

An Overview of the Usage of Italic Style in Early Printed Books of the Sixteenth-Century

On Altıncı Yüzyıl Erken Dönem Basılı Kitaplarda İtalik Yazı Biçeminin Kullanımı Üzerine Genel Bir Bakış

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Özet

Günümüzde italik yazı biçemi genellikle metin elemanlarını ayırtırmak ve Roma yazı biçemiyle oluşturulmuş bir metnin içerisindeki kelimeleri farklılaştırarak, onları vurgulamak için kullanılır. Bunun dışında, akademi ve edebiyatta da italik biçeminin kullanımına ilişkin birçok farklı kural mevcuttur. Bununla birlikte, erken dönemde basılan kitaplardaki italik biçeminin kullanımı ve hatta tasarlanma amacı, bugünkünden farklıydı. Bu makale, on altıncı yüzyıl erken dönem kitaplarında kullanılan farklı italik kullanımlarını kısaca ortaya koymayı amaçlamakta ve zaman içerisinde italik biçeminin roma biçemine nasıl yardımcı unsur haline geldiği sorusunu cevaplamak için italik kullanımın izini sürmektedir. Bunu gerçekleştirmek için ise, baskı harfleri ve italik üzerine bilinen çalışmalar gözden geçirilmiş olup, bu çalışmada kullanılmak üzere örnek seçiminde bunlardan faydalanılmıştır. Ek olarak, orijinal materyallerin görseline ulaşmak için bazı online veritabanları ve web sayfaları taranmıştır. Makale iki ana bölümden oluşmaktadır. İlk bölümde italik biçeminin yaratılmasına zemin hazırlayan dönemin şartlarını anlamak için İtalya ve Fransa'da bunun ilk ortaya çıkışıyla ilgili kısa bir tarihsel bilgi verilmiştir. Roma yazı biçemine yardımcı olarak kompleks tipografi uygulamalarındaki ilk ve sonraki dönemlerde geliştirilmiş kullanımlar ise son bölümde ortaya koyulmuştur. İnceleme sonucunda, sadece yarım yüzyıl içerisinde, italik yazı biçeminin metin ve sayfa elemanlarını farklılaştırmada roma yazı biçemi için etkin bir yardımcı haline geldiği ve başlıklar, şiiirler, resim altı yazısı ve kenar notu gibi bölümlerde kullanılarak çok yönlü zengin metinler dizmeyi mümkün kıldığı gözlemlenmiştir. Buna ek olarak, küçük-büyük harfleri, ince ve kalın yazıları içeren yeni harf formlarının ve biçemlerinin yaratılmasının da yolunu açmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Tipografi, İtalik Harf, Erken Dönem Kitaplar, Aldus Manutius, Francesco Griffo.

Abstract

The aim of the usage of italic style in the current era is mainly for differentiating the text elements, putting emphasis on words or making contrast in a Roman text. In addition, there are various certain rules of using italics in literature and the academic world. However, the usage and even the design motive of italic style in early printed books had a very different purpose than today's approach. This article aims to reveal the different usages of italic style in early printed books of the sixteenth-century briefly, and traces the journey of italic usage to answer how it became an auxiliary to roman in time. To achieve this, well-known studies on printing types and italics were reviewed and utilised to choose exemplars for this study. In addition to this, some of the online databases and websites were scanned to access the image of original materials. This article is consist of two main parts; in the first part, a brief historical background about the italic type and its appearances in Italy and France are mentioned to understand the circumstances of the era that paved the way for its creation and use. In the last part, the initial and enhanced usages in complex typography as auxiliary to roman text are revealed. As a result of the review, it is observed that italic style became an efficient auxiliary to roman style in a half century, after its creation and was used for differentiating text and page elements to set more sophisticated texts, as being devised in headings, poems, picture captions, sidenotes etc. Furthermore, the invention of it also inspired many typographers to create new type forms and styles, including small capitals, light and bold.

Key Words: Typography, Italic Type, Early Books, Aldus Manutius, Francesco Griffo.

1. Introduction

In the early years of printing, book sizes were considerably large and the books were generally in folio size, whereas octavo sized manuscript books still existed. It was hard to read folio sized printed books without a bookstand or carry them from one place to another. Not only physical conditions but also economical reasons reduced the demand for this kind of books, as usually wealthy people could afford to buy them:

The cost of materials and unwieldiness of the great folio volumes soon caused a demand for smaller books. Gutenberg's 36-line Bible was almost immediately replaced by the 42-line Bible. A reduction of one sixth in the number of pages of a book as large as the Bible would affect a very important saving in the cost of material and labor, especially when we remember that the early printing press was a very laborious and slow affair (Hamilton, 1918, p.2).

