

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/43556> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation.

Author: Blokland, F.E.

Title: On the origin of patterning in movable Latin type : Renaissance standardisation, systematisation, and unitisation of textura and roman type

Issue Date: 2016-10-11

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation I have demonstrated that the moving force in the evolution of type was above all a technical one. To do so, I first supported my hypothesis that roman type is the result of the standardisation in the Renaissance of the Humanistic minuscule to the type production process, in a process analogous to the one that took place when the gothic hand was used as the basis for textura type. In roman type, horizontal and vertical character proportions, details and aesthetic preferences are clearly the result of the standardisation of the Renaissance production process. Finally I supported my sub-hypothesis that aesthetic preferences in roman type were and continue to be conditioned by the initial standardisation of roman type production.

This contradicts the generally accepted view on the origin and evolution of roman type, which puts the emphasis in the translation of Renaissance handwritten models to movable type on aesthetics. This view places the Renaissance punchcutters mainly in the role of type designers. It ignores the fact that the punchcutters were originally goldsmiths and engravers who invented, organised, and executed a complex and sophisticated production process that comprised, besides the design aspect, the cutting of punches, the striking and justification of matrices, and the casting of type.

Conversely, this dissertation illustrates the ways in which, with the invention of movable type, these craftsmen moulded the handwritten Humanistic minuscule into a fixed structure. This emphasised the rhythmic and harmonic patterns in the Humanistic minuscule, which are an intrinsic part of this Renaissance hand and its mediaeval precursors, but never needed to be mapped and applied in such a clearly structured manner as in movable type. After all, in handwriting a meticulous patterning is not required: there are no strict physical boundaries between characters and between lines, but in printing there are. The oldest roman type that shows a clear standardisation of the rhythmic and harmonic patterns is Jenson's model. It was used by Griffo as the basis for his two roman types from 1495 and 1499 respectively. It is plausible that Griffo used Jenson's model because it nicely combined aesthetics with technical advantages due to its standardisation. French-Renaissance punchcutters, such as Garamont, copied Griffo's model. Subsequently Jenson's patterning became dominant in the world of Latin type and hence determined the typographic conventions that are still used today. Because Jenson's patterning was in part determined by prerequisites for the production of

type, the typographic conventions are not purely the result of optical preferences predating the invention of movable type, but are also the result of the standardisation of characters in the Renaissance type production.

The mapping of the initial standardisation of roman type has positive implications for present-day type design. It makes the analysis of type easier, helps to artificially reproduce these aspects, and makes the parameterisation of type design processes possible. The relatively crude Renaissance unitisation can be translated into a related but much more versatile yet still simple system for digital type, such as the software that I developed during the writing of this dissertation. This can be used for the artificial fitting and kerning of letters. By mapping the underlying harmonic and rhythmic aspects, we gain more insight into what exactly the creative process in type design comprises, and what its constraints are.