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Towards an Atlas of Book Design – A Modest Research Proposal

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Abstract
In 1998 the author published a blueprint for his research in the ornamentation of early modern books in *Quaerendo*, then under the supervision of Ton van Uchelen. In 2007 this research resulted in a thesis on the subject called *De beer is los* (Foxes on the Loose). In this special edition of *Quaerendo* a new blueprint is presented. This time it is for research on layout. Inspired by the writings of his promotor, Professor Janssen and in close cooperation with his Belgian colleague Goran Proot, the author proposes to develop a computer-assisted model for layout that can be used to examine the interaction between ideas and the pages on which these are presented. The *Idea* of a book is derived from the famous Dutch typographer Huib van Krimpen (1917-2002). Early modern books will be compared to this 'ideal book' to find out if and how we can define progress in book design, and the circumstances that influenced it.

Keywords
book design, typography, early printed books

In 2007 I presented a thesis entitled in English *Foxes on the Loose* at the University of Amsterdam.[1] The study deals with the use of ornaments and historiated initials in early modern printed books. In the introduction I described this research as a digression and also wrote that it was time to return to what I considered to be the main road, namely book design.[2] My concern is not so

1 'Foxes on the Loose' is a free rendering of the Dutch title: *De beer is los* (Amsterdam 2007). The original blueprint for this research: P. Dijstelberge, 'Towards a Digital Atlas of Initials and Ornaments, Used in the Netherlands', *Quaerendo*, 28 (1998), pp. 215-25.

2 Dijstelberge, op. cit. (n. 1), p. 10. The inspiration for research into the layout of books was triggered by Frans Janssen's inaugural lecture in 1989 and also by following the design of a complicated catalogue for the Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica by the late Charles Jongejans. F.A. Janssen, *Auteur en drukker in de geschiedenis van de typografische vormgeving. Rede uitgesproken*

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much the *minutiae* of the subject, but has to do with some more fundamental questions.[3] How did texts eventually find their form on the printed page? How did changing factors like content or fashion and technical advances determine that form? Why do books look as they do? And last but not least: who were the readers for whom the books were intended? How did their expectations influence the form in which the content was presented to them?

Most typographical innovations have to do with two important properties of the printed book: the random access to the pages and references to information, either in the book itself or in other books. The first is innate and has to do with the book itself. If one opens it, one wants to know where you are and how you can quickly find the information for which one is looking. Page numbers, headlines and a clear layout are there to help you. The creation of a system of references to other books had to do with the enormous amount of information that became available once the printed book was well on its way as the prime source of information. In the beginning of the fifteenth century an educated person could know what knowledge he had in common with his peers anywhere in Europe. This changed dramatically in the early sixteenth century, for the printed book had only become a serious rival to the manuscript in the last quarter of the fifteenth century.[4] A new common ground had to be found; gaining quick access to information, by using references and indexes, was one way to create a new common culture for the elite.[5]

For modern books the question why books look as they do has a straightforward answer. Book design became a profession in the early twentieth century. Many designers have given an account of the how and why of their decisions. We know about different traditions and have information about the ambitions

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bij de aanvaarding van het ambt van hoogleraar in de boek- en bibliotheekgeschiedenis aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam op dinsdag 24 oktober 1989 (Amsterdam 1989). See also: F.A. Janssen, *Genomineerd voor de best verzorgde boeken van het jaar 1512* (Amsterdam 1993); P. Dijstelberge, *Onder handen werk: typografie in de Nederlanden 1473-1673* (Amsterdam 2004); Id., 'De vorm: typografie in de Renaissance', *De Boekenwereld*, 21 (2004), pp. 114-24.

3 With the *minutiae* I mean the details of ornamentation and type, not small details of design of pages or the distribution of information in a book.

