Oldřich Menhart — calligrapher, type designer and craftsman

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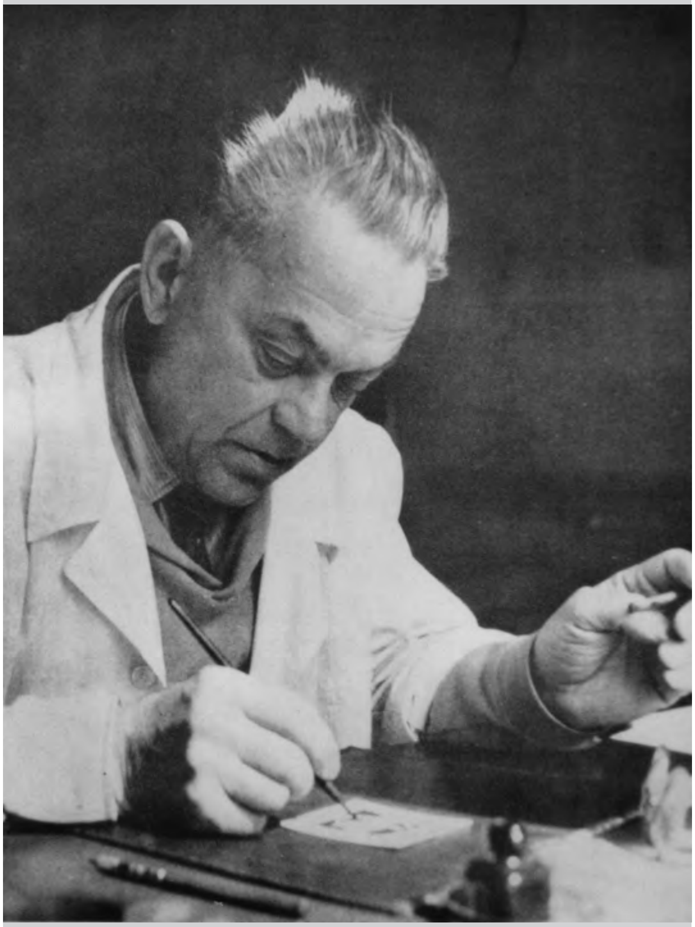
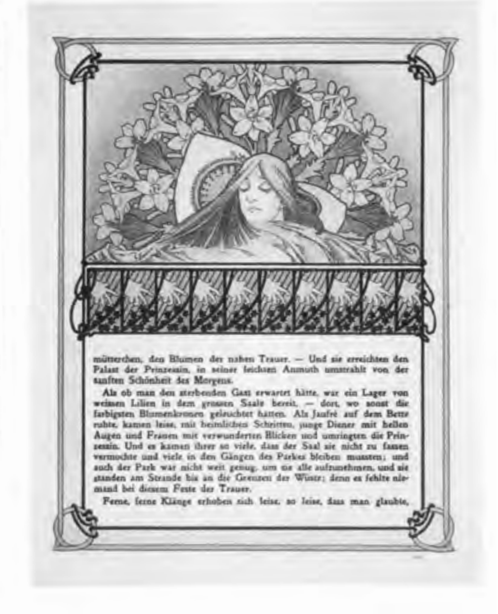
Department of Typography and Graphic Communication
The University of Reading

Many thanks to the Department of Typography, František Storm,
Otokar Karlas, the staff of the Klingspor Museum and Robin Nicholas.



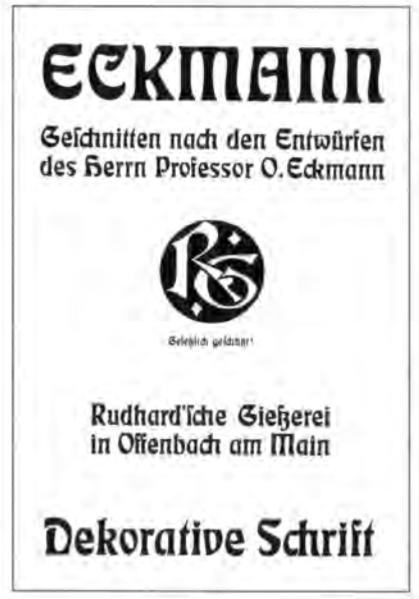


mütterchen, den Blumen der nahen Trauer. — Und sie erreichten den Palast der Prinzessin, in seiner leichten Anmuth umstrahlt von der sanften Schönheit des Morgens.

Als ob man den sterbenden Gast erwartet hätte, war ein Lager von weissen Lilien in dem grossen Saale bereit, — dort, wo sonst die farbigsten Blumenkronen geleuchtet hatten. Als Jaufré auf dem Bette ruhte, kamen leise, mit heimlichen Schritten, junge Diener mit hellen Augen und Frauen mit verwunderten Blicken und umringten die Prinzessin. Und es kamen ihrer so viele, dass der Saal sie nicht zu fassen vermochte und viele in den Gängen des Parkes bleiben mussten; und auch der Park war nicht weit genug, um sie alle aufzunehmen, und sie standen am Strande bis an die Grenzen der Wüste; denn es fehlte niemand bei diesem Feste der Trauer.

Ferne, ferne Klänge erhoben sich leise, so leise, dass man glaubte,

Figure 1 Alphonse Mucha, Illustration from *Ilsée, Princesse de Tripoli*, 1901. Six-colour lithographic print (Meggs 1998).



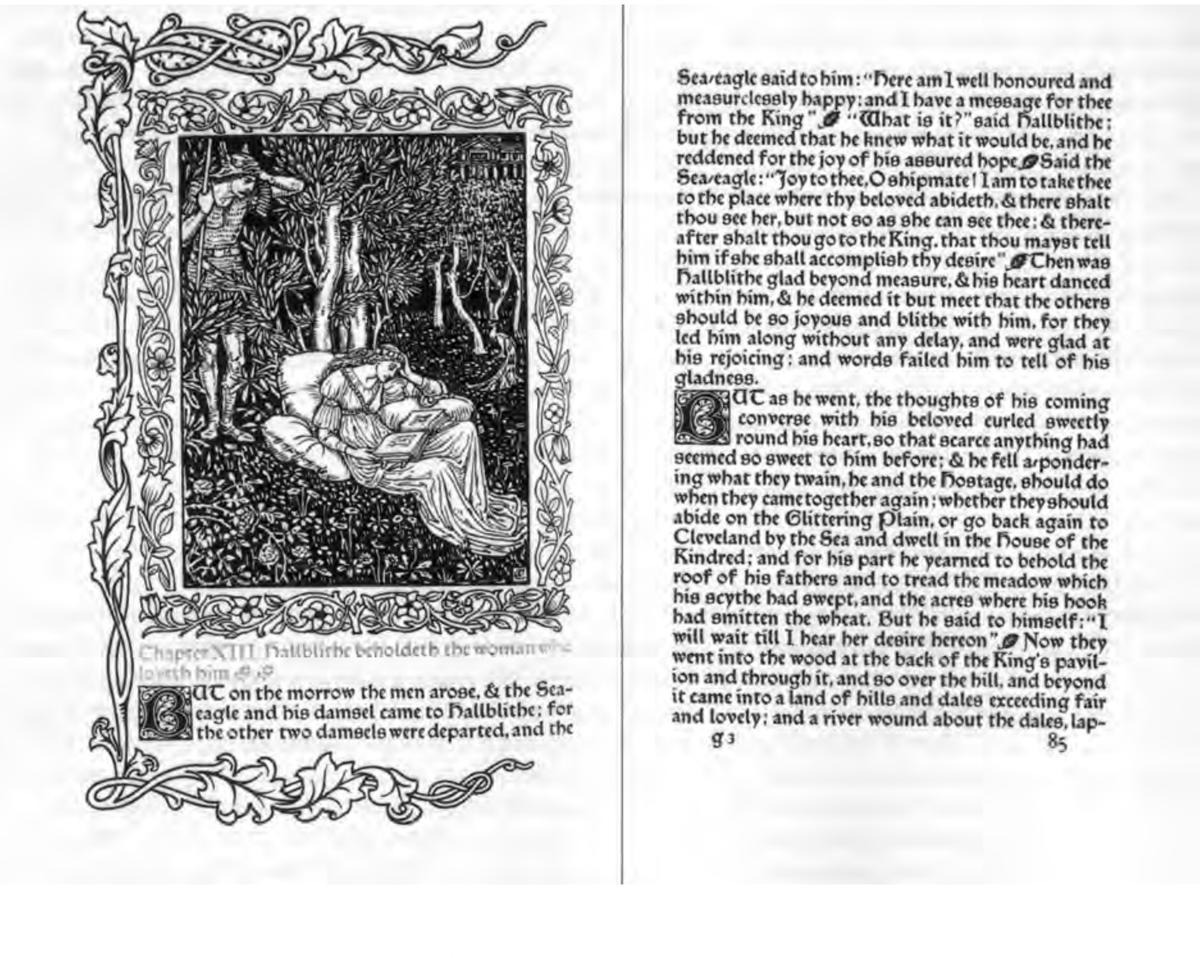
ECKMANN

Geſchnitten nach den Entwürfen
des Herrn Professor O. Eckmann

Rudhard'ſche Gießerei
in Offenbach am Main

Dekorative Schrift

Figure 2 Otto Eckmann, title page specimen *Eckmann Schriftprobe*, 1901 (Meggs 1998).



Chapter XIII. Hallblithe beholdeth the woman who loveth him

BUT on the morrow the men arose, & the Sea-eagle and his damsel came to Hallblithe; for the other two damsels were departed, and the

Sea-eagle said to him: "Here am I well honoured and measurelessly happy: and I have a message for thee from the King" ❧ "What is it?" said Hallblithe; but he deemed that he knew what it would be, and he reddened for the joy of his assured hope ❧ Said the Sea-eagle: "Joy to thee, O shipmate! I am to take thee to the place where thy beloved abideth, & there shalt thou see her, but not so as she can see thee; & thereafter shalt thou go to the King, that thou mayst tell him if she shall accomplish thy desire" ❧ Then was Hallblithe glad beyond measure, & his heart danced within him, & he deemed it but meet that the others should be so joyous and blithe with him, for they led him along without any delay, and were glad at his rejoicing: and words failed him to tell of his gladness.

BUT as he went, the thoughts of his coming converse with his beloved curled sweetly round his heart, so that scarce anything had seemed so sweet to him before; & he fell a-pondering what they twain, he and the Hostage, should do when they came together again; whether they should abide on the Glittering Plain, or go back again to Cleveland by the Sea and dwell in the House of the Kindred; and for his part he yearned to behold the roof of his fathers and to tread the meadow which his scythe had swept, and the acres where his hook had smitten the wheat. But he said to himself: "I will wait till I hear her desire hereon" ❧ Now they went into the wood at the back of the King's pavilion and through it, and so over the hill, and beyond it came into a land of hills and dales exceeding fair and lovely: and a river wound about the dales, lap-

g 3 85

Figure 3 William Morris, spread *The Story of the Glittering Plain* set in Troy type, 1894. Illustrations by Walter Crane (Meggs 1998).

Oldřich Menhart (1897–1962) was one of the most influential personalities of the Czech typographic scene. This essay is a thematic presentation of Menhart's versatile work, focusing on typeface design, in his most unique and interesting period between 1930 and 1948.

Introduction

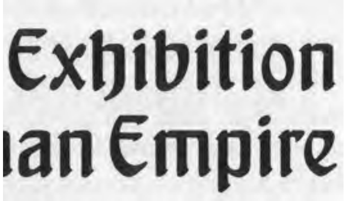


Figure 4 Peter Behrens, *Behrens type*, 1900. Issued by Klingspor, Germany (Tracy 1986).

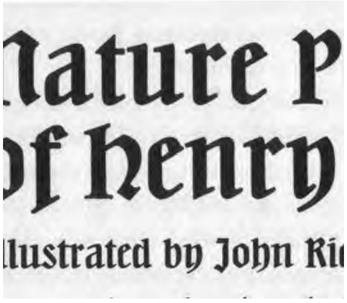


Figure 5 Otto Hupp *Neudeutsch*, c.1900. Issued by Genzsch & Heyse foundry, Germany (Tracy 1986).

The first three decades of the twentieth century was a period full of cultural experimentation and revolution against traditionalism in society and art. Scientific discoveries and the associated technological innovations, such as motion pictures, the airplane, car and radio transmission, and political changes drastically transformed many aspects of human life. Existing values and the role of art and design in society was questioned. New ways of visual expression had to be found to represent this social upheaval. Many different movements, mutually influencing each other, arose throughout Europe — Expressionism, Cubism, Constructivism, Futurism, Suprematism, De Stijl, Bauhaus (figs 7–14). Their effect was crucial for the evolution of the graphic language of form and visual communication of the twentieth century. The domain of typography and type design, although less affected, also experienced many changes in this period. Symmetry and harmony were rejected and new methods of organising letters in space were explored. In Germany, the discussion about blackletter against roman, received new stimuli and ended finally in the repeal of blackletter by the Nazi regime in 1941 (figs 4–5). The modern ideas of clear functionalism, mainly promoted by the Bauhaus, also found their way into typeface design. The most famous example is *Futura* by Paul Renner, a mono-linear, sans serif and constructed typeface (fig. 6). Starting already at the end of the nineteenth century and then contemporary to this avant-garde, the Arts & Crafts movement and Art Nouveau supporters followed a more moderate way, reacting against the decadence and falsification of the book-trade (figs 1–3). In particular the A&C movement had a noticeable influence on the applied graphic arts of Europe and the USA.

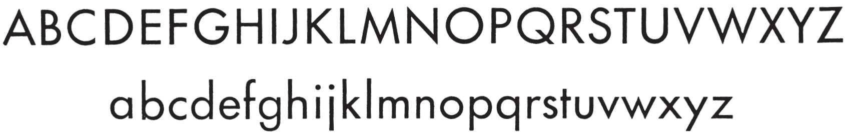
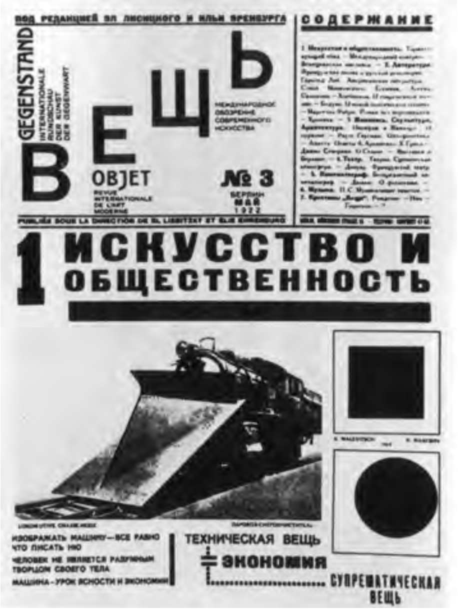


Figure 6 Paul Renner *Futura*, 1927. Issued by Bauer typefoundry of Offenbach, Germany (Jaspert, 2001).

The situation of Czech designers was less advantageous than that of their colleagues in Western Europe, especially regarding technology. The country's history, involving loss of political sovereignty for many centuries, and the related lack of an independent printing industry, contributed greatly to the missing professional knowledge and experience of type-making.

Most of the typefaces then in use came from foreign, usually German, type foundries. They were subsequently equipped with diacritical marks without respecting the basic design, contrast or colour of the letters. Monotype, for



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GEGENSTAND

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ВЕЩЬ

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OBJET

REVUE INTERNATIONALE DE L'ART MODERNE

№ 3

БЕРЛИН МАЙ 1922

СОДЕРЖАНИЕ

1 ИСКУССТВО И ОБЩЕСТВЕННОСТЬ

ИЗОБРАЖАТЬ МАШИНУ—ВСЕ РАВНО ЧТО ПИСАТЬ НЮ

ЧЕЛОВЕК НЕ ЯВЛЯЕТСЯ РАЗУМНЫМ ТВОРЦОМ СВОЕГО ТЕЛА

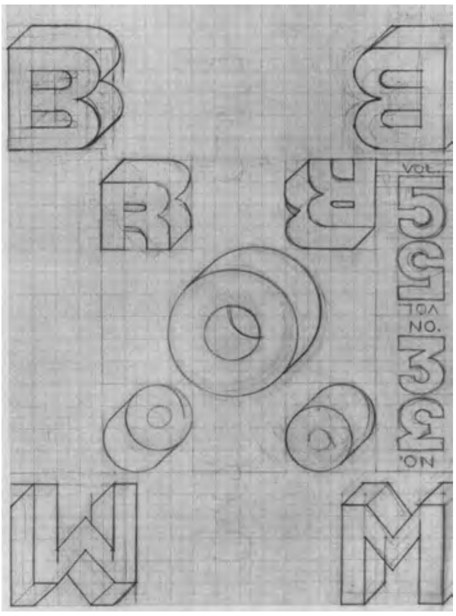
МАШИНА-УРОК ЯСНОСТИ И ЭКОНОМИИ

ТЕХНИЧЕСКАЯ ВЕЩЬ

ЭКОНОМИЯ

СУПРЕМАТИЧЕСКАЯ ВЕЩЬ

Figure 7 El Lissitzky, title page for the journal *Veshch*, 1922 (Meggs 1998).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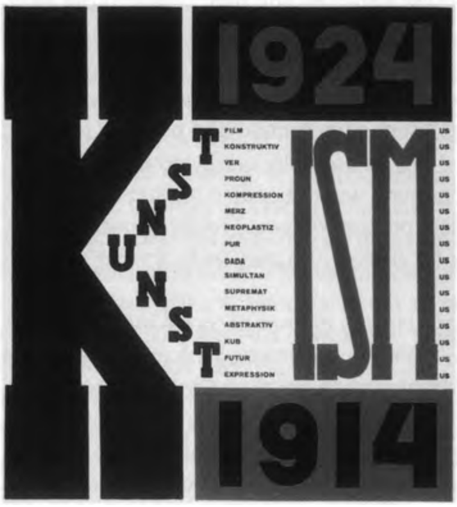
NO. 3

Figure 8 El Lissitzky, layout for a cover *Broom*, a radical American magazine, vol 5, no 3, 1922 (Meggs 1998).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ABSTRAKTIV
KUB
FUTUR
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ISM
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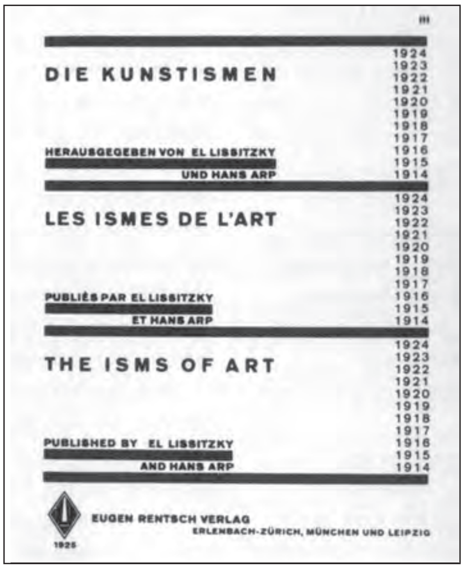
1914

Figure 9 El Lissitzky, book cover for *The Isms of Art*, 1924 (Meggs 1998).



III

DIE KUNSTISMEN

HERAUSGEGEBEN VON EL LISSITZKY
UND HANS ARP

LES ISMES DE L'ART

PUBLIÈS PAR EL LISSITZKY
ET HANS ARP

THE ISMS OF ART

PUBLISHED BY EL LISSITZKY
AND HANS ARP

1924 1923 1922 1921 1920 1919 1918 1917 1916 1915 1914

EUGEN RENTSCH VERLAG
ERLENBACH-ZÜRICH, MÜNCHEN UND LEIPZIG

1925

Figure 10 El Lissitzky, title page for *The Isms of Art*, 1924 (Meggs 1998).

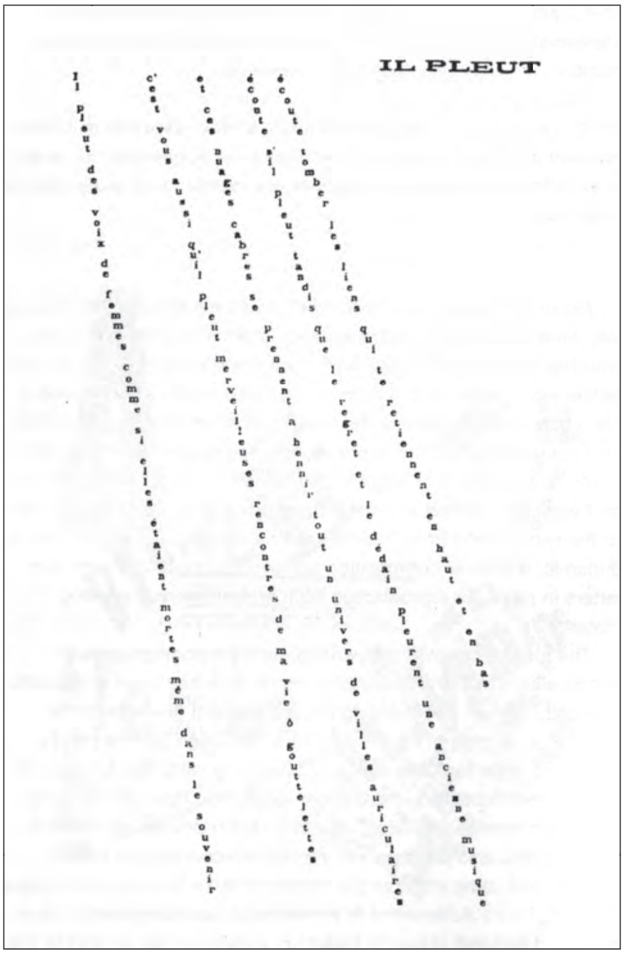

IL PLEUT
Il pleut des voix de femmes comme si elles étaient mortes même dans le souvenir
c'est vous aussi qu'il pleut merveilleuses rencontres de ma vie ô gouttelettes
et ces nuages cabrés se prennent à hennir tout un univers de villes auriculaires
écoute s'il pleut tandis que le regret et le dédain pleurent une ancienne musique
écoute tomber les liens qui te retiennent en haut et en bas

Figure 11 Guillaume Apollinaire, *"Il Pleut"* ("It's raining"), from *Calligrammes,* 1918 (Meggs 1998).

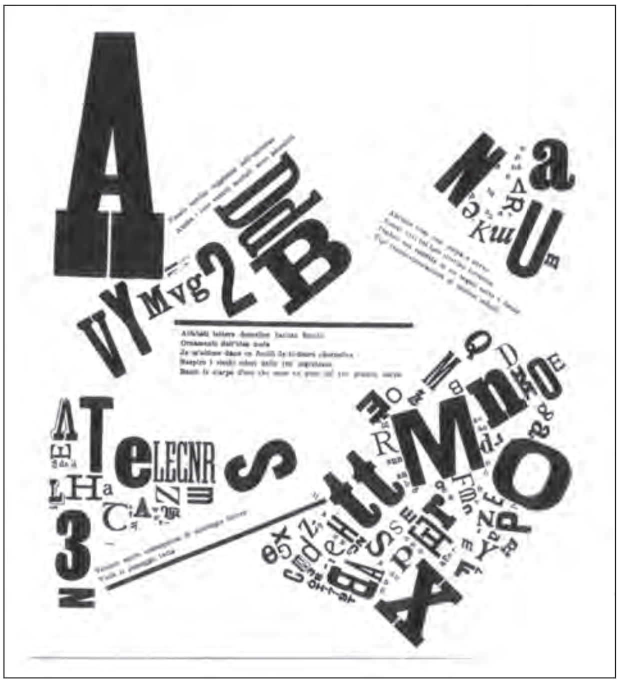


Figure 12 Andrengo Soffici, *Bifszf + 18 Simultaneitè Chimismi lirici*, 1915 (Meggs 1998).

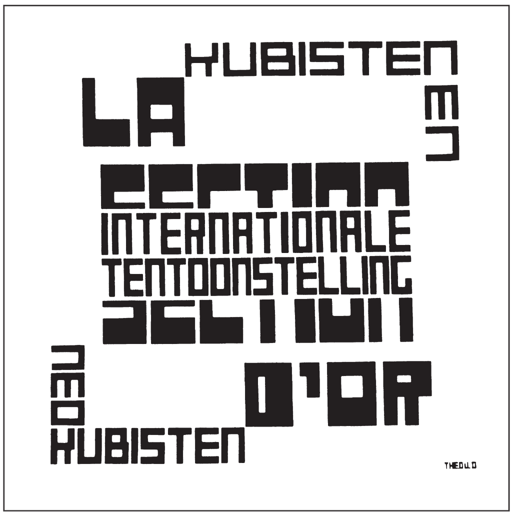

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Figure 13 Théo van Doesburg, exhibition poster, 1920. International Exhibition of Cubists and Neo-Cubists (Meggs 1998).

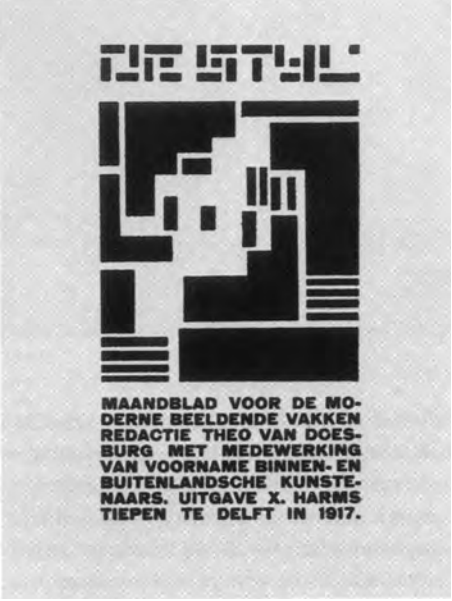
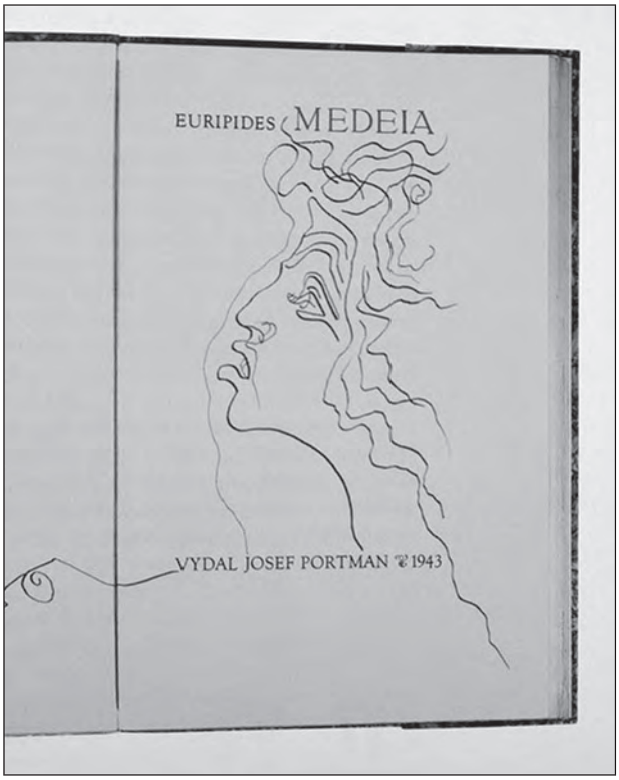

DE STIJL
MAANDBLAD VOOR DE MODERNE BEELDENDE VAKKEN REDACTIE THEO VAN DOESBURG MET MEDEWERKING VAN VOORNAME BINNEN- EN BUITENLANDSCHE KUNSTENAARS. UITGAVE X. HARMS TIEPEN TE DELFT IN 1917.

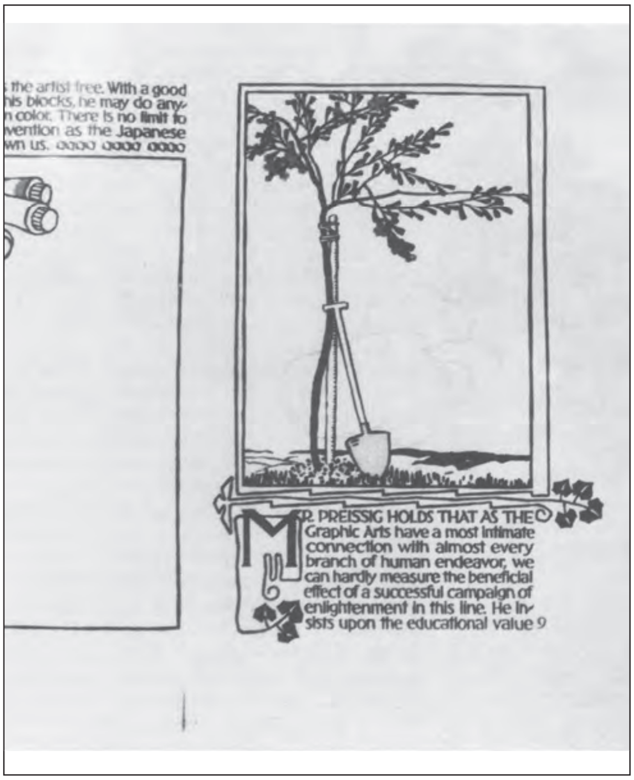
Figure 14 Vilmos Huszar, cover design for *de Stijl*, 1917 (Meggs 1998).



EURIPIDES MEDEIA

VYDAL JOSEF PORTMAN 1943

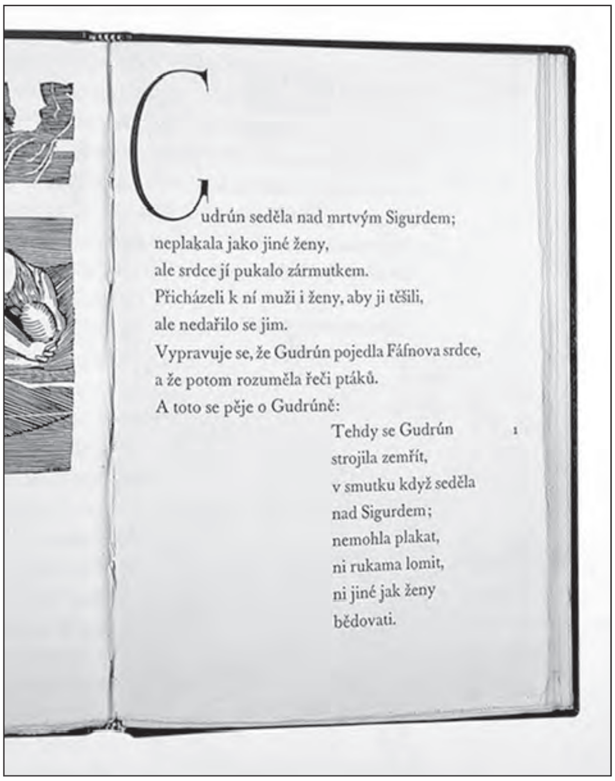
Figure 15 Karel Svolinsky, title page *Europides Medel*, 1943 (Musil 2001).



the artist free. With a good
his blocks, he may do any-
n color. There is no limit to
vention as the Japanese
wn us.