The huge dimensioned books were sufficient for libraries or a divine atmosphere like a church had. But in this case, librarians, scholars/academics, aristocrats and priests were the only people who kept the intellectual and cultural knowledge to themselves. However, the initial aim of printing was to spread the knowledge within the society and make getting information easier for every individual. The only way to realize this goal was by reducing the size of books, making them portable and affordable. At this stage, printers of the time had to face a serious contradiction about whether they should sacrifice the legibility of their texts while reducing the size of books or find another solution without making a sacrifice. The printers' seeking solutions ended up with the discovery of a smaller, clearer and simpler type. Frederick Hamilton reveals the reason why such a type was a lifesaver for a printer who wanted to print a small sized book:

The first types were cut in imitation of the Gothic or black letter handwriting employed at that period in copying Bibles, missals, and the like. It was large and angular and the lines were very coarse and black. [...] Its characteristics made it easy to read even in the dim light of a church or by the failing eyes of the aged. This form of type, however, was only suitable for large pages. When reduced in size it became very difficult to read, being an almost indistinguishable blur on the page (Hamilton, 1918, p.1).

Besides the problems of legibility of gothic and black letter type in smaller books, Roman type met partially the requirement of legibility in small size books for many years. But according to a printer, Aldus Manutius, it was still not economical enough to print small books with Roman type, As a result, italic style brought its brand-new solution as an alternative for text styles and its contribution for differentiation of the text.

2. Research Universe and Limitations

This paper does not aim to examine italic types or their origins, but to answer the question of how italic style became an auxiliary to roman text by revealing the different uses of italic style in the sixteen-century books. Especially this century is being put under the examination, because of the invention of italic in 1501 and its rapid evolution on the use

of books towards the end of the century. As one century is too long to examine in an article, it is necessary to observe how its usage evolved in time and became an important secondary style. To highlight its changing function in text in the course of time, the exemplars were picked from different times of the century, publisher/printer and countries that would represent the different usages mentioned in this study.

The books that are selected as examples are the pioneers in many ways. For instance, *Virgil* published by Aldus Manutius and Arrighi's *La Operina* are the books that introduced two different kinds of italic type that are first of their kinds. Filippo Giunta is one of the first printers in Italy that prints books with italic and roman types as harmonised in the heading, introduction and main text of Boccaccio's *Decamerone*. Cicero's *Officia* printed by Simon de Colines is a good example of how French printers advanced in using italic style in different components in a book, such as title pages. Jean Cousin the Elder's *Livre de Perspective* is a good example of italic capitals with elegant swashes that are used along with exquisite French italics. Euclid's book *Elementorum Liber Demicus* is important because of its diverse use of italic style, such as in explanatory notes and diagrams. Vesalius' famous anatomy book *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* is a pioneer on many aspects, but it is also a unique example for using italic style widely in illustrations, schemes and side notes. Dante's *Commedia* is chosen to show the use of italic style in poems for its popularity as a poetry book. To show an example for italic style use in the separation of a bilingual text, Marcus Tullius Cicero's *Three Bookes of Dueties*, printed in London, is selected to show how italic style was mainly used for the differentiation of the text, as in Continental Europe. In addition to their active use of italic style in text setting, Robert Estiennes' *Dictionnaire Francoislatin* and Christopher Plantin's *Emblemata* and *Nomenclator* are fine and well-known printed books that are appreciated for the complexity and quality of their typography and the skills of their printers.

To choose these examples, their mentions and appearances in some of the well-known studies on printing types and italics, such as: Harry Carter's *A View of Early Typography* (2002), Daniel Berkeley Updike's *Printing Types: Their History, Forms, and Use* (1962), Hendrik D. L. Vervliet's *The Palaeotypography of the French Renaissance Selected Papers on Sixteenth-Century Typefaces* (2010) and Mathieu Lommen's *The Book of Books: 500 Years of Graphic Innovation* (2012) were also considered. Some of the online databases, such as *archive.org* and *gallica.bnf.fr* were used to access the high-resolution image of the book pages. In some cases, only the detail of examples are used and found sufficient enough to show an exact usage. The examples are mainly from Continental Europe, as it is the land of where italic style was born (Italy) and was advanced (France).

3. Method

This research is a historical review on the development of italics and its different usages that are advanced during the 16th century mainly in Italy and France; and it's based on a comparative theoretical discussion focusing on this historical literature. Detailed information and examples have been gathered for the discussion of the topic in terms of book production and typography.

4. The Invention of Italic Style

The very first italic was designed in consequence of a need of these small-sized (pocket) printed books, which is called *octavo*. Aldus Manutius was the printer who initiated the invention of italics. As Steinberg states, he was utterly fortunate by choosing Francesco Griffo of Bologna as his type designer, because Griffo designed and cut a novel font that other typographers in that era had not thought of (Steinberg, 1996, p.14). It was based on the *cancelleresca humanistica* of the papal chancery, which humanists had taken over for their informal writing. It was an effective match to the formal roman type. Griffo's italic was chosen by Aldus for his octavo series, not only with the consideration of its beauty, but also the commercial purposes in that it was condensed and narrow and consequently made the most economic use of type area (Steinberg, 1996, p.14). Harry Carter describes the effectiveness of the italics as:

The success of the type is very likely attributable in part to the success of the publishing of which it was a feature. The house of Aldus published the first series of books uniform as to format, the classics that people ought to read, and reasonably priced; and it kept the texts in print (Carter, 2002, p.74).

