

Aa Bb Cc Dd Gg Mm Nn Qq Rr

Group I – Humanistic

Aa Bb Cc Dd Gg Mm Nn Qq Rr

Group II – Garaldic

Aa Bb Cc Dd Gg Mm Nn Qq Rr

Group III – Transitional

Aa Bb Cc Dd Gg Mm Nn Qq Rr

Group IV – Didonic

Aa Bb Cc Dd Gg Mm Nn Qq Rr

Group V – Mechanistic

Aa Bb Cc Dd Gg Mm Nn Qq Rr

Group VI – Lineal

Aa Bb Cc Dd Gg Mm Nn Qq Rr

Group VII – Incised

Aa Bb Cc Dd Gg Mm Nn Qq Rr

Group VIII – Script

Aa Bb Cc Dd Gg Mm Nn Qq Rr

Group IX – Manual

Aa Bb Cc Dd Gg Mm Nn Qq Rr

Group X – Black Letter

آپ کو 'سونوٹائپ' شینوں کی

Group XI – Non-Latin

Fig. 1. In the early twentieth century, the plethora of available typefaces called for a classification system that would make it easier to find and identify them. The above system, named Vox after its deviser, Maximilien Vox, is based on the style and chronology of letterforms and was adopted by the Association Typographique Internationale in 1962.

THE HISTORY OF TYPOGRAPHIC FORMS IN EUROPE

René Ponot

Ever since the emergence of Carolingian minuscule script, the basic shape of each letter of the Latin alphabet has conformed to a convention consecrated by twelve centuries of use. The evolution of letterforms, both handwritten and typeset, has therefore mainly involved their non-essential features—that is to say, visual details that do not affect the interpretation of the character. These details nevertheless apply to all the letters in the alphabet and establish its style (Fig. 1).

Since the notion of a single script to be used in all contexts did not exist when Gutenberg managed to “write without a pen,” he was obliged to imitate the various hands used by his local contemporaries, namely Gothic script and its derivatives, each of which had a specific social function. Gutenberg therefore designed the Textura typeface for his “42-line Bible,” cursive Gothic for letters of indulgence (both mid-1450s) and Rotunda for his encyclopedic *Catholicon* (1460). Italian scholars had been the only ones in Western Europe to shun “Gothic artifice” in favor of a humanistic, neo-Carolingian book hand (the first manuscript in this hand dates from 1408). Publishers Conrad Sweynheym and Arnold Pannartz, exiled from Mainz, Germany, produced the first typographic version of this hand in 1465 at Subiaco, near Rome (hence the name “roman” given to this type by French printers in the sixteenth century). But the cutter’s lack of skill in reproducing a script with which he had only recently become familiar gave his prototypes a hesitant feel. Thus French typecutter Nicolas Jenson improved on them five years later, in Venice, by eliminating every hint of Gothicism. Jenson’s type would become the future standard, thanks to the Latin elegance of its forms and the masterful way its serifs stabilized the printed line. Twenty-five years would pass before this typeface was rivaled, in its refinement, by one designed by

Aldus Manutius, another Venice-based printer who worked with typecutter Francesco Griffo. At this point a watershed was reached: typographic writing asserted its autonomy by abandoning all allusion to handwriting, henceforth answering only to its own criteria. Manutius was not content with roman type alone, and in 1500 he had Griffo cut a slanting, cursive script like the hand used at the papal chancery since 1431—this type was dubbed “italic,” although its capital letters remained vertical until 1540. Their model was perhaps not the finest, but it was the easiest to typeset. Furthermore, Griffo was obliged to make the tall letters, with their long ascenders and descenders, less angled than the shorter letters. It was nevertheless a popular typeface and still survives today.

In only a short while, around 1530, all of the most competent printers were using roman typeface exclusively, even for texts that had been produced in Gothic script up till then. Inspired by Manutius, Claude Garamond led the way in creating new roman characters. His name, more than any other cutter of type (except Robert Granjon when it comes to italic), best expresses the spirit of typographic creativity in Latin letterforms. Yet such letterforms were not just Latin. This should not be forgotten, for it explains why, from subtle change to subtle change and from national identity to national identity, the creative torch passed to the roman type of Van Dijk, Voskens, and Kiss in the Netherlands during the last third of the seventeenth century, thanks to their more massive letters that narrowed the eyes of short letters (a, c, e) and shortened the ascenders and descenders of stemmed letters (b, d, p). Then England came to the fore, freeing herself from typographic subservience to the Dutch, due to the efforts of William Caslon (1720) and John Baskerville (1757). Exploiting his talent as a former teacher of handwriting,