MR. PREISSIG HOLDS THAT AS THE Graphic Arts have a most intimate connection with almost every branch of human endeavor, we can hardly measure the beneficial effect of a successful campaign of enlightenment in this line. He insists upon the educational value 9

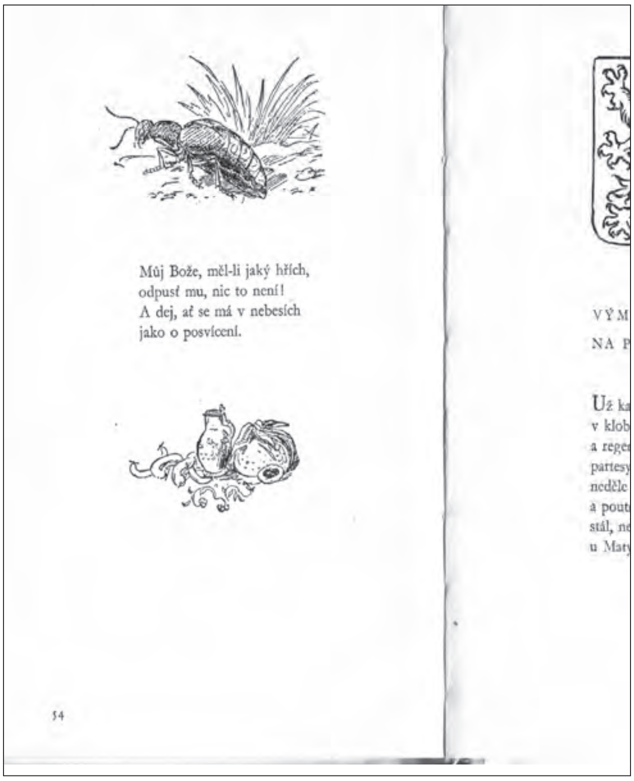
Figure 16 Vojtech Preissig, page spread, book and date are unknown (Typografia 1973).



Gudrún seděla nad mrtvým Sigurdem;
neplakala jako jiné ženy,
ale srdce jí pukalo zármutkem.
Přicházeli k ní muži i ženy, aby ji těšili,
ale nedařilo se jim.
Vypravuje se, že Gudrún pojedla Fáfnova srdce,
a že potom rozuměla řeči ptáků.
A toto se pěje o Gudrúně:

Tehdy se Gudrún 1
strojila zemřít,
v smutku když seděla
nad Sigurdem;
nemohla plakat,
ni rukama lomit,
ni jiné jak ženy
bědovati.

Figure 17 Karel Svolinsky, page layout and illustration
Tri edicke pisne, 1930 (Musil 2001).



Můj Bože, měl-li jaký hřích,
odpusť mu, nic to není!
A dej, ať se má v nebesích
jako o posvícení.

54

VÝM

NA P

Už ka
v klob
a rege
partesy
neděle
a pout
stál, ne
u Maty

Figure 18 Method Kaláb, page spread *Sel Malir chude do sveta*
by Jaroslav Seifert (private archive author).

instance, had about 20 different sets of basic diacritical marks. These were selected to match, approximately, the existing alphabets that was to be extended.

Harmony of shape and weight, distinctiveness, correctness of size and position are important features in the design of well-balanced accents. Foreign type foundries, not having an understanding of the peculiar rhythm of the Czech language, found this very difficult, and perhaps even too much trouble to design appropriate signs. Many errors occurred as shown in figures 19 and 20˙

Increasing confidence and the search for national identity enhanced the evolution of the Czech book craft and type design. A small group of artists endeavoured to address the present deficiencies and to establish a souvereign Czech style. Unfortunately, many attempts failed due to the conservative attitude of the Czech national type foundry, the insufficient technical equipment and the industry which was ignorant of new rising needs. Thus, it was not until the mid-1920s that any Czech typefaces were published.

On the other hand, the Czech book art was more successful. Some gifted and courageous designers made huge efforts to provide a style that was independent from foreign models (figs 15–18). Indeed, Czech book design received many compliments at the Parisian exhibition of book art in 1925. The designs were described as fresh, earnest, transparent and avoiding mannerism and affection. "The prevalence of distinguished talents permits Czech book-craft to assume a more rapid tempo in its development than is the case in other countries" (Steiner-Prag 1933).

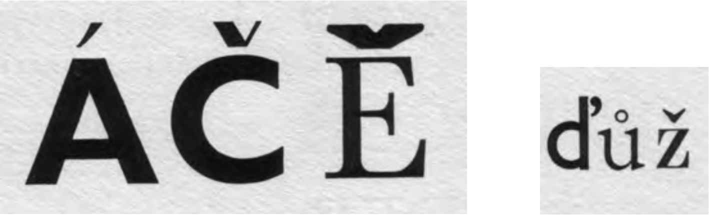


Figure 19 Examples of unbalanced diacritics (enlarged). The accent on *A* is too small, on *C* it does not match the mono-linearity of the basic letter and on *E* it is unproportionally big. The mark on *d* has wrongly the same design as an apostrophe, the krouzek (ring) on *u* is too monolinear and circular, and the hacek (caron) on *z* does not reflect the strong contrast of the letter (Hlavsa 1957).

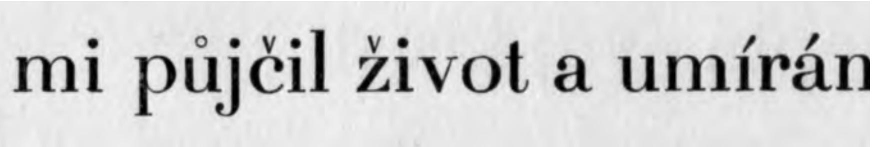
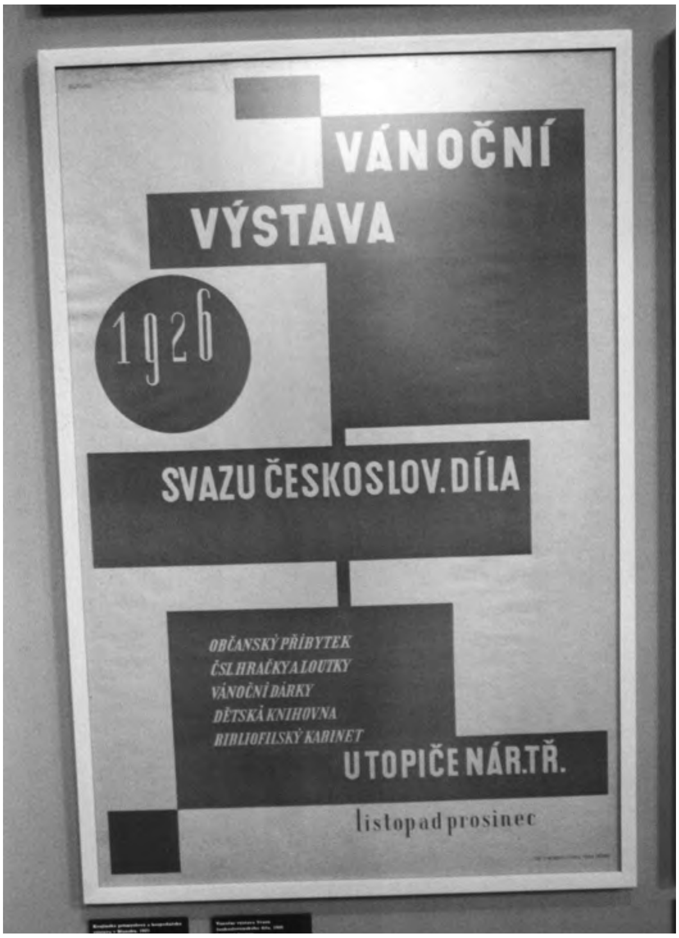

mi půjčil život a umírán

Figure 20 The weak and contructed hacek and krouzek (enlarged) on the letters *u*, *c* and *z*, neither correspond in their design to the rest of the alphabet nor to the shape of the dot and acute on *i* and *a* (Hlavsa 1957).


VÁNOČNÍ
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SVAZU ČESKOSLOV. DÍLA
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DĚTSKÁ KNIHOVNA
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U TOPIČE NÁR.TŘ.
listopad prosinec

Figure 21 Photograph of an exhibition poster by Ladislav Sutnar, 1926 (private archive).

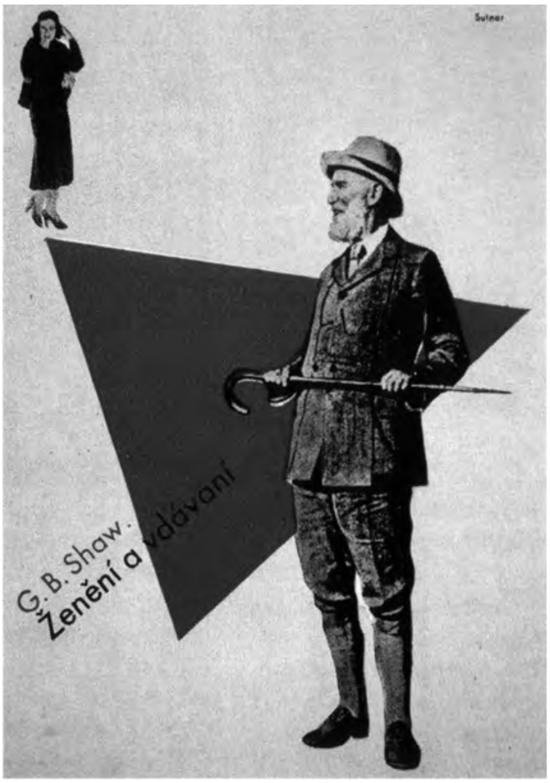
Sutnar
G. B. Shaw.
Ženění a vdávání

Figure 22 Ladislav Sutnar, cover design for *Getting Married*, 1929. (Meggs 1998).

First attempts in Czech typeface design at the turn of the century

MAIN FIGURES — Introduction

¶At the turn of the century, in the realm of an awakening national pursuit of cultural and political independence, greater interest in typography, illustration, typeface design, poster and book design arose. Private progressive publishers, new art magazines, schools and museums all encouraged young Czech artists to focus on applied graphic arts. This opportunity was welcomed as a new way of expressing ideas and concepts. They were enthusiastic about the artistic developments and achievements abroad and soon made contributions of their own. Major sources of influence were the Arts & Crafts movement, Art Nouveau, Symbolism and Expressionism. VH Brunner and Vojtěch Preissig were two important representatives of that time, particularly in book design and lettering.

The foundation of Czechoslovakia, the first republic, after the First World War in 1918, enhanced this evolution of graphic art and gave way to more flourish and experimentation in many domains, so too in fine-book making and typeface design. Principles of the Soviet avant-garde, the Bauhaus and other modern movements started to gain ground between young designers including Karel Teige and Ladislav Sutnar (figs 21–22). They stood for a change of view of art and culture and evoked a new style in the applied graphic arts. However, typeface design was not part of their main interests.

Related to the attempt to express national Czech identity and the nonexistence of typefaces appropriate for Czech text setting, a small group of artists was concerned with the design of an original Czech typeface. They recognised the demand for typefaces able to highlight the intrinsic peculiarities of Czech writing. The most important designers in this context were VH Brunner, Jaroslav Benda, Karel Svolinský, Slavoboj Tusar, Karel Dyrynk and Vojtěch Preissig.

Unfortunately, their attempts remained unique artistic approaches without achieving international success. None of them concentrated entirely on typeface design. Their main focus lay in book design, illustration, engraving and the like. Additionally, as opposed to other European countries, such as Great Britain and Germany, the industry of type-production was under developed and so too the domain of typeface design. Consequently the level of their quality and maturity suffered without the necessary experience and machinery.

Brunner, Svolinský and Benda showed a strong search for personal and unknown solutions to the problem. But their results do not go beyond the level of superficiality and decoration. Dyrynk and Tusar, on the other hand, pursued a more discreet and less ornamental path. Indeed, *Tusar Antiqua* was even published by Monotype in 1926 and a more conventional version in 1936. The success, after all, was nominal and it did not have any further impact on the international scene, nor even at home. Preissig's work stands out due to its expressive personality. He was a master of lettering and engraving and was one of the most influential characters in the Czech graphic art movement in the first two decades of the twentieth century. His only industrially produced typeface, *Preissig Antiqua/Kursiva,* was amply admired but commercially unsuccessful. His work influenced many of his contemporaries as well as later generations including Oldřich Menhart.

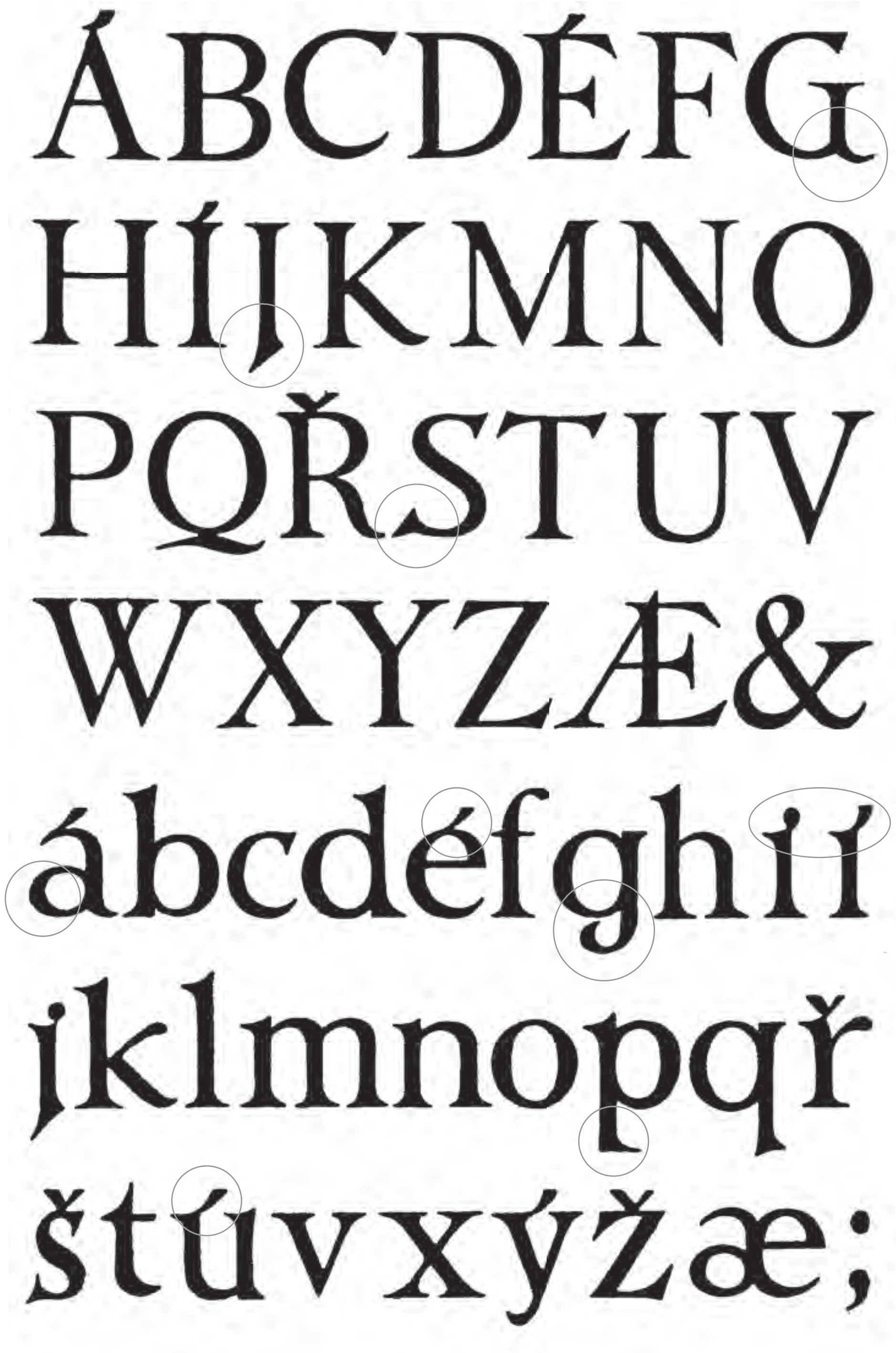
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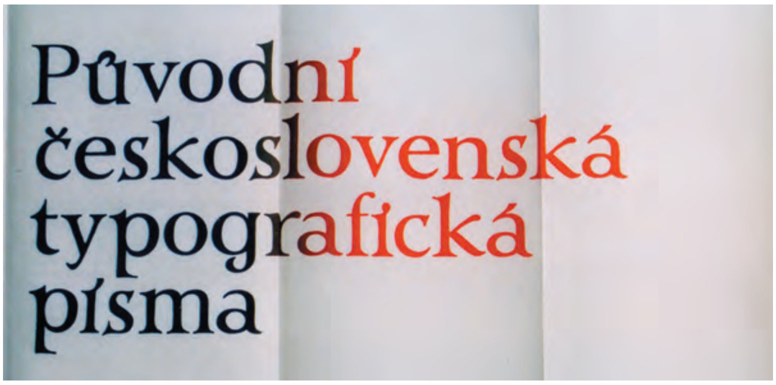
Figure 23 VH Brunner, design of an alphabet, 1919 (Muzika 1965).

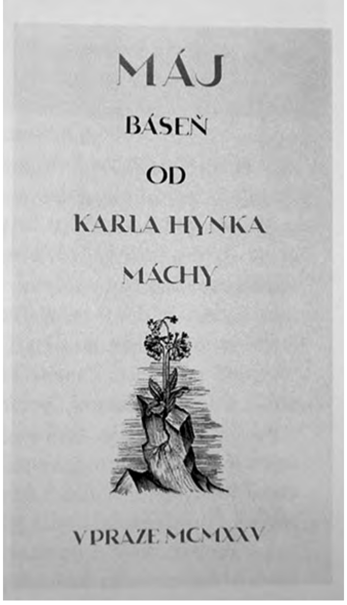
Examples of their work

¶VH Brunner (1886–1928) was mainly an illustrator and book designer. He created about 600 books in total. Due to various circumstances, his eight typefaces (five roman and three italic) have never been published. Similar to other designers of his time, Brunner was influenced by Edward Johnston's[1] school of calligraphy. It was his guidance and source of inspiration. Brunner's own design shows a good deal of individuality and quirkiness. It dates from around 1919 and consist of capitals and the lowercase (figs 24–25). He tried to solve the problematic effect caused by diacritical marks, peculiar to Czech text setting, in a rather unusual way. They merge into the body of the letter so forming a unity. Notice in figure 23 the small size in relation to the body letter. The differentiation between dot and acute above the letter *i* becomes difficult, particularly in small text sizes. The accents appear too decorative and unfamiliar, making recognition, and thus easy reading, harder. Additionally, quirky lettershapes, especially *G J S a g j p s*, hinder the typeface in being useful and pleasant to read in continuous text.



Původní
československá
typografická
písma

Figure 25 Text sample, typeface by VH Brunner, 1919 (Vichnar 1972).



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BÁSEŇ
OD
KARLA HYNKA
MÁCHY
V PRAZE MCMXXV

Figure 24 Title page of the book *Máy* by KH Macha, set in *Svolinský Antiqua*, 1925. (Musil 2001). Dimensions are c. 40x60cm.

Karel Svolinský approached the problem of phonetic sounds in a similar way to Brunner. His main fields of activity were wood-engraving, typography and calligraphy. He created *Svolinský Antiqua*, in 1925. It was used in the book, *Máy* by KH Macha, and was presented at the exhibition of book art in Paris the same year (figs 24,26). The Průmyslová Tiskárna, one of the two printing houses in Prague, cast one size, 24 pt, and intended it for one purpose only. This is reflected by the exclusion of the letters *w q* and *x* (only in the lowercase) as these are not used in the Czech language.

Svolinský wanted his typeface to be new and autonomous without traces of historical and even contemporary models and conventions. This aim, however, was hard to achieve and the *Svolinský Antiqua* is still reminiscent of his historical predecessors. One can be tempted to recognise similarities with the *Bodoni style*. It is the strong contrast between thick and thin strokes and the vertical stress that suggests this correspondence (fig.29). Looking further, *Svolinský Antiqua* reveals idiosyncrasies, such as one-directional serifs, irregular distribution of weight and no terminals, all of which are alien to *Bodoni*. Inconsistencies in the design are also noticeable, for instance, the double-sided serifs on the letters *f i I P T* and the

---

[1] Edward Johnston was the main figure in the revival of calligraphy and the broad edge pen. His book *Writing & Illuminating & Lettering* was the source of inspiration for a whole generation of letter-artists at the beginning of the twentieth century. He also designed the world famous typeface for the London Underground.

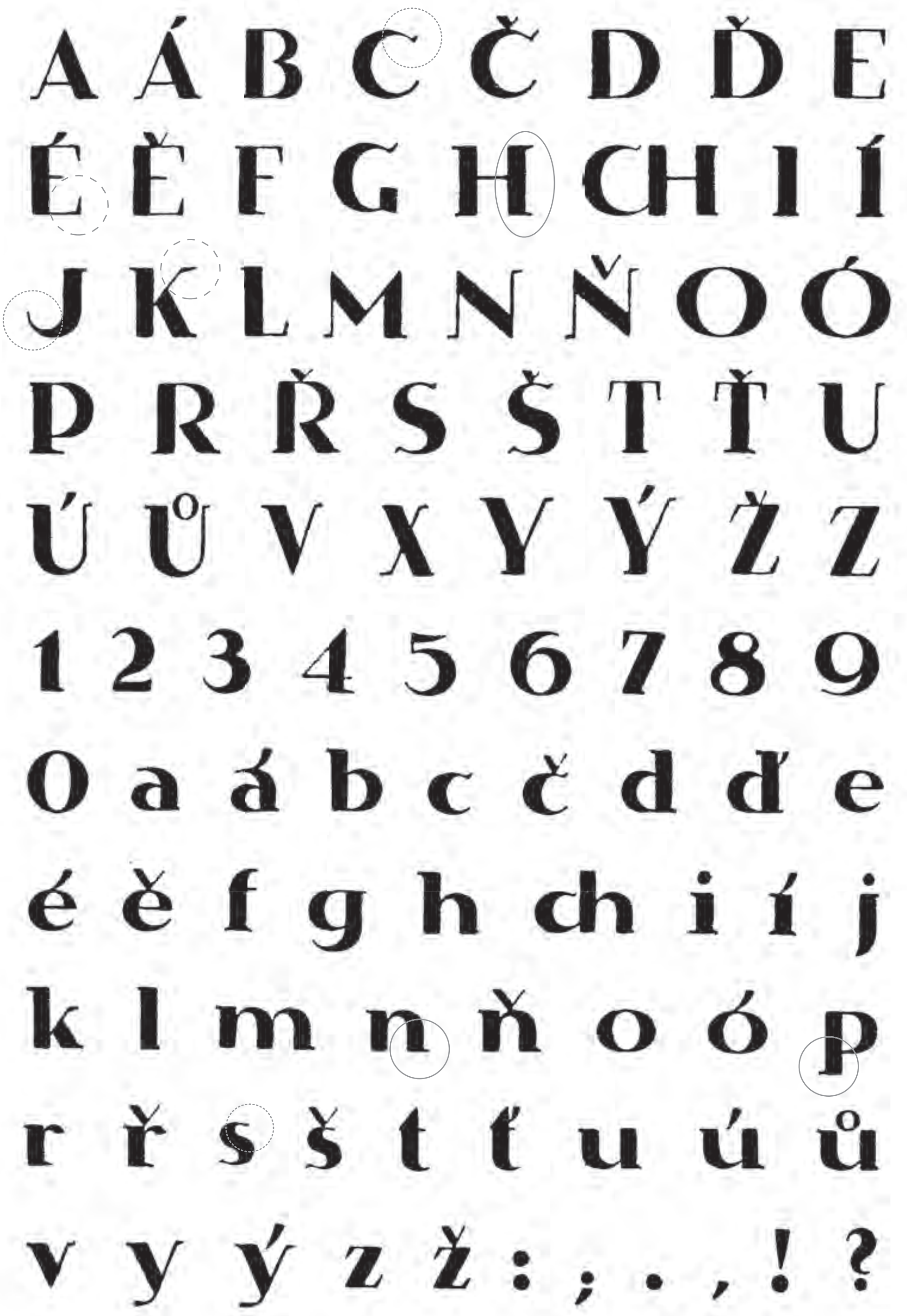

A Á B C Č D Ď E
É Ě F G H CH I Í
J K L M N Ň O Ó
P R Ř S Š T Ť U
Ú Ů V X Y Ý Ž Z
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
0 a á b c č d ď e
é ě f g h ch i í j
k l m n ň o ó p
r ř s š t ť u ú ů
v y ý z ž : ; . , ! ?

Figure 26 Karel Svolinsky, *Svolinsky Antiqua*, 1925, casted by the Prumyslova tiskarna in one size only—24 pt. (Muzika 1965).
Circled are examples of features which are mentioned in the text. The solid circles refer to one-directional serifs, the dotted ones to non-exisitng terminals and the dashed ones to the irregular distribution of weight.

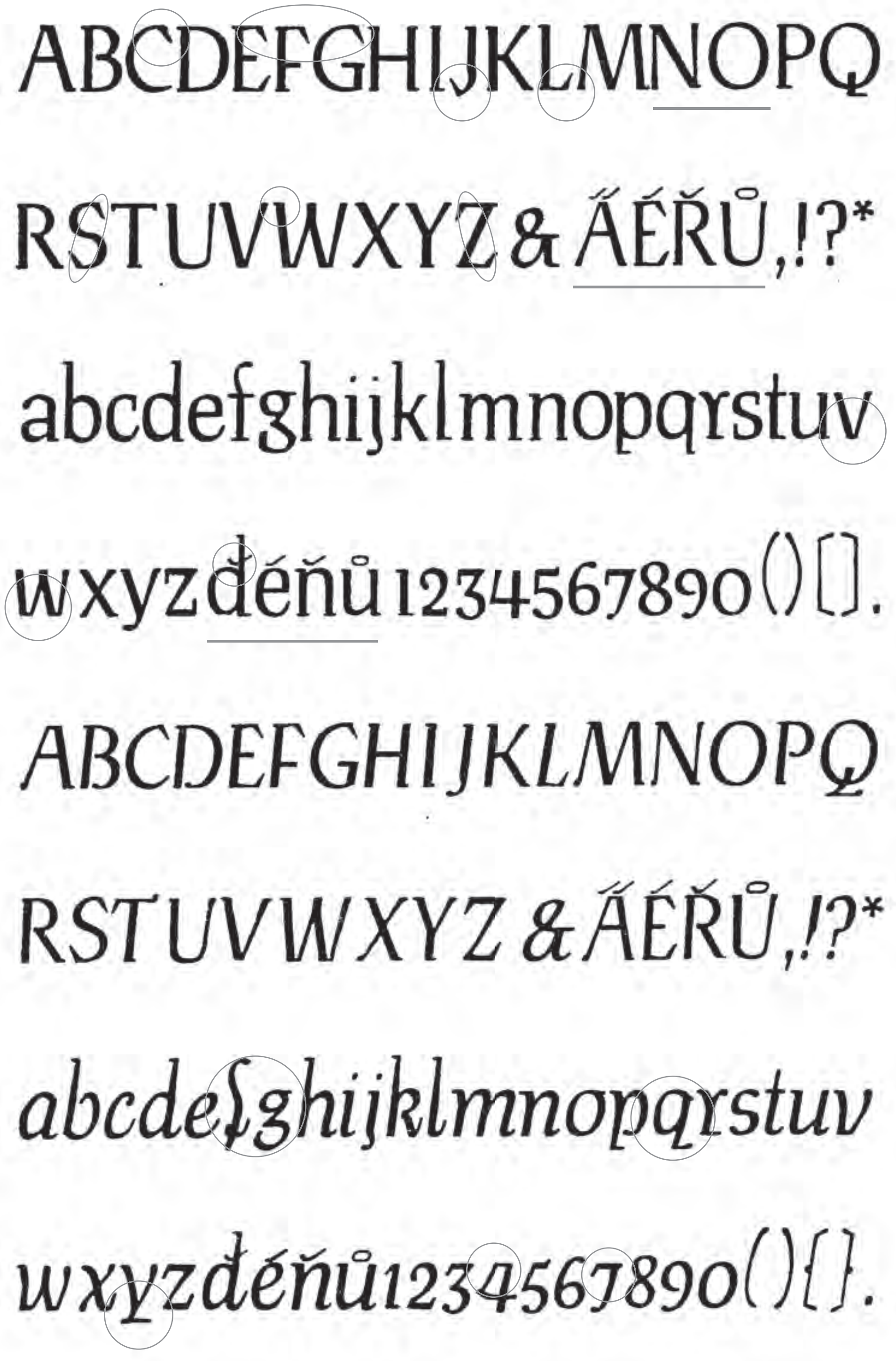

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQ
RSTUVWXYZ & ǺÉŘŮ,!?*
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuv
wxyzďéňů1234567890()[].
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQ
RSTUVWXYZ & ǺÉŘŮ,!?*
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuv
wxyzďéňů1234567890(){}.

Figure 27 Jaroslav Benda, design of an alphabet, 1923 (Muzika 1965).

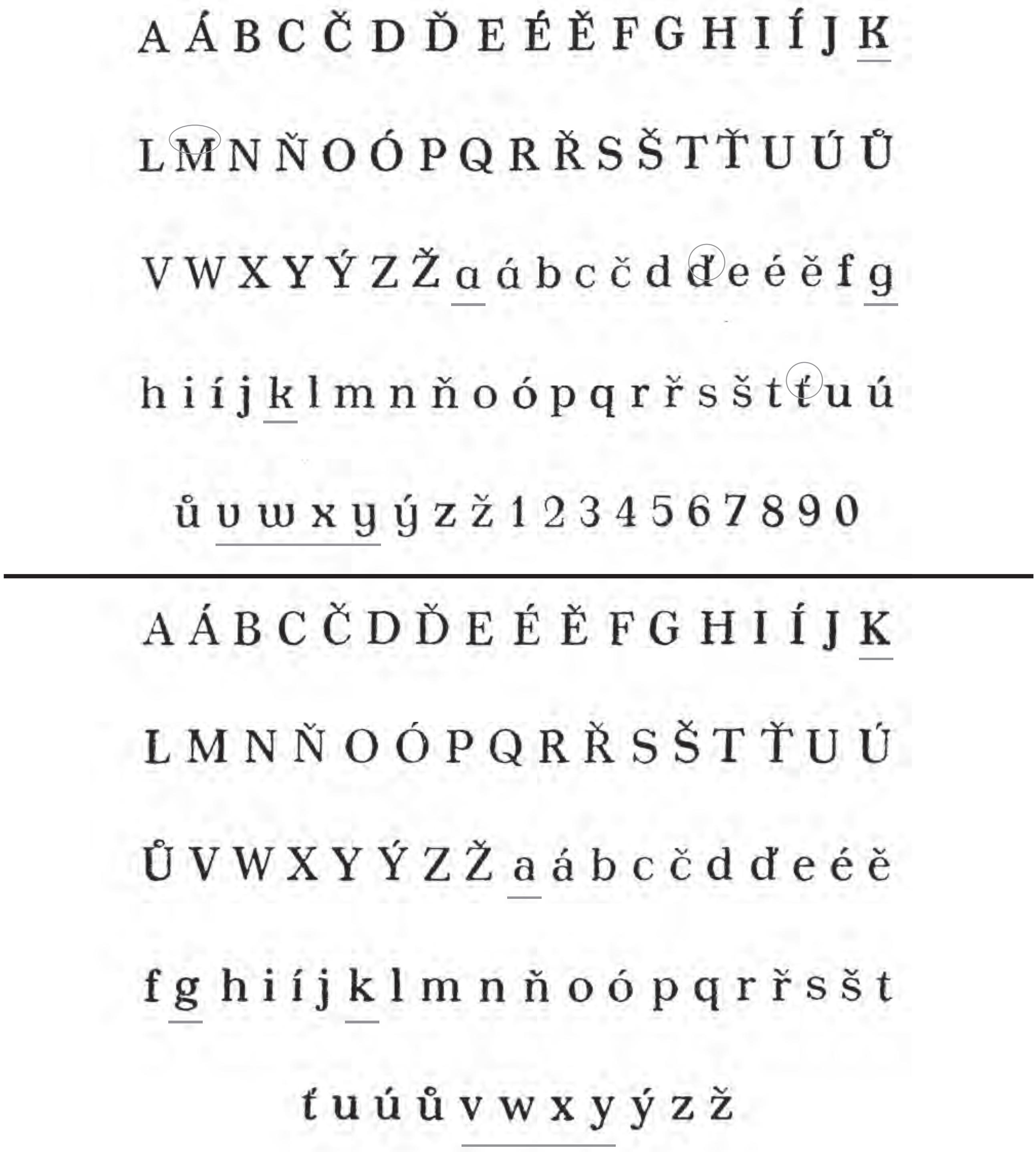

A Á B C Č D Ď E É Ě F G H I Í J K
L M N Ň O Ó P Q R Ř S Š T Ť U Ú Ů
V W X Y Ý Z Ž a á b c č d ď e é ě f g
h i í j k l m n ň o ó p q r ř s š t ť u ú
ů v w x y ý z ž 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0
A Á B C Č D Ď E É Ě F G H I Í J K
L M N Ň O Ó P Q R Ř S Š T Ť U Ú
Ů V W X Y Ý Z Ž a á b c č d ď e é ě
f g h i í j k l m n ň o ó p q r ř s š t
ť u ú ů v w x y ý z ž

Figure 28 Slavoboj Tusar, *Tusar Antiqua*, original version on the top from 1926 and the revised version below from 1936. Both were issued by Monotype, London (Muzika 1965).

varying size and shape of the diacritics. Indeed, although it was one of the tasks to face, the marks do not seem to be handled with appropriate care and thought.

