

*H-France Review* Vol. 9 (July 2009), No. 98

Hendrik D. L. Vervliet, *The Palaeotypography of the French Renaissance: Selected Papers on Sixteenth-Century Typefaces*. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008. viii + 564 pp. in 2 vols. Figures, notes, bibliography and index. 195 €; \$299.00 U.S. ISBN 978-90-04-16982-1.

Review by Stephen Rawles, University of Glasgow.

The *Paleotypography of the French Renaissance* is not a catchy title, and these two volumes are not an easy read. They do not need to be. This compilation brings together all the significant work of Hendrik Vervliet on French types of the Renaissance period, defined roughly here as about 1480-1620. There is no other comparable corpus of material on the subject. Any work on French historical or enumerative bibliography, and book history, will forthwith inevitably turn to these volumes.

Here we have thirteen previously published works originally dating from between 1967 and 2007, with all but two dating from 1998 or later; items not originally published in English are here translated.[1] All are based on the close (usually unbelievably close) examination of a lot of books; as a result Vervliet is able to appraise all previous work from a position of empirical authority.

Space precludes listing the contents.[2] All the big names of French (particularly Parisian) Renaissance printing are there: the Estienne dynasty, Colines, Garamont, Janot, Haultin, Granjon and the others. In all 286 types are described, of which exactly half are Romans, with 67 Italics, 38 Greeks, 15 Musics, 14 Hebrews, 6 Arabics, and 1 each of Cyrillic, Gothic and Syriac. By any standards this is impressive; and yet Vervliet does not claim to be exhaustive, and, indeed, in reviewing the work, I have observed at least one other type (or a variant). Vervliet describes some types in more than one place, reflecting their status in a given category: e.g., “Colines’s First English-Bodied Roman” appears both in the context of ‘Early Sixteenth-Century Parisian Roman Types’ (no. 17, p. 36) and in “Simon de Colines, Punchcutter; 1518-1546” (no. 2, p. 71). In other words, the integrity of Vervliet’s original publications is maintained, at the cost of duplication.

It should be stated now that, by concentrating on the descriptive elements, this review does scant justice to the analytical parts of Vervliet’s work: suffice it to say that he provides the groundwork for the full-scale history of French sixteenth-century typography which we lack.

The mechanics of description are obviously important, so as to provide a set of objective points of comparison. It is unlikely that any further refinement of Vervliet’s observational principles will have to be evolved, although (as we will see) the current means of reference to a given type are a little cumbersome. The Introduction sets out the parameters. For each type, alongside a historical narrative, we are given as appropriate: 1) the name of the type; 2) its measurements (see below); 3) its first occurrences; 4) its early appearances; 5) references to the type-specimens which display it; 6) details of the connected artefacts (e.g. punches, matrices) which have been preserved; 7) key and variant letters; 8) contemporary attributions in archival records; 9) recent secondary literature; 10) a facsimile reproduction of the type.

The chief objective criterion of observation is obviously size and, despite reservations, Vervliet has elaborated a reliable set of measurements, comprising the traditional body size, a 20-line unleaded measurement, the “x” height, and the “height of an average capital”; all measurements are given in millimetres (p. 3). All this is nonetheless subject to variation: mould sizes or adjustments could vary, thereby affecting type size whatever the size of a matrix; again, unevenly damped and dried paper in a given copy can affect the 20-line measurement significantly. Vervliet consequently urges caution: “It ... makes little sense to distinguish an 80 mm face from a 78 or 82mm one by measurement alone” (p. 4).

All this necessary qualification being understood, references to types at the head of each description adopt a running number pertaining to the individual article in question, followed by a verbal description including twenty line measurement and an indication of the “letter family”, and using the English and French nomenclature for size, and the earliest recorded date.[3] Thus to return to “Colines’s First English-Bodied Roman” mentioned above, in the first reference to it on p. 36, the heading is as follows: “17. Colines’s First English-Bodied Roman [R 90] or *Saint-augustin* (1519).” In the second reference to this type on p. 71, all that changes is the running number. This is, as stated, rather cumbersome; it can be argued that Vervliet’s perhaps long-winded names for types are justified on the grounds of exactitude, but some abbreviation may become necessary if (more likely, when) his work is linked with the tidal wave of on-line digital material coming on-stream.