To understand the circumstances of the birth of italics and the Aldus' motive behind it, we should regard Updike's thought about it. He thinks that it is not possible to understand the work of Aldus and his creation through smaller books in italic type without knowing the intellectual condition of Europe at that time. Also Pollard propounds a historical fact that we should consider: "In 1500, men were thinking of new things" (Updike, 1962, p.125). Aldus was an Italian scholar who embraced humanism and later became a publisher and also printer. Therefore, he combined his wish to make knowledge accessible for widespread use with his intention to publish more economical books at a rapid pace. His claim was that italic type necessitates less space than roman type, which eventually allows printers to print more text and eventually smaller and economical books.

Aldus' innovation also affected the number of printed books in that period. Before Aldus, books were normally printed in runs of 100 to 250 books, whereas his press issued runs of 1,000 books (Howard, 2005, p.81). In this case, it is possible to say that he revolutionized printing after Gutenberg with its italic type and octavo books and led to start a new period in the history of printing. As Colin Clair defines this milestone:

It was a great departure from tradition, for up to that time the classics had generally been issued in large folio editions, well suited to a rich man's library and purse, but beyond the means of the growing numbers of students at the universities who badly needed carefully edited editions of the classics in both durable and portable form at a reasonable price (Clair, 1976, p.146).

The first italic cut by Griffo appeared as five-word in a woodcut illustration in 1500. However, its first appearance was in Aldus' first octavo series, *Virgil*, in 1501 (figure 1). In *Virgil*, Aldus used italic as a type of main text for the entire book. After this phase, italic became an alternative type for roman. Nevertheless he did not specially design italic uppercase letter; in place of this, he continued to use roman capitals. Additionally, roman capitals remained as a heading and running head type right along with italic text. *The*

*Aldine capitals*¹ were small; they were possibly the precursor of the small capitals that is used today. Updike reveals the contemporary consequence of the usage of italic, probably with the most efficient perspective. He thinks that “placing italic fonts on bodies corresponding to roman fonts was the outcome of its later use in connection with roman for purposes of differentiation, emphasis, and for ‘liminary and preliminary’ matter” and he also added, “with the Aldine Italic, originality of idea in type-forms ceases” (Updike, 1962, p.129). Harry Carter also agrees with him: “The italic became a symbol of learned humanism, and in Italy, and to a less extent in Western Europe as a whole, it made great inroads on the Roman.” (Carter, 2002, p.75).

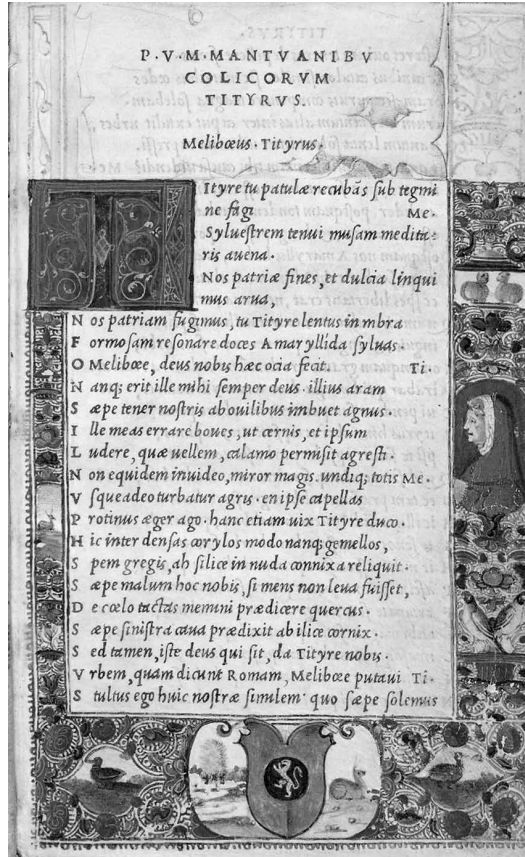


Figure 1. First italic use in 'Virgil' (Aldus Manutius, Venice, 1501).

In the dedication page of Virgil, Aldus praises his type and type-cutter by saying: “scalpta daedaleis Francisci manibus Bononiensis”, means that cut by skilled hands of Francis of Bologna. Furthermore, he claims that he caused to be cut a cursive cancellaresca type of an entirely new design of beauty (Nolhac, 1888, n.p). But, there is no explicit evidence about the influence of italics. Moreover, as a consequence of an ongoing academical debate between historians, there are three different names attributed for it. One of the asserted names is Italian poet Petrarch. As Updike states, he intended to copy the handwriting of Petrarch (Updike, 1962, p.128), but, the other possible candidates are

¹ The upright capitals that Aldus Manutius created and used besides the italic text. His productions are named as *Aldine*; so it is possible to see many uses, such as *Aldine model*, *Aldine italic* etc.