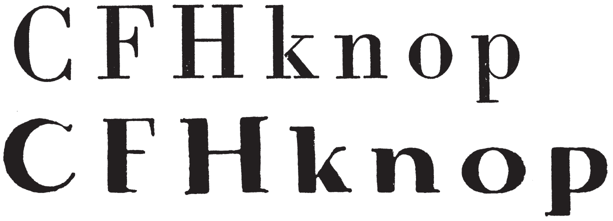


Figure 29 Comparison of Jaroslav Benda's alphabet (bottom) with *Bodoni*. Similarities, such as the vertical stress, flat and thin serifs and the strong contrast between thicks and thins, suggest some influence.

The lettering artist Jaroslav Benda was another designer concerned with searching for unusual and individual letterforms expressing 'Czech-ness'. He admired, as did some of his contemporaries, the ideas and work of W Morris[2] and E Johnston. Yet, looking at the typeface that he drew in 1923 does not demonstrate any particular link to their work being a source of influence (fig. 27). Except in some ways reminiscent of the broad edge pen, it is almost mono-linear in the lowercase. In the uppercase the contrast varies inconsistently, compare for example, letters *O N*. Some of the shapes appear awkward, especially in the italic letters *f g q y 4 7*. The square-ness of the design feels unusual on letters such as *v w*. The form and weight of the diacritics are not balanced with the basic letter. Their position, very close to it, and their weak presence, greatly hamper both recognition and thus legibility. Also awkward are the very sharp and somehow misplaced serifs on the capital letters *C E F G J L S Z*, unlike the other very short and thick top and head serifs.

In contrast, Slavoboj Tusar (1883–1950) sought a more functional and less decorative design capable of performing well in text settings. Like Svolinský, he created a typeface, *Tusar Antiqua*, for the exhibition of book art in Paris in 1925 and it was cast by the Průmyslová Tiskárna in Prague (fig. 28). The success at the exhibition convinced Method Kaláb, then director if the printing house, to let Tusar develop his design further. With Kaláb's support and contacts, *Tusar Antiqua* was published by Monotype in 1926 as their first typeface made by a Czech artist. The design's overall impact was more convincing because of its higher level of maturity. It is quieter and less idiosyncratic but still some of the shapes stand out, *K M a g k v w x y* for example. The diacritics look more in harmony with their basic letter and are better placed, except for *ď ť*, where the accent merges with the stroke creating a dark spot. Some of these deficiencies were omitted in the revised version of 1936 and more traditional letterforms were designed such as, K *a g k v w x y*, in order to increase its usage.

Similar to Tusar, the typographer, theoretician and director of the State Printing House (Státní tiskárna), Karel Dyrynk (1876–1949) attempted a more practical and less obtrusive design. He was very engaged in finding answers to the dazzling effect Czech diacritics could cause on the page, distracting the reader, and even leading to misunderstandings of the language. Complaining about the poor qual-

[2] He spearheaded the Arts & Crafts movement. His Kelmscott Press is well-known for beautifully designed books. Besides this, he created wallpapers, stained glasses, textiles, paintings and acted as writer.

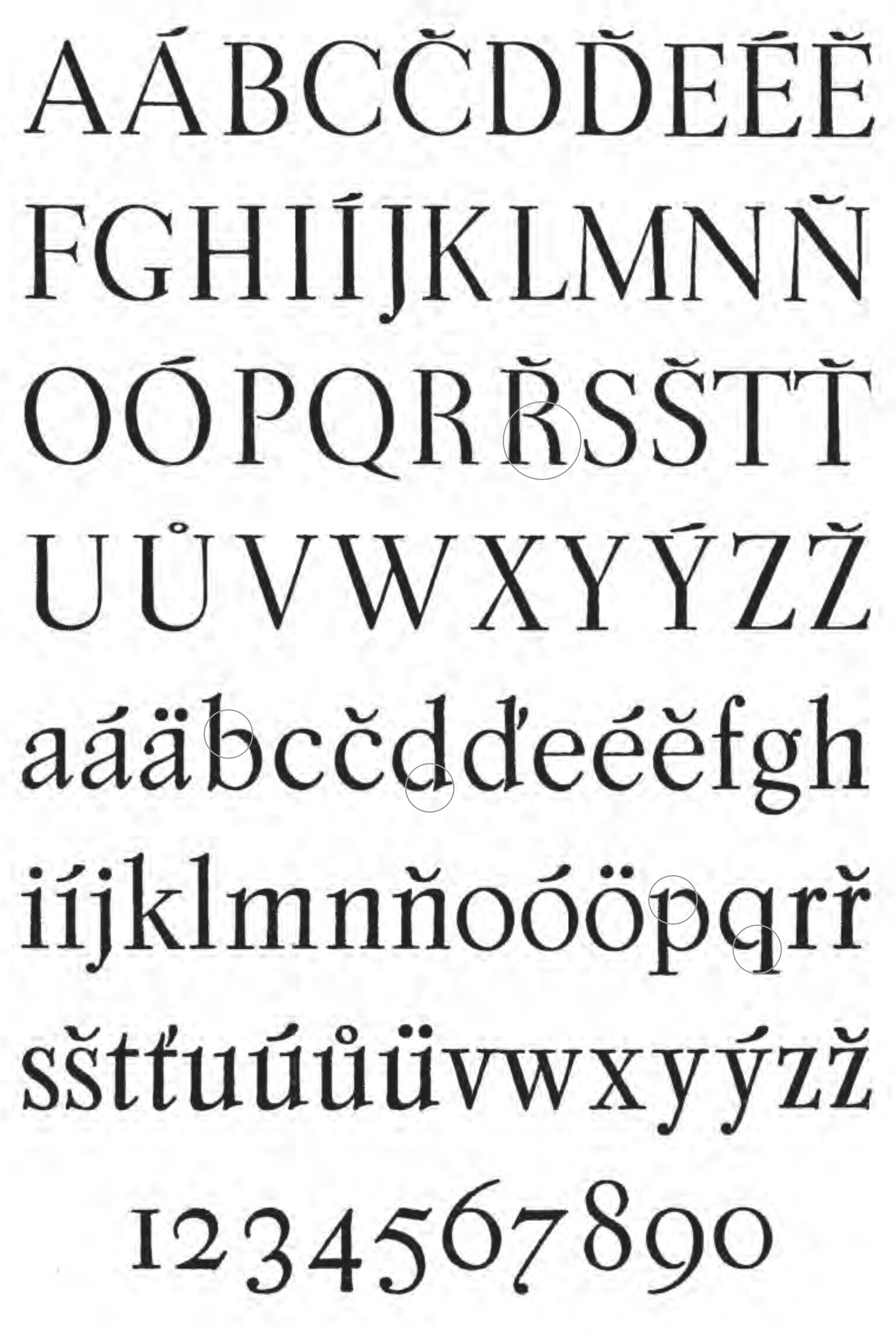

AÁBCČDĎEÉĚ
FGHIÍJKLMNŇ
OÓPQRŘSŠTŤ
UŮVWXYÝZŽ
aáäbcčdďeéěfgh
iíjklmnňoóöpqrř
sštťuúůüvwxyýzž
1234567890

Figure 30 Karel Dyrynk, *Malostranska Antiqua*, 1927, issued by Statni tiskarna, Prague (Muzika 1965).

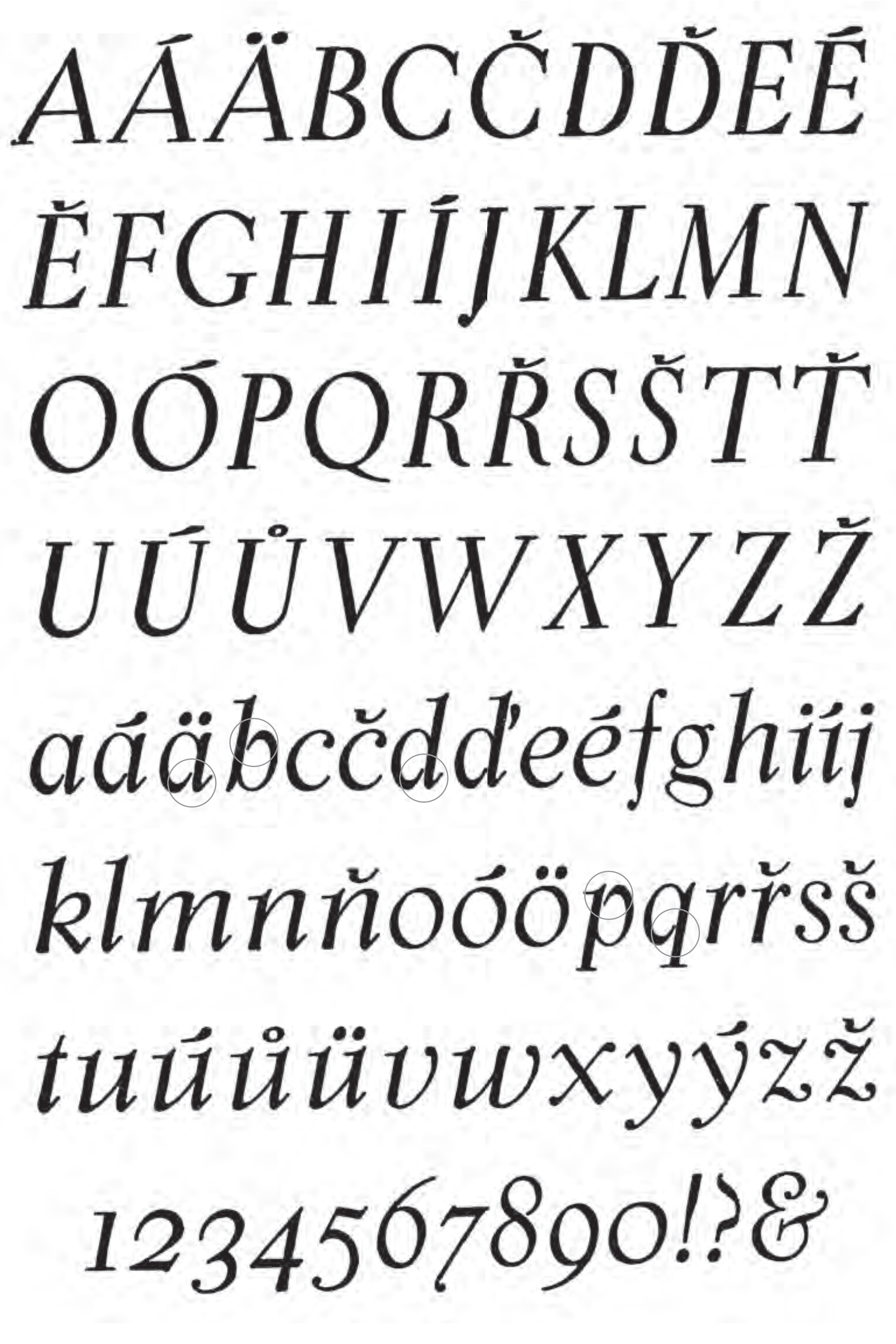

AÁÄBCČDĎEÉ
ĚFGHIÍJKLMN
OÓPQRŘSŠTŤ
UÚŮVWXYZŽ
aáäbcčdďeéfghiíj
klmnňoóöpqrřsš
tuúůüvwxyýzž
1234567890!?&

Figure 31 Karel Dyrynk, *Malostranska Kursiva*, 1928, issued by Statni tiskarna, Prague (Muzika 1965).

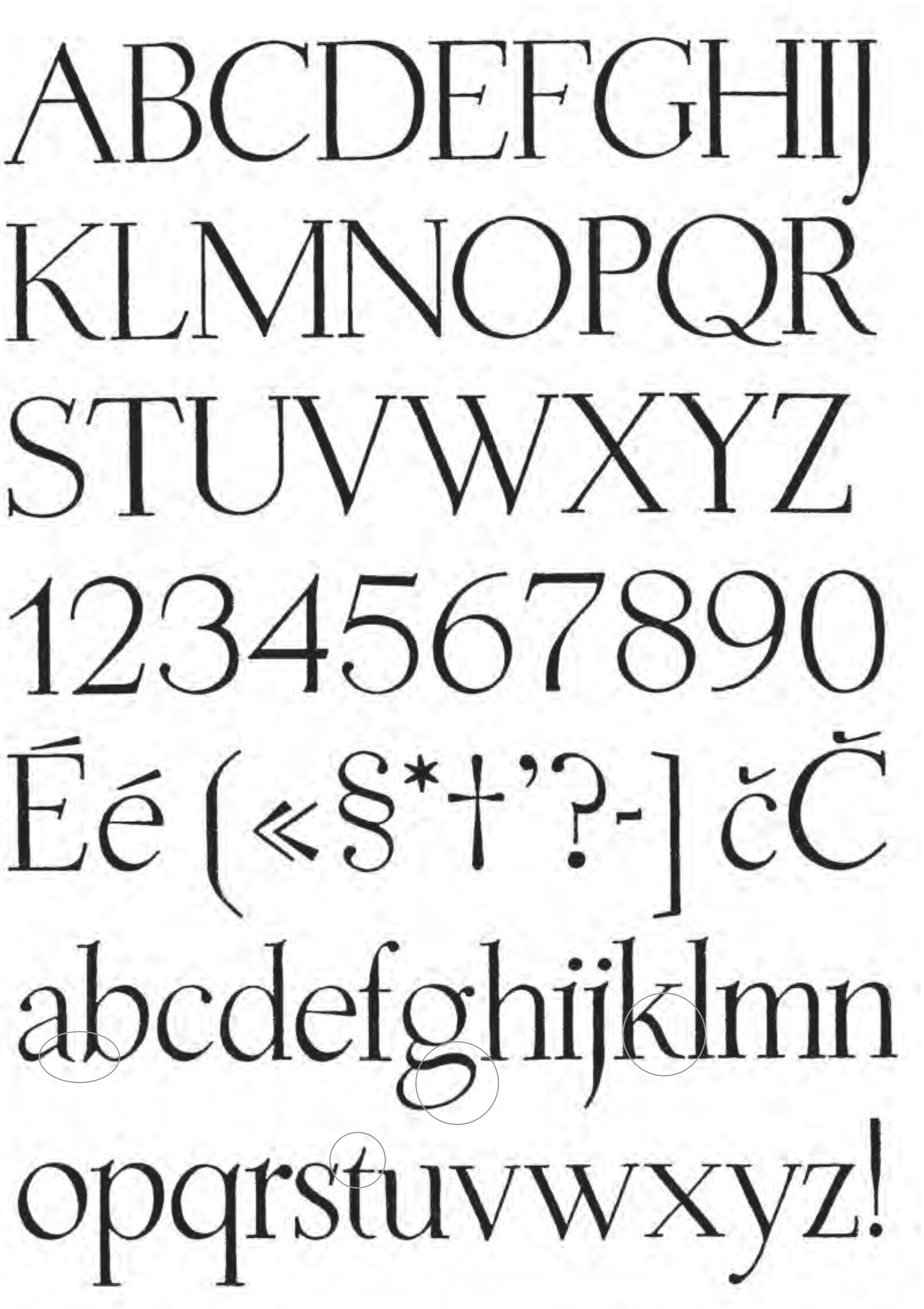


Figure 32 Karel Dyrynk, *Dyrynkova Latinka*, 1930, issued by Grégr, Prague (Muzika 1965).

ity of the then current typefaces in Czechoslovakia, he pointed out that, unfortunately, the reader became insensitive to the correct proportions and shapes of diacritical marks. Typefaces which did not repeat the common errors would even be regarded negatively as mere modern novelty (Dyrynk 1925).

In his own creations, Dyrynk tried to counteract this and paid a lot of attention to the balance of the design. *Malostranská Antiqua/Kursiva*, made in 1927–28, is based on historical models, such as the Aldine-type of the 16th century (figs 30–31). It is rather condensed, with low contrast, and bears some peculiarities, such as open counters on the *b d p q* and the arched leg of the *R*. Here Dyrynk achieved better consistency between the basic letter and the accent. They are distinct enough and fit in proportion and design. The characters have in general a pleasant stroke width, and the typeface appears both vivid and dynamic.

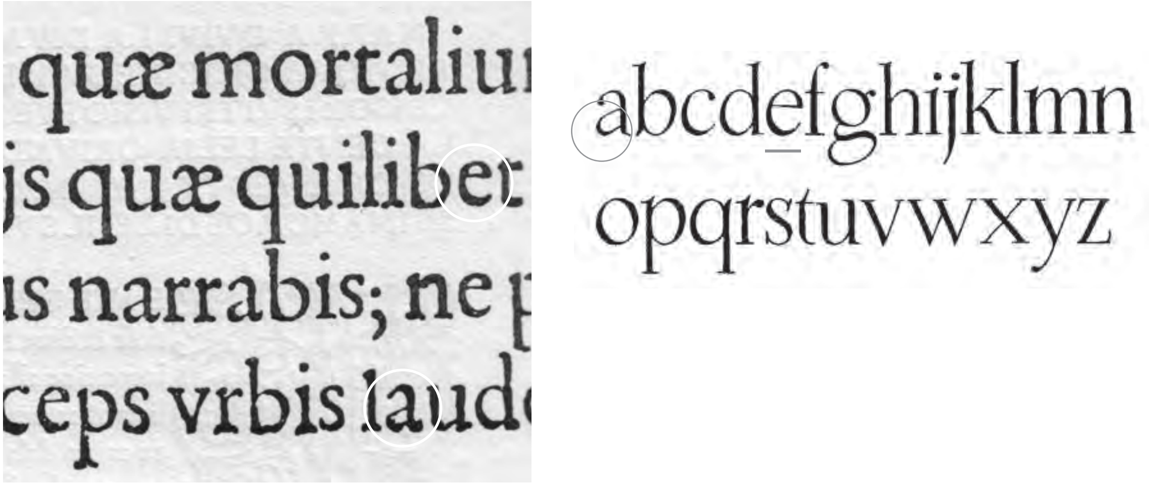


Figure 33 Comparison between *Garamond* on the left and *Dyrynkova Latinka* on the right. Note the hanging bowl on the letter *a*, the shape of *e*, the long extenders and the rather condensed proportions.

Dyrynk's second typeface, the *Dyrynková Latinká*, is meant to have some reminiscence of *Garamond*—the hanging bowl on the letter *a*, long extenders, the general shape of the *e* and the rather condensed proportions—but strongly altered (fig. 33). It was cast by the typefoundry Grégr in Prague in 1930 (fig. 32). Dyrynk wanted it to be a rich typeface with a harsh change between the thin and thick strokes, rhythmic and decorative, but with good mutual proportions, making it more readable and less obtrusive (Muzika 1965, p 530). He himself described it as anxiously avoiding eccentricity, practical, lean and modest. However, some

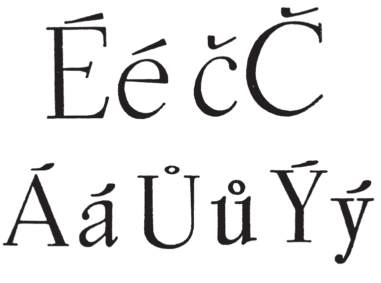
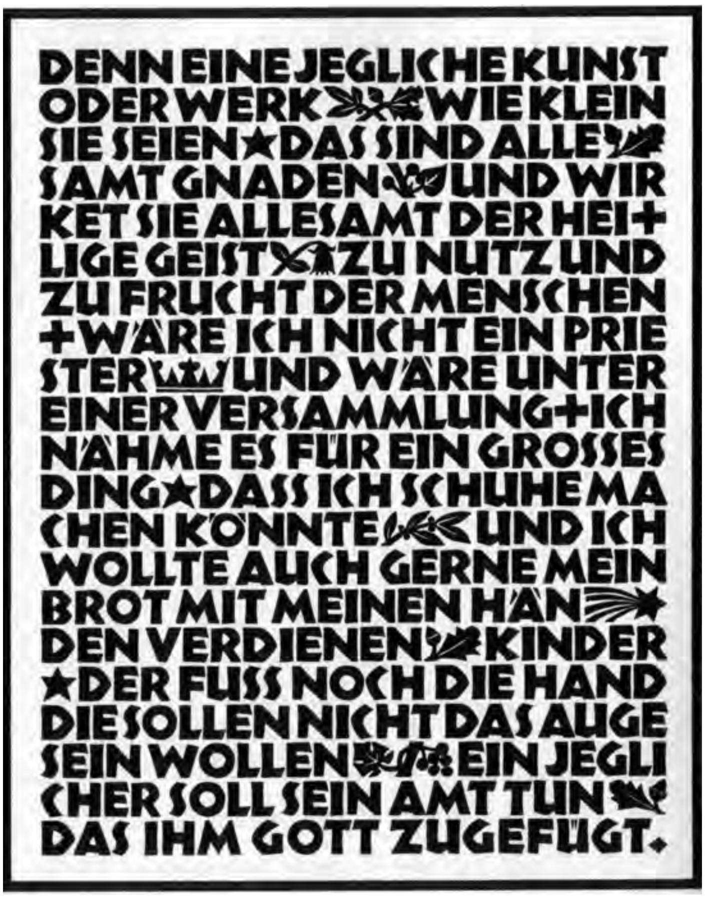
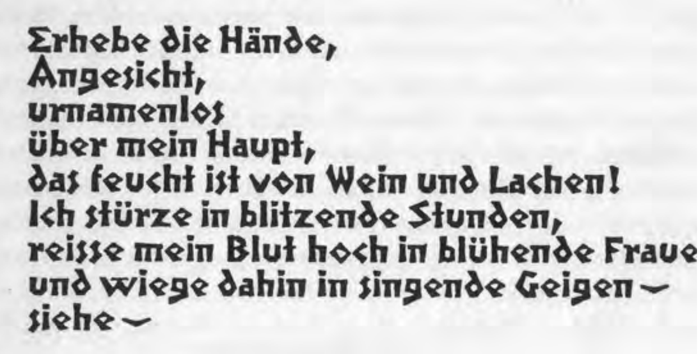


Figure 34 Examples of the diacritics of *Dyrynkova Latinka* (top) and *Malostranska Antiqua*. They vary in size and angle in order to avoid breaking off the typebody and collisions with the descenders.



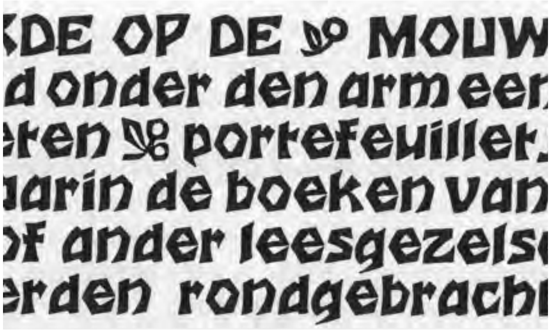
DENN EINE JEGLICHE KUNST
ODER WERK WIE KLEIN
SIE SEIEN★DAS SIND ALLE
SAMT GNADEN UND WIR
KET SIE ALLESAMT DER HEI+
LIGE GEIST ZU NUTZ UND
ZU FRUCHT DER MENSCHEN
+WÄRE ICH NICHT EIN PRIE
STER UND WÄRE UNTER
EINER VERSAMMLUNG+ICH
NÄHME ES FÜR EIN GROSSES
DING★DASS ICH SCHUHE MA
CHEN KÖNNTE UND ICH
WOLLTE AUCH GERNE MEIN
BROT MIT MEINEN HÄN
DEN VERDIENEN KINDER
★DER FUSS NOCH DIE HAND
DIE SOLLEN NICHT DAS AUGE
SEIN WOLLEN EIN JEGLI
CHER SOLL SEIN AMT TUN
DAS IHM GOTT ZUGEFÜGT.

Figure 35 Rudolf Koch, specimen of *Neuland*, 1922–23, issued by Klingspor, Germany (Meggs 1998).



Erhebe die Hände,
Angesicht,
urnamenlos
über mein Haupt,
das feucht ist von Wein und Lachen!
Ich stürze in blitzende Stunden,
reisse mein Blut hoch in blühende Fraue
und wiege dahin in singende Geigen ~
siehe ~

Figure 36 M*endelssohn type*, 1921, issued by the Schriftguss foundry, Germany (Tracy 1986).



DE OP DE MOUW
d onder den arm ee
eren portefeuille
arin de boeken van
of ander leesgezels
erden rondgebrach

Figure 37 André van der Vossen, Houtsneeletter, 1927, issued by the Enschedé foundry, Netherlands (Tracy 1986).

features such as, the tail on the letter *k*, the foot serifs on *a b*, the bottom storey of the *g* and the top stroke of *t*, indicate a less calm and more pretentious effect. Something worth mentioning, regarding diacritics, is the variation in size and angle from lowercase to capitals (fig. 34). The shallow angle on the capitals helps to avoid breaking off from the typebody and collisions with the descenders. As with *Tusar Antiqua*, Dyrynk's typefaces leave the ornamental approach of other designs behind them.
Another remarkable personality is Vojtěch Preissig (1873–1944). He devoted all his talent and skill to the revival of Czech book arts, performing in many areas including illustration, lettering and book making. Preissig's general artistic style was to be deeply involved in experimentation with various techniques, giving preference to lino and wood cut. Indeed, most of his typefaces were made directly in the material without initial drawings. The character of his designs demonstrates, quite frankly, the influence of Expressionist publications, which used woodcuts intensively (fig. 38). The 'primitivity' and roughness of the design is reflected in the work of other contemporary artists as well (figs 36–37). Rudolf Koch's *Neuland* is one such example (fig. 35).

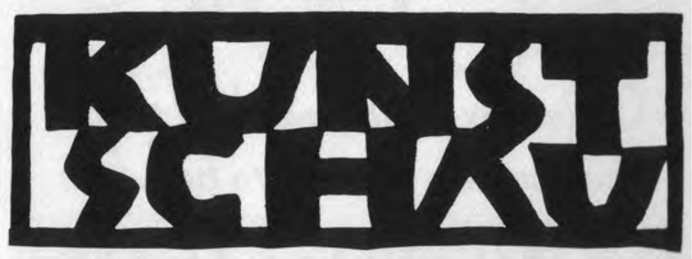


Figure 38 From a poster by Oskar Kokoschka, 1908 in Vienna (Tracy 1986). This kind of accidental and blockish style, resembling wood letters, appeared often in Expressionist publications.

Similarly, Preissig saw a challenge in providing new ideas to the problematic effects of diacritics. Furthermore, it was an opportunity to express national identity and uniqueness. After equipping several existing typefaces with appropriate Czech accents (fig. 39), he came to design a fully consistent typeface in 1912 (fig. 40). It was made mainly for teaching purposes at the Arts College in New York and cut only one size, 18pt. At the first glance it seems busy, random and at least irregular. The stems of the letters bend in different directions and the square serifs are as if tacked to the heavy strokes. Finally, the diacritics are very evident and almost take control of the page—this becomes a distinctive element of several of

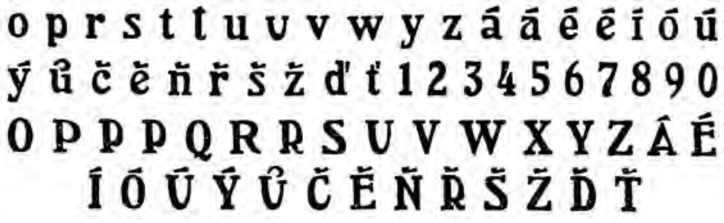

o p r s t t u v v w y z á á é é í ó ú
ý ů č ě ň ř š ž ď ť 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0
O P P P Q R R S U V W X Y Z Á É
Í Ó Ú Ý Ů Č Ě Ň Ř Š Ž Ď Ť

Figure 39 *Arlington*, an American typeface. V Preissig added appropriate Czech phonetic marks and modified some letters accordingly (e g, U krouzek) in 1909. It was used in the book *Slezske písne* by Petr Bezruc (Dyrynk 1925).

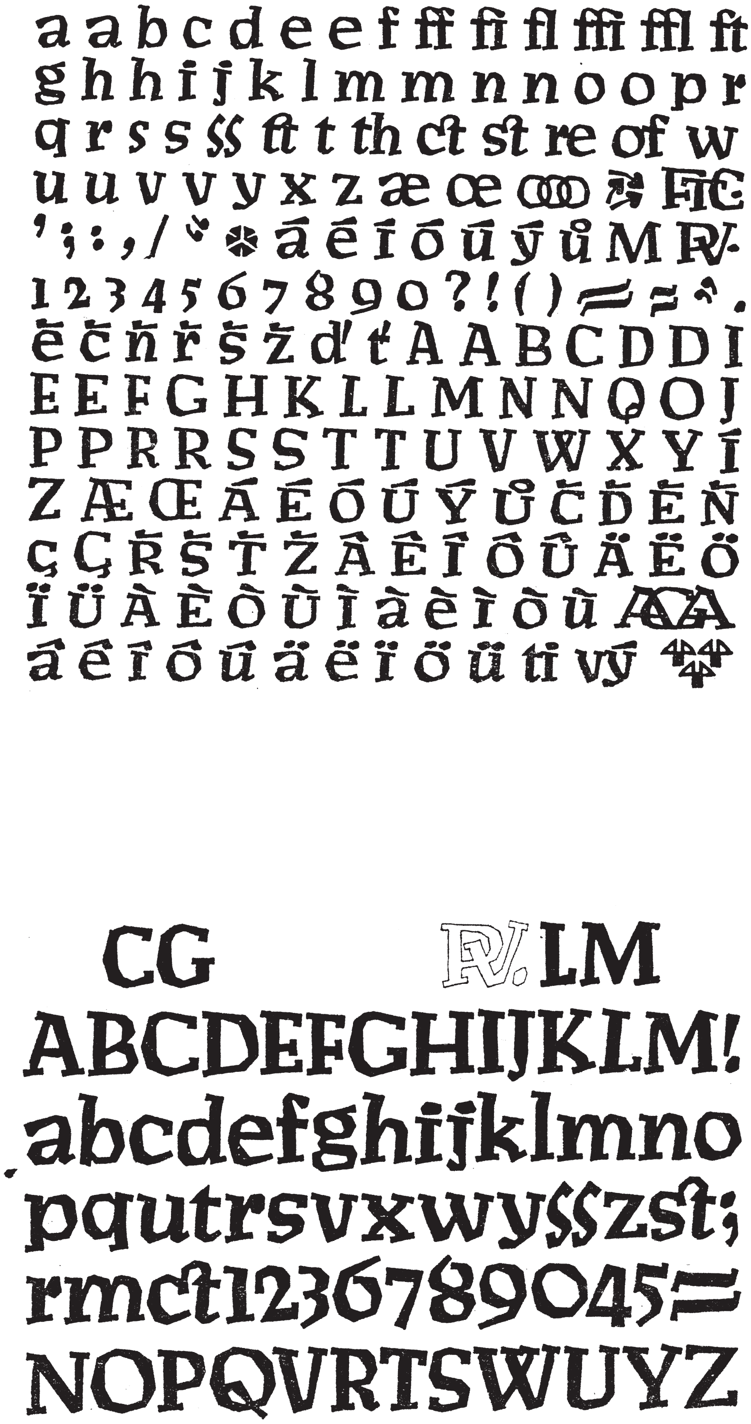


Figure 40 Vojtech Preissig, design of an alphabet, 1912. It was cut directly into linoleum in one size only, 18pt, and used mainly for teaching purposes at the Arts College in New York and for printing some of their publications, where he lectured classes in graphic art. (Dyrynk 1925).