To return to “Colines’s First English-Bodied Roman”: we read that this is a close copy of another earlier Roman used by Henri I Estienne, and that Colines’s version also exists in two later states. Size is more fully noted as: “English (*Saint-augustin*); 20.90 x 2 : 3 mm.” Early appearances are listed, and the variant states require careful use of the notes on key and variant letters. In this case a page-facsimile illustrates the type in question. In other entries, alphabets of upper- and lower-case are assembled, sometimes by chopping individual letters from photographs of whole pages, sometimes from existing illustrations of sorts in secondary sources[4], sometimes from type cast from the original matrices, notably from the Plantin Museum in Antwerp.[5]

One might ask why palaeotypography matters. The answer (or one answer) is that, as we all learn when we are students, the advent of printing was comparable to our own information revolution. In the same way that we now expect websites to be appropriate to their purpose, or aesthetically pleasing, or a combination of the two, so the Renaissance reader had analogous expectations: what books looked like mattered. Printers concerned themselves with elegance and legibility. Typography inevitably developed from manuscript norms: there was nothing else to follow. There is no need to go into the various streams of development in various areas of Europe. There is, however, little argument that it was French typography which most influenced the eventual hegemony of Roman and italic, to the detriment of what can be labelled, for convenience, the “gothic” forms, even if these survived in German and English contexts. It should also be added that the people of the period itself were aware of the issues. The infamous “placards” of 1532 were printed in “bastard gothic”, presumably because their legibility to the greatest number of readers was maximised that way. Rabelais’s *Pantagruel* and *Gargantua* were also first printed in bastard gothic, probably in part as a way of disguising their content in a deliberately anachronistic way. At all events Rabelais knew what he was talking about: in the famous letter from Gargantua to his son Pantagruel, we read of:

“Les impressions tant élégantes et correctes en usance, qui ont été inventées de mon aage par inspiration divine....”[6]

If Gargantua’s words do not actually specify the Roman and italic typography which we characterise as “Renaissance”, it is however a fact that Rabelais’s more overtly “humanist” third and fourth books adopted the new typographical conventions, alongside their use of privileges and dedications to important people. Not that Vervliet’s work restricts itself to Roman and italic, since Greek, Hebrew, music, and other more exotic typography rightly receive attention. There is ample room for studies like

these. And they back up the underlying truth that Roman/italic typographical material exemplified the humanising—in the sense of returning to the ancients—agenda of Renaissance France. And when it's good, there is still little to beat the best sixteenth century French typography in terms of book design and execution.

By the 1970s, Vervliet as well as others whom he cites frequently, notably Harry Carter, and Jeanne Veyrin-Forrer, had already done important work.[7] What we now have is a point of reference for a vast range of humanist printing in Roman, italic and Greek, and to a lesser extent, Hebrew and Arabic types.[8] “Non-humanist” printing, and the “gothic” types of the period are a subject in themselves, but sixteenth-century French material is in itself an important area of study: “Both that country and that century are in many ways peculiar in the sense that the typography and commercial organisation of the type-founding trade changed markedly from an incunabular, integrated in-house operation in the beginning of the century into an industrial network of outsourcing and specialization at the century's end. Moreover, the type designs introduced gained global acceptance until the eighteenth century” (p. ix).

An interesting point is that Vervliet is prepared to make qualitative judgements between the types he analyses—for him this is a matter of important aesthetic concern: “Most of these Romans are unremarkable, except for those by Colines” (p. 11); “... on the aesthetic side the autochthonous Parisian Romans look unbalanced and lacking evenness and symmetry. Many of them are unattractive, and their readability is weak” (p. 15); “A crude Roman...” (p. 52); “A small-sized and rather second-rate Roman...” (p. 55); “The 1542 Estienne Pica Italic ... is a very close, though in my opinion somewhat inferior, copy of this Colines face” (p. 304). Vervliet is a scholar who engages in a personal way with his material: one senses that he likes what he studies.

Enough of generalities. The value of this kind of work lies not only in the synthetic view it offers, but also in its use as a practical observational tool. I have used the volumes to identify types in two sixteenth-century books from Glasgow University Library.

Gilles Corrozet, *Hecatographie, c'est à dire les descriptions de cent figures & hystoires, contenant plusieurs appophthegmes, proverbes, sentences & dictz tant des anciens, que des modernes. Le tout reveu par son autheur* (Paris: Denis Janot, 1543 [=1544] (Glasgow University Library: SM 370).[9]

a) Much of the text of this work is in Roman, 86mm for 20 lines. Vervliet's point about not relying only on size is amply borne out here, since there is no Roman of this size mentioned in his index (pp. 475-482). He does, however discuss a Pica / Cicéro Roman of 81mm for 20 lines, used by Denis Janot (“32. The ‘Janot’ Pica Roman [R 81] or *Cicéro* (1534)”) (p. 202), and the type used in 1543/4 is the same, resized and recast, but with, for example, the same backwards leaning standard ampersand, and with some variants and new sorts, notably for mute “e”, “é”, and two magnificent swash ampersands. Vervliet's entry mentions the new ampersands of 1543 at the end of his “Key Letters” section.

b) The four-line verses on the verso of the text proper are in italic, 13 mm for 3 lines, which equates with 86 or 87 mm for 20 lines, although the margin for error in the calculation of a 20 line measurement does not admit accuracy. Again I cannot find an exact match: close matches seem to be “Colines's Pica Italic [It 81] or *Cicéro* (1534)” (p. 304), or what Vervliet (see above) called the inferior copy: “The Second ‘Estienne’ Pica Italic [It 81] or *Cicéro* (1542)” (p. 309). If anything date would indicate the later, 1542, type, although Janot uses sorts not found in Vervliet's sample, notably a mute “e”, and a pointed “v”; Janot's ampersand is more like Estienne's than Colines's; the upper bowl of the “g” is similar to neither Colines's nor Estienne's. Every attempt to make this identification indicates the minefield through which Vervliet navigates.

c) The italic used on the title is easily identified as “Granjon’s First English-Sized Italic [It 98] or *Saint-augustin* (1543)” (p. 325). This therefore constitutes an early use of this type.