4 This is borne out by the number of editions printed in the fifteenth century. The ISTC gives nine editions for the year 1460, 47 for 1469, 201 for 1470, 912 for 1480, 1658 for 1490 and 2861 for 1500 (accessed May 2012). See also David McKitterick, *Print, Manuscript and the Search for Order, 1450-1830* (Cambridge 2003), especially the first five chapters.

5 Research in the use of books, and the annotations of contemporary users, will certainly bear this out. A research proposal for a thesis on this subject will be presented in 2013 by John Tholen, under the supervision of Professor Arianne Baggerman and the author at the University of Amsterdam.

of those iconoclasts who broke the rules.[6] We can follow the careers of William Morris, Stanley Morison, Jan van Krimpen, or Irma Boom, and trace their influence in the countless books of followers and admirers.[7] The nineteenth-century traditions are more difficult to follow, while it is barely possible to establish those of the early modern period (1450-1800). A number of designers are well known to us – Baskerville, Bodoni, the Didot family – because of their radical innovations in the field, not only as designers of type but also as book designers. We know a few great sixteenth-century printers like Josse Bade and the Estiennes, mainly because the twentieth-century designer Morison reverted to their designs.[8] We call Aldus Manutius's *Hypnerotomachia* one of the most beautiful books in the world mainly because it is an established tradition amongst bibliophiles to do so. But you will hardly find a statement that explains why this is so – sometimes the instinctive love for books does not seem that different from human love.

Research on design in the early modern period tends to concentrate on typefaces, on the letters of Arrighi or Garamond, but hardly considers the lay-out, and does not focus at all on the functions thereof which are, firstly, to make a text accessible, and secondly, to make the text acceptable.[9]

This lack of coherent and ongoing research is remarkable. For centuries the book has been the main venue for the dissemination of ideas, only to be recently superseded by computer and internet. Books and the industry that created them formed the material infrastructure of most intellectual exchange. The way in which books were organized and presented was of vital importance to the reception of new concepts – and the rejection of old ones. The importance of the design of books can perhaps be demonstrated in an unexpected way. Eighteenth-century travellers sometimes noted the neglect of old libraries – a neglect which a modern researcher may also notice when he studies an old (public) library in detail.[10] As Kees Gnirrep, former curator of rare

6 *Breaking the Rules. The Printed Face of the European Avant Garde 1900-1937*, ed. Stephen Bury (London 2007).

7 See for the latest overview M. Lommen, *Het boek van het gedrukte boek. Een visuele geschiedenis* (Amsterdam 2012).

8 See S. Morison and K. Day, *The Typographic Book, 1450–1935. A Study of Fine Typography Through Five Centuries* (Chicago 1963).

9 Two important exceptions are Margaret M. Smith, *The Title-Page. Its Early Development, 1460-1510* (London 2000), pp. 9-10, and Janssen, op. cit. (n. 2: 1993).

10 This is clearly so in the Alkmaar Municipal Library, now part of the Archives of Alkmaar. Most of its 500+ volumes were acquired in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century. After 1625 the dust settled down.

books in Amsterdam University Library, remarked, this certainly has to do with a shift in paradigm in the early seventeenth century, when scholars stopped to look back and scientists started to look forward. But the change may also have been caused by books which had become outdated in presentation. How unfamiliar a book must have looked that had been printed in early sixteenth-century Basel to a reader whose eye was accustomed to works printed by Didot or Bodoni?[11]

Studies on the metamorphoses that texts underwent in the course of almost five centuries of the printing press are scarce. Books that show the changes are legion, but there is hardly any study that analyses or describes the changes in depth and detail.[12] Most bibliographers and historians use the study by Sayce on compositorial practices.[13] Short and sketchy as this work may be, it is still the most comprehensive study in the field. The main purpose of Sayce was the determination of (anonymous) publications and false imprints. His work has little to do with the history of ideas in relation to the organisation and design of books or with the relations between text and paratext. Nor can his model be applied to trace the gradual – and sometimes abrupt – changes in the layout of books. More recently, Frans Janssen has written a series of articles about the subject.[14] His matrix of typographical features can be used to trace the changes that a specific text has undergone in the course of time. It has been successfully applied in the bibliography of the travelogue that describes the adventures of the Dutch skipper Bontekoe during his unhappy trip to the East Indies.[15] This was one of the most popular books ever published in the Netherlands. The text itself went through many transformations. One can