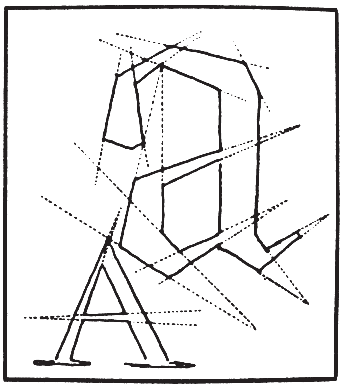


Figure 41 Vojtech Preissig, drawing of *Preissig Antiqua*, explaining the underlaying concept of the design. Curves are built up by short wedge shape lines which are smoothend in small size (Dyrynk 1925).

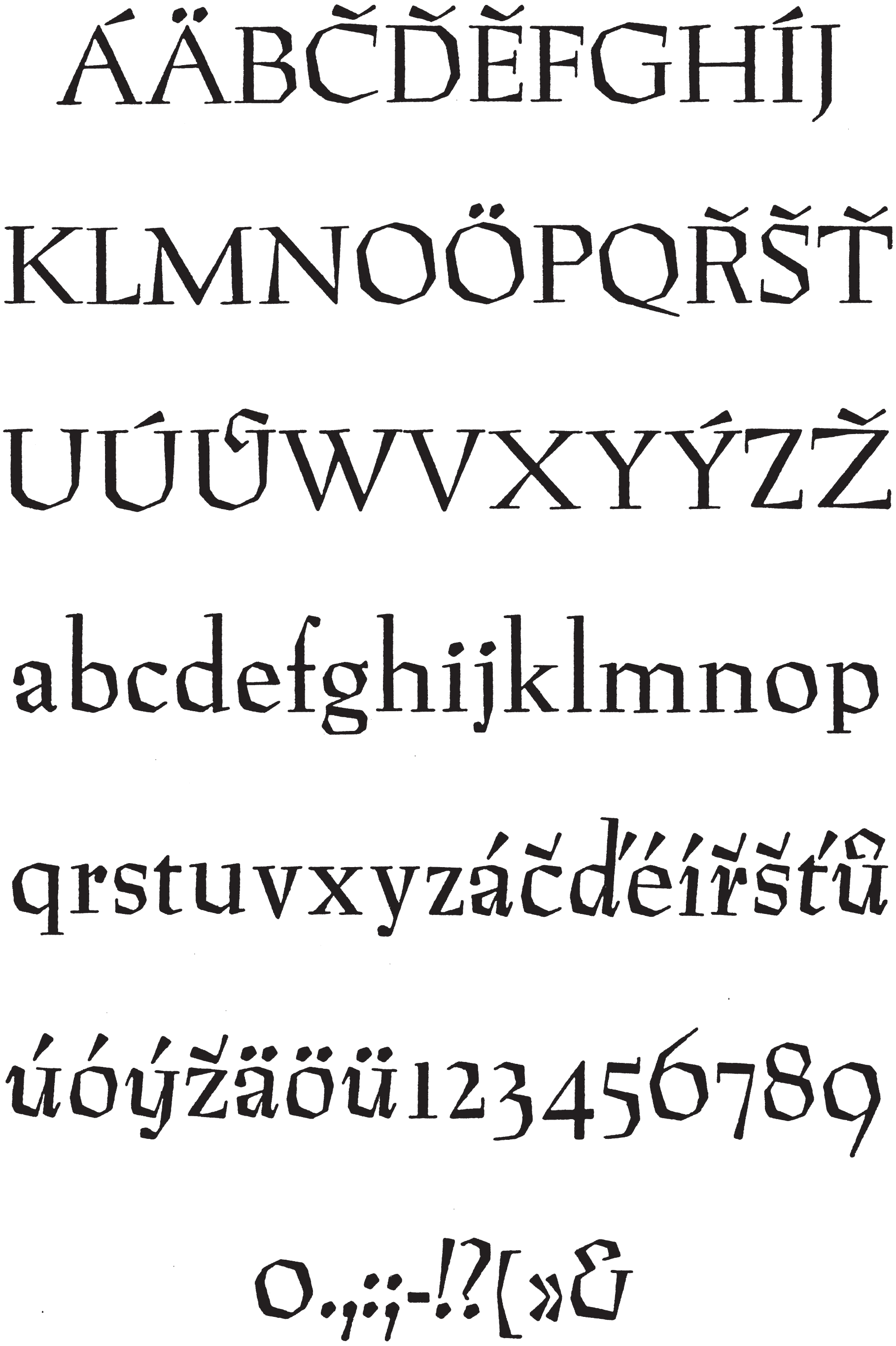
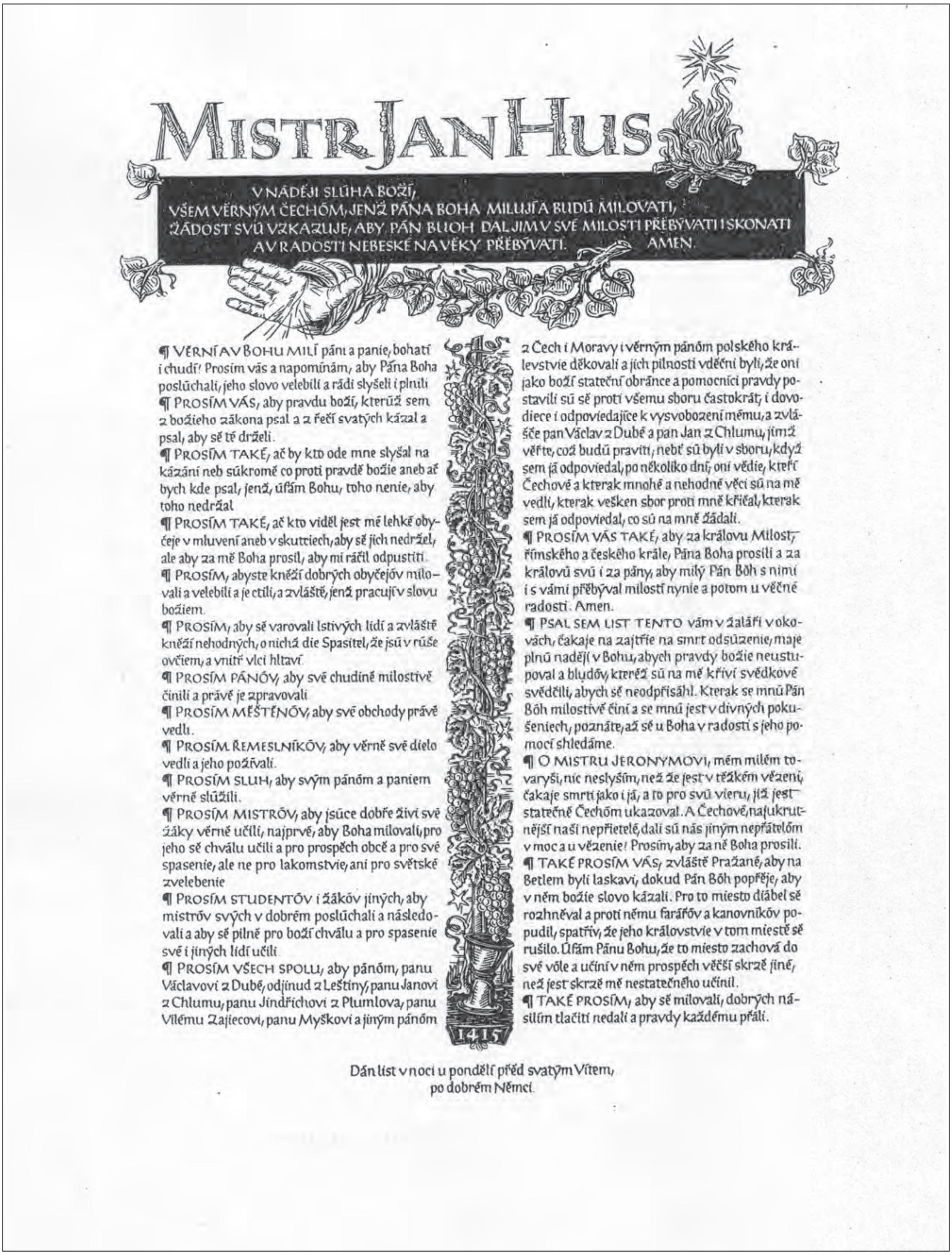

ÁÄBČĎĚFGHÍJ
KLMNOÖPQŘŠŤ
UÚŮWVXYÝZŽ
abcdefghijklmnop
qrstuvxyzáčďéířšťů
úóýžäöü123456789
0.,:;-!?[»&

Figure 42 Vojtech Preissig, *Preissig Antiqua*, 1923–25, issued by Statní tiskárna, Prague (Dyrynk 1925).



MISTR JAN HUS

V NÁDĚJI SLÚHA BOŽÍ,
VŠEM VĚRNÝM ČECHÓM, JENŽ PÁNA BOHA MILUJÍ A BUDÚ MILOVATI,
ŽÁDOST SVÚ VZKAZUJE, ABY PÁN BUOH DAL JIM V SVÉ MILOSTI PŘEBÝVATI I SKONATI
A V RADOSTI NEBESKÉ NA VĚKY PŘEBÝVATI. AMEN.

¶ VĚRNÍ A V BOHU MILÍ páni a panie, bohatí i chudí! Prosím vás a napomínám, aby Pána Boha poslúchali, jeho slovo velebili a rádi slyšeli i plnili

¶ PROSÍM VÁS, aby pravdu boží, kterúž sem z božieho zákona psal a z řečí svatých kázal a psal, aby sě té drželi.

¶ PROSÍM TAKÉ, ač by kto ode mne slyšal na kázání neb súkromě co proti pravdě božie aneb ač bych kde psal, jenž, úfám Bohu, toho nenie, aby toho nedržal

¶ PROSÍM TAKÉ, ač kto viděl jest mé lehké obyčeje v mluvení aneb v skutciech, aby sě jich nedržel, ale aby za mě Boha prosil, aby mi ráčil odpustiti.

¶ PROSÍM, abyste kněží dobrých obyčejóv milovali a velebili a je ctili, a zvláště, jenž pracují v slovu božiem.

¶ PROSÍM, aby sě varovali lstivých lidí a zvláště kněží nehodných, o nichž die Spasitel, že jsú v rúše ovčiem, a vnitř vlci hltaví.

¶ PROSÍM PÁNÓV, aby své chudiné milostivě činili a právě je zpravovali.

¶ PROSÍM MĚŠTĚNÓV, aby své obchody právě vedli.

¶ PROSÍM ŘEMESLNÍKÓV, aby věrně své dielo vedli a jeho požívali.

¶ PROSÍM SLUH, aby svým pánóm a paniem věrně slúžili.

¶ PROSÍM MISTRÓV, aby jsúce dobře živi své žáky věrně učili, najprvé, aby Boha milovali, pro jeho sě chválu učili a pro prospěch obcě a pro své spasenie, ale ne pro lakomstvie, ani pro světské zvelebenie

¶ PROSÍM STUDENTÓV i žákóv jiných, aby mistróv svých v dobrém poslúchali a následovali a aby sě pilně pro boží chválu a pro spasenie své i jiných lidí učili.

¶ PROSÍM VŠECH SPOLU, aby pánóm, panu Václavovi z Dubé, odjinud z Leštiny, panu Janovi z Chlumu, panu Jindřichovi z Plumlova, panu Vilému Zajiecovi, panu Myškovi a jiným pánóm z Čech i Moravy i věrným pánóm polského královstvie děkovali a jich pilnosti vděčni byli, že oni jako boží statečnī obránce a pomocníci pravdy postavili sú sě proti všemu sboru častokrát, i dovodiece i odpoviedajíce k vysvobození mému, a zvláště pan Václav z Dubé a pan Jan z Chlumu, jimž věřte, což budú praviti, nebť sú byli v sboru, když sem já odpoviedal, po několiko dní, oni vědie, kteří Čechové a kterak mnohé a nehodné věci sú na mě vedli, kterak vešken sbor proti mně křičal, kterak sem já odpoviedal, co sú na mně žádali.

¶ PROSÍM VÁS TAKÉ, aby za královu Milost, římského a českého krále, Pána Boha prosili a za královú svú i za pány, aby milý Pán Bóh s nimi i s vámi přěbýval milostí nynie a potom u věčné radosti. Amen.

¶ PSAL SEM LIST TENTO vám v žaláři v okovách, čakaje na zajtřie na smrt odsúzenie, maje plnú naději v Bohu, abych pravdy božie neustupoval a bludóv, kteréž sú na mě křiví svědkové svědčili, abych sě neodpřisáhl. Kterak se mnú Pán Bóh milostivě činí a se mnú jest v divných pokušeniech, poznáte, až sě u Boha v radosti s jeho pomocí shledáme.

¶ O MISTRU JERONYMOVI, mém milém tovaryši, nic neslyším, než že jest v těžkém vězení, čakaje smrti jako i já, a to pro svú vieru, již jest statečně Čechóm ukazoval. A Čechové, najukrutnější naši nepřietelé, dali sú nás jiným nepřátelóm v moc a u vězenie! Prosím, aby za ně Boha prosili.

¶ TAKÉ PROSÍM VÁS, zvláště Pražané, aby na Betlem byli laskavi, dokud Pán Bóh popřěje, aby v něm božie slovo kázali. Pro to miesto diábel sě rozhněval a proti němu farářóv a kanovníkóv popudil, spatřiv, že jeho královstvie v tom miestě sě rušilo. Úfám Pánu Bohu, že to miesto zachová do své vóle a učiní v něm prospěch věčší skrzě jiné, než jest skrzě mě nestatečného učinil.

¶ TAKÉ PROSÍM, aby sě milovali, dobrých násilím tlačiti nedali a pravdy každému přáli.

Dán list v noci u pondělí před svatým Vítem,
po dobrém Němci.

Figure 43 Oldrich Menhart, design of a poster, *Mistr Jan Hus: List vernym Cechum*, 1936, dimensions 67 x 100 cm. (Kaláb 1939).

Preissig’s typefaces. He even let the accent marks influence the shape and size of the basic letter in an attempt to bring them into optimal accord, see *U Û Ů* (fig. 44). Paul Standard suggested that the marks were too heavy, excessive and even exaggerated. He said, “[they]…invaded and destroyed, and the smooth flow of the lines broken to bits.”

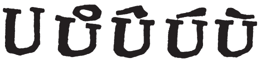


Figure 44 Exmaples of the letter *U* and its diacritical brothers. Vojtech Preissig, modified the shapes of the accented letters quite drastically in order to achieve optimal harmony.

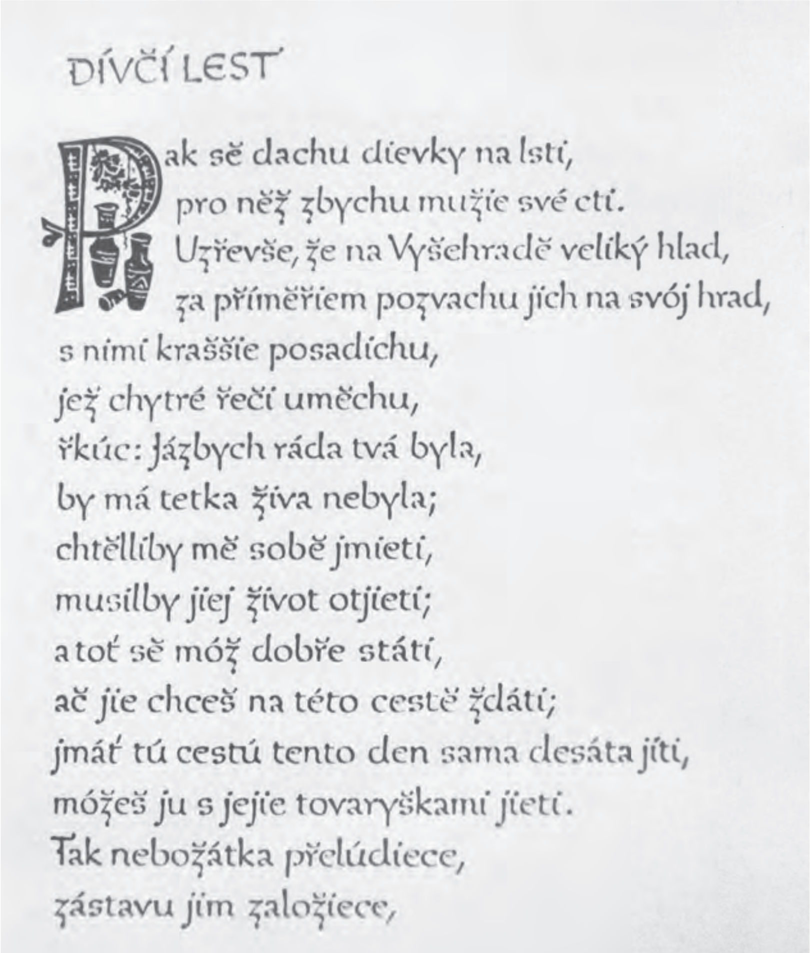
Preissig created many other handmade but incomplete character sets that show an increasing level of confidence and experience. These attempts and trials resulted in the single industrially manufactured and well known typeface, the *Preissig Antiqua/Kursiva*, cast by Státní tiskárna Prague in 1923–25 (fig. 42). Preissig mentioned Gothic letters cut in wood as one of his sources of inspiration. The curves are simulated by short wedge shape lines which become smooth in small sizes generating an even and pleasant appearance on the page (fig. 41). The continuous concern, about perfecting proportions and shapes, led him to experiment extensively with different forms, positions and slopes of the accents. In the final design they are fairly steep and proportionally big, becoming an inherent part of the body of the letter itself. Although very readable, *Preissig Antiqua’s* strong personality suggests being a piece of art rather than a practical and successful text face.

MENHART’S POSITION

¶Contrary to this early group of artists, Oldřich Menhart concentrated more on typeface design and calligraphy. He did not consider himself an artist, but more a craftsman, upholding the revival of fine typography and the importance of calligraphic roots. Unlike his contemporaries, Menhart had ample knowledge and experience of the industrial production of typefaces, due to his many years of working in a printing office. His understanding of technical requirements is one of the crucial reasons for Menhart’s international success. This was surely further enhanced by publishing his typefaces abroad (Bauer from Germany, Monotype from Great Britain) where more advanced technology was in use and where there existed a broader distribution network.

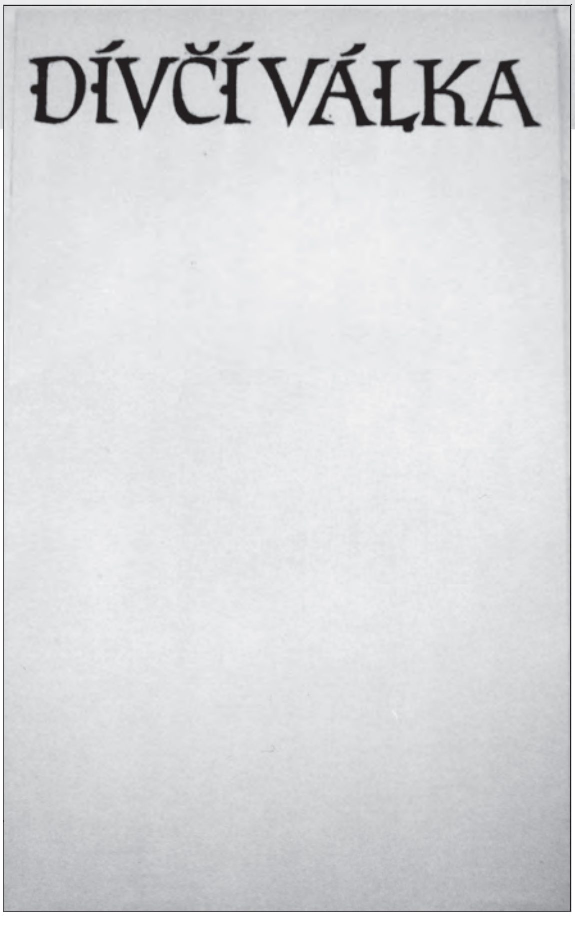
Other factors, involved in his success, include, his highly refined calligraphic skills and profound feeling for the intrinsic anatomy of letters. Menhart was an enthusiast, obsessed with designing letterforms expressing the spirit of his time and maintaining the lively hand of the scribe. His work does not breed nationalistic feelings. It is free of decorative elements and aspires elegance and lightness. The aim is to omit “…every bit of excess typographic baggage,…” (Duensing 1989), and revealing the pure, elemental and comprehensible forms of the classic letters. This suggests Menhart’s influence, although less radical, by the idea, ubiquitous at that time, of linking art and technology in order to come up with new visual concepts expressing cultural developments.

Menhart’s approach to design and its realisation therefore differs quite remarkably from other representatives of that same period. The maturity of his work led to great success that finally achieved an international acceptance and awareness of Czech typeface design.

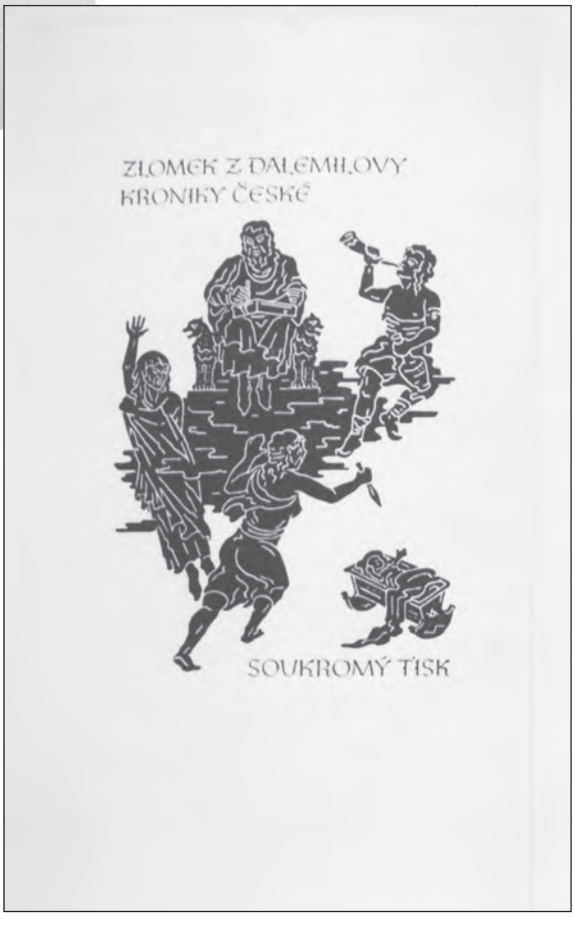


DÍVČÍ LEST

Pak sě dachu dievky na lstí,
pro něž zbychu mužie své ctí.
Uzřevše, že na Vyšehradě veliký hlad,
za příměřiem pozvachu jích na svój hrad,
s nimí kraššie posadíchu,
jež chytré řečí uměchu,
řkúc: Jázbych ráda tvá byla,
by má tetka živa nebyla;
chtělliby mě sobě jmieti,
musilby jiej život otjieti;
a toť sě móž dobře státi,
ač jie chceš na této cestě ždáti;
jmáť tú cestú tento den sama desáta jíti,
móžeš ju s jejie tovaryškami jieti.
Tak nebožátka přelúdiece,
zástavu jím založiece,



DÍVČÍ VÁLKA



ZLOMEK Z DALEMILOVY
KRONIKY ČESKÉ

SOUKROMÝ TISK

Figure 45 Oldrich Menhart, design and calligraphy, page spread, cover and title page *Divci valka*, 1931 for Otakar Zahradnik, Prague (private archive of Otakar Karlas).

Period of preparation

FORMATIVE INFLUENCES

¶In his early years Oldřich Menhart experienced formative influences from three main directions. One of them was his father. He was a goldsmith who taught his four sons engraving, drawing and carving. In his father's workshop Menhart acquired skilled hands and a profound feeling for shapes. He developed a sense for detail up to a level of perfectionism. Increasing experience made his working hand secure and assured. Additionally, he became familiar with the peculiar characteristics of the material and the tool. The skill of being aware of the relationship between tool and form, that is to know how technology would effect the final shape, became Menhart's fundament for his later mastery.

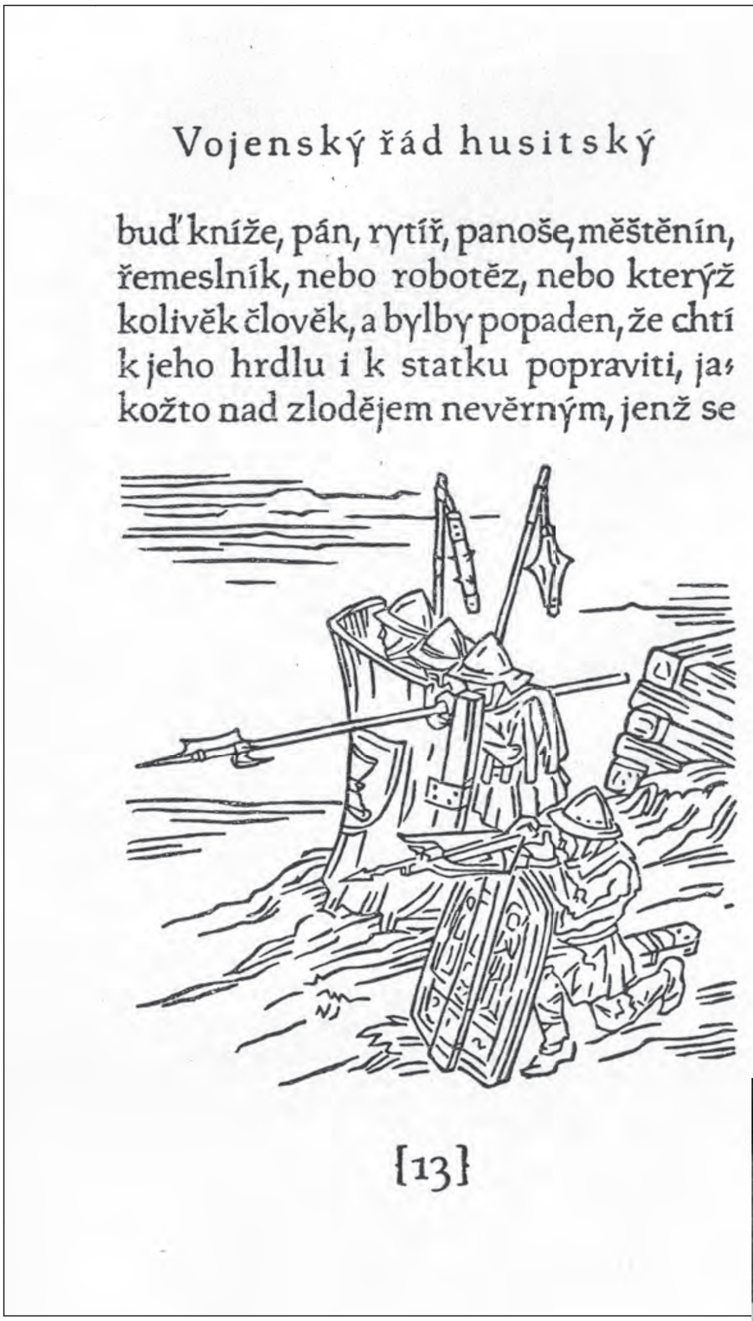
Another important source was working first as an apprentice, then as an ordinary worker and finally as foreman in the printing house Politka in Prague. Here he gained many years of professional experience in contact with the process of printing and the industrial production of typefaces. This was crucial for his extraordinary understanding of technical conditions when it comes to design typefaces.

Finally, the third influence came from his teacher Karel Mrázek at the school of typography. Here Menhart encountered for the first time the art of calligraphy and book design. Mrázek recognised his talent and encouraged him to occupy himself with these subjects.

Furthermore, visits to the Plantin-Moretus Museum in Antwerp, to the Imprimerie Nationale in Paris and the private Klingspor collection in Kronberg, financed by the Czech Institute of Economy, had deep impacts on Menhart's later professional evolution. He got in touch with original punches, matrices and prints. During this time he also studied the work and life of several important masters of writing, such as Plantin, for example.

