type was supported by the contemporary vogue for books of devotion printed from copper-plates finely engraved after models set by the best calligraphers of the day. It would occupy too much space here to discuss the influence of the engravers upon Italic and the approval given to the models of Alais by the Abbé Bignon.

Considered stylistically, the change from a calligraphic basis of lettering is of the utmost significance, since it led directly to the striking typographical effects produced by Giambattista Bodoni. Although the relative economy in depth is slight, it exists; and while the degree of saving in width is even slighter it is again perceptible. There is also the slight increase in the height of the normal lower case to be considered. Finally, it should be remarked, the new horizontal serif entailed the raising of the capitals to the level of the horizontal serif of the ascenders, instead of, as in the Aldine Roman, to the lower level indicated by the dip of their diagonal serif. Thus, in the 'Romain du Roi' the capitals are taller than in all preceding Romans when used normally, though exceptions may be found in the sixteenth century. The theory underlying the construction of the 'Romain du Roi' is explained in the copious memorandum which Jaugeon prepared for the Académie des Sciences. He indulged himself so liberally that the text was considered too expensive to print, and has remained in manuscript to this day. This is regrettable.

Had Jaugeon's report been printed, with the magnificent geometrical diagrams engraved to accompany it, our terminology might have been rationalized and, for instance, our sixteenth-century terms 'Romain' and 'Italic' might have been superseded by the new terms 'Droit' and 'Penché'. The fact remains that the types created upon the rationalist theory of Louis XIV's scientific commission created the watershed whose existence Fournier-le-Jeune, writing 1764-6, and soon to be mentioned, acknowledges in the distinction he draws between 'ancien' and 'moderne'. As M. André Jammes shows in the course of his

print [published 1962] of a series of documents on the origins of the Paris type, the measurement of the bodies and the establishment of their relations to each other was also part of that enterprise. In other words, the method of Louis XIV's reform of typography was more thoroughly scientific than was understood until the discoveries now reported. [See André Jammes, *La Réforme de la Typographie Royale sous Louis XIV — Le Grandjean*, Paris, 1962.]

The Commission thus opened the way for Fournier's point system promulgated as part of his conception of a 'nouvelle typographie' and necessitates a revision of his claims to have been the creator of the point system. It is true, however, that in 1737 Fournier published an elaboration of the system originated for the Imprimerie Royale as part of the monarch's plan to rationalize the *arts et métiers*. The first meeting of Louis XIV's commission was held in January 1693 at the residence, and under the presidency, of the Abbé Bignon. The Table of the 'Proportions des Caractères de l'Imprimerie Royale' was drawn up by the Père Truchet c. 1693.

THE 'MODERN' FACE

The German approximation toward what Pater calls the 'neue Schrift' and Fournier the 'moderne' may, or may not, be independent of the 'Romain du Roi'. In the present state of knowledge there is reason to think that the German rationalist approach to Roman is a response less to the Roman example of Paris than to the Fraktur example of Leipzig. What is certain is that the task of assimilating Roman to Fraktur in terms of the relation of thick and thin strokes, of the new proportioning of the projectors to the normal lower case, was committed to the punch-cutters of Leipzig and Frankfurt during the first quarter of the eighteenth century.

The process is to be seen in the sheet honorifically entitled *Verzeichnis derer Holländischen Schriften* collected by Wolfgang Dietrich Ehrhardt of Leipzig, whose successors published the specimen about 1720 (as Mori judges). Here is what the trade would now describe as a