Bartolomeo San Vito of Padua and Niccolò de' Niccoli. We do not know the exact root of italic, but we do know how it affected and influenced printers for many years. Aldus and his press pioneered the usage of italics in books and started a tradition by publishing numerous books by using italic as a text type and maintained the tradition in the subsequent years.

4.1. Another Approach in Italy

The Aldine italic became the model for the italic types that are designed in the following years, as Updike mentioned in his book. “In its own day it had a great success, and, like most typographic successes today, was widely and inaccurately imitated.” (Updike, 1962, p.129). But even so, apart from Aldus, there was another printer who drew a different path about designing a new italic type. This printer is known as Roman Ludovico degli Arrighi, whose italic type based on the Renaissance Italian handwritten script known as *cancellaresca corsiva*. Morison describes his type as greater distinction and formality than the Aldine model (Morison, 1949, p.27). However, there is little information about him; but the attempts of his contemporaries to imitate his italics, made him remarkably known. It is also widely known that he was a calligrapher before becoming a printer. As Steinberg stated, Trissino recommended Arrighi to Pope Clement VII as a man ‘who as in calligraphy he has surpassed all other man of our age, so, having recently invented this most beautiful method of doing in print almost all that he formerly did with pen, has in beautiful types gone beyond every other printer (Steinberg, 1996, p.31).

He used his first chancery italic cut on woodblocks when he published *La Operina* in 1522. He maintained the tradition of using italic type as a type of main text in this book, yet differently from Aldus. He designed upright capitals, sometimes including decorative swashes (figure 2). It is possible to say that his type seems more tidy and narrower than the Aldine italic, and it makes people to think that it is more effective and economical than the Italic of Aldus. But according to Henry Carter, the ease and economical use of his italic is argumentative:

It reproduces the most carefully formed of Latin cursive hands –perhaps a slightly affected hand, tiresome to the reader because of the exaggerated length of ascending and descending strokes (Carter, 2002, p.119).

But still, according to Clair, it cannot be denied that Arrighi’s italic were vastly superior to Manutius’ both in design and practicality (Clair, 1976, p.146). After Aldus and Arrighi, Italian printers continued to use italic as a text type until the late sixteenth century. They also published books harmonized with both roman and italic types in the course of time (figure 3). Not only in Italy, Italian masters had an enormous influence on French printers. Especially, Arrighi’s italic types initiated to mainstream typographic developments. French masters such as Robert Granjon, Peter Schoeffer II, and others blended the two styles of italic for many years (Lommen, 2012, p.102). It is possible to say that italic is invented in Italy and brought a remarkable innovation to the text, but French printers took this heritage and made a huge improvement in its usage in books. The achievement of French printers remained as a standard form of italic type for nearly two centuries.

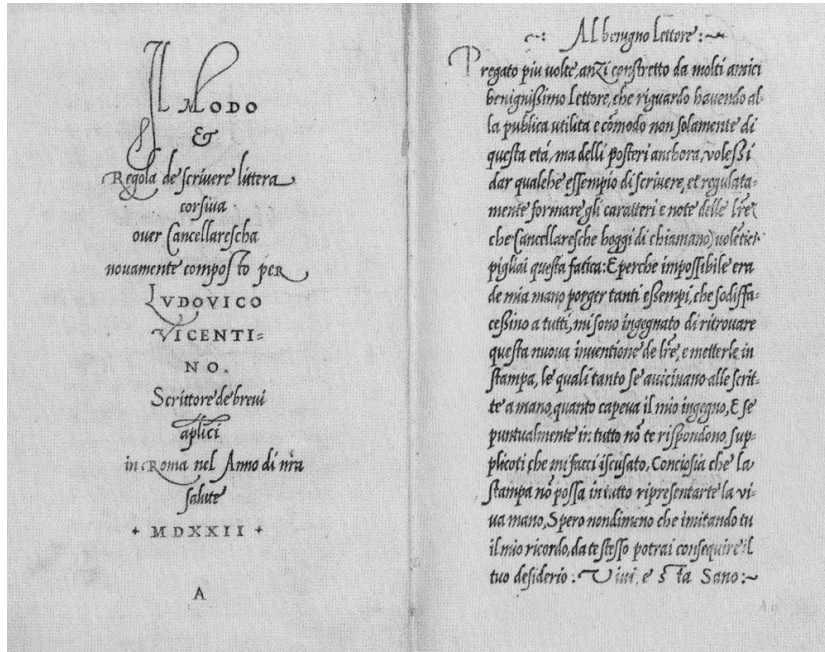


Figure 2. Arrighi's italic in 'La Operina' (Ludovico Degli Arrighi, Rome, 1522).