INTEREST IN CALLIGRAPHY

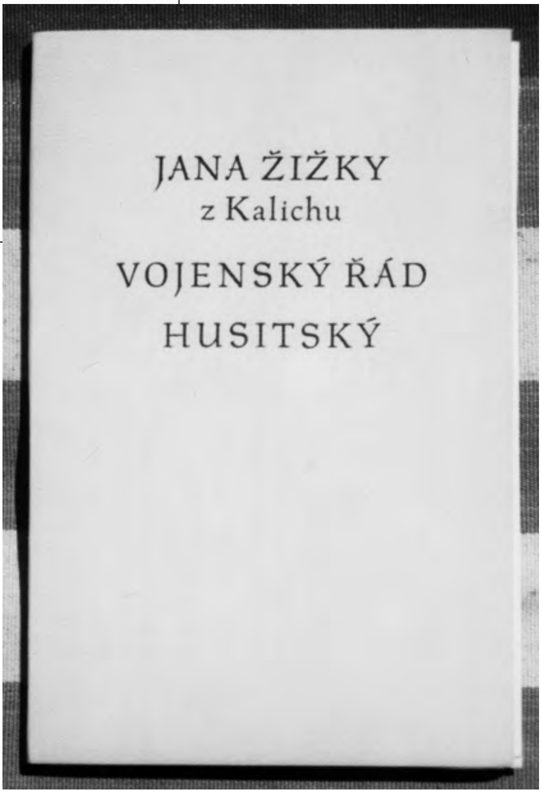
¶Menhart became increasingly involved with the study of calligraphy and old writings. He realized the potential of expressing visually, beauty, sentiments and intellect by the means of calligraphy. He had a strong creative drive and wanted to understand, to absorb the inherent nature of letters. Unfortunately, the opportunities, available to him, were quite limited. Churches, public buildings, cementeries, libraries and the like, were some of the places where he could study letterforms. Free from traditional heritage and knowledge, he was able to observe the inscriptions with innocent eyes and to see the spirit of the letters behind the external form. He refined his sense for detail and tried to comprehend the system of relationships between single pieces of writing. This made for a gradual maturing of his intuition for the viability of lettershapes and their emotional effect on the message to the reader. Also interesting for him, was the power of letters as testimonies of time and culture. This experience led Menhart to search for the natural style of his time, the hidden rhythm of life and the hand of the scribe. Beautiful but superficial and decorative calligraphy was alien to him. The challenge was to develop his own ideas and to find new ways of conceiving of artistic handwriting as a graphic representation of his individuality. The art of writing, in



Vojenský řád husitský

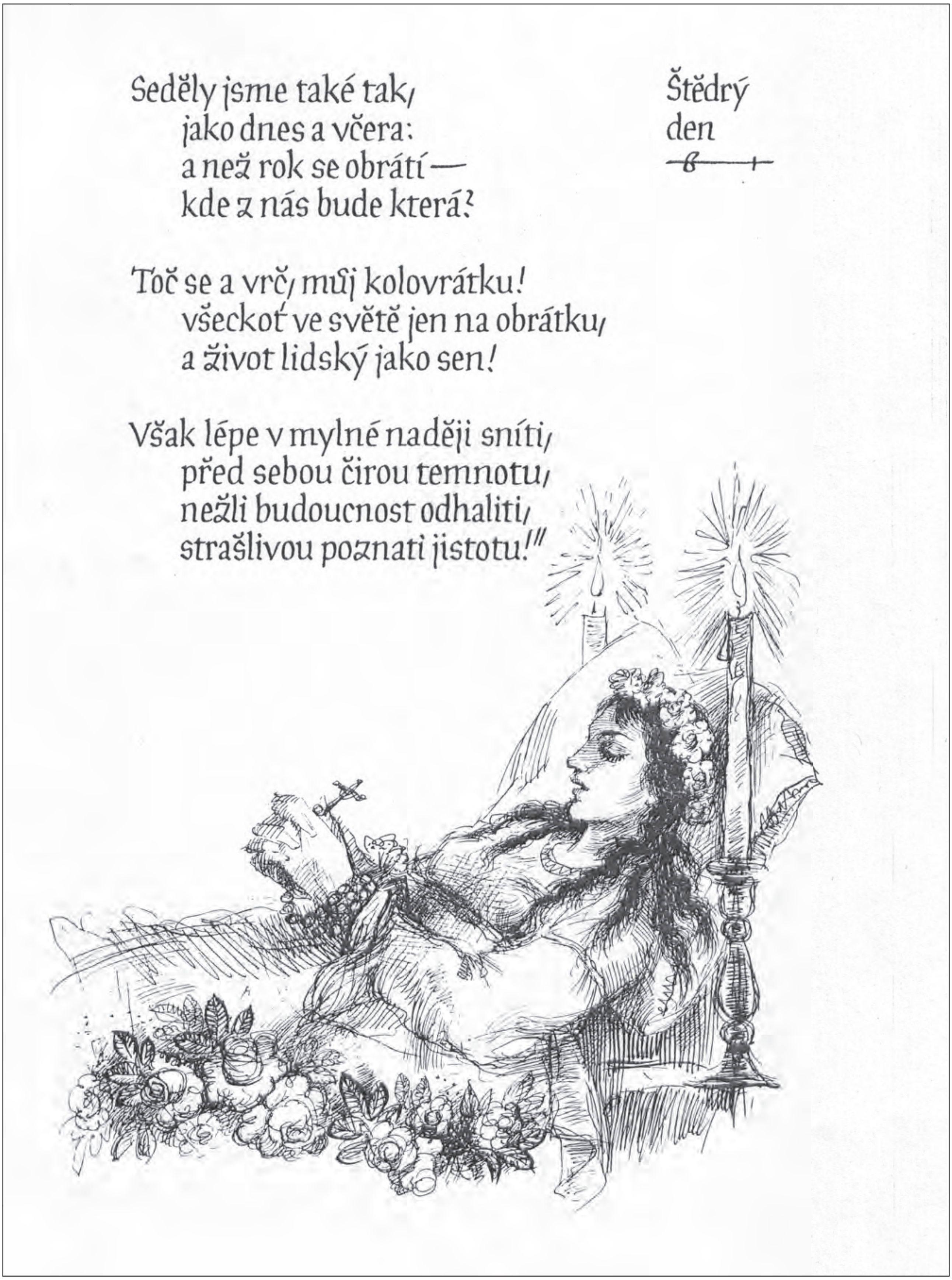
buď kníže, pán, rytíř, panoše, měštěnín, řemeslník, nebo robotěz, nebo kterýž kolivěk člověk, a bylby popaden, že chtí k jeho hrdlu i k statku popraviti, jakožto nad zlodějem nevěrným, jenž se

{13}



JANA ŽIŽKY
z Kalichu
VOJENSKÝ ŘÁD
HUSITSKÝ

Figure 46 Oldrich Menhart, design and calligraphy, page spread and cover *Jana Zizky z Kalichu vojensky rad Husitsky*, 1932 for Otakar Zahradnik, Prague (private archive of Otakar Karlas).



Seděly jsme také tak,
jako dnes a včera:
a než rok se obrátí—
kde z nás bude která?

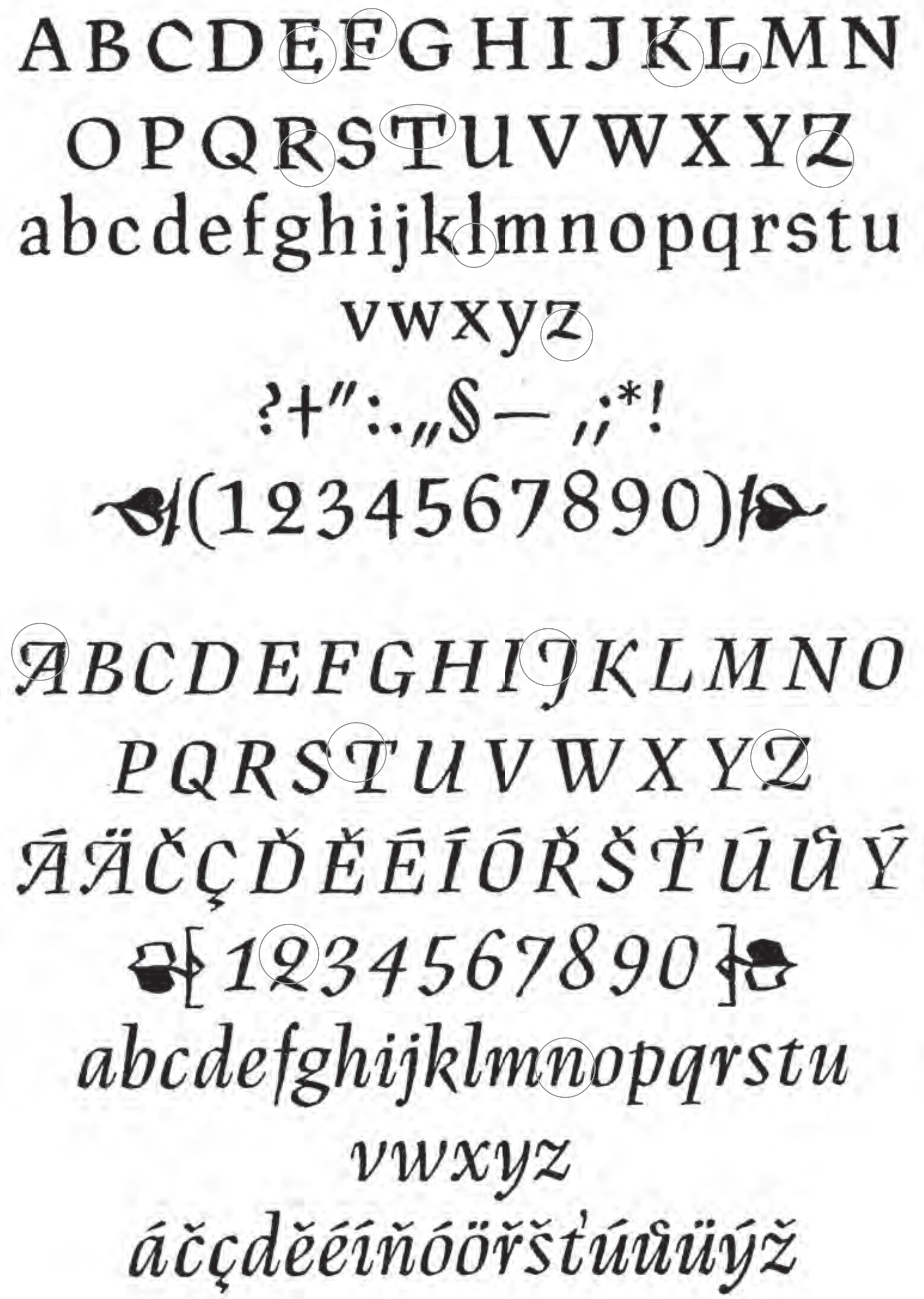
Toč se a vrč, můj kolovrátku!
všeckoť ve světě jen na obrátku,
a život lidský jako sen!

Však lépe v mylné naději sníti,
před sebou čirou temnotu,
nežli budoucnost odhaliti,
strašlivou poznati jistotu!"

Štědrý
den

6

Figures 47 Oldrich Menhart, design and calligraphy, page spread *Kytice* by Karel Jaromír Erben, 1941 for the Edition Atlantis, Brno. Illustrations by Antonín Procházka (Menhart 1956).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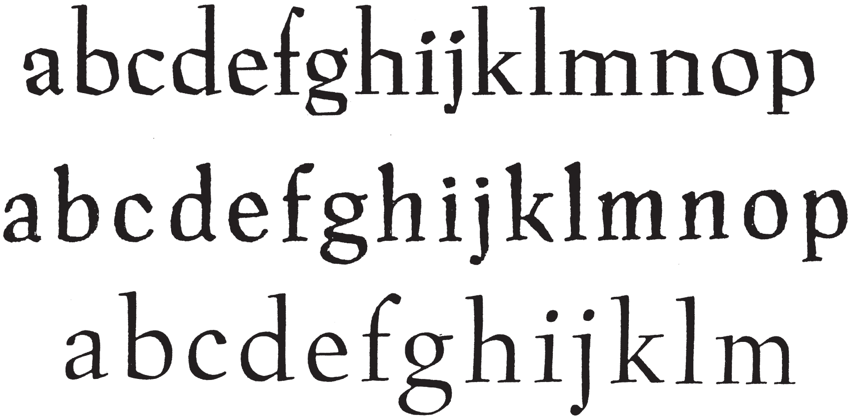
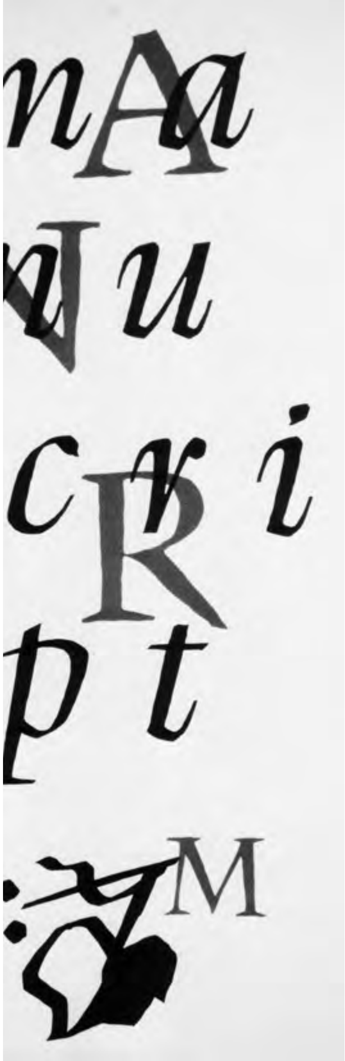
Figures 48 Oldrich Menhart, *Manuscript Antikva/Kursiva*, 1943/1946, issued by Státní tiskárna, Prague (Muzika 1965). In the italic, the calligraphic appeal is even more apparent, see for example the letters *A J T Z 2*, and the strong in- and outstrokes on such letters as *i l m n*.

fact, became an existential element of his life. Similar to other designers at that time, he was engaged finding the national Czech style, although he was aware that any given personal style could be only one of many possible interpretations of the national style. Unrepelled, this task remained an endeavour until the very end of his days.

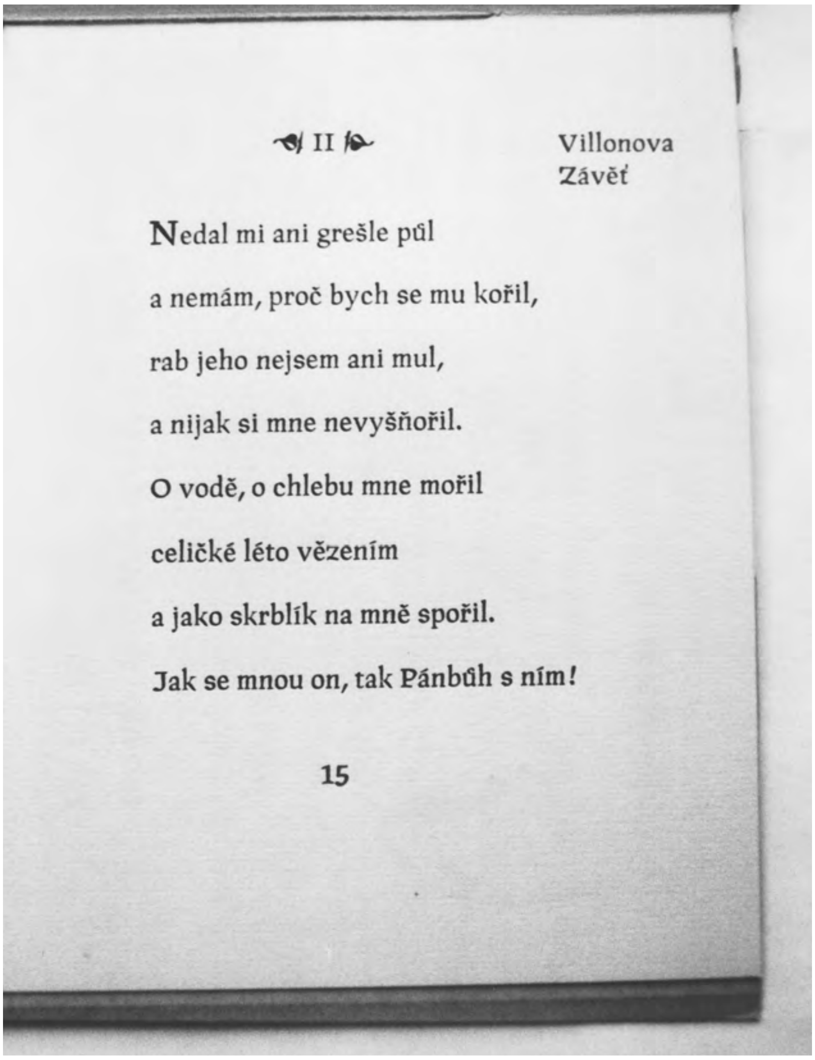
His lifelong concern about teaching and discussing the 'black art', started with the educational publication, together with his mentor Karel Mrázek, of his first book in 1921, *První českou školu ornamentálního písma*. It describes the rules of calligraphy he had discovered during his early years of studying letterforms. The use of various design elements is shown together with their visual relationship to the message of the text. Besides that, he began to create plenty of fine books, seeking to unify the written word with the illustration. Figures 45–46 show two handwritten books, *Dívcí válka* 1931 and *Jana Žižky z Kalichu vojenský řad Husitský* 1932. Other examples of his vast range of lettering, exlibris and books include *Mistr Jan Hus: List věrným Čechům* a poster 1936 (fig. 43) and *Kytice* by Karel Jaromír Erben 1941 (fig. 49). Both pieces of work can be regarded as precursors to the highly individual typeface *Manuscript* from 1943–45 (figs 48 49 51 52). According to Paul Standard (1953), the design is strongly influenced by Preissig's Antiqua, but "its maximum fragmentation was…brought under control…" (fig. 50). Freely drawn with a spring pen, it is deliberately rough with a primitive and peasant finish. Despite its rustic feel and irregularity, the typeface appears very spirited, elegant, surprisingly uniform and therefore legible. It is, "seemingly written with molten metal" (Standard, 1953). Obviously based on handwriting, informal and yet poetic, its irregularity is intensified by the to the jagged and to the bottom tapering strokes. The tails on the letters *K R*, the frankly pen-formed serifs on *E F L T* and the characteristic slope on the bottom stroke of *Z z* show, also, the calligraphic heritage of *Manuscript*. It is regarded as Menhart's masterpiece, expressing the author's energetic temperament and self-confident personality. Max Caflisch went as far as to say (Duensing, 1989) that it "…has no type-design counterpart either contemporary or historic."



Figures 50 Comparison of *Preissig Antikva* (top), *Manuscript Antikva* and *Figural* (enlarged to the same x-height). Observations, in particular, the shape of the letters *a c e* and the flat and very thin serifs of *Preissig Antikva* and *Figural* (Menhart), suggest a remarkable influence by Preissig on Menhart.



Figures 49 Detail of a poster layout in the magazine Typografia, vol 5, 1962, showing some letters of *Manuscript Antikva/Kursiva*.



II

Villonova
Závěť

Nedal mi ani grešle půl
a nemám, proč bych se mu kořil,
rab jeho nejsem ani mul,
a nijak si mne nevyšňořil.
O vodě, o chlebu mne mořil
celičké léto vězením
a jako skrblík na mně spořil.
Jak se mnou on, tak Pánbůh s ním!

15

Figure 51 Photograph of a specimen booklet, showing a poem set in *Manuscript Antikva* (private archive of Otakar Karlas).

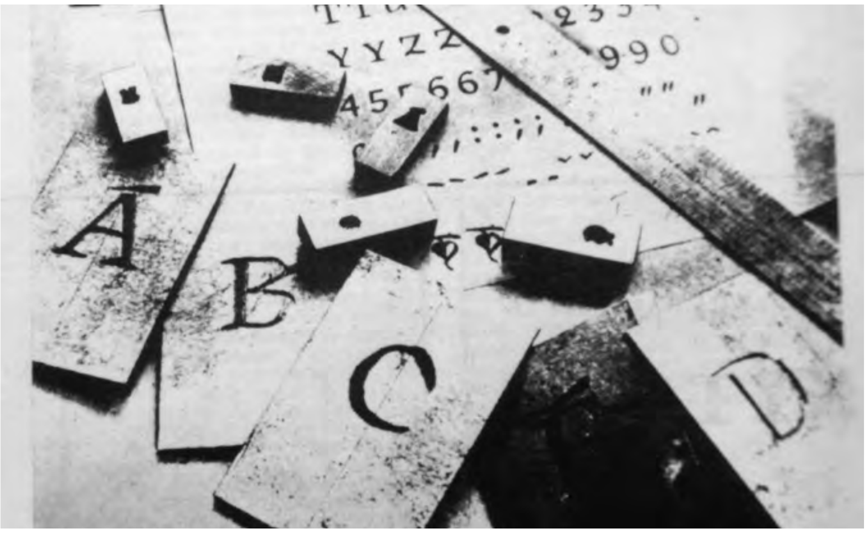
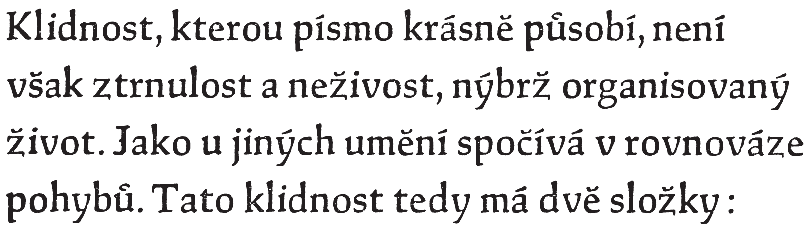


Figure2 52 Photograph of patterns and matrices of *Manuscript Antikva* (Standard 1953).



Klidnost, kterou písmo krásně působí, není
však ztrnulost a neživost, nýbrž organisovaný
život. Jako u jiných umění spočívá v rovnováze
pohybů. Tato klidnost tedy má dvě složky :

Figure 53 Oldrich Menhart, *Hollar,* 1939. It was a work comissioned by Jaroslav Picku intended to be used for his private prints. The design is rather dark and dense with calligraphic overtones, apparently influenced by the client who wanted an alphabet in the spirit of German and English private presses. The swelled strokes and the square-ness of the round parts indicate some familiarity with *Manuscript*. The production was quite poor and the matrices were afterwards destroyed. (Duensing 1989).

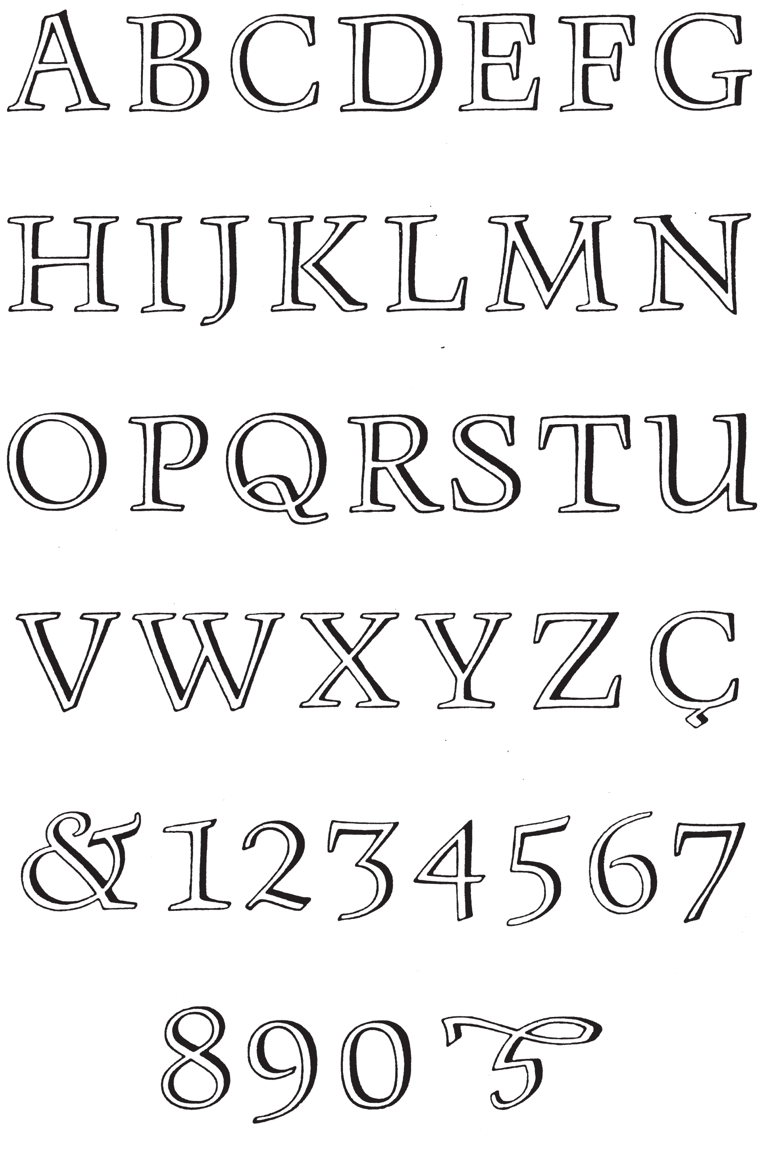


Figure 54 Oldrich Menhart, *Monument,* 1950. Originally only a few letters were done for the title and chapter headings of the book *Satyr* by Victor Hugo, 1939 (Muzika 1965). Following Jan Tschichold's suggestion he expanded it to a whole alphabet consisitng of capitals only. Paul Standard described it in 1966 saying, "The verticals seem to be wrought like iron on an anvil, to impart an evident torsion; and the serifs too seem to have taken hammer-blows."

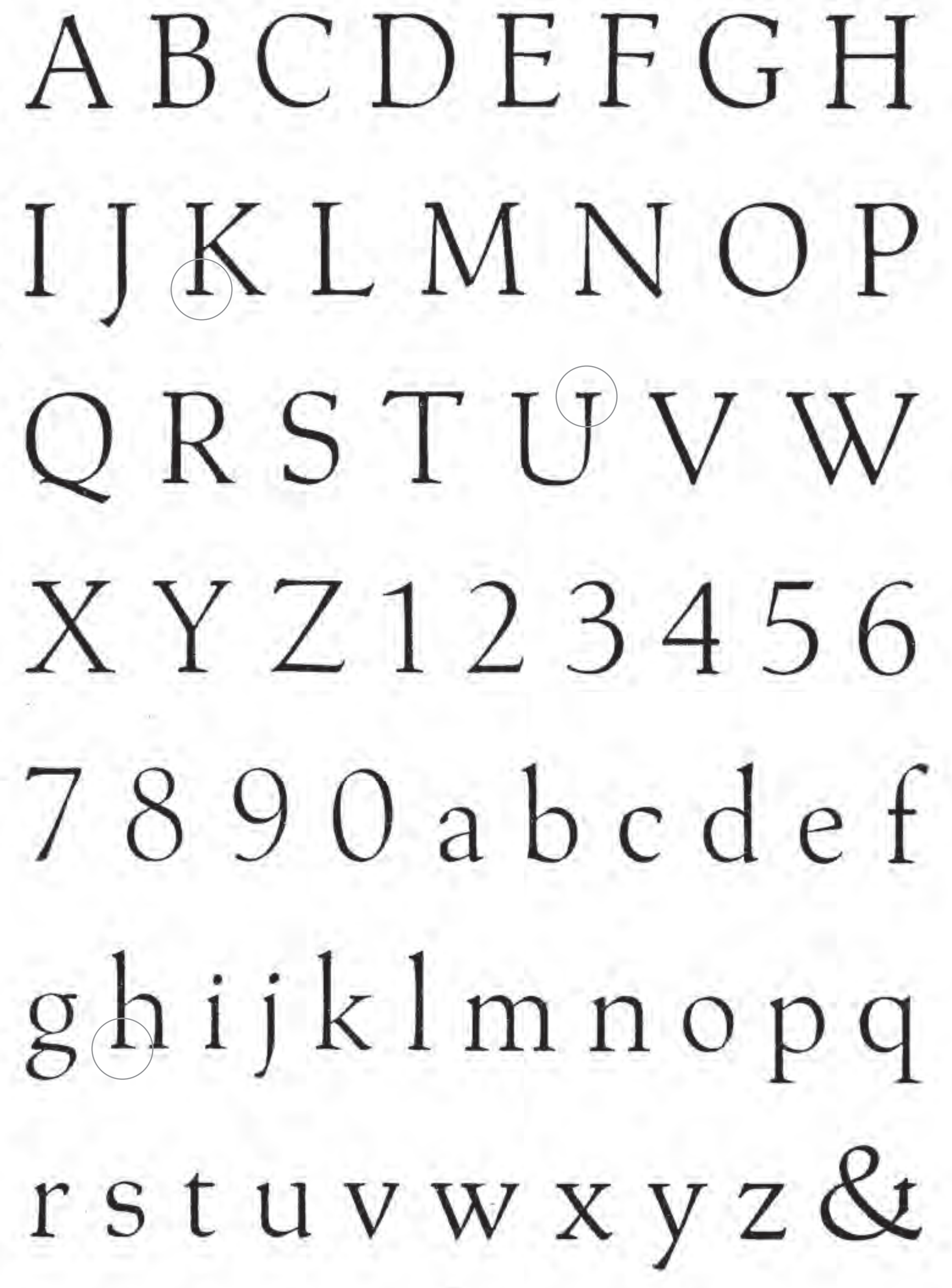

A B C D E F G H
I J K L M N O P
Q R S T U V W
X Y Z 1 2 3 4 5 6
7 8 9 0 a b c d e f
g h i j k l m n o p q
r s t u v w x y z &

Figure 55 Oldrich Menhart, *Menhart Antiqua,* 1930, issued by Bauer typefoundry, Germany (Muzika 1965). The circles point out, exemplary, the special shape of the serifs.

Period of creation

ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY — Designer and technology

¶Menhart had a positive attitude towards new technologies, probably because of the experience of his father's workshop and working in a printing house. Here he became familiar with the characteristics of the material, its constraints and possibilities. Furthermore, he knew about the technical limits and requirements of printing and the production of type.

It was a long and expensive process with many revisions and trial castings. The drawings had to be adjusted according to the machines producing the patterns, matrices and finally metal type. The designer himself was increasingly removed from the process and so lost the general overview and control. In Menhart's opinion, the designer had to keep this in mind while creating. He needed to imagine the final appearance of his typeface, had to predict possible problems and act upon it. Optimal preparation was experience and knowledge of the craft of type and printing. He points out in his book *Tvorba typografického písma* (1957, p 70), "There is no other way for the artist, who wants to control the design of typefaces, than to learn the fundamental rules of the craft of typography." Essential was also to know in what kind of environment—newspapers, books, ephemera and the like—the typeface was going to be used, because this would influence many design-related decisions. Another important condition for obtaining good results was, according to him, competence and mutual understanding between designer and typefoundry. They should work closely together. Moreover, the designer should not rely on the typefoundry to correct his errors. He was convinced that, because of the designer's demands and high level of quality, he could have a positive influence on the progress of technology.

Menhart evaluated mass-production of printed matter and typefaces as generally positive. It has brought many advantages, such as enabling faster and cheaper production of books. He appreciated this democratisation of the book-trade and regarded it as logical consequence of the social changes of that time. This makes him stand out from the group who shared more the opinion broadly promoted by the Arts & Crafts movement. That is, to go back to the roots of individual craftsmanship as a reaction to the industrial revolution and the poor quality of print. Only small, and consequently expensive, editions of fine books were made for an exclusive society. By abandoning the classic academic approach, he opposed this, and designed truly popular books. From his point of view, the designer's task was to prove that the machine does not silence the artist's voice. That is, to try to use the technology smartly and thereby create aesthetically and culturally valuable objects. The designer is supposed to give to the industrially produced typographical product a sense of personality and liveliness. He says (Narodní Muzeum, 1963), "The designer has to address the technical requirements whilst upholding his art." Nonetheless, he was aware of the difficulty a typeface designer experiences in trying to do so, in contrast to a calligrapher. The latter has a vast range of possibilities, limited only by his own imagination, whilst the designer is confronted with the plain, cold and repetitive nature of a machine.

Whilst believing that technology was not the enemy of fine type, he was aware of the under-developed economic and technical climate in his home country, holding the inadequate equipment and miserable conditions of Czech typefoundries and printers jointly responsible for the international failure of Czech typefaces.