A more intractable problem ensues from examination of the types in another book: *Biblia Sacra iuxta Vulgatam quam dicunt aeditionem, a mendis ... repurgata, atque ad priscorum probatissimorum que exemplarium normam, adhibita interdum fontium autoritate, restituta. Adjecta est in fine ... peregrinarum vocum cum illarum varia a nostra notatione interpretatio ...* (Paris: Simon de Colines for Galiot Du Pré, 1541). (Glasgow University Library: Ds-a.10), from which I consider four types, the first three of which are familiar in the productions of Simon de Colines.

a) The large Roman used in the title is “The Finé Two-Line Double Pica Roman [R 280] or *Gros-canon* (1536)” (no. 20, p. 88; further discussed on p. 153). As the bibliographer of Denis Janot, who also used this type, I am always pleased to see a very fine face in use elsewhere—although Vervliet thinks it “less elegant and less accomplished than Estienne’s version” (of 1531; p. 156).

b) The italic used at the beginnings of chapters is almost certainly “Colines’s Great Primer Chancery Italic [It 118] or *Gros-romain* (1532)” (no. 24, p. 92).

c) The italic used in the index measures 95 mm for 20 lines; it may be identified as “Colines’s Chancery Italic on English [It 91] or *Saint-augustin* (1528)” (no. 10, p. 299). The type here is cast on a slightly larger body, but the identification is certain.

d) The identification of the Roman used in the text is difficult. It measures 95 mm for 20 lines. It does not appear to be listed by Vervliet. Of nine candidates of the *Saint-augustin* size, three of which are attributable to Colines, none matches the type used here. The closest match is probably “The ‘Loys’ English-Bodied Roman” [R 90] or *Saint-augustin* (1535) (no. 26, p. 197), but the “G” in particular is not comparable. As Vervliet freely observes several times elsewhere, perhaps more research is required here.

To conclude: this review cannot begin to do justice to what is, by any standards, a monument to scholarship, and to its author—not that this monument can yet be permanent, since his enquiries continue. Idiosyncrasies due to the maintenance of the format of the original articles, minor typos, a few infelicities of English, and minor formatting errors pale into insignificance alongside the sheer weight of information provided. Obviously not everything is here, as practical use of the work has shown, and as Vervliet foresaw, but there is now a convenient yardstick against which to measure typographical studies of the French Renaissance. As already hinted, the challenge is now to adapt and adopt all this information in the on-line resources now being channelled in vast amounts into Renaissance scholarship, at the same time as retaining a healthy respect for the hard copy material which we still all need.

## NOTES

[1] A few infelicities of English occur, but nowhere obscure the sense.

[2] The full list is available on the publisher’s website: [http://www.brill.nl/product\\_id29262](http://www.brill.nl/product_id29262)

[3] The Introduction gives exhaustive tables of all the English and French conventions of nomenclature, alongside modern size measurements: metric, anglo-saxon points and Didot points, as well as keys to abbreviations.

[4] E.g., of the ‘grecs du roy’, from A. Bernard, *Les Estienne et les types grecs de François Ier*, Paris, 1856.

[5] We must gratefully assume a degree of benign influence at the Museum on Vervliet's part that such illustrations are still possible. One example is 'Granjon's Paragon Greek' of 1565 (pp. 416-417). Apart from the ordinary and accented characters, which with variants comprise 117 individual sorts, we also have 119 of the ligatures which now constitute such a minefield in the reading and transcription of Greek from renaissance books.

[6] Rabelais, *Pantagruel*, chapter eight.

[7] See, e.g., Harry Carter, *A View of Early Typography up to about 1600* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969); Jeanne Veyrin-Forrer, 'Antoine Augereau, graveur de lettres et imprimeur parisien', *Paris et Île-de-France: mémoires publiés par la Fédération historique et archéologique de Paris*, 8 (1956):103-56.

[8] Vervliet is still working: only in December 2008 did I send him copies of a Lyonnais book from Glasgow University Library which he had not seen with some Hebrew to identify.

[9] Facsimile edition: Gilles Corrozet, *L'Hecatographie (1544) & Les Emblemes du Tableau de Cebes (1543)*; reproduits en facsimilé avec une étude critique par Alison Adams (Geneva: Droz, 1997).

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ISSN 1553-9172