Fig. 2. Examples of letterform details on three upper-case and four lower-case letters, with the basic shape shown on the first line. Note, on each line: the various serifs (1); spurs, beaks, or brackets (5); the bowl (2) or loop (7) with an "angle of stress" that may be more or less vertical or oblique; the finials (3); ascenders (4), which may be of equal height to or taller than the capitals; the ear of the "g" (8); the height of the crossbar of "e" (6) and its length in "E"; the tail of "Q"; the crossbar of "R". These variations are complicated by contrast between the thickness of mainstroke and hairline, and by differences between bold, roman, italic and other fonts.

Baskerville launched a neo-classic style called Transitional (*Réales* in the Vox classification system—see Fig. 1), which also elegantly assimilated the style of Frenchman Grandjean—indeed, back in 1693 the French Academy of Sciences had charged the Bignon Commission with developing a geometric method of constructing letters against a squared-up background. The pedagogical goal was to stimulate type design, and this approach inspired Grandjean to design a typeface called "romain du roi" in honor of King Louis XIV (but also called Grandjean). The innovation was crucial, since for the first time typographic design abandoned the *ductus*, or physical gesture of handwriting letters, to form letters solely by their outline—the axes of letters could thus become more vertical as their attacks and terminals became more horizontal. This method, once it had sufficiently incubated, was extended by the Didot family of typesetters around 1784, creating a maximum contrast between thick and thin strokes and their filiform serifs. This "modern" (or "Didonic") typography reigned unchallenged until the "Elzevier revolution" inspired by Louis Perrin in Lyon (1854) and Théophile Beaudouin in Paris (1858) spurred a return to favor of "old style" roman type. Meanwhile, the lithographic process had been invented, permitting the printing of letters that no longer had to be cast in typographic relief. Hence the requirements of trade, the emergence advertising, and the rise of the press all combined with Romantic exuberance to create new styles, subsequently imitated by lead typefaces, for setting texts not intended to be read continuously—short texts to be noticed rather than read. In addition to "fancy" types (Manual and Script), there emerged antique and sans-serif typefaces (also called Lineal), the latter being highly popular in the latter half of the twentieth century. There also appeared "Egyptian" (Mechanistic) types, with their slab-like serifs (Fig. 2).

In the late nineteenth century, the invention of the pantograph by American Linn Boyd Benton made it possible for non-professionals to industrially produce punches and/or dies, leading to the development of automatic typefounding and type-setting machines that were five to six times faster than manual methods. The drawback was that



Fig. 3. Punches for letters were formerly cut from designs that were modified as a function of the body size, in an effort to retain the visual unity of characters once they were printed. Here the letter "g" has been subtly modified for 18-, 14-, 12-, 9-, and 6-point type.

- 1 ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ&
 2 abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
 3 *ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ&*
 4 *abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz*
- 5 LINOTYPE faces are standard throughout the world
 6 *LINOTYPE faces are standard throughout the world*

Fig. 4. In manual typesetting (lines 1 to 4), upper-case roman and italic faces (1 and 3) have approximately the same spacing, whereas lower-case roman (2) requires more spacing than lower-case italic (4). In mechanical typesetting, the spacing is the same for upper- and lower-case roman and italic (5 and 6), leading to a certain degree of deformation of the characters.

the most widely used machine, the Linotype, used duplexed dies, that is to say that each die bore the same letter twice, once in roman and once in italic or bold. This required the unfortunate bastardization of all three fonts in order to give them the same spacing (Fig. 4). Around 1950, a further weakening of the typographic purity of letterforms occurred with photocomposition technology in which a single design, often established for a 10-point body size, was used for every single body size in that type; the uniform scaling of letterforms, however, actually sabotages their homogeneity unless it is accompanied by

compensating optical adjustments (Fig. 3). The same is true of the process of italicizing types by slanting them, or of making condensed versions through anamorphosis, which introduces crippling deformations in the final impression. All these concessions, piling drawback upon drawback, pollute the eye, which becomes accustomed to mediocrity. Now mediocrity, like slander, never seems to go away completely, even when disavowed. And today we find ourselves confronted with the benefits and drawbacks of digital characters, although that is the subject of another article (see page 384).

g

designs that were
to retain the visual
letter "g" has been