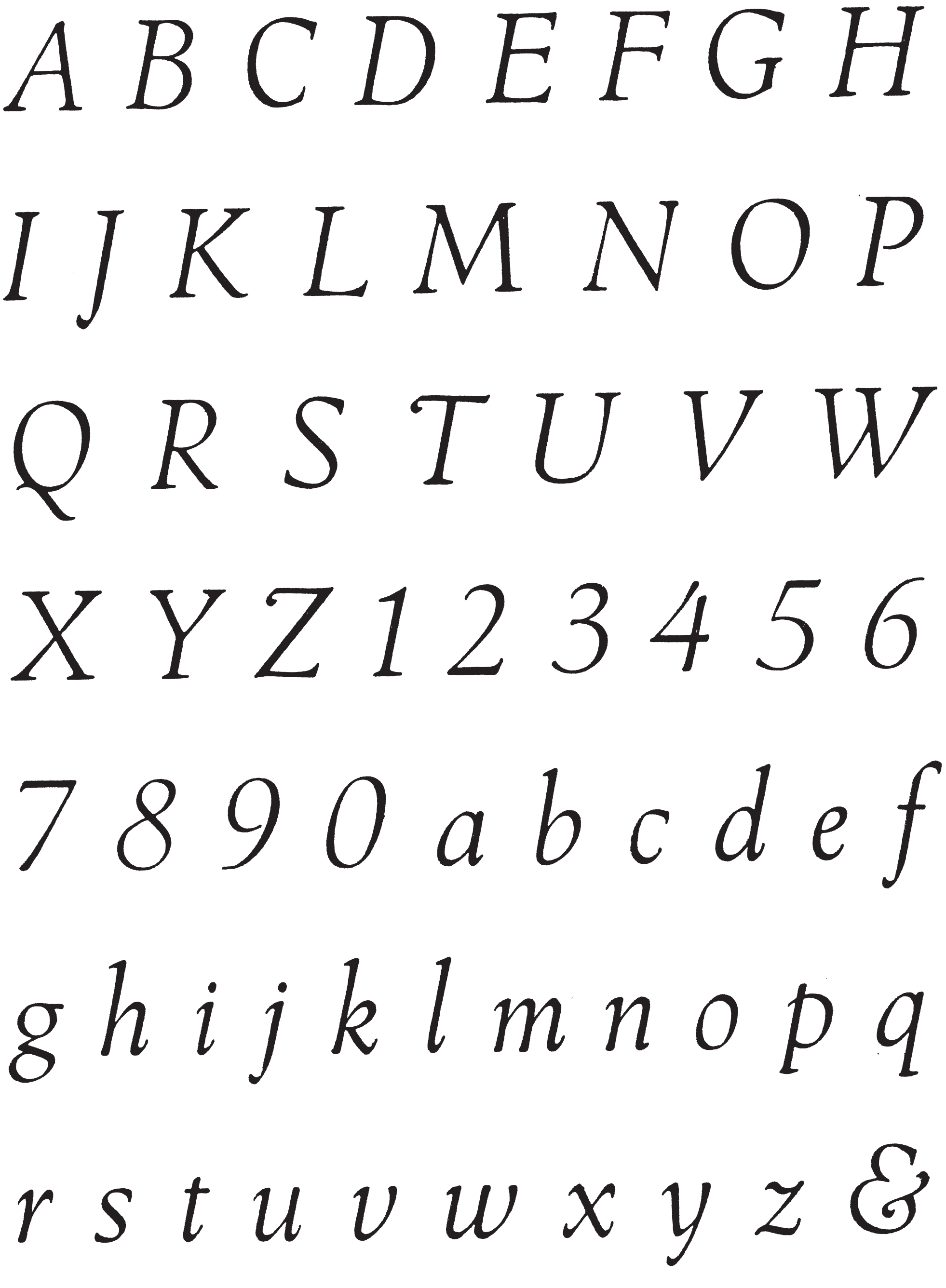
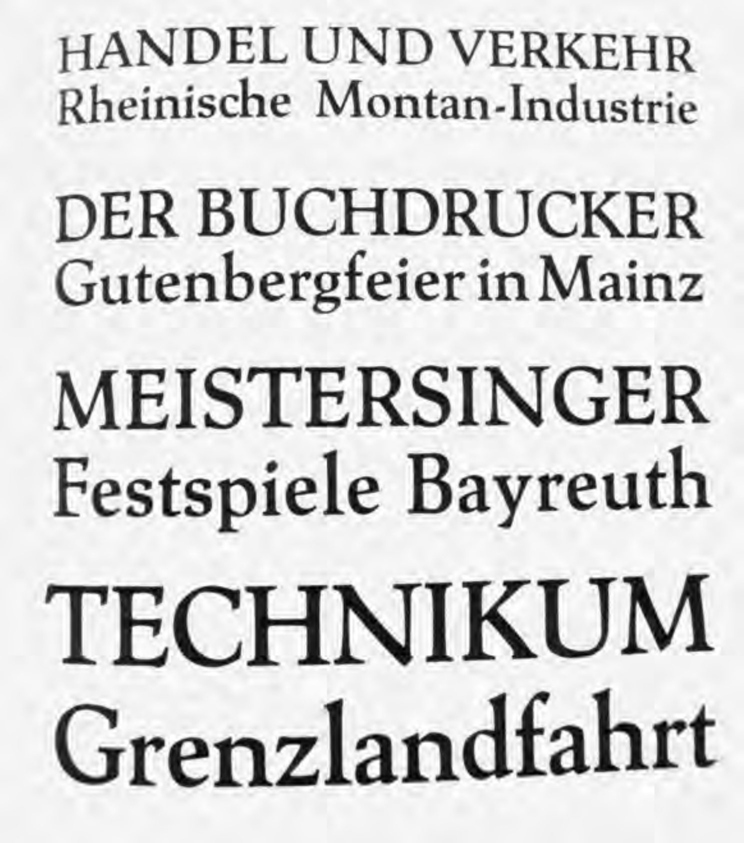

A B C D E F G H
I J K L M N O P
Q R S T U V W
X Y Z 1 2 3 4 5 6
7 8 9 0 a b c d e f
g h i j k l m n o p q
r s t u v w x y z &

Figure 56 Oldrich Menhart, *Menhart Kursiva*, 1931, issued by Bauer typefoundry, Germany (Muzika 1965).



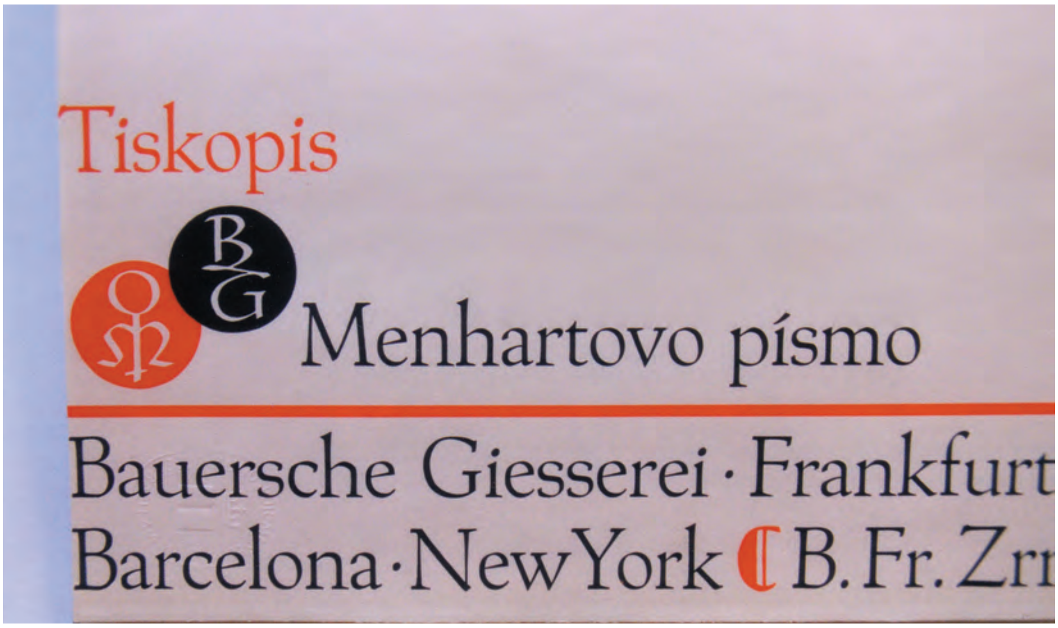
HANDEL UND VERKEHR
Rheinische Montan-Industrie

DER BUCHDRUCKER
Gutenbergfeier in Mainz

MEISTERSINGER
Festspiele Bayreuth

TECHNIKUM
Grenzlandfahrt

Figure 57 Oldrich Menhart, *Menhart Antiqua halbfett* (medium), 1935, issued by Bauer typefoundry, Germany (Collection of the Klingspor museum in Offenbach).

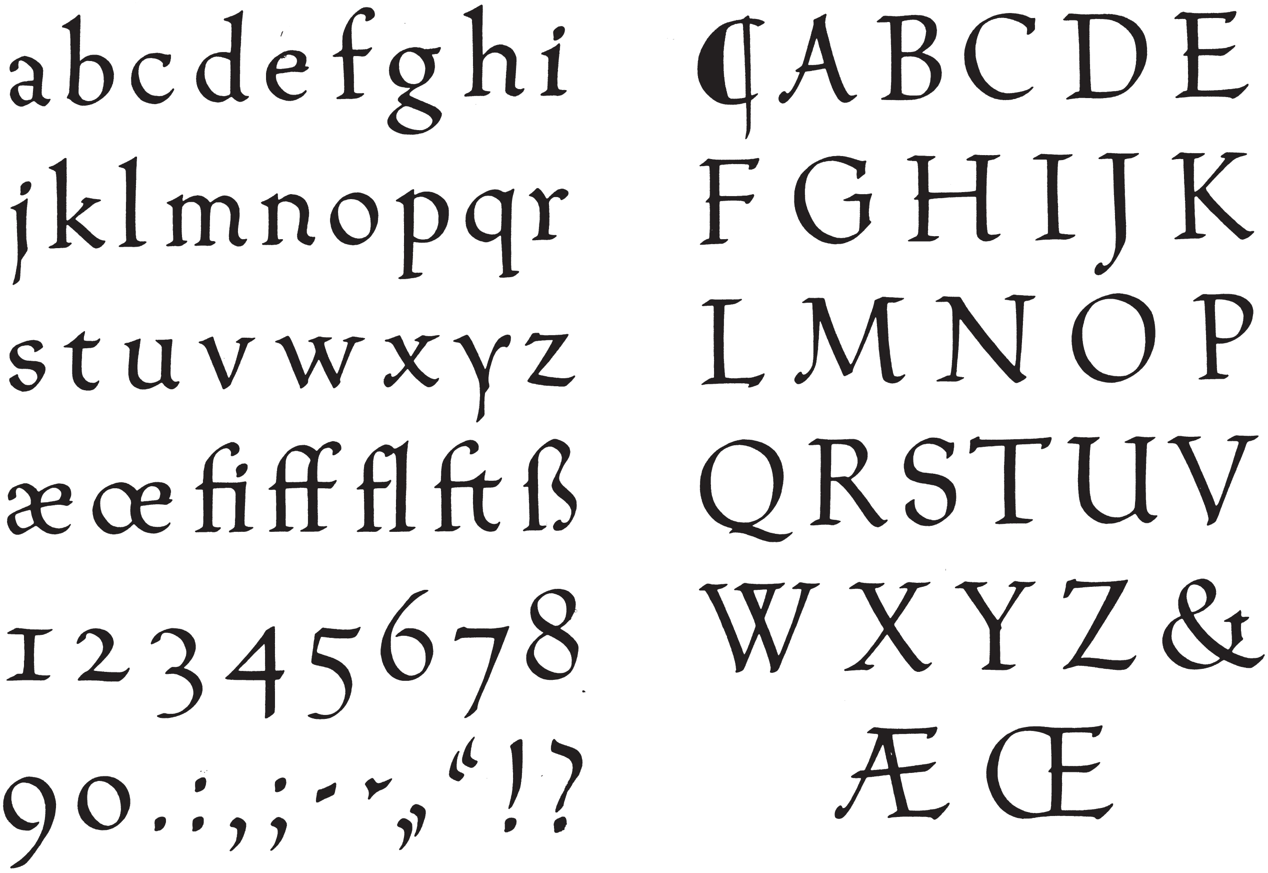


Tiskopis

Menhartovo písmo

Bauersche Giesserei · Frankfurt
Barcelona · New York B. Fr. Zr

Figure 58 Photograph of a detail of a specimen, showing *Menhart Antiqua* (Collection of the Klingspor museum in Offenbach).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¶ABCDE
FGHIJK
LMNOP
QRSTUV
WXYZ&
ÆŒ

Figure 59 Oldrich Menhart *Codex Antiqua*, 1930. It is the forerunner of *Menhart Antiqua*, revealing greatly calligraphic featues (Collection of the Klingspor museum in Offenbach).

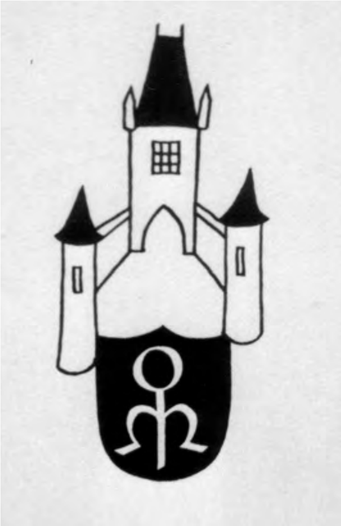
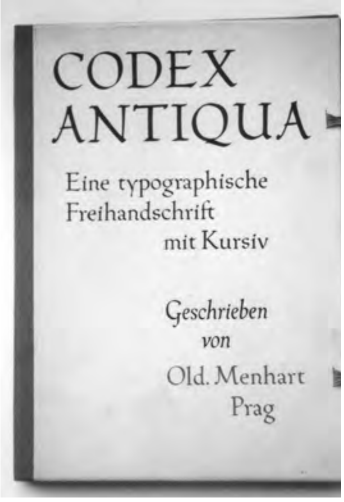


Figure 60 Oldrich Menhart, personal signet, shown in the map containing drawings of *Codex Antiqua,* 1930. (Collection of the Klingspor museum in Offenbach).



CODEX
ANTIQUA

Eine typographische
Freihandschrift
mit Kursiv

Geschrieben
von
Old. Menhart
Prag

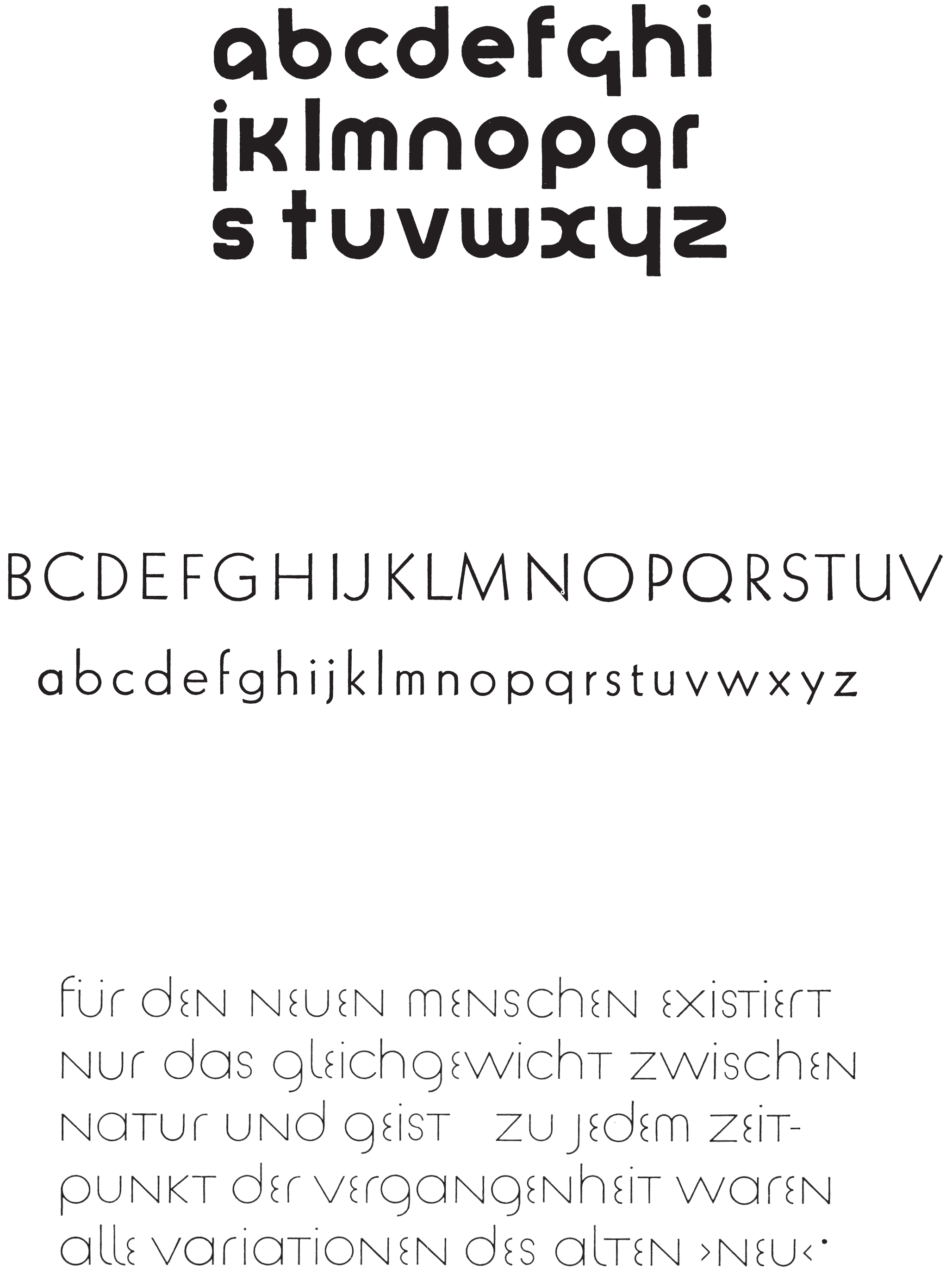
Figure 61 Photograph of the map containing drawings of *Codex Antiqua,* 1930. (Collection of the Klingspor museum in Offenbach).

He was fortunate to have had the possibility to publish his first typefaces abroad. The dealer for the Bauer typefoundry, O Zahradnik, whom Menhart encountered on his trip to Offenbach, encouraged him to submit a proposal to the foundry. He followed this advice and sent a map with drawings and sample text layouts. The name was *Codex Antiqua* and *Kursiv*, a hint to two important medieval manuscripts, the Reimser and Wyssehrader Codex (fig. 59–61). It was strongly calligraphic and dynamic, but not yet accomplished. After several revisions it resulted in the typeface *Menhart Antiqua / Kursiva,* cast in 1931 by Bauer in Germany (figs 55–58). It is a nicely balanced and calm design, with generous proportions and calligraphic reminiscence. The dynamic spirit is enhanced by the asymmetrical shape of the serifs. They are blunt, rectangular on the right side but wedge shaped and elongated on the other. The strokes are modulated, reflecting the broad edge pen and the round letters tend towards a square shape. In doing so they form a solid base for the diacritics above them (see also the section Czech peculiarities). These are some hints of his *leitmotifs* (Duensing, 1989), that became fundamental features of his later designs.

The typeface is neither radical nor particularly inventive. It respects traditional heritage and conventions. Nevertheless, it is elegant, vigorous, personal and legible. People, including E R Weiss, Stanley Morrison and Jan Tschichold were among those that stated their admiration. The most remarkable comment, though, reflecting Menhart's perfectionism and skillfulness, came from Georg Hartmann, senior chief of the Bauer typefoundry. He said, "Tell me, how did you do it? In all my thirty years of typefounding I have never before had a design from an artist's hand which in the very first trial cutting and casting was ready and usable without any correction!" (Standard, 1953). All of these characteristics contributed to make *Menhart Antiqua* the first Czech typeface, to have any truly international success. It was mature in design and offered a reasonable solution (see also section 'Czech peculiarities') to the difficulties peculiar to Czech text setting. It also represented the level of Czech culture and art in a self-confident and sovereign way. O F Babler mentioned in 1950, "...[the alphabet] is fashioned in conformity with tradition; and...found an inner discipline."

"Bodies without soul"

Menhart expressed this opinion with reference to the constructed sans serif typefaces, which enjoyed popularity and simultaneously provoked rejection, especially in the 1920s (fig. 62). As discussed earlier, he believed in social and technical progress that required new solutions in the field of visual communication. The direction he took, however, was less controversial. It was very much related to his calligraphic background and love of written letterforms (see also section 'Marriage of calligraphy and typeface design'). To him, free handwriting was the best source of inspiration and innovation in the search for new, interesting forms. One of his slogans was that, "letters could not be designed until they had been written." He refused to use any technical tools (ruler, compass, ruling pen), stating that typefaces created in this manner, could be executed by anybody. This reflects frankly his conviction that the quality of design is based on the artist's sensitivity, skill


abcdefghi
jklmnopqr
stuvwxyz
BCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUV
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
für den neuen menschen existiert
nur das gleichgewicht zwischen
natur und geist zu jedem zeit-
punkt der vergangenheit waren
alle variationen des alten ›neu‹.

Figures 62 From the top; alphabet by Herbert Bayer 1925, *Kabel* by Rudolf Koch 1926–29, alphabet by Jan Tschichold 1929. All three have purely contructed letterforms, coming from basic geometric elements such as the circle, line and rectangle. (Carter 2002, Jaspert 2001).

and personality. In an article published in the magazine 'Český Bibliofil' in 1932, Menhart explained, that the beauty of a typeface and its aesthetic value do not depend on a pile of geometrical tools. He continued mentioning that letters that are purely mathematically constructed, so to speak, unpleasantly accurate and consistent, are only results of mechanical production, without personal charm, thoughtless, and a boring and deadly born thing (Halá, 1962). He believed that dull repetition of shapes and their lack of subtle optical adjustments hamper legibility and tire the reader.

As proclaimed by some designers, the idea of a universal typeface, that was supposedly appropriate for every application, reduced in Menhart's view, the energy and power of a typeface. He sought for typographical diversity and thus expression of the diversity of life. Industrial production must not destroy human versatility. A typeface should maintain the dynamic vibration of the human hand with all its irregularities and imprecision. This is the spring of charm and vigour.

Superficial attributes decorating the letters unnecessarily were not what he envisioned. On the contrary, he wanted to free the classic letters, to retain their original and eternal, comprehensible spirit, to achieve maximum simplicity without disturbing the easy flow of readability. Indeed, in his second typeface *Menhart Roman /Italic*, he experimented with how far he could remove the design from the traditional conventions normally associated with text faces (figs 63–67). It was supposed to represent modern typeface design deliberated from historical archaism and focused more on functionality.

Thanks to Method Kaláb, it was published by Monotype, Great Britain, in 1936. Max Caflisch (Christians, 1968) suggested an influence from Constructivism and other similar theories some concepts of which having reached typography and typeface design by that time. *Menhart Roman* shows, typically for Menhart, hints of calligraphy and other common elements. The thick parts of the letters were thinned down (usually it is the other way round) to an almost mono-linear stroke width. The starting point was a simple handwritten alphabet. Gradually and very carefully serifs and terminals were added only where optical balance, texture and legibility required it. This led to the use of semi-serifs—only one sided and completely missing on the first legs of the letters *h k m n*—as a solution which was unusual for that time (fig. 65). Again, as in *Menhart Antiqua* he paid a lot of attention to bringing the diacritics into accord with the basic letter, much to his success. They are unobtrusive, harmonious but still distinctive. In general, the typeface appears light, unsophisticated and aloof, functioning very well in continuous text.

On the other hand, *Menhart Italic* which incidentally was developed simultaneously, is by its angular ductus much more calligraphic in style (fig. 66). The colour, proportion and some design details were adapted to the roman. The serifs, for instance, were kept very similar in shape, instead of the more usual outstroke form. The italic, though, is not a sloped roman — the one-storey *a* and *g*, the altered letters *v w x z* and in general deeper crotches and stronger modulation—and despite being less pronounced, it maintains its function of emphasis (fig. 67).

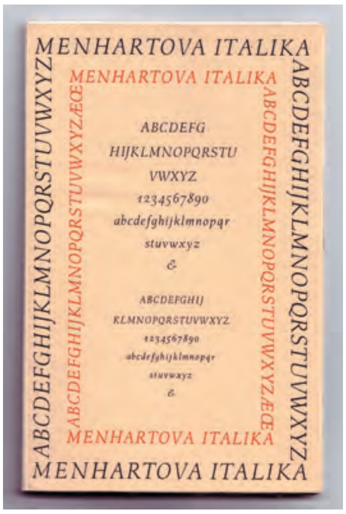
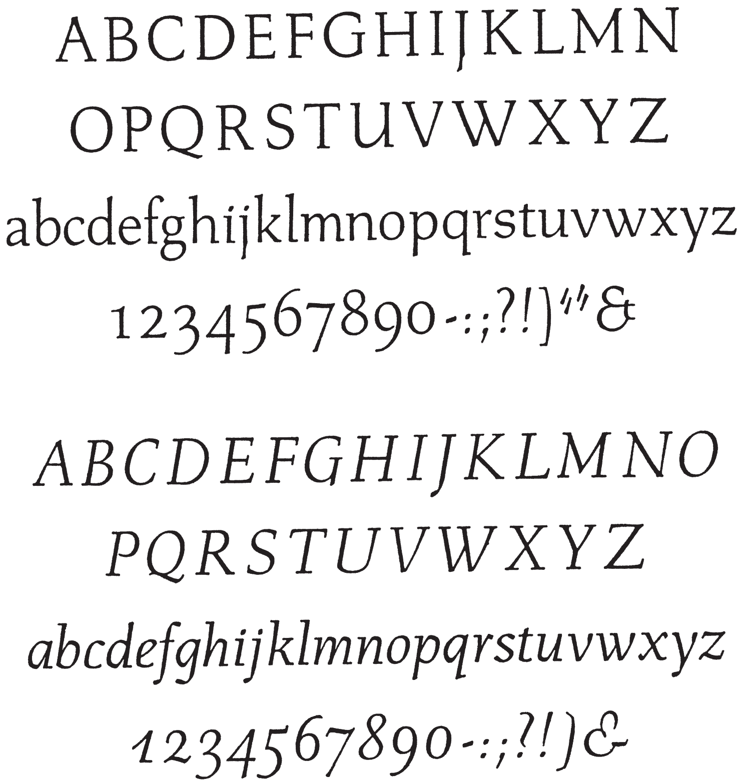
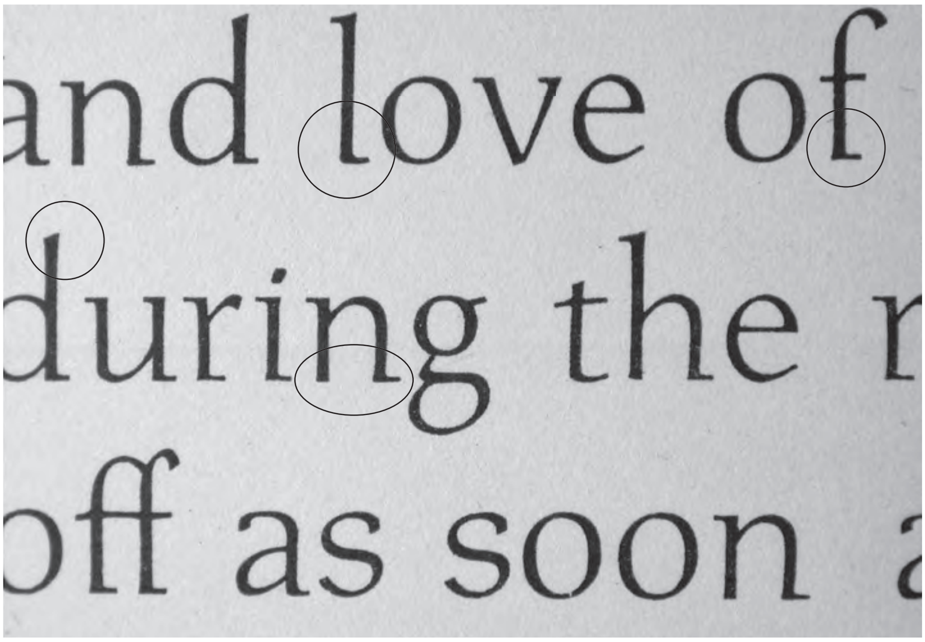


Figure 63 Photograph of a small specimen book, with examples of *Menhart Italika* and comments about the process of the design written by Menhart himself. Only 150 copies were printed by the Prumyslova tiskárna in 1936 (private archive).


ABCDEFGHIJKLMN
OPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
1234567890-:;?!)‘’&
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNO
PQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
1234567890-:;?!)&

Figures 64 Oldrich Menhart, *Menhart Roman/Italic*, 1934–36, issued by Monotype, London (Christians 1968).



and love of
during the
off as soon

Figures 65 Detail of a text set in *Menhart Roman* (Monotype archive).
Note the semi-serif style.

