

## **A retrospective of typefaces, borders, and ornaments from the foundry of the legendary Giambattista Bodoni**

Giambattista Bodoni, *Manuale Tipografico*. Parma: Presso la Vedova, 1818. 13 1/8 inches x 9 inches (333 x 229 mm), 2 volumes: 1,129 pages.

The *Manuale Tipografico* of Giambattista Bodoni (1740–1812) is the greatest monument ever constructed to the art of printing from metal types. Issued posthumously in 1818 by Bodoni's devoted widow Margherita, the two-volume work shows a dazzling array of 142 roman alphabets, each accompanied by a corresponding italic. In addition there are many script and exotic faces, as well as an outstanding collection of flowers and ornaments, all beautifully printed on crisp, handmade paper. These types and decorative ornaments were the culmination of forty years of assiduous devotion by Bodoni to the typographic arts, both in his capacity as printer to the Duke of Parma and as proprietor of his own private press and type foundry. Only 250 copies of Bodoni's specimen book were printed, and surviving examples are now highly prized by collectors and connoisseurs.

The true value of the *Manuale* lies not in the fact that it is a splendidly printed rare book, or even that it summarizes the lifework of a celebrated type designer and printer who blithely sailed through some of the most tumultuous times in European history. Rather, its real significance is that from its pages speak the first successful modern types, more refined and logical than those of Baskerville, yet not so clinical as those of Bodoni's great French rival Firmin Didot. Bodoni's types, although of pure vertical stress, emanate warmth and humanity; they are still widely used to evoke elegance and strength.

After nearly 200 years Bodoni's aesthetic sense serves as a guide to all typographers. In the *Manuale*, Bodoni enumerates the four qualities from which a good typeface derives its beauty: 1. Regularity, where the common elements among the letters of an alphabet are rendered in precisely the same way; 2. Smartness and neatness, in other words, well-cut and finished matrices, which ultimately produce sharp and mirror-smooth type; 3. Good taste, an elegant simplicity, and an awareness of one's debt to the best

manuscript letters; 4. Charm, difficult to define, but present in letters that give the impression of being written painstakingly as a labor of love.

This copy of Bodoni's *Manuale Tipografico* (1818) forms part of the remarkable collection of books printed by Bodoni that is housed in Bridwell Library at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas. The greater part of the collection was assembled by the Rocca-Saporiti family of Reggio, a mere 15 miles from Bodoni's Parma in northern Italy. The two volumes of *Manuale Tipografico* are bound with quarter green leather and marbled paper-covered pasteboards. The boards are covered with green and blue shell-patterned marbled paper. The spine is smooth, gold-tooled, and divided into six panels. Gilt titling in the second panel. The volumes are housed in quarter calf with brown and orange German marbled paper-covered slipcases. The leather spine is divided by raised bands decorated with a gold-tooled saltire pattern. The bottom panel has the gilt arms of the Rocca-Saporiti family. Gold titling in second panel; other blind-stamped.

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