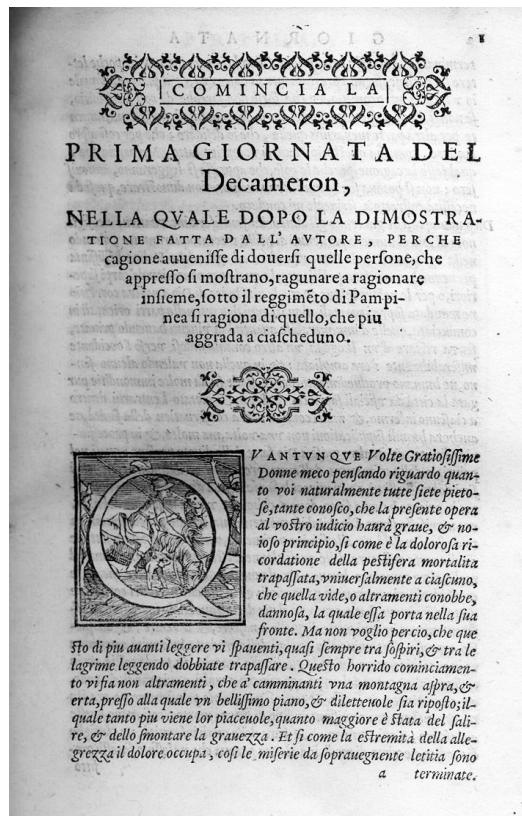


Figure 3. Harmonised use of italic in 'Decamerone' (Filippo Guinta, Florence, 1573).

4.2. French Italic

Henry Carter mentions about the first appearance of italic in France, as rare and sporadic, until Simon de Colines sponsored it in 1528. (Carter, 2002, p.117). Simon de Colines was one of the first printers who used italic. In his publishing career, he took both Aldus and Arrighi as a model and cut his punches by harmonizing these two different styles. Hendrik Vervliet praises him about his mastership: "Simon de Colines cut punches for most of his fonts that were equal (and perhaps superior) in quality to the best Italian typefaces." (Vervliet, 2010, p.15). He used italic both as a type of main text and in the different components of his books such as title page (figure 4).



Figure 4. The use of italic on the title page of 'Officia' (Simon de Colines, Paris, 1543).

One of the improvements about italic in France was the invention of italic capitals (figure 5). It is commonly agreed that first slanting italic capital is introduced in Lyon in 1537 and it is attributed to Peter Schoeffer II (Lommen, 2012, p.102). It is accepted and spreaded to Europe in a short time. However, Daniel Updike is not agree with the idea of italic capitals' success:

To the Lyons printers we owe the slanting italic capital letters now adopted for all italic fonts. Artistically this was not wholly an improvement, as roman capital letters gave a page of italic lower-case type an agreeable perpendicular movement which italic capitals do not supply. So what was generally considered a fault in the Aldine italic was, typographically, one of the best things about it (Updike, 1962, p.130).

Another French type cutter Robert Granjon, one of the prolific punch cutters in the history of printing, cut about thirty italics in different styles with the combination of Aldine and

Arrighi italics. His italic versions remained as a standard nearly for centuries and became widespread among European printers. Granjon's success inevitably made a major contribution to the usage of italics in printing and initiated the creation of italic variants in text.

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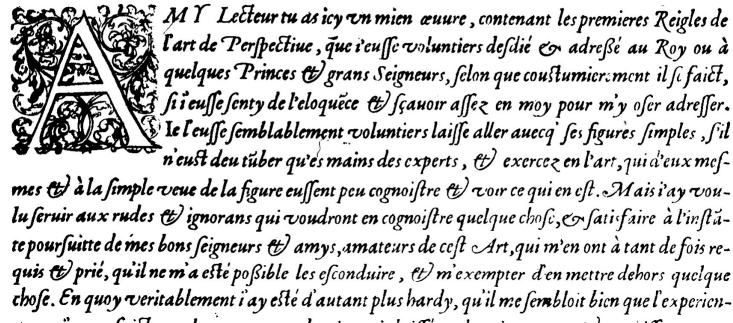


Figure 5. (Detail) An example of italic capitals in Jean Cousin the Elder's 'Livre de Perspective' (Jean Le Royer, Paris, 1560).

5. Enhanced Usages of Italic

Besides the different uses in main text, title page and title, italic also became a demand as an auxiliary to Roman for other text elements in books. It was commonly used in explanatory notes of diagrams (figure 6), illustrations, schemes and additionally references and side notes (figure 7) in academic and scientific books. Italic was also appeared in early printed poetry books as the type of poems (figure 8). Furthermore, it was possible to see italic style in the differentiation of bilingual text to separate languages on a page (figure 9).