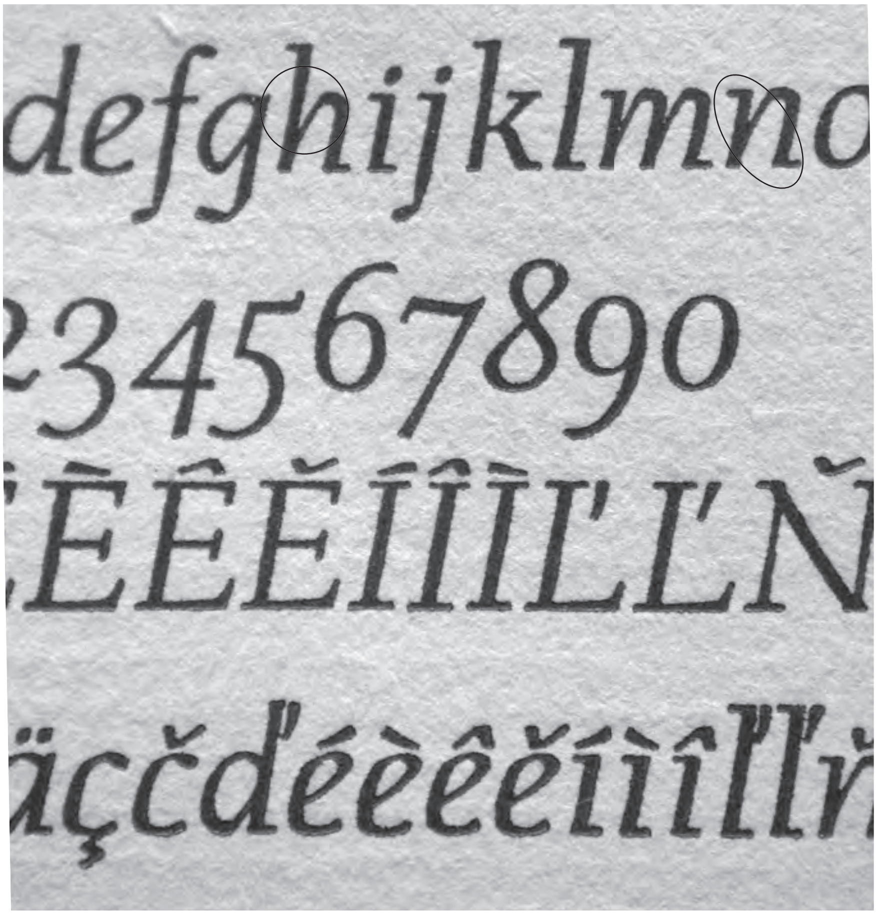
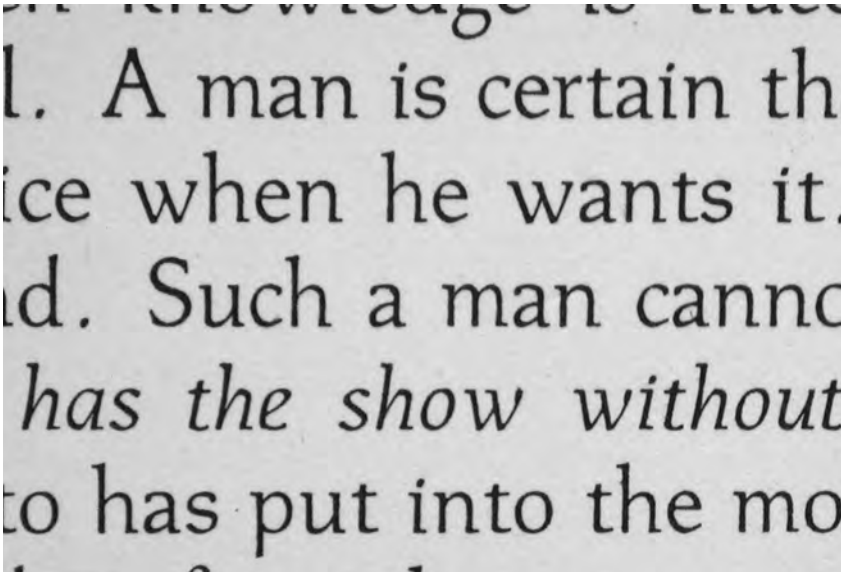
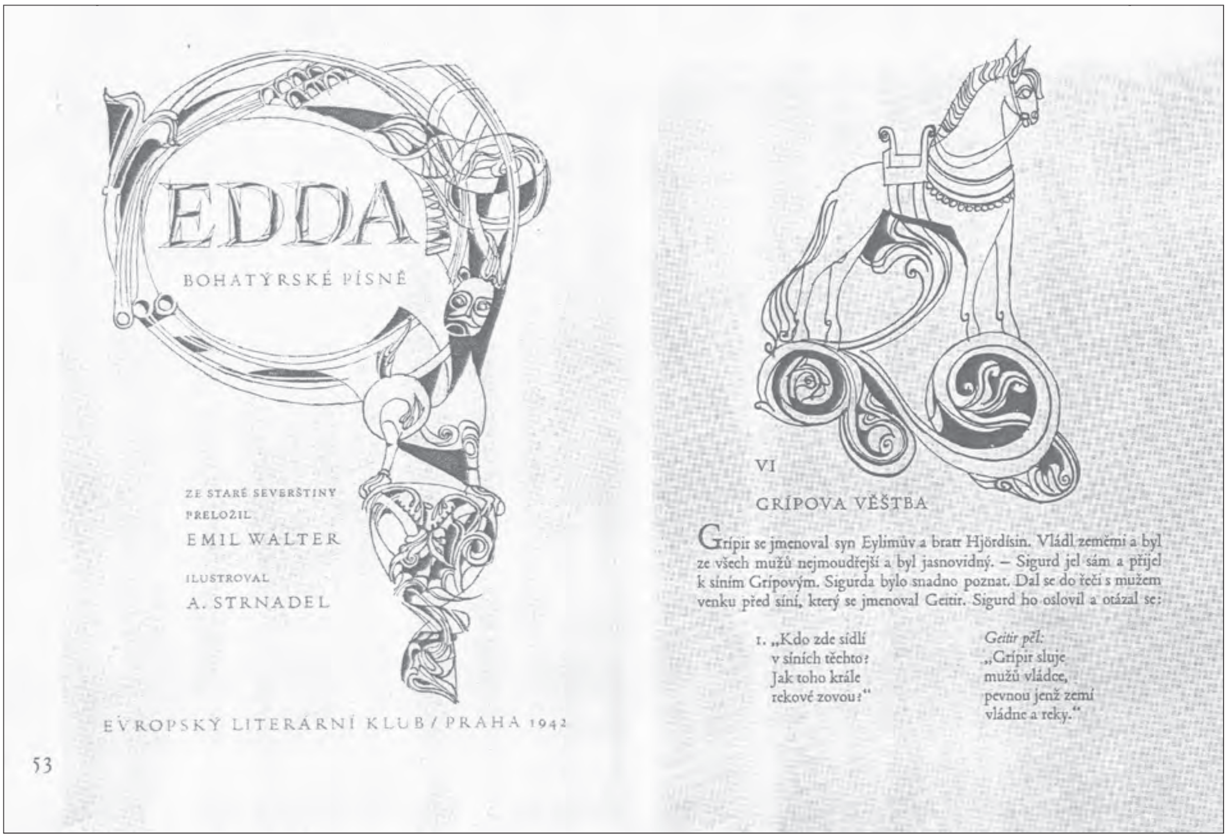

defghijklmno
234567890
ÈÊĚÍÎÌĽŇ
ăçčďéèêěíìîľľň

Figure 66 Detail of *Menhart Italic* (Monotype archive).
Note the deep crotches and the use of serifs instead of in/outstrokes.



l. A man is certain th
ice when he wants it.
d. Such a man canno
has the show without
o has put into the mo

Figure 67 Detail of a text set in *Menhart Roman* combined with its italic. (Monotype archive).
Despite the close familiarity of both, the italic still fulfills the function of emphasising very well.



EDDA

BOHATÝRSKÉ PÍSNĚ

ZE STARÉ SEVERŠTINY
PRELOŽIL
EMIL WALTER

ILUSTROVAL
A. STRNADEL

EVROPSKÝ LITERÁRNÍ KLUB / PRAHA 1942

53

VI

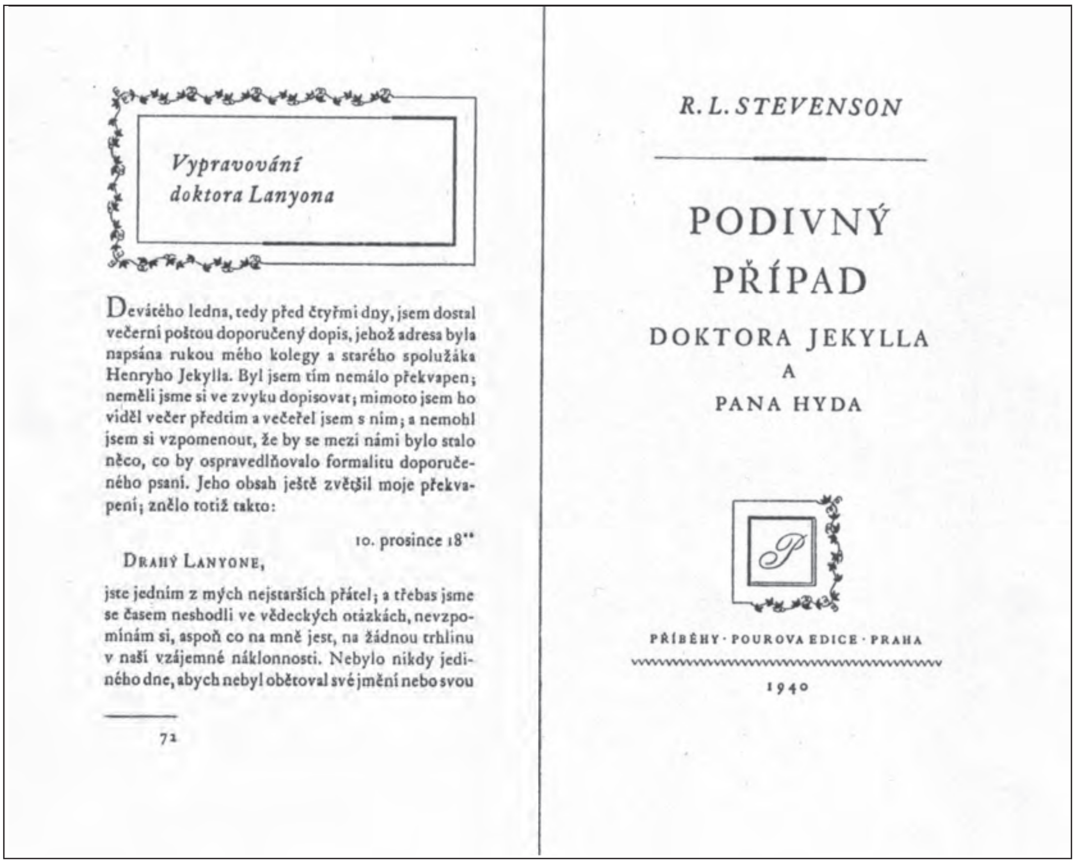
GRÍPOVA VĚŠTBA

Grípir se jmenoval syn Eylimův a bratr Hjördísin. Vládl zeměmi a byl ze všech mužů nejmoudřejší a byl jasnovidný. – Sigurd jel sám a přijel k síním Grípovým. Sigurda bylo snadno poznat. Dal se do řeči s mužem venku před síní, který se jmenoval Geitir. Sigurd ho oslovil a otázal se:

1. „Kdo zde sídlí
v síních těchto?
Jak toho krále
rekové zovou?“

Geitir pěl:
„Grípir sluje
mužů vládce,
pevnou jenž zemí
vládne a reky.“

Figure 68 Oldrich Menhart, title page and spread *Edda*, *bohatyrske pisne,* 1942, published by Evropsky literarni klub, Prague (Menhart 1956).



Vypravování
doktora Lanyona

Devátého ledna, tedy před čtyřmi dny, jsem dostal večerní poštou doporučený dopis, jehož adresa byla napsána rukou mého kolegy a starého spolužáka Henryho Jekylla. Byl jsem tím nemálo překvapen; neměli jsme si ve zvyku dopisovat; mimoto jsem ho viděl večer předtím a večeřel jsem s ním; a nemohl jsem si vzpomenout, že by se mezi námi bylo stalo něco, co by ospravedlňovalo formalitu doporučeného psaní. Jeho obsah ještě zvětšil moje překvapení; znělo totiž takto:

10. prosince 18**

DRAHÝ LANYONE,

jste jedním z mých nejstarších přátel; a třebas jsme se časem neshodli ve vědeckých otázkách, nevzpomínám si, aspoň co na mně jest, na žádnou trhlinu v naší vzájemné náklonnosti. Nebylo nikdy jediného dne, abych nebyl obětoval své jmění nebo svou

72

R. L. STEVENSON

PODIVNÝ
PŘÍPAD
DOKTORA JEKYLLA
A
PANA HYDA

P

PŘÍBĚHY · POUROVA EDICE · PRAHA

1940

Figure 69 Oldrich Menhart, title page and spread *Puvodni pripad doktora jekylla a pana hyda*, 1940, published by Pourova Edice, Prague (Kaláb 1942).

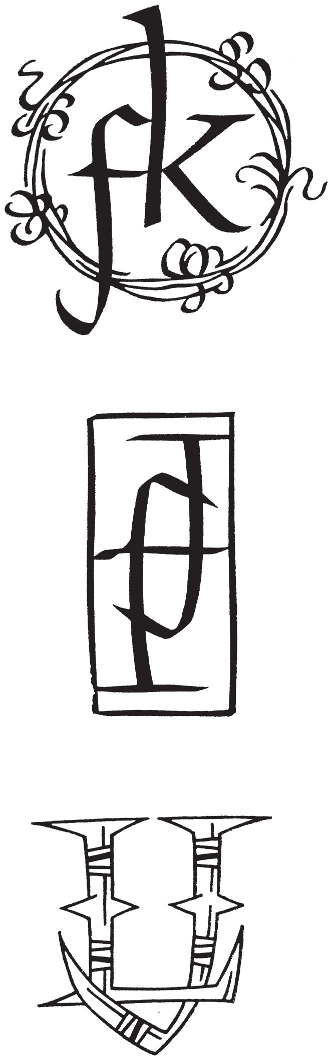


Figure 70 Oldrich Menhart, examples of some monograms (Menhart 1954).

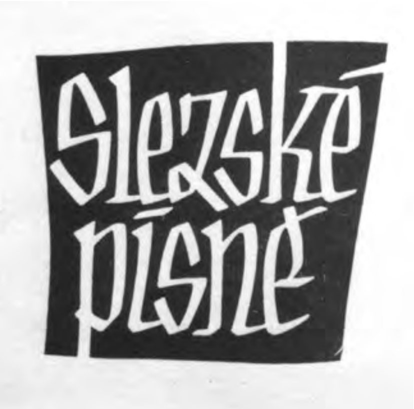


Figure 71 Oldrich Menhart, lettering for title page *Slezske pisne* by Petr Bezruc (Menhart 1954).

SERVANT OF THE WORD — User friendliness

¶"The whole duty of typography, as of calligraphy, is to communicate to the imagination, without loss by the way, the thought or image intended to be, communicated by the author." This citation by Thomas James Cobden-Sanderson corresponds to Menhart's own opinion about the role of alphabets and typography in general. He believed in the nature of writing as one of the oldest forms of cultural human expression. In its abstract sense, the alphabet is a system of signs, a visual construct of the spoken word, human thought and intellect. It has a direct relationship to content, language and is not only a random string of letters (Christians, 1968). In Menhart's view, expressive writing is able to expand the pure function of communication and raise the text to a higher level of artistic experience by bearing "...the imprint of every mood, passion, inclination or melody" (Standard, 1953).

Typefaces are part of an organic entity and are supposed to serve the word representing the author's voice. They are the bridge between him and the reader, communicating his message and evoking impressions and sentiments. Menhart stated in his book *Tvorba typografického písma* (1957, p 45), that typefaces, as well as people, have their face, their voice that can be friendly or rough, cold, upset or insistent. He went on saying that the visual image of a typeface is able to provoke in the reader a whole range of associations before he actually knows the content of the text. This suggests the psychological power of letters and their composition. In his typographical work—books, posters, invitations, labels (figs 68–77)— correspondence between message and the graphic representation was sought, linking related areas, such as paper, format, colour, binding, etc. Each task had to be solved every time anew, appropriate to the text, illustration, aura and the time of the author.

In all areas of his work he pursued a rather discrete, simple, honest but still personal style and shared the point of view that good typography is invisible. The reader should be respected and not shocked. Typefaces were supposed to support this by withdrawing themselves from the scene and not disturbing the reader with "...cheap typographic acrobatics" (Standard, 1953). As opposed to lettering, the effect of typefaces can be assessed only by considering the printed page as a whole. Supposedly individual touches can become tedious, redundant and do not enhance creativity. The reader is obtruded by the arbitrary ornamental dress calling too much attention to itself. According to Menhart the designer should be aware of this and consequently avoid disturbing novelty. Instead, the designer's concern should be focused on optimal readability. It is a walk on the ridge, especially when, as in Menhart's case, the artistic individual character is so strong. Paul Standard, together with other critics, testified his success in this context, stating, "Menhart's versatility is stamped into every book he has ever designed — stamped in blind,..., and apparent only to his colleagues; the plain reader feels only a sense of being quietly at home with his author" (Standard, 1953).

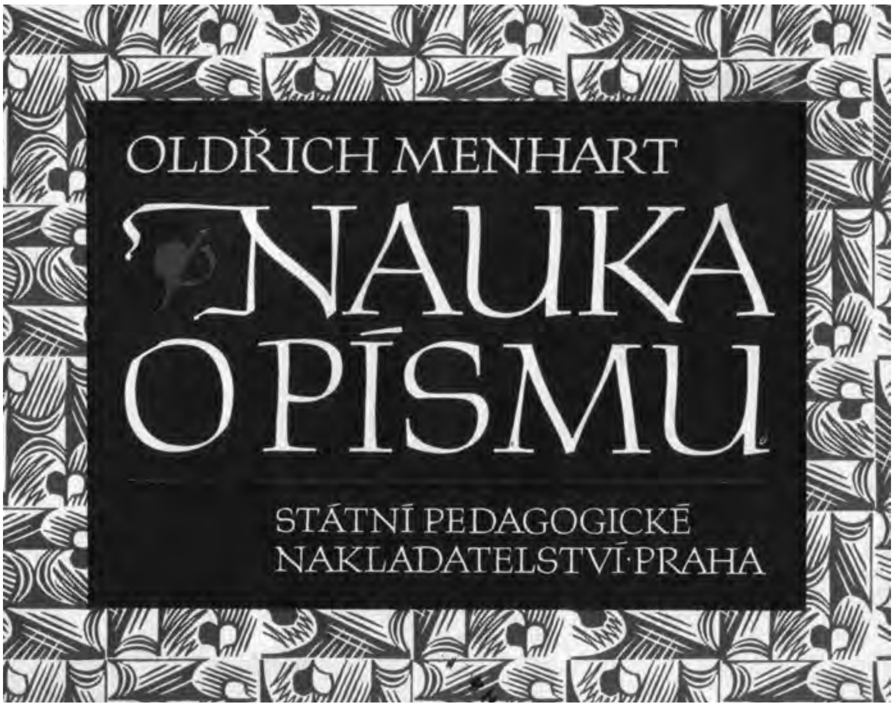

OLDŘICH MENHART
NAUKA
O PÍSMU
STÁTNÍ PEDAGOGICKÉ
NAKLADATELSTVÍ·PRAHA

Figure 72 Oldrich Menhart, detail of cover of his own book *Nauka o pismu,* 1954 (private archive).

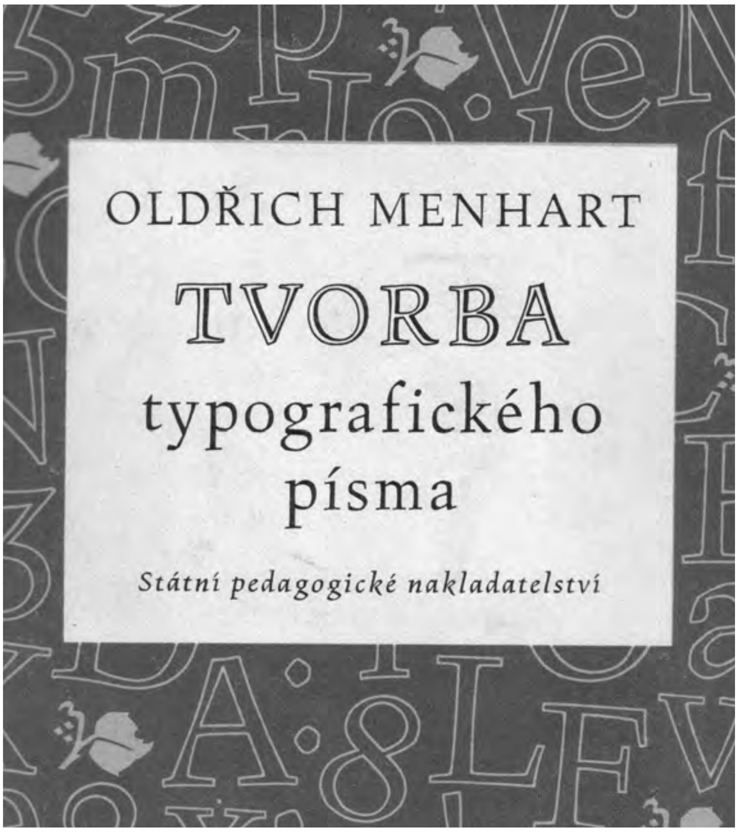

OLDŘICH MENHART
TVORBA
typografického
písma
Státní pedagogické nakladatelství

Figure 73 Oldrich Menhart, detail of cover of his own book *Tvorba typografickeho pisma,* 1957 (private archive).

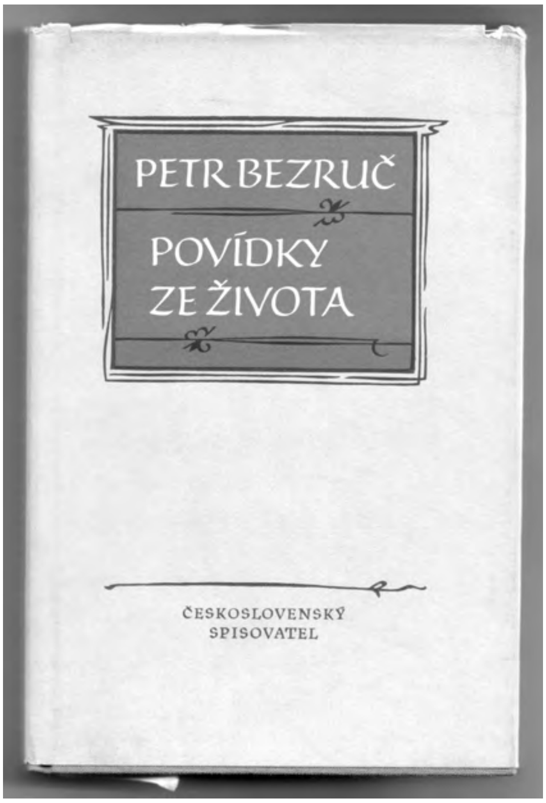
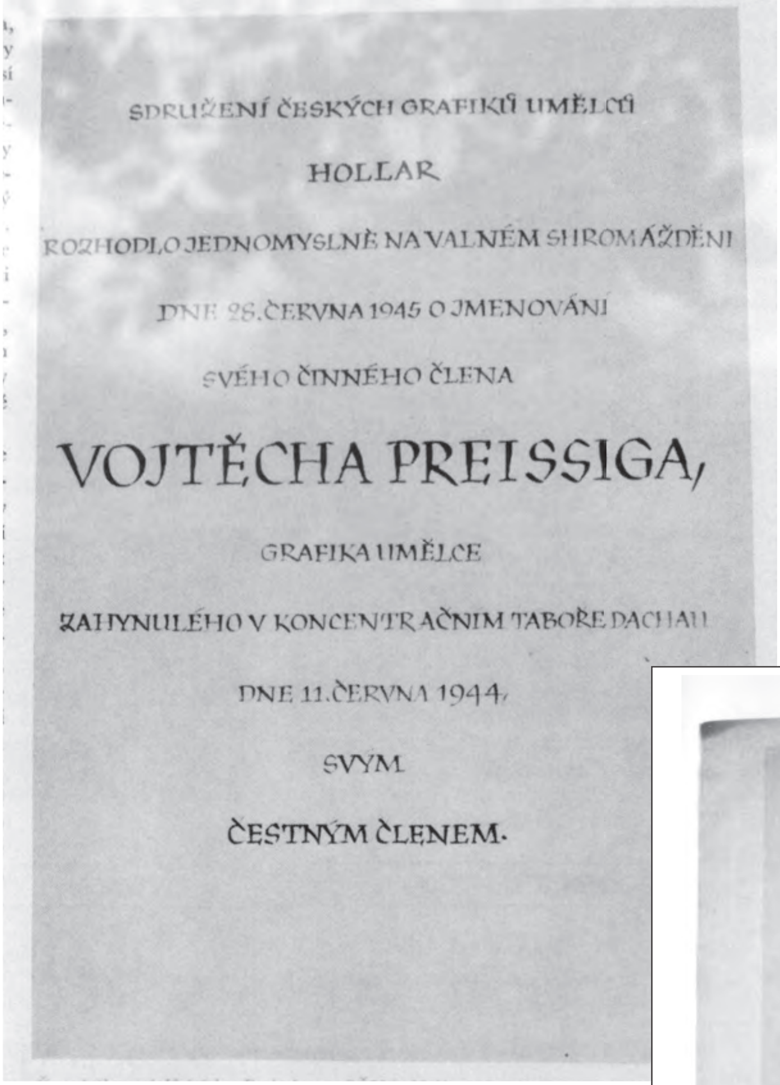

PETR BEZRUČ
POVÍDKY
ZE ŽIVOTA
ČESKOSLOVENSKÝ
SPISOVATEL

Figure 74 Oldrich Menhart, cover design *Povidky ze zivota* by Petr Bezruc, 1957 (private archive).



SDRUŽENÍ ČESKÝCH GRAFIKŮ UMĚLCŮ

HOLLAR

ROZHODLO JEDNOMYSLNĚ NA VALNÉM SHROMÁŽDĚNÍ

DNE 28. ČERVNA 1945 O JMENOVÁNÍ

SVÉHO ČINNÉHO ČLENA

VOJTĚCHA PREISSIGA,

GRAFIKA UMĚLCE

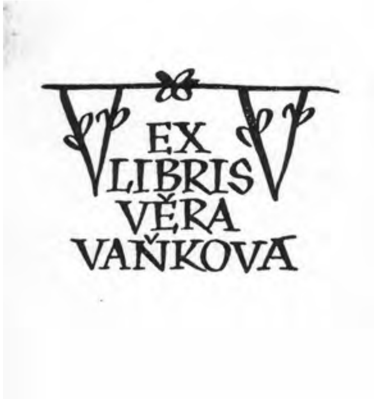
ZAHYNULÉHO V KONCENTRAČNÍM TÁBOŘE DACHAU

DNE 11. ČERVNA 1944,

SVÝM

ČESTNÝM ČLENEM.

Figure 75 Oldrich Menhart, calligraphy for SCUG Hollar, the association of graphic artists (Frauenterka 1973).



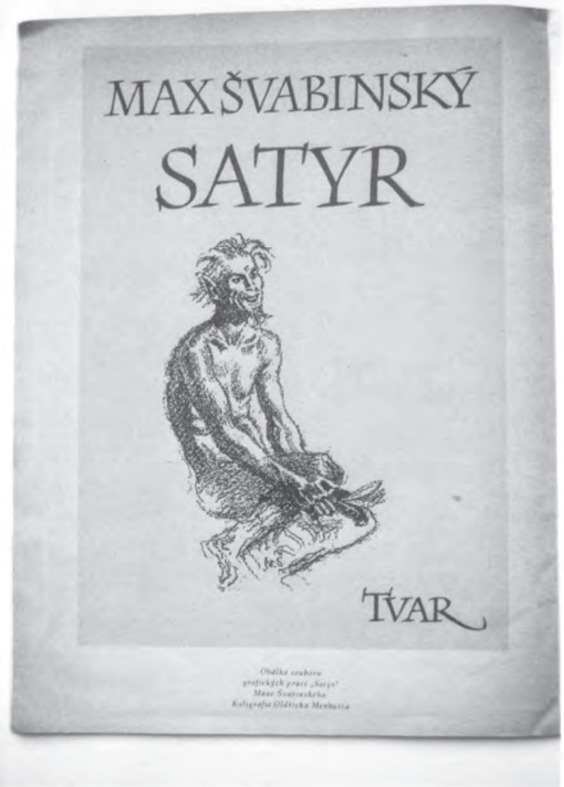


Figure 76 Oldrich Menhart, cover *Satyr* by Max Svabinsky (collection of the Klingspor museum).

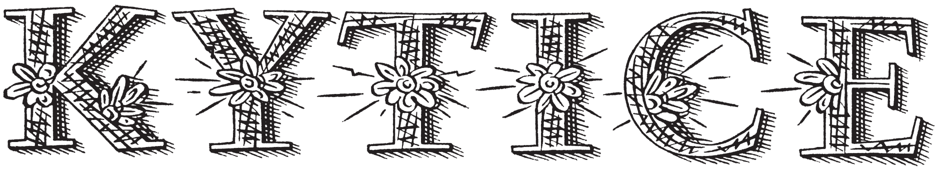


Figure 77 Oldrich Menhart, decorative lettering *Kytice* by Karel Jaromir Erben (Menhart 1954).

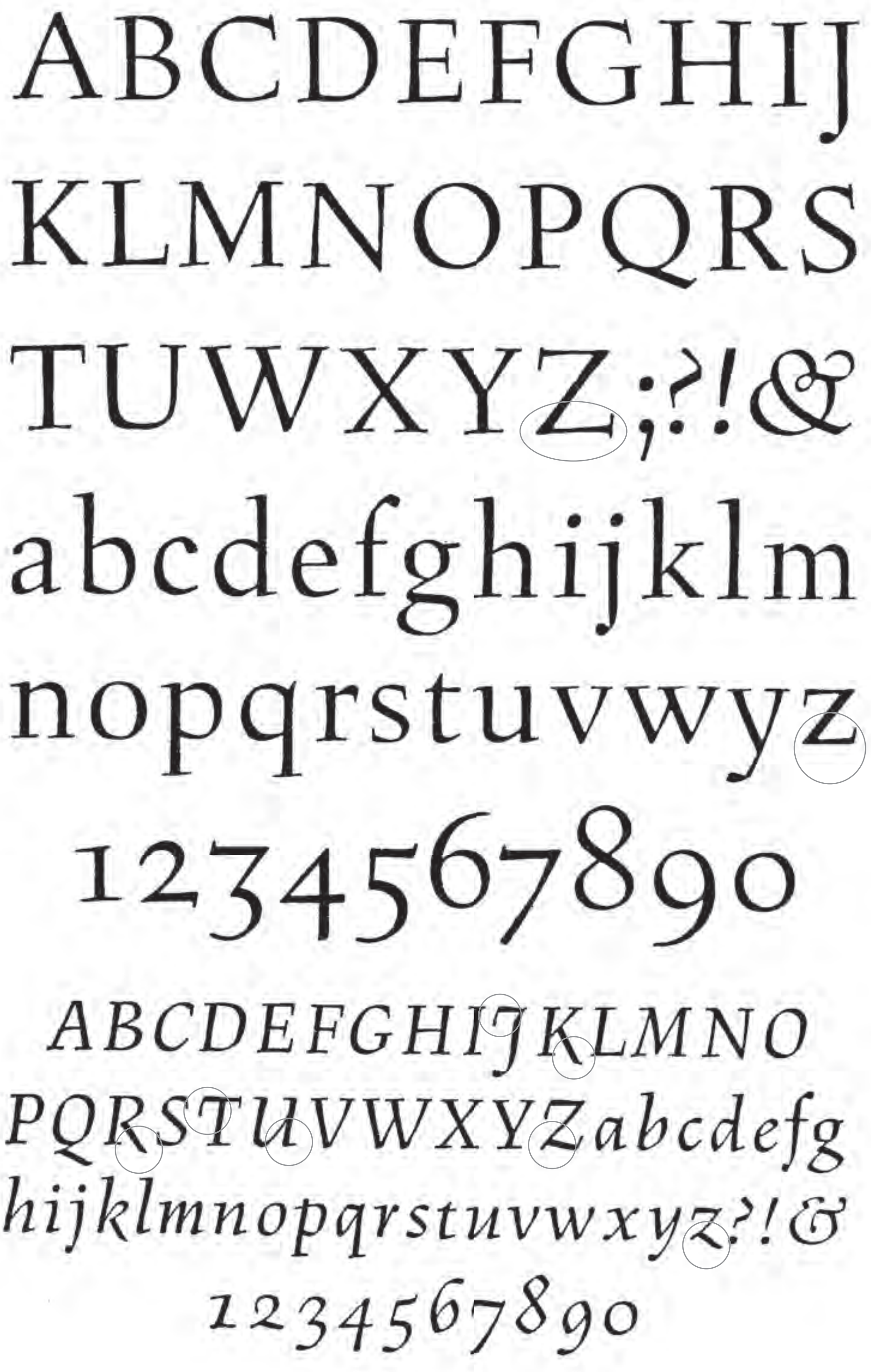

ABCDEFGHIJ
KLMNOPQRS
TUWXYZ;?!&
abcdefghijklm
nopqrstuvwyz
1234567890
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNO
PQRSTUVWXYZabcdefg
hijklmnopqrstuvwxyz?!&
1234567890

Figure 78 Oldrich Menhart, *Manuscript Antikva/Kursiva*, 1943/46, issued by Státní tiskárna, Prague (Muzika 1965). The italic reveals its roots in the broad-edge pen more honestly than the roman. Note the generally spiky ductus and some features, such as the tail on *K R k*, the long stroke on *J T*, the minuscle form of *U* and the sloped bottom stroke of *Z z*.

