
✎ Garamond & His Famous Types

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*A history very interesting to all who may be benefited
through the use of printing.*



It is a part of the glory of French art that two type designs that are admittedly masterpieces beyond competition were created by Frenchmen. These creations have had a decisive influence on subsequent type designers, and though four hundred and fifty years have passed since the first use of one of these designs, and three hundred and seventy-five since the first use of the other, both of them in their original models are now more popular and more generally used than in any previous period. The earliest of these master designers was Nicolas Jenson, who first used his famous Roman types in Venice in 1470. But we are here more concerned with the second master, Claude Garamond of Paris, in whose honor this book is issued and in reproductions of whose famous Roman and Italic type designs it is composed, that those who read herein may better understand their merits.

Original steel punches and copper matrices made and used by Garamond, some time before his death in 1561, are now the property of the French nation, and are included as an item in the great asset of the national arts which French governments, whether royal, imperial or republican in form, have invariably honoured and protected. These implements and the types cast by means of them are kept in a special

'Garamond & His Famous Types' was originally published in *An Exhibit of Garamond Type with Appropriate Ornaments. Being the third of a series of books showing the many beautiful types in the composing room of Redfield-Kendrick-Odell Co., Printers & Map Makers* (Redfield-Kendrick-Odell Co.: New York, 1927).

room in the National Printing House in Paris, and are reserved for use by selected workmen in printings relating to great occasions or in the production of books planned to exemplify the higher typographic art, and for proclamations, programmes, notices and memorials, and for purposes of notable interest. In the great inventory of French art possessions they are associated with the works of the greater artists and art craftsmen of ancient and modern times. These works of Garamond's hands and genius were acquired for the French nation in the year 1640 by the illustrious Cardinal Richelieu who was then brilliantly and wisely directing the destinies of France. He established *L'Imprimerie Royale*, which, after a distinguished activity of two hundred and eighty-five years, is now flourishing under the style of *L'Imprimerie Nationale*. It is characteristic of the French that while this great printing house produces the ordinary and multitudinous blank forms, postage stamps and other necessary aids to governmental activities, it has never in any period since 1640 failed to give to the world examples of printing, generally of books, in which the motive has been to honor the art of printing and prove how fine, splendid or luxurious that art may be. There is now in progress in that famous printing house a veritably magnificent large folio work of masterful literary and artistic distinction, not equalled by any other printed work of this century, which is issued in honor of printing, done at the public expense, its title, *Histoire de L'Imprimerie en France au XV^e et au XVI^e Siecle*, four volumes already completed with perhaps as many more to follow, planned and written by France's greatest bibliographer, M. Claudin, and printed with the veritable sixteenth century types of Claude Garamond and the seventeenth century types of Phillippe Grandjean. As Lawrence Sterne said: 'They order this matter better in France.' We would do well to emulate the French spirit in our vast Public Printing House in Washington.

To appreciate what Garamond accomplished it is necessary to take a retrospective view of his art. When Gutenberg invented movable cast types and began to print, about 1450, his was a commercial proposition. Making books at less cost than those made with pens, the new invention soon put the penmen and the illuminators out of business or compelled them to become printers. The principal livelihood of the penmen and illuminators was derived from making books for devotional purposes. Very few secular books were in circulation. These devotional books were usually inscribed in Gothic letters (i.e., those letters quite erroneously though generally called 'Old

English'), which were preferred for various good reasons: Gothic letters are much more easily made with pens or brushes than Roman (Latin) letters; Gothic letters have a churchly look, and, in fact, are preferred even now for church printing; and, again, Gothic letters were peculiarly appropriate to the medieval mentality, dominated as it was by reliance on the simple finality of its Faith and its impressive ritual. Very naturally the earlier printers sought to make their type printed books similar to the pen-made books they were competing with. Thus it was that for the first two decades of printing the Gothic letters were exclusively used in the text of their books. But when the enthusiastically welcomed new art of bookmaking spread into Italy it was confronted by the mentality of the Renaissance, then displacing in that country the Age of Faith for an Age of Inquiry and Ideas. It is psychologically very interesting to know that the earlier printers invading Italy, all of whom (whatever their nationality) had been taught in Germany to use Gothic letters, and adopted, sometimes in a compromising spirit, the Latin letters, the best models of which, especially in the capital letters, were found in the chiselled monuments of ancient Rome. Whatever difficulties these geometrical Latin letters presented to the pen, they had none for the users of the gravers and chisels required in cutting steel letter punches. With such implements the Latin letters were in fact easier than the Gothic letters to cut in steel.

The first two Roman type designs are dated 1467 and 1469, made by or for Germans who introduced their art of printing in Rome and in Venice. As Germans they had little if any use of the Latin characters and it is therefore not surprising that these earlier designs were crude and not easy to read. The third design for Roman types was that of Nicolas Jenson, a Frenchman, who before learning the new art of printing in Germany had acquired a reputation in France as an engraver of dies for minting metal monies. He first used his Roman type design in Venice in 1470. It was immediately recognized as a masterpiece and has been the standard of the forms of Roman characters ever since, though in its color and general stately effect it reflects those elements as found in the better Gothic letters. For three-quarters of a century almost all Roman type designs were based upon Jenson's. But during this period the humanistic ideas of the Renaissance has proceeded toward modernism, and this newer phase of a restored civilization seems to have required, subconsciously, a style of letters more in conformity with the greater alertness and inquisitiveness of the

sixteenth century. The reading public has increased marvellously through the educational influences of printing, and books and types were made smaller in size to lower the cost of reading, first in Italy, but more generally in France, which at the time vigorously and successfully challenged Italy's intellectual and esthetic superiority.