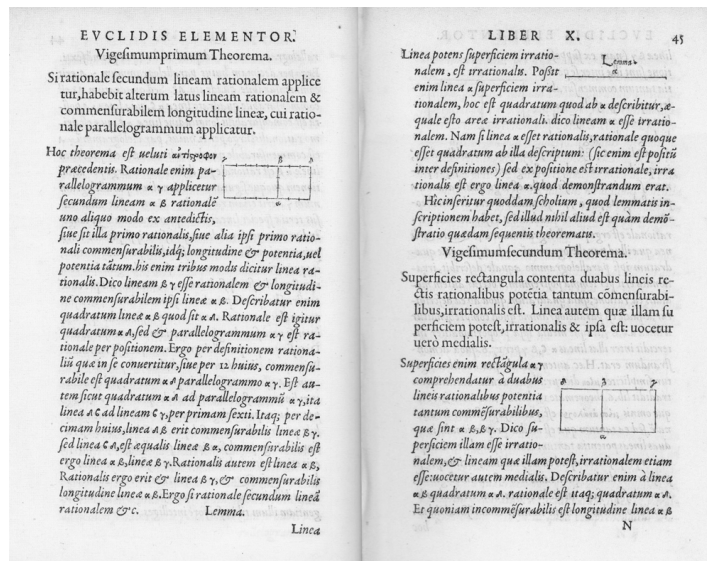


Figure 6. Italic style for the explanatory notes of diagrams in Euclid's 'Elementorum Liber Demicus' (Michael de Vascosan, Paris, 1551).

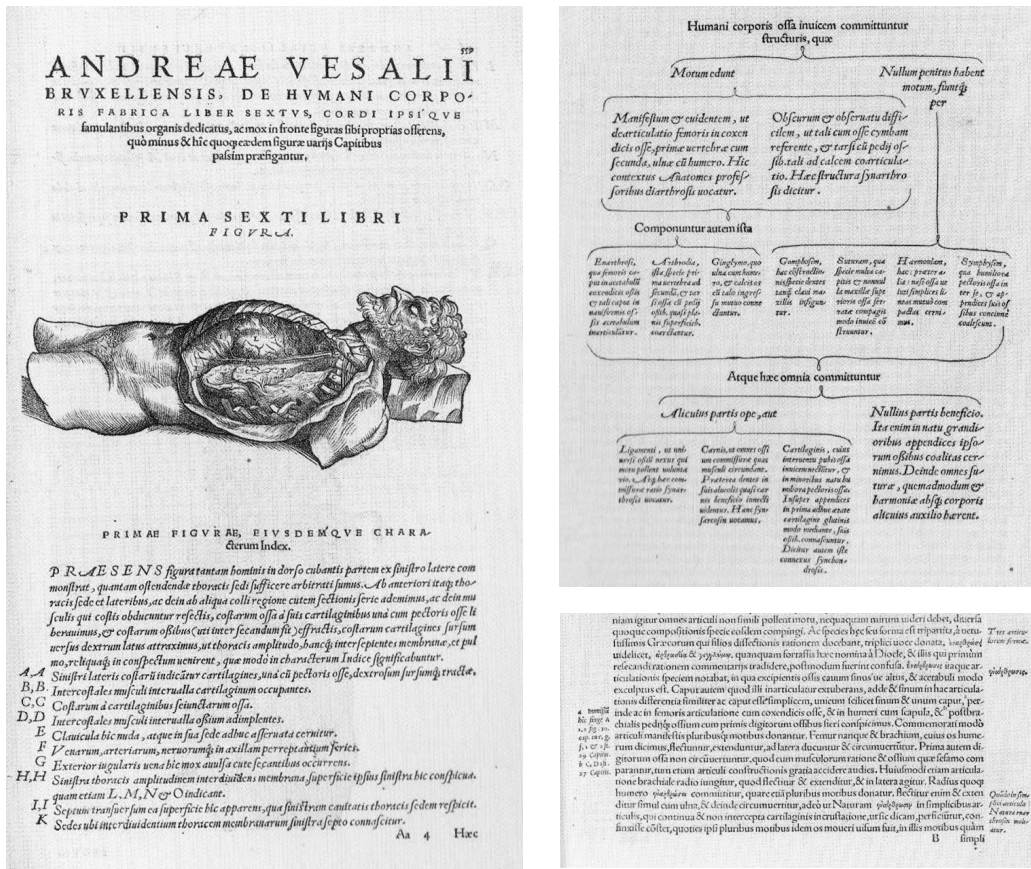


Figure 7. (Details) The use of italic style in illustrations, schemes and side notes in Andreas Vesalius's 'De Humani Corporis Fabrica' (Johannes Oporinus, Basel, 1543).