11 I have suggested before that Stendhal could not read the Elzeviers his grandfather loved so much because he was used to the books of the late eighteenth century. See P. Dijstelberge, *De lof der onleesbaarheid* (Leiden 1999); slightly revised and reprinted in: *Boekverkopers van Europa: het 17de-eeuwse Nederlandse uitgevershuis Elzevier,* ed. B.P.M. Dongelmans, P.G. Hoftijzer, O.S. Lankhorst (Zutphen 2000), pp. 281-9.

12 Not only are there many books on books, they also tend to repeat each other. The latest and best is Lommen, op. cit. (n. 7), who names most of its predecessors in the bibliography. The most interesting of these is perhaps A. Bartram, *Five Hundred Years of Book Design* (London 2001).

13 R.A. Sayce, *Compositorial Practices and the Localization of Printed Books, 1530-1800* (Oxford 1979).

14 F.A. Janssen, *Technique and Design in the History of Printing* ('t Goy-Houten 2004).

15 *Journael ofte Gedenckwaerdige beschrijvinghe vande Oost-Indische Reyse van Willem Ysbrantsz. Bontekoe van Hoorn: descriptieve bibliografie 1646-1996,* ed. Garrelt Verhoeven & Piet Verkruijsse. (Zutphen 1996). The matrix concentrates on the different typefaces for the different types of information. The only information on the *mise-en-page* is the number of columns.

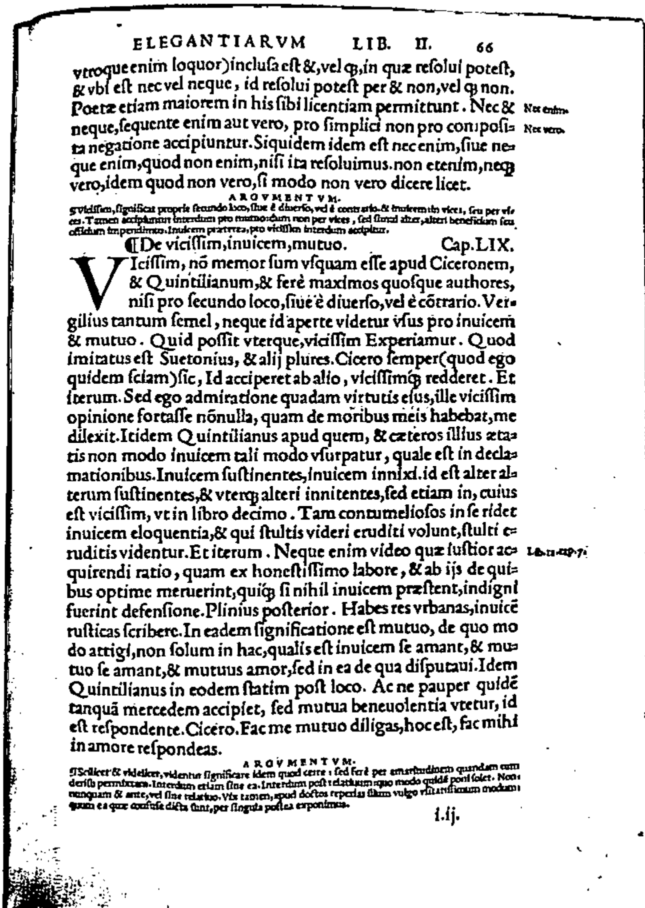
pinpoint the year that a text like Bontekoe's was revamped for a mass-market. But any attempt to widen its use for research that spans genres, years and regions, offers limited possibilities. The points that are taken into account are few and the 'yes or no' type of queries leave out many crucial features for this kind of research. For example, one will not be able to establish the relationship between bibliographical format and the number of lines on a page. Nor does the matrix contain any information on the form of bibliographical entries and index, or on the nature of the headlines, marginal notes, and so on. An important contribution was made by Margaret M. Smith whose seminal work on early title-pages (1460-1510) also has a profound influence on my ideas.[16]