In the early sixteenth century the printers of France were distinguished above all other printers of any place or time for their activities, learning and influence. Even the workmen were scholarly, as by a law sought for and enforced by the guilds of printers no one was permitted to be taught type composition who had not first passed an examination in both Latin and Greek. It is not strange, therefore, that printers and the printing profession were highly honoured; nor is it strange that in 1516 a distinguished professor in the College of Bourgogne, who had been active in reforming the French language and had employed his leisure in inscribing and illuminating manuscript books, resigned his professorship to become the first to adopt typography as a profession, finding his clients among a group of aspiring printers who desired to be advised how they might print more artistically and effectively. This man is Geoffroy Tory, now seen by all students of the typographic art to be the supreme master—our Michelangelo! In pursuance of his new profession, Tory went to Italy for two years to study in the great Italian homes and centres of art. He imbibed the Italian spirit of art, to which he added a Gallic flavour. Establishing himself in Paris, he became the guide to fine typography in France, exerting a good influence, which if not more powerful than in his lifetime, is certainly more widespread in this twentieth century. Tory took into his atelier a number of apprentices of whom we know little as individuals, but who as a group carried on his work in his manner and possibly in his atelier for a generation after his death. Tory himself excelled in decorative designs, borders, initials and illustration, much of which he engraved himself for printing uses. These are the chiefest treasures of typographic art, now earnestly sought after by collectors of the arts of the book, by typographic artists and students of fine and effective typography. Though he wrote and illustrated a book on letter designing, in which he carefully describes the operations required to cut the steel letter punches which are the originals from which the matrices are made in which types are cast, we cannot identify any type design as the work of his hands; but that the art of cutting steel letter punches was practised in his workshop may be inferred from the fact that one of his apprentices became the most

famous type designer and punch cutter of his time. This was Claude Garamond, the merit of whose work will not be dimmed as long as the art of typography is practised.

Of Claude Garamond the individual little is known. Many contemporary complimentary allusions to him have been found, but very few facts. That he was conceded by his contemporaries to be the most famous type designer and punch cutter of his time is made quite clear, but no one tells us where or when he was born. He was the first to engage in typefounding as a business separate from a printing-house, but when he did this is not known. However his type foundry flourished. In the ancient archives of famous printing-houses throughout Europe there are records of purchases of punches, matrices and types from Garamond. At his death his type foundry was purchased by Guillaume Le Bé, after which its history is clear for upwards of two centuries from that year, 1561, until the time of the French Revolution. When typefounding became a widespread and flourishing industry, a certain new size of type body was called 'Garamond,' and one of these earlier typefounders referred to Garamond as 'the prince of type designers.' In 1541 he was commissioned by the King of France, Francis I, to design and engrave originals in steel of Greek types in various sizes for use by the Royal Printer. These types were so highly esteemed that more than one university in foreign countries petitioned the King of France for the use of them for their Greek printing. In 1545 Garamond added printing and publishing to his business. We know the places in Paris where he lived. He left none to succeed to his business, which was promptly sold by his widow.

Garamond's monument are the steel punches or originals of one (and the best) of his Roman and Italic type designs, which are now the property of France, as we have said. The reader has now under his eyes as he reads, a faithful reproduction of these designs by two American matrix makers. In the Roman design Garamond was clearly influenced by the models of the several letters created almost a century before by Jenson. But Garamond vivified these models by introducing a decided contrast in the main and minor lines and more freedom in the curves, giving each letter its maximum clarity or readability. Garamond's types are lighter in color than the earlier Roman and Gothic types. They were in fact commonly known when first put into use as 'White' letters, and Gothic letters at the same time began to be called 'Black' letters. They set a fashion in types which continued to the end of the eighteenth century, at which time the 'White' letters, as

interpreted by scores of type designers, were displaced for half a century by types now generally known as 'modern' Roman. When the 'White' letters again came into use they received a new name—'Old Style.' American printers at the time of the reinstatement of the 'Old Style' types were under British influence and so continued until an American type foundry in 1921 reproduced the Garamond types, as they are printed in this book. They achieved instant popularity and have since been made available to printers by type founders in England, France and Germany. Garamond was more original in his Italics, which are unequalled in grace, movement, style and readability. Among 'Old Style' types Garamond Roman and Italic are now the most popular. Their merit is such that we cannot believe they will ever cease to be used and admired. We know that these two designs are adequate to every use in typography from a dictionary to a de luxe edition, from letterheads to broadsides, from time-tables to automobile catalogues. And to whatever uses they may be put they will impart with utmost style utmost readability. In its greatest literary period, in the days of Voltaire, literally all the printing done in Latin characters in France were printed in the type designs herewith presented for the use and advantage of all who have need to approach the public in a convincing and no less pleasing manner.



This text is set in Adobe Garamond which is based on the typefaces first created by Claude Garamond in the sixteenth century. The face was created by Robert Slimbach and released by Adobe in 1989. The italic is influenced by the designs of Garamond's assistant, Robert Granjon.