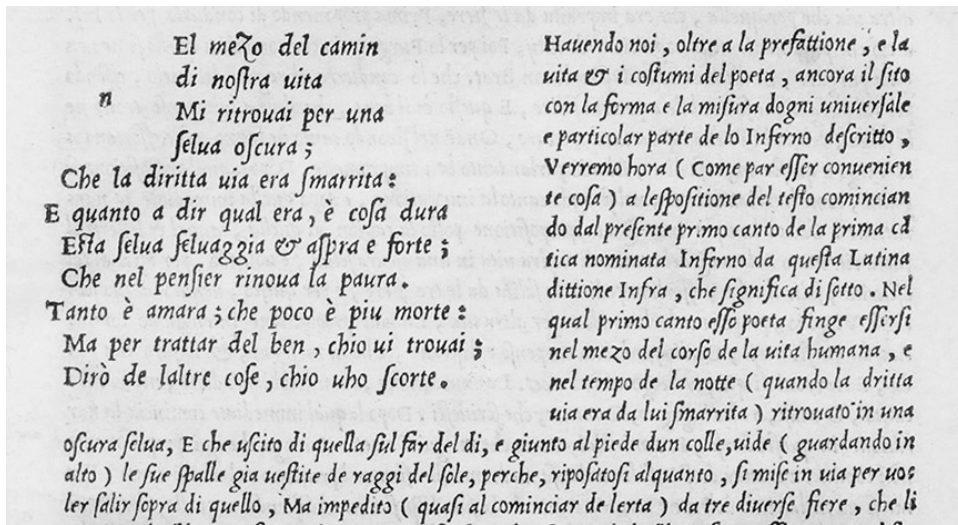


Figure 8. (Detail) A poem in italic style in Dante's 'Commedia' (Francesco Marcolini Da Forli, Venice, 1544).

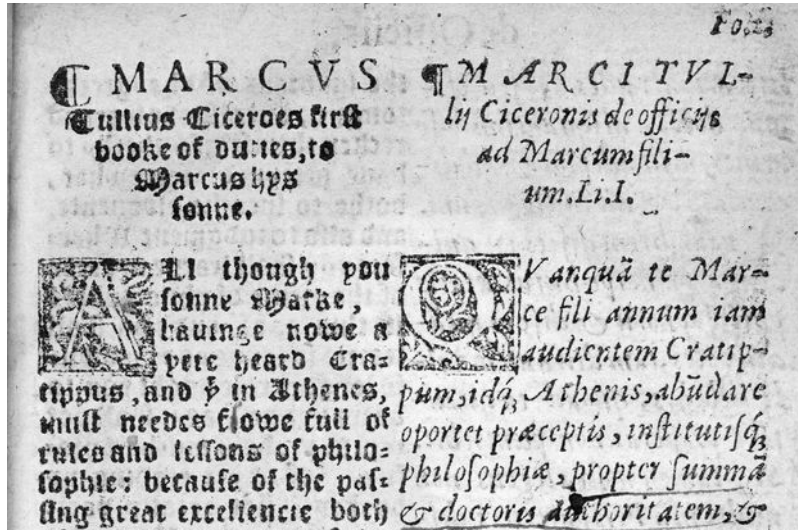


Figure 9. (Detail) Italic use for bilingual text in Marcus Tullius Cicero's 'Three Bookes of Duties' (Richard Tottel, London, 1558).

Another use of italic appeared in emblem books. Despite its popularity in the sixteen century, today a few people know about this kind of book. Emblem books are collections of images with accompanying text which consists of an idea and explanation related to the picture with an implicit mean. Plantin was one of the publishers of emblem books in various languages. As we see in his emblem book, epigrams were generally set in italic (figure 10).