It is clear then that the matrix proposed by Janssen will have to be expanded – but how much? In an unpublished blueprint Goran Proot has shown that it is possible to create a model of a book that takes literally every feasible typographical change into account. However, such an approach has little to do with book design. Typography is of course about the smallest details, but there is a hierarchy: not all details are equal. Changes in layout that reflect a different approach towards the text are more interesting than minor shifts that reflect a recent addition to the printer's type-case. Take the example of running titles. Detailed research in this domain is worthwhile, because the evolution from early sixteenth-century headings in a florid black letter to spaced Roman small caps is an interesting development. Nevertheless, the change in the relationship between running title and the text is more important. The first development has to do with typographical fashions and the availability of typefaces. The relationship of the running title with the text on the other hand has to do with the content and with changes in the access to information. This, in turn, is important for the history of ideas. It tells us something about how readers made use of a book (or were supposed to use a book by the publisher or the author).[17]

Together with the typeface and the technique used for illustrations this gives an indication of the reader to whom the publisher hoped to sell his book.

16 Smith, op. cit. (n. 9). Smith has written many articles on similar subjects. See also: M.M. Smith, 'Printed foliation: forerunner to printed page-numbers?', *Gutenberg Jahrbuch*, 63 (1988), pp. 54-70.

17 See for instance the remarks of Descartes in his introduction to the *Discours* (1649) where he declines a table of contents or an index, because people needed to read the complete book to be able to understand it.



ELEGANTIARVM LIB. II. 66

vtroque enim loquor) incluſa eſt &, vel q;, in quæ reſolui poteſt, & vbi eſt nec vel neque, id reſolui poteſt per & non, vel q; non. Poetæ etiam maiorem in his ſibi licentiam permittunt. Nec & neque, ſequente enim aut vero, pro ſimplici non pro compoſita negatione accipiuntur. Siquidem idem eſt nec enim, ſiue neque enim, quod non enim, niſi ita reſoluimus. non etenim, neq; vero, idem quod non vero, ſi modo non vero dicere licet. Nec enim. Nec vero.

ARGVMENTVM.

Vicissim, significat proprie secundo loco, siue è diuerso, vel è contrario. & inuicem [illegible] vices, seu per vices. Tamen accipiuntur interdum pro mutuo: [illegible] non per vices, sed simul alter, alteri beneficium seu officium impendimus. Inuicem praeterea, pro vicissim interdum accipitur.

De viciſſim, inuicem, mutuo. Cap. LIX.

