The Young Garamont: Roman Types Made in Paris in the 1530s

Old-face Roman printing types were introduced in Paris about 1530, where they rapidly met success. It is accepted that this form of type design persisted over the following centuries, that it spread all over Europe, and that it withered away in the eighteenth century but was revived in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The design derived from a fount based on the best of late fifteenth-century humanist lettering, and originating at the end of the 1490s at the press of Italy’s foremost learned printer, Aldus Manutius Pius.

Between 1530 and 1560, Paris punchcutters enhanced this type design with a comprehensive range of typefaces of outstanding quality. These Paris faces helped forge modern type design. From the second half of sixteenth century onwards, the earliest independent large-scale typefoundries commercialized them, ensuring their permanence and global expansion.

The name of Claude Garamont (d.1561) is firmly attached to France’s ascent to leadership in type design in the sixteenth-century. While this is certainly correct for the later Romans by this master, one may question whether he was involved from the very beginning of this typographical revolution, which in Paris has been traced back to the press of Robert I Estienne in the autumn of 1530. Garamont’s mythic status has led to the misattribution to him of many later typefaces. A critical appraisal of his beginnings is therefore needed. This paper attempts to do that and to define more exactly Garamont’s role as a type designer in that crucial period before 1540, the year he was contracted to cut the famous Royal Greeks. As no contemporary archival documents are known which would shed some light on the question, the major source of this enquiry will be the 3,500 or so books printed in Paris between 1530 and 1540.

Unlike later times, punchcutters were not then a scarce resource. In Paris at least, there were many of them. No doubt, the interest of Francis I and his court in the New Learning movement and in the related fields of bibliophily and typography, was important. For the period under consideration here and as far as letter engraving is concerned, one may refer to the Estienne Master (as yet anonymous), Colines, Augereau, Gryphius, Garamont, Picard and a number of unknown engravers, some excellent, others less than remarkable. At the end of the decade, the plethora caused some of these craftsmen to emigrate. That was the case for Michel Du Boys, Calvin’s typographer in Geneva, or François Guyot, who went to work for Christopher Plantin and John Day, in Antwerp and London, respectively. Presumably it was also one of the reasons for Garamont’s short-lived excursion into the publishing field in 1545 and the travels of Jean Picard, Guillaume I Le Bé and Robert Granjon around Europe.

The following study lists forty-seven Roman typefaces made in Paris between 1530 and 1540. It does not cover the Paris typefaces belonging to a previous period though still used in the 1530s nor the rare typefaces imported from abroad. Thirteen typefaces, mainly by Colines or the Estienne Master, were described recently and are reproduced here in their context, albeit with a somewhat abridged description. While most information on the Colines, Estienne, Summary

This study investigates the early career of Claude Garamont as a designer of the new form of Roman type that appeared in Paris during the 1530s and came to dominate Western typography for the following two centuries. The materials for the enquiry are, principally, the 3,500 or so books printed and published in Paris in the 1530s. The paper first discusses the available sources, the actors on the scene, such as Colines, Constantin, Augereau, Gryphius and Garamont, and the role of Paris as a centre of type design. It attempts to account for the origins of the Paris types, attributing half of them to named letter engravers. It highlights especially the young Garamont’s work – starting in the mid 1530s – and corrects some earlier misattributions. It identifies the anonymous ‘Estienne Master’ as Maitre Constantin. In a second part, the paper describes the typefaces in order of size and date. Two summary tables, arranged respectively by date and punchcutter, conclude the study.

Revision of a paper that appeared in Typography papers, 7 (2007), 5–60.

a. See the list of typefaces below, pp. 475–82.
1. Also known as Renaissance Romans and Garaldes.
Augereau types has been published earlier and is only summarized here, the paper attempts to circumscribe more precisely the origins of the types, attributing half of them to named punchcutters. It highlights the role of François Gryphius as a provider of types and the first products of the young Garamont. I propose to identify the Estienne Master as Maitre Constantin.

Sources

The sources for this enquiry are twofold. First, the books printed in that period, some 3,500 titles, listed in Moreau’s Inventaire chronologique, vol. 4 (1992) and 5 (2004). By inspecting – non-selectively and without preconceived assumptions – as many of them as feasible and thereby trying to distinguish new or unusual typefaces, some hypotheses can be ventured. First occurrences of typefaces are, if properly grounded, facts and facts deserve respect. I am aware that this method implies an argument a silentio and therefore should be used with some restraint. But as there are no contemporary archival documents available, the evidence gathered from the books, however circumstantial, may be included.

Second, the archival sources. Contemporary archival records about the making of and trading in types abound from 1540 onwards, after the major reorganization of judicial and notarial procedures by the Royal Edict of Villers-Cotterets (30 August 1539).8 For Garamont alone, they amount to more than forty, all dating between 1540 and 1564. However, for the period before 1540 notarial or parochial acts are much rarer and the scarce ones (as far as they bear on printing and known to me) are not relevant for the subject of this paper.

Two later documents mention the making of types in the period considered here. The first was written by Guillaume Postel (1510–81), an excellent but somewhat eccentric Orientalist.9 Upon his return from his first journey to the East and Venice, he published in 1538 a Linguarum duodecim characteribus … alphabetum,10 which contained short introductions to and alphabets of Hebrew, Chaldean, Syriac, Samaritan, Arabic, Ethiopic (called Indica), Greek, Georgian, Serbian, Albanian (Illyrica), Armenian, and Latin. All alphabets were woodcut except for the Hebrew, Greek and Latin11 ones. For his next publication, the c. 1538 Grammatica Arabica12 had a (nondescript) Arabic cut, the first to be engraved North of Alps. Both of Postel’s works became standard introductions for contemporary students of Oriental languages. His work was valued at the court: in 1539 he was appointed royal lecturer in mathematics and ‘peregrine’ languages. About 1543 he left Paris anew for a wandering life around the East and Europe, returning to Paris for a short stop in 1552/3 and for good in 1562. His mysticism and ecumenism (he found some truths in the Koran and Kabbala) made him suspect to both ecclesiastical and secular authorities. For many years he was jailed in Venice, Rome and Lyons. Upon his return in Paris in 1562, he was declared insane and kept secluded in a cloister for the later part of his life. In the 1560s he wrote an hagiography of King Francis I.13 A passage (f. 45) dwells on Robert I Estienne, the Grecs du Roy and the roles of Garamont and the calligrapher Angelus Cres (Vergikios). He also mentions Estienne’s Hebrew (‘as good as Bomberg’s’) and the Estienne Romans which he attributes to Garamont (see the account of Garamont below).

A later but more explicit source is a Memorandum, usually attributed to Guillaume II Le Bé, typefounder in Paris (d.1645). The manuscript, written