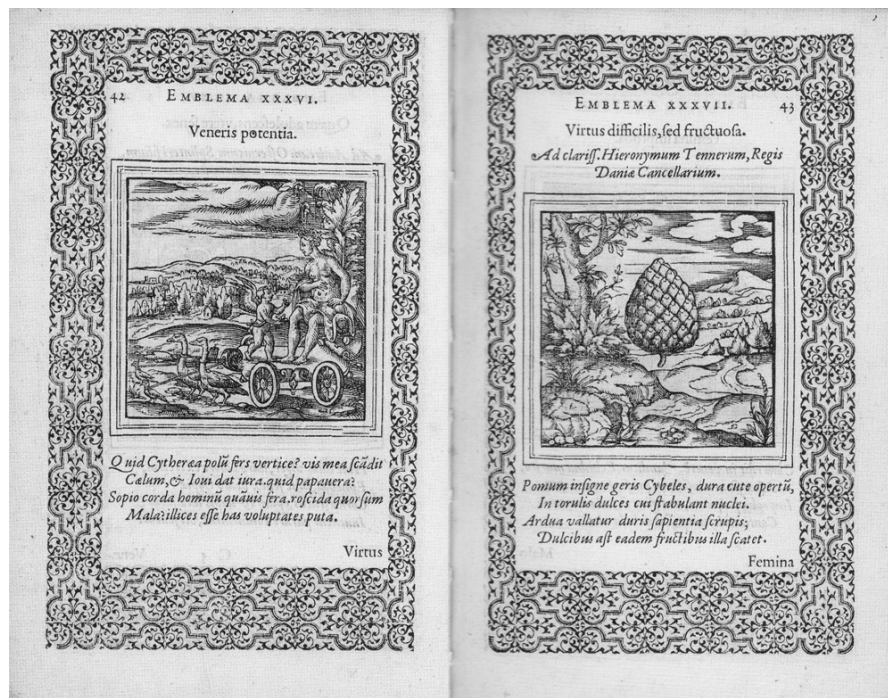


Figure 10. Epigrams in italic in Hadrianus' 'Emblemata' (Christopher Plantin, Antwerp, 1565).

5.1. Italic and Complex Typography

After various uses of italic style in books, some printers and typographers discovered the distinctness and auxiliary of it in text setting. This discovery helped them to achieve handling with complex text and increase readability. Besides,—there was a need of comprehensive dictionary-thesaurus at that time and it coincided with the time of awakening about differentiating text elements. In the surge of humanism, numerous dictionaries appeared in the sixteenth century. There are two notable names that we should highlight because of their efficient usage of italics in complex text. One of them is Robert Estienne, the French printer and scholar.

Robert Estienne began to publish a series of dictionaries in 1531, including the *Dictionarium Latinogallicum* and the *Dictionnaire Francoislain*. His dictionaries became a model for Latin, Flemish, German and English dictionaries in sixteenth century and especially, the *Dictionnaire Francoislain* was important to be the first dictionary with French headwords, followed by their Latin and equivalent French definitions (figure 11). Steinberg defines him ‘as the father of French lexicography’ (Steinberg, 1996, p.41). Twyman also points out that he was the man who popularized the italic style for particular functions (Twyman, 1982, p.12-13).



Figure 11. French words in italic in ‘Dictionnaire Francoislain’ (Robert Estienne, Paris, 1538).

In his dictionary *Dictionnaire Francoislain*, he used italic type to differentiate French and Latin words and separate quotations from the main text. The other significant printer who

used italic in a complex text was Christopher Plantin. He was not a scholar like Estienne, but he made significant contributions to the literature and academic world with his publications. It is known that most of his publications established and organized the relation between roman and italic by combining roman type of Garamont and italic type of Granjon.

He published a nomenclature, a kind of dictionary/glossary, of Hadrianus in 1583. It included numerous languages like Latin, French, Greek, German and Spanish. He also used italic for the purpose of differentiation like his contemporary, Estienne. He set his italic for the explanations of the words in Latin and the annotations for each chapter. Apart from this, he used an italic version of a Greek type for the Greek, gothic type for the German and roman type for the French and Spanish words (figure 12). He probably published the most sophisticated text in his era by using various metal types.



Figure 12. Italic use in 'Nomenclator of Hadrianus Junius', (Christopher Plantin, Antwerp, 1583).

6. Conclusion

The need of a smaller, portable book caused to the invention of a brand new, *italic*, in 1501 by Aldus Manutius; and it was recognized as a main text type for nearly one century in contrast with today's approach. As being main text style, italic served the purpose of being economical in the early years of printing by providing the print of smaller books. After Manutius and the owner of the second most popular italic type, *Arrighi*, Italian printers continued to publish harmonized books with roman and italic styles. French typographers improved the style and advanced in its usages in different components of

the text, by mixing these two versions. They also invented italic capitals and actively used it in headings, subheadings and title pages. As the book production progressed, the need of differentiating text elements occurred and printers started to discover the importance and benefits of the italic style. As a result, the italic texts were appeared in various book parts, such as diagrams, illustrations, reference and side notes. Apart from these, it is possible to see italic usage in poetry books to differentiate poems from the regular content, as it was the case for bilingual text to separate languages. Emblem books were the ones that its epigrams were generally set in italic style. Towards the end of the century, more complex texts are being printed, such as dictionaries and nomenclatures. Estienne and Plantin were used the italic style to differentiate quotations, annotations and explanation of Latin or French words. Towards the end of the century, italic style was commonly preferred inside the text to emphasize words, special names and places etc. In the course of time, its invention paved the way for new usages of types and creating new type forms and styles, including small capitals, bold, light and medium weights. So, its reputation and contribution to the history of printing cannot be denied; especially scholars, like Erasmus, praised it with their words and nearly every notable printer in Europe copied and used it in their prints, right after its creation.

This study is limited to the development and the variation of the uses of italic style in printed books mainly from Italy and France in 16th century. In further studies, it is possible to research the books that are printed in the sixteenth-century, which consists italic text and examine thoroughly to find more and unusual usages that are not mentioned here. So, this article aims to be a starting point for further studies which might contribute to the discovery of other type styles and their usages (not only italic) that were developed for the differentiation of the text.

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