Viciſſim, nō memor ſum vſquam eſſe apud Ciceronem, & Quintilianum, & ferè maximos quoſque authores, niſi pro ſecundo loco, ſiue è diuerſo, vel è cōtrario. Vergilius tantum ſemel, neque id aperte videtur vſus pro inuicem & mutuo. Quid poſſit vterque, viciſſim Experiamur. Quod imitatus eſt Suetonius, & alij plures. Cicero ſemper (quod ego quidem ſciam) ſic, Id acciperet ab alio, viciſſimq; redderet. Et iterum. Sed ego admiratione quadam virtutis eius, ille viciſſim opinione fortaſſe nōnulla, quam de moribus meis habebat, me dilexit. Itidem Quintilianus apud quem, & cæteros illius ætatis non modo inuicem tali modo vſurpatur, quale eſt in declamationibus. Inuicem ſuſtinentes, inuicem innixi. id eſt alter alterum ſuſtinentes, & vterq; alteri innitentes, ſed etiam in, cuius eſt viciſſim, vt in libro decimo. Tam contumelioſos in ſe ridet inuicem eloquentia, & qui ſtultis videri eruditi volunt, ſtulti eruditis videntur. Et iterum. Neque enim video quæ iuſtior acquirendi ratio, quam ex honeſtiſſimo labore, & ab ijs de quibus optime meruerint, quiq; ſi nihil inuicem præſtent, indigni fuerint defenſione. Plinius poſterior. Habes res vrbanas, inuicē ruſticas ſcribere. In eadem ſignificatione eſt mutuo, de quo modo attigi, non ſolum in hac, qualis eſt inuicem ſe amant, & mutuo ſe amant, & mutuus amor, ſed in ea de qua diſputaui. Idem Quintilianus in eodem ſtatim poſt loco. Ac ne pauper quidē tanquā mercedem accipiet, ſed mutua beneuolentia vtetur, id eſt reſpondente. Cicero. Fac me mutuo diligas, hoc eſt, fac mihi in amore reſpondeas. Lib. 12. cap. 7.

ARGVMENTVM.

Scilicet & videlicet, videntur significare idem quod certe: sed ferè per amaritudinem quandam cum derisu permixtam. Interdum etiam sine ea. Interdum post relatiuum quo modo quidē poni solet. Nonnunquam & ante, vel sine relatiuo. Vix tamen, apud doctos reperias illum vulgo vitatissimum modum: quum ea quæ confuse dicta sunt, per singula postea exponimus.

l. ij.

The French scholar (and printer) Josse Bade published this edition of *Elegantiae linguae Latinae* – a famous book by the Italian humanist Lorenzo Valla (c. 1405-1457) in 1527. At least forty different editions were published all over Europe in the century after Valla's death. It was printed in Paris by Simon de Collines, renowned for his learned and elegant publications. The typography of this quarto shows some key elements of book design: an argumentum in a small typeface is followed by the text itself, a simple capital shows the reader where a new paragraph starts, notes in the margin help to interpret the text. It is interesting to note that citations of Cicero, Pliny and Quintillian are given without references. This would change in due time, especially in the nineteenth century, when footnotes became the hallmark of serious scholarship. The longevity of books like these and their different functions in different periods make them ideal for research in book design.

[Special Collections, University of Amsterdam, O 80-641 (1)]

Towards a Model for Book Design

In an article published in 2006, I suggested the application of modern software such as *InDesign* to find out what is significant and what is not.[18] By duplicating the design of a sixteenth-century book one certainly gains insight in how early typographers thought and worked. However, it proved more fruitful to see what a modern designer had to say on the subject. I have used Huib van Krimpen's *Boek over het maken van boeken* (Book on the making of books) to create a kind of platonic ideal model.[19] This twentieth-century book represents the apogee of the classic tradition in book design and its precepts can function as a model to which any book can be compared.

In order to give a complete description of a printed book, two approaches must be combined. The first progresses from the first page to the last and enumerates the different types of content and the relationships between them. The second describes the different layouts that a book may contain. The combination of both concerns a variety of information found in a book. The system I propose here is a first effort and will of course change in time. In this *Idea of a book* we find the following items, here arranged in alphabetical order:

Bibliography

The bibliography or list of books quoted at the end of a scholarly text is an eighteenth- or nineteenth-century invention that has its roots in the marginal notes and in the catalogues of libraries and booksellers. The habit of noting on which authorities a text is based, is much older. Pliny already mentioned all authors on whom he based his *Natural History*. The evolution of the bibliographical description is of the greatest interest. Classical authors just mentioned names. In early modern times a reference might take the form of a marginal note such as 'Cicer. Orat.' But from the early sixteenth century onwards scholars also took care to note down which editions were of interest, including the name of the printer or the editor in catalogues. In almost any seventeenth-century sale catalogue one can find notes about editions that were singled out from the rest, simply by adding the name of the printer and the format (for example: 'Plantin, in-8').