Expressing contemporary culture

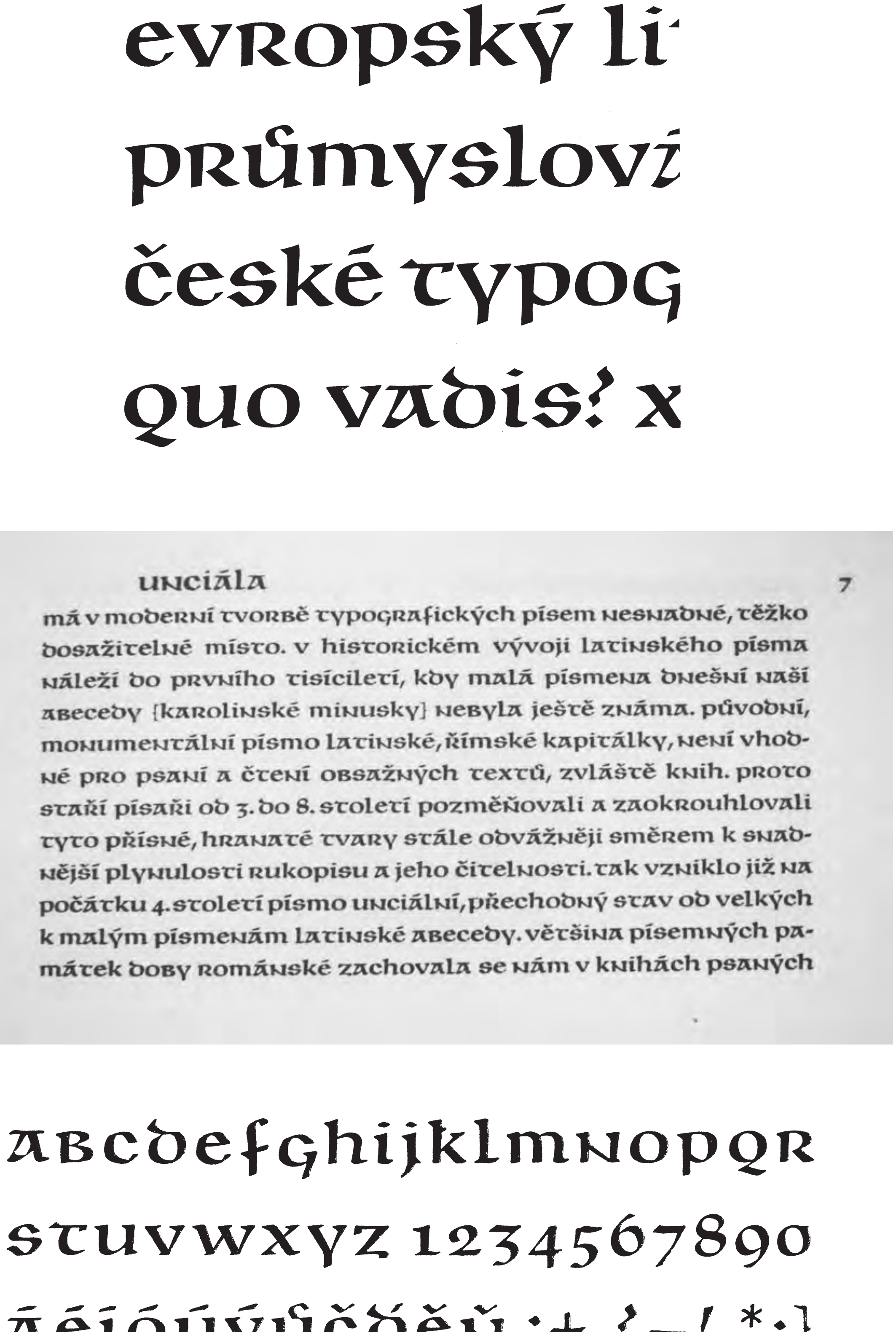
¶Studying typefaces, printings and the books of old masters of typography evoked, in Menhart, an admiration for their work. He was aware of their importance and contribution to the development of classic letterforms. In his eyes, studying their work was crucial for every designer. On the other hand, he was convinced that the artist should find his own contemporary style. He should not follow and copy historical models. Instead he is supposed to take an active part in shaping the visual appearance of contemporary culture and society and in doing so become historical himself. The tradition of the past should be logically continued by creating honest, authentic methods and styles from the spirit of the time. It serves the reform and evolution of society. The revival of old typefaces, as practitioned by Monotype in the 1920s, could no longer serve as the stimulus of new ideas[3]. It fulfilled its task of cleaning the typefoundries and printers from the type ballast of the excessive nineteenth century, but now it was time to move on. This did not mean, however, that typographic tradition, conventions and history should be neglected.

In this context it is interesting to see the typeface *Figural* from 1940, published in 1949 by Státní tiskárna in Prague (fig. 78). Here his ideas of how a contemporary book face should be, are realized. Remotely based on Jenson's roman of 1470, it shows again traces of calligraphic heritage, but only in a very subtle way. As opposed to the previous designs, the serifs are flat and very fine and the 'Menhartesque' sloped stroke of the *z Z* is reduced to a serif drawn over the baseline. The character of freehand drawn letters, brings elasticity, dynamism and fluidity to the shapes. The proportions are rather classic and generous. *Figural* appears in general angular, disciplined and vigorous, emphasising horizontality. This enhances the flow of reading and forms a good base for the accents. It is commonly regarded as Menhart's greatest and most mature book face. Paul Standard (1966) said, "Both [roman and italic] are plainly derived from his handwriting, handwriting so direct and muscular as to suggest the learned script of a structural steelworker with a PhD." Further Max Caflisch pointed out in the book *Oldřich Menhart 1897–1962* (Christians, 1968, p 30), "...the Figural is a product of our time." Although being designed about eight years later, the accompanying italic matches happily with the roman. It shows, as opposed to the roman, more frankly its calligraphic roots, for instance on the letter *J K T R U Z*. The thin straight serifs, on the other hand, build an interesting contrast to the handwriting reminiscence. *Figural kursiva* reveals in its spiky and angular quality, a secure, controlled and powerful hand.

Another example of this approach, of allying tradition with progression, can be seen in *Česka Unciala* 1940, published in 1948 by Státní tiskárna, Prague (fig. 79). Larger sizes were cut by Grafotechna, Prague, in 1953. Work on the uncial[4] began as early as 1922 with experiments involving many variations and regional interpretations of the letterforms. According to him, features of the uncial such as its age, its transitional character (lowercase not yet existent as independent system), its solemnity, richness and simplicity were some reasons for his continuous interest in creating an uncial himself. His aim was to design a distinctive, readable and modern uncial that would compensate for the lack of capitals and would be of equal quality and importance to its predecessors. He was aware, though, of the

[3] Stanley Morrison launched at Monotype a revival campaign. The aim was to improve the situation of typography and typeface design. The idea behind is that all great typefaces have been already done several centuries ago. Thus, the task of today was to choose the good ones and adapt them to the technical requirements of new technologies, in this case the Monotype maschines. An example is *Bembo*, a typeface released in 1929 that was based on the design of Francesco Griffo, Venice 1499.

[4] The uncial forms are predecessors of the Carolingian minuscle, about eight-century, from which our present lowercase letters developed. It was the most elastic time in typology. Scribes experimented intensively in the attempt to find optimal forms enhancing legibility and fast writing. The vastly spread Roman Capital letters were too difficult and stiff for continuous reading. Hence, the scribes started to adapt the shapes to the logic of writing.



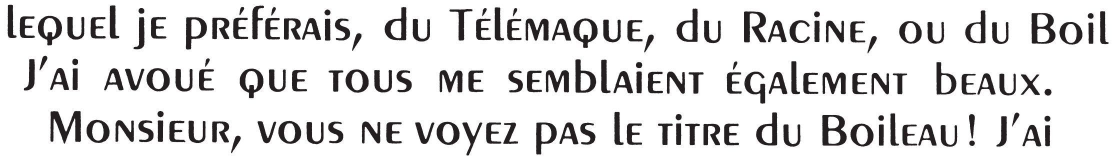
evropský li
průmyslovi
české typog
quo vadis? x

unciála 7

má v moderní tvorbě typografických písem nesnadné, těžko dosažitelné místo. v historickém vývoji latinského písma náleží do prvního tisíciletí, kdy malá písmena dnešní naší abecedy {karolinské minusky} nebyla ještě známa. původní, monumentální písmo latinské, římské kapitálky, není vhodné pro psaní a čtení obsažných textů, zvláště knih. proto staří písaři od 3. do 8. století pozměňovali a zaokrouhlovali tyto přísné, hranaté tvary stále odvážněji směrem k snadnější plynulosti rukopisu a jeho čitelnosti. tak vzniklo již na počátku 4. století písmo unciální, přechodný stav od velkých k malým písmenám latinské abecedy. většina písemných památek doby románské zachovala se nám v knihách psaných

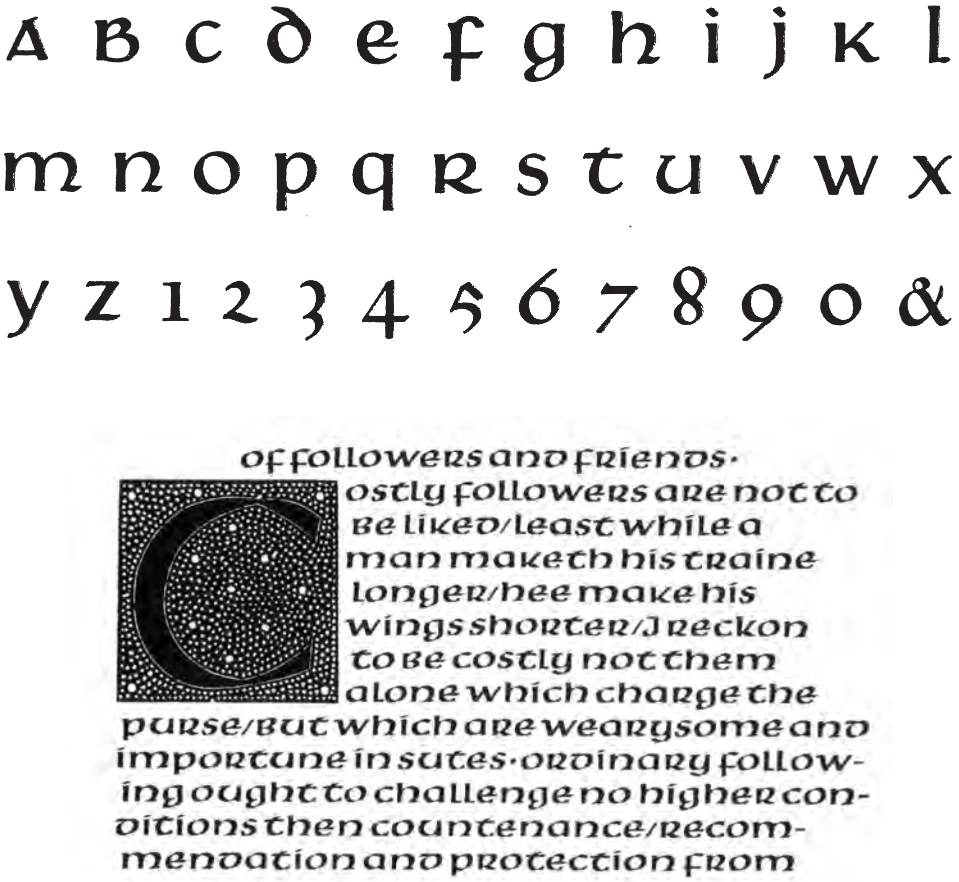
abcdefghijklmnopqr
stuvwxyz 1234567890
áéíóúýůčďěň :+,?–!.*;}

Figure 79 Oldrich Menhart, *Ceska Unciala*, 1948, issued by Státní tiskárna, Prague (Menhart 1957, private archive O Karlas, Muzika 1965).



lequel je préférais, du Télémaque, du Racine, ou du Boil
J'ai avoué que tous me semblaient également beaux.
Monsieur, vous ne voyez pas le titre du Boileau! J'ai

Figure 80 A M Cassandre, *Peignot*, 1937, issued by Deberny & Peignot, Paris (Carter 2002). It is a modern interpretation of the uncial letterforms, including capitals.



a b c d e f g h i j k l
m n o p q r s t u v w x
y z 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 &

of followers and friends·
Costly followers are not to
be liked/least while a
man maketh his traine
longer/hee make his
wings shorter/I reckon
to be costly not them
alone which charge the
purse/but which are wearysome and
importune in sutes·ordinary follow-
ing ought to challenge no higher con-
ditions then countenance/recom-
mendation and protection from

Figures 81 Victor Hammer, *Hammer Unziale*, 1923, issued by Klingspor, Offenbach (Carter 2002).

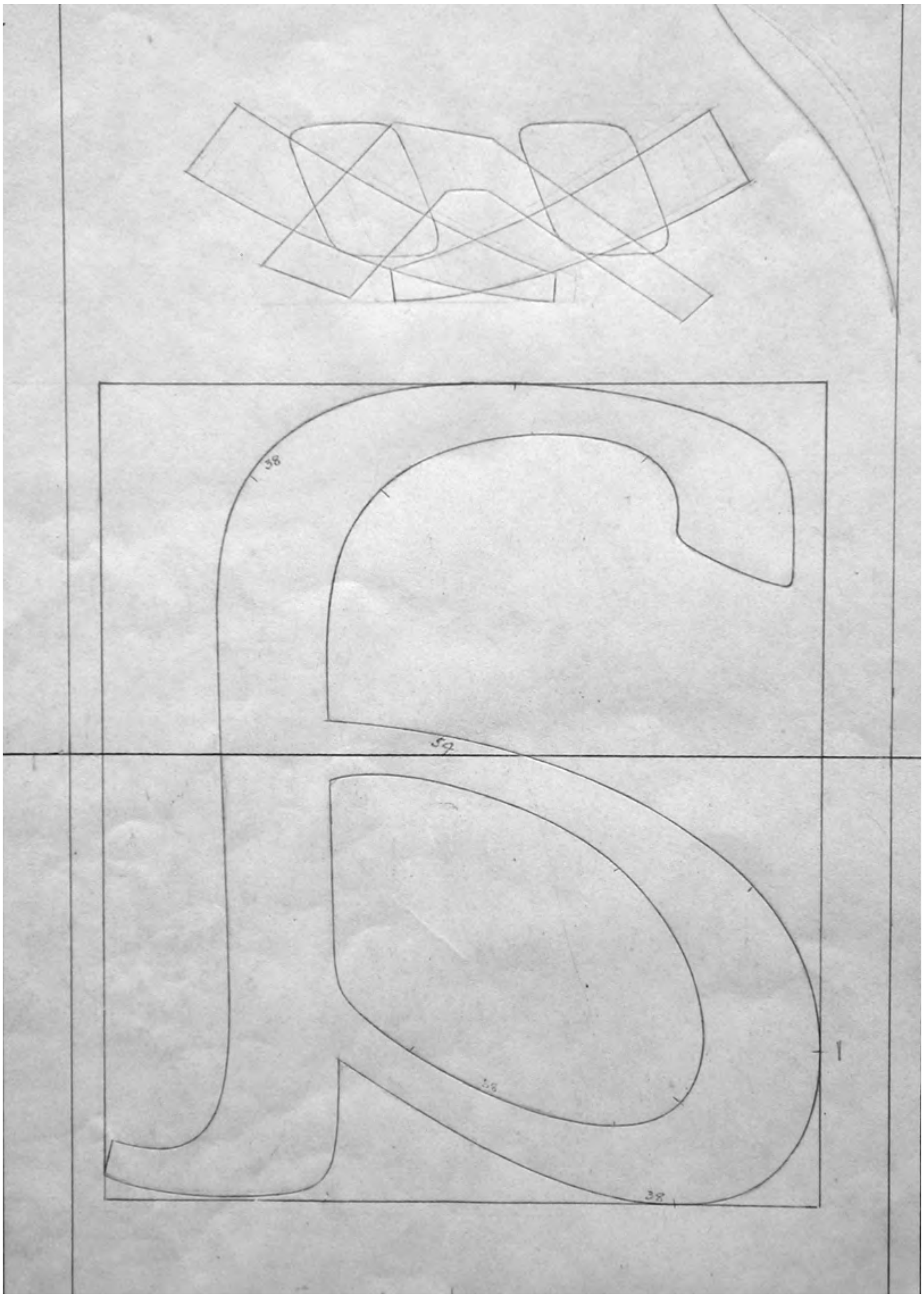


Figure 82 Photograph of an original technical drawing of *Menhart Roman*, done by the Monotype drawing office (Monotype archive).
It shows the lowercase letter *a* with all the accompayning diacritics. Normally, Monotype would have choosen them from a standard set of marks and then cast them together with the letter on the type body.

limited applicability to only "...most uncomplicated kinds of text", due to "...no display device other than colour" (Duensing, 1989).

Česká Unciala can be placed in the same category with *Hammer Unziale,* 1921 Victor Hammer (fig. 83), *Peignot*, 1937 A M Cassandre (fig. 82), *Libra,* 1938 S H DeRoss and *Friar,* 1937 F W Goudy.

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL — Czech peculiarities

¶How are Czech typography and typeface design defined? According to Karel Dyrynk, an original Czech face is a typeface created by a Czech artist, with an inherent understanding of the Czech language, and also produced and cast in Bohemia [Czech Republic] (Dyrynk, 1925). Menhart, on the other hand, believed that "...a Czech style of type comes above all from the spirit in which it was designed, which gives it its 'signature', and not so much from decorative composition, and even less from the geographic location of its creation" (Duensing, 1989). Albert Kapr suggested in 1962, that, to the uninvolved observer, it seems that Menhart had found a specifically national Czech form of the 'Antikva' this being the overriding reason for the positive response that it received.

A Czech typeface should, in Menhart's view, address, in particular, the syntactic and diacritic peculiarities of the Czech language. In doing so, the richness of Czech culture is then properly demonstrated and national ambience and character are reflected. However, he knew that no letterform expressed 'Czech-ness' intrinsically and that every attempt in this direction could lead only to a very superficially decorative and unattractive result. He sought for solutions that would make the printed Czech text more balanced and comprehensive than if printed in other languages. According to him, the designer should take language biased peculiarities, such as the construction of words, reoccurrence of special characters and use of diacritical marks, into account while creating. But he should not intend to invent new letterforms. The skeletal structure of the present classical letters is the result of a long evolution that should be respected. Disregarding the reader's habits ends up being counterproductive.

In addition to the regular latin alphabet, the Czech language makes use of 15 accented letters. They were introduced by the reformer Jan Hus, in 1406, as substitution of particular letter pairs representing peculiar sounds that had no correspondence in the latin script. Since then, unfortunately, very little attention has been given to their design and the organic relationship to the letter itself. Usually, diacritics were added to existing typefaces as an afterthought, disregarding style, position and size, and bringing a busy and even confusing effect to the printed text. In 1957, Menhart pointed out, that by now the Czech reader had to tolerate typefaces, beautiful and excellent in other languages, but, destroyed in Czech text setting by inferior and poorly designed diacritics. According to him, readability and aesthetic appearance of the typeface suffer markedly if the diacritics are not brought into accord with the rest of the alphabet. Similar to punctuation marks, they are a subdued but very important part of the script, helping the reader (figs 83 86 87). Their function is to enhance the ease and flow of reading and to gently

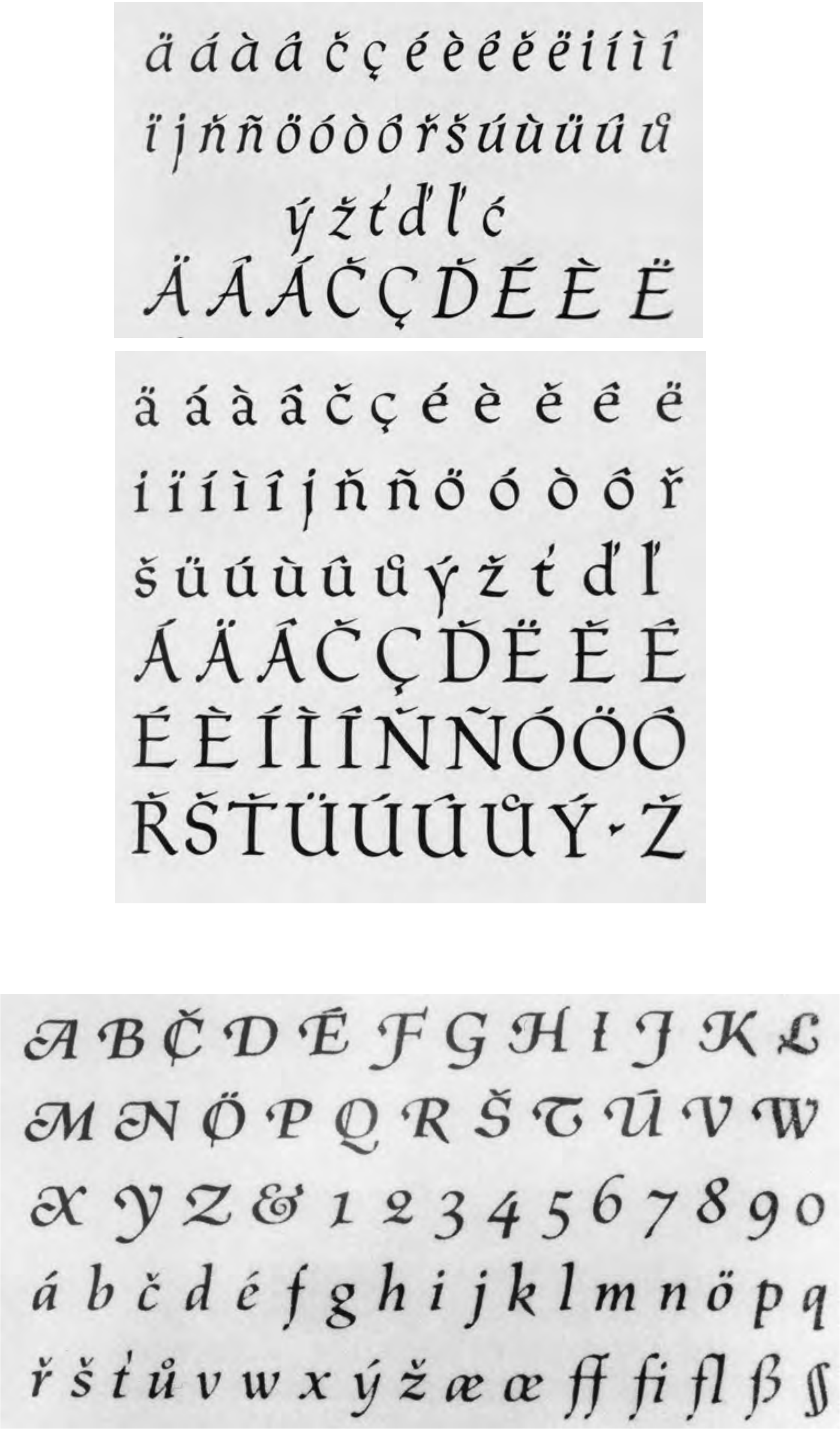

ä á à â č ç é è ê ě ë ı í ì î
ï j ň ñ ö ó ò ô ř š ú ù ü û ů
ý ž ť ď ľ ć
Ä Ă Á Č Ç Ď É È Ë
ä á à â č ç é è ě ê ë
ı ï í ì î j ň ñ ö ó ò ô ř
š ü ú ù û ů ý ž ť ď ľ
Á Ä Â Č Ç Ď Ë Ě Ê
É È Í Ì Î Ň Ñ Ó Ö Ô
Ř Š Ť Ü Ú Ù Û Ů Ý · Ž
A B Č D Ê F G H I J K L
M N Ö P Q R Š T Ú V W
X Y Z & 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0
á b č d é f g h i j k l m n ö p q
ř š ť ů v w x ý ž æ œ ff fi fl ß ſſ

Figure 83 Examples of accented letters of *Codex Antiqua/Kursiva* (top) and *Ministr* (collection of the Klingspor museum, Vichnar 1972).

indicate changes in pronunciation and the phonetic value of letters. Arbitrary changes to their appearance and position might lead to misunderstanding.

Preissig was one of the first to be concerned with trying to improve this miserable situation. He equipped many foreign typefaces with appropriate diacritical marks and experimented extensively, exploring different design solutions. For the first time, the phonetic signs were treated with an equal importance to that of the rest of the alphabet and their shapes developed from the intrinsic character of the letters. In Menhart's opinion, however, their visual image was both out of balance and exaggerated (fig. 85). They intruded the quietness of reading with their strong presence, almost taking control of the printed text. His own approach was more reserved, more functional than expressive. The design problem, as he thought, could not be solved schematically following a standard pattern. Instead, the marks, as well as letters, coming originally from handwriting, should be written first, displaying their natural and logical structure of form (see also the section 'Marriage of calligraphy and typeface design').

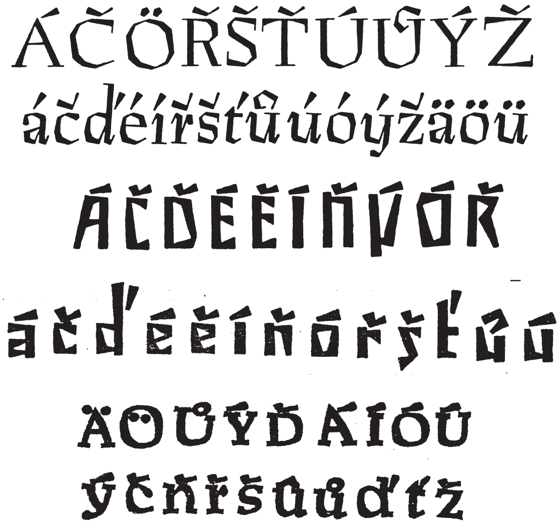


Figure 85 Vojtech Preissig, examples of accented letters of three different typefaces, showing the strong presence of the marks (Dyrynk 1925).

He worked very carefully solving each accent individually, and respecting the peculiar shape of the basic letter. The design shouts less, is toned down and unobtrusive, but still visible and distinctive. Although, he did not follow the same suggestive path as Preissig, he did acknowledge his achievements. Indeed, the design of the *u krouzek (ů)* and the shallow angle of the diacritics on the capitals, imply his influence here (fig. 84). He summed up, "The correct size, coloration, placement and forms of accents are technically and aesthetically a significant part of Czech type design" (Duensing, 1989). Even before he started designing typefaces, he was already theoretically concerned with finding answers to this problem, developing a particular approach visible in his very first designs. These include, in addition to well-proportioned accents, an emphasis of the x-height, which he considered as crucial for legibility. Laying the optical stress on this point serves as a guide for the eye when moving along the text line. Referring to several research

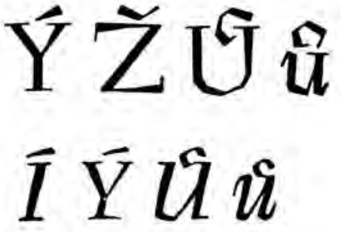


Figure 84 Examples of some accented letters of *Preissig Antiqua* (top) and *Manuscript Kursiva*, showing the similarity of their design (Dyrynk 1925, Muzika 1965).

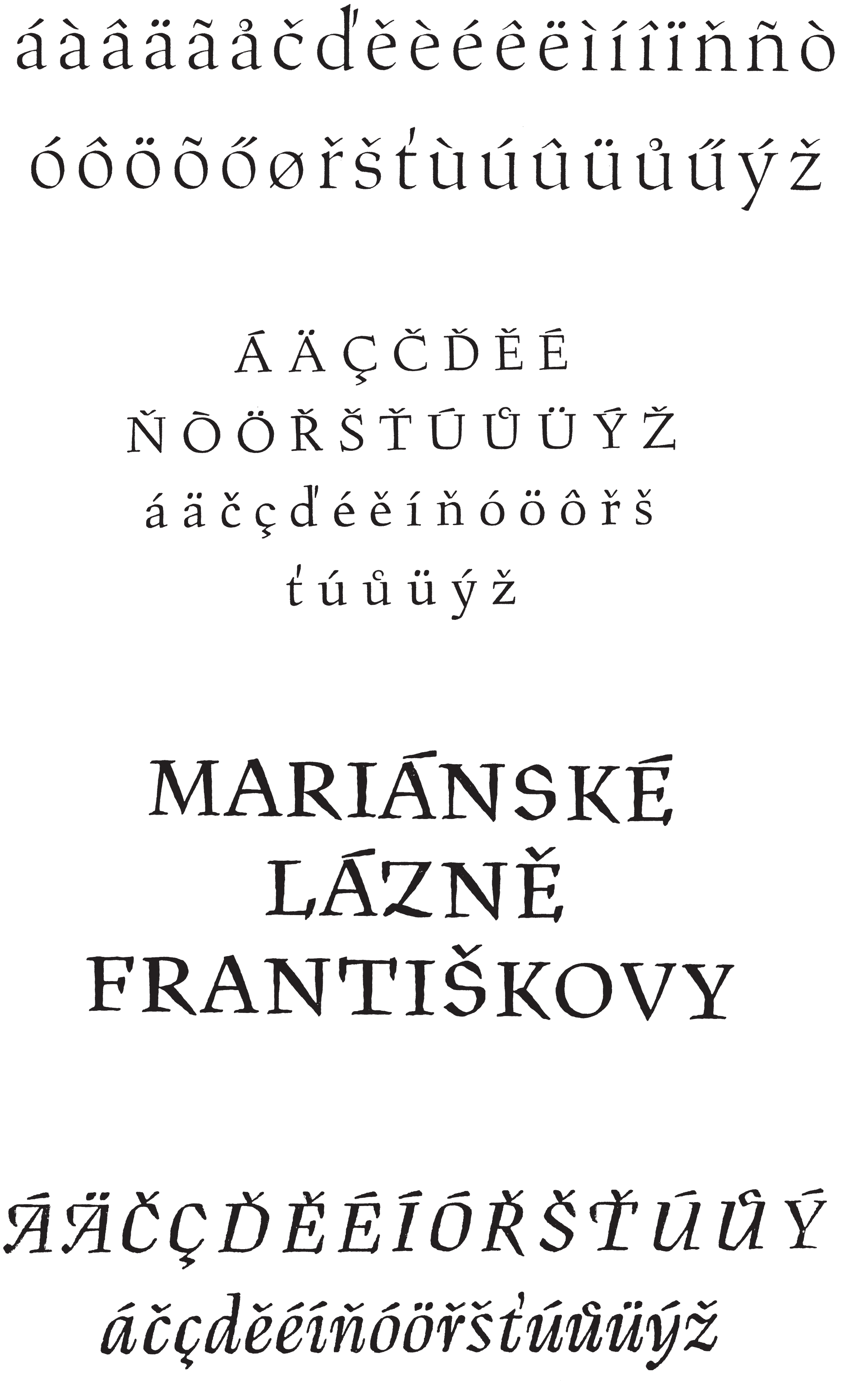

áàâäãåčďěèéêëìíîïňñò
óôöõőøřšťùúûüůűýž
Á Ä Ç Č Ď Ě É
Ň Ò Ö Ř Š Ť Ú Ů Ü Ý Ž
á ä č ç ď é ě í ň ó ö ô ř š
ť ú ů ü ý ž
MARIÁNSKÉ
LÁZNĚ
FRANTIŠKOVY
ÁÄČÇĎĚÉÍÓŘŠŤÚŮÝ
áčçděéíňóöřšťúůüýž

Figure 86 Examples of accented letters of *Menhart Antiqua* (top), *Figural, Manuscript Antikva* and *Manuscript Kursiva* (Menhart 1954, Hlavsa 1957, Muzika 1965).