18 P. Dijstelberge, 'Het papier is de huid van de gedachte. Op zoek naar een retorica van de vorm', in: *Boekgeschiedenis in het kwadraat. Context & casus*, ed. Stijn van Rossem & Maartje De Wilde (Brussel 2006), pp. 29-38.

19 H. van Krimpen, *Boek over het maken van boeken* (new rev. ed.; Veenendaal 1986).

Colophon

In early modern books impressum and colophon were closely connected. In time, information from the colophon migrated to the impressum on the title-page. The following should be noted: lines, words, kind of information. Some information simply faded away in time, such as the habit of mentioning the date when the book was (supposed to be) finished. The listing of the gatherings and their size, detailed information on the printer and so on, should also be included.

Copyright Page or Privilege

This has no specific layout. It is important to note whether the privilege is for the book in hand or simply copied from an earlier edition. Related is the short note by the censor, usually found at the end, and often copied from one edition to another.

Dedication

Many early modern books were dedicated to individuals or corporate identities such as the States General (in the Dutch Republic). The layout is of limited interest: sometime late in the seventeenth century the amount of empty space between the name of the dedicatee and the dedication began to grow until the name was followed by an almost empty page. There is a relation between the use of white here and the use in the rest of the book. An almost empty dedication often goes with wide margins and more spacing between the lines in the text itself.

Frontispiece

The most common frontispiece is an engraving that was placed opposite the typographed title. At the end of the seventeenth century, a frontispiece was sometimes accompanied by an extra page with a poem that explained the more complicated imagery. Important to note are the technique, if there is a relation to the text, and how this relation is expressed.

Half-Title

The French title is a more recent (eighteenth-century) addition to the book. A description should note the number of lines, words and typefaces.

Laudatory Poems

The habit of putting laudatory poems at the front of a book died out somewhere in the seventeenth century. Typographically they are of some interest. In the Netherlands they often followed the practice of contemporary printed songbooks to put poems in different typefaces. The layout of printed songbooks (those of the Dutch printer and publisher Paulus Aertsz van Ravesteyn come to mind) seem to have been derived from the *album amicorum*, or autograph book, in which (young) travellers collected poems and drawings from their friends, but also from the famous of their time.

List of illustrations

In seventeenth-century books one can find a list of illustrations at the end. They were not meant for the reader but for the binder, who had to know where to place the separately printed engravings. When the list of illustrations became of interest to the reader, it was moved to the front. In the nineteenth century also the illustration technique was often mentioned, probably as an advertisement.

Notes

The history of the footnote or endnote is closely related to the marginalia. Marginalia are derived from the habit of readers to note information about the text in the margins. About 1500 some printers started to put them in print. In time this became the formal system most scholars use today. The system of citation, typefaces, placing, and content is of importance for the history of ideas. The significance is twofold: as more and more books were available, it became important for readers to find their way quickly in a text.[20] It also was important that references to external sources were unambiguous and in the end they became the mark of scholarship and authority.[21]

Table of Contents

The where, when and how of the table of contents is also important. Its history and content are closely interconnected with the rise of the index. However, the index is older than the table of contents. When there was no table, the index was placed at the front of the book. It is important to note what the entries

20 That is: in a textbook. It is of course hardly important for novels.

21 A. Grafton, *The Footnote: A Curious History* (London 1997).

refer to: chapters, paragraphs, pages or marginalia. Typefaces should also be noted since the differentiation in typefaces was used to guide the reader quickly to the information he needed.

Title-Page

The title-page is one of the most interesting and most complicated parts of the book. Margaret Smith's study of the title-page must be considered as a milestone in typographical research.[15] My approach is purely pragmatic: the number of lines, words and typefaces used give an indication of the amount of information on the title-page. What is it trying to tell us and why? Smith describes in detail how the information on the title-page grew, from title to title-author to title-author-impressum. Decoration falls in different categories: the printer's device, an illustration or illustrations and simple decorative woodblocks. These are mostly arabesques or intricate decorations that were put together from small typographical elements. A special category is the decorative title-border that may or may not illustrate the content. The number of lines, words and typefaces used, the different kinds of information, and the decoration should all be noted.

Index

Type, typefaces and place should be noted. Index and table of contents are the close cousins that made the book a 'machine à lire'. Both became more complicated in the course of time. Typographical innovation went hand in hand with inventions such as the keyword-in-context index or the separate name and subject indexes. I have noted no fewer than twenty-eight different typefaces in some early modern books.[22]

Glossary

A list of terms used in a book with their explanation. This is related to encyclopaedias and dictionaries.[23]

22 E. Kwakkel, R. McKitterick, R. Thomson, *Turning over a New Leaf: Change and Development in the Medieval Manuscript* (Leiden 2012).

23 Ibid.

Page

The layout of the page consists of three parts: the text-block itself, the secondary matter or paratext and the unused paper, most of it located in the margins. The development of the text-block has to do with the separation of information. This could be done with paragraph marks, white spaces, new lines and different typefaces. Quotations and referring signs like the asterisk, dagger, and so on, were added to refer to the paratext on the same page or pages elsewhere in the book. The text could be segmented, like Bibles often were, with paragraph- and even line-numbers that were placed in the text block or in the margins. The paratext consisted of page numbers, running headlines that could refer to the book, chapters and paragraphs and to information on the page like short introductions, enumerations and so on. Readers probably wrote the first marginalia. Late in the fifteenth century marginalia were also printed, to be partly superseded by notes in the sixteenth century. Marginalia could refer to the sources of quotes, function as titles for paragraphs or give summaries of the content. Notes had different functions. They could contain references to sources, comments or extra information. In the manuscript era and in early printed books, the commentary could be larger than the text itself. It would be placed in a smaller typeface around the text in two columns. This was common for both legal and classical texts.

Ligatures and abbreviations

Of special interest is the use of ligatures and abbreviations. The printers inherited a complicated system of ligatures from the medieval scribes. These made sense in a manuscript but not in a printed book. It made the production of type more complicated as well as the typesetting. The easiest way to see this, is the effort a Polish writer using a computer has to make to put his thoughts on paper, compared with that of an American. The many accents of Polish could not even be represented on a computer screen until the graphical interface became common. Scribes also invented abbreviations, but unlike their inventors, abbreviations survived into the twenty-first century.

Ornamentation

Historiated initials were used to accentuate the beginnings of parts, chapters and paragraphs. In most – but not in all – books there was a clear hierarchy: the largest initial was placed at the beginning of the book, smaller ones were used for chapters. Far fewer of them were used than in manuscript books. Early

sixteenth-century printed books were sometimes ornamented by hand, and now and then one finds a mixture of both printed and painted initials. The numbers change depending on the place and time. In the eighteenth century they were almost everywhere replaced by small cast ornaments.

Conclusion

The exact details of the model will be completed in 2013 by students who are going to study the layout of early modern books, starting with incunabula and early sixteenth-century books. We shall use a simple database to gather data that can be used to create graphs and that takes the relationship between different parts of the book into account. Place, time, genre and the intended reader will receive attention. Fundamental to this approach is that the system must be simple and that the description of a book takes as little time as possible without impairing the quality or usefulness of the observations. The maximum should be about 30 minutes per item, the average 20 minutes. Thus it should be possible to cover in a few years a wide area over a long period. A second database in which type, ornaments and historiated initials are recorded, will supplement the first. In poetical terms one can think of the final part of Marcel Proust's great novel in which the road of Swann and the road of the Guermantes that had been separated in the first pages, are joined once again. There are worse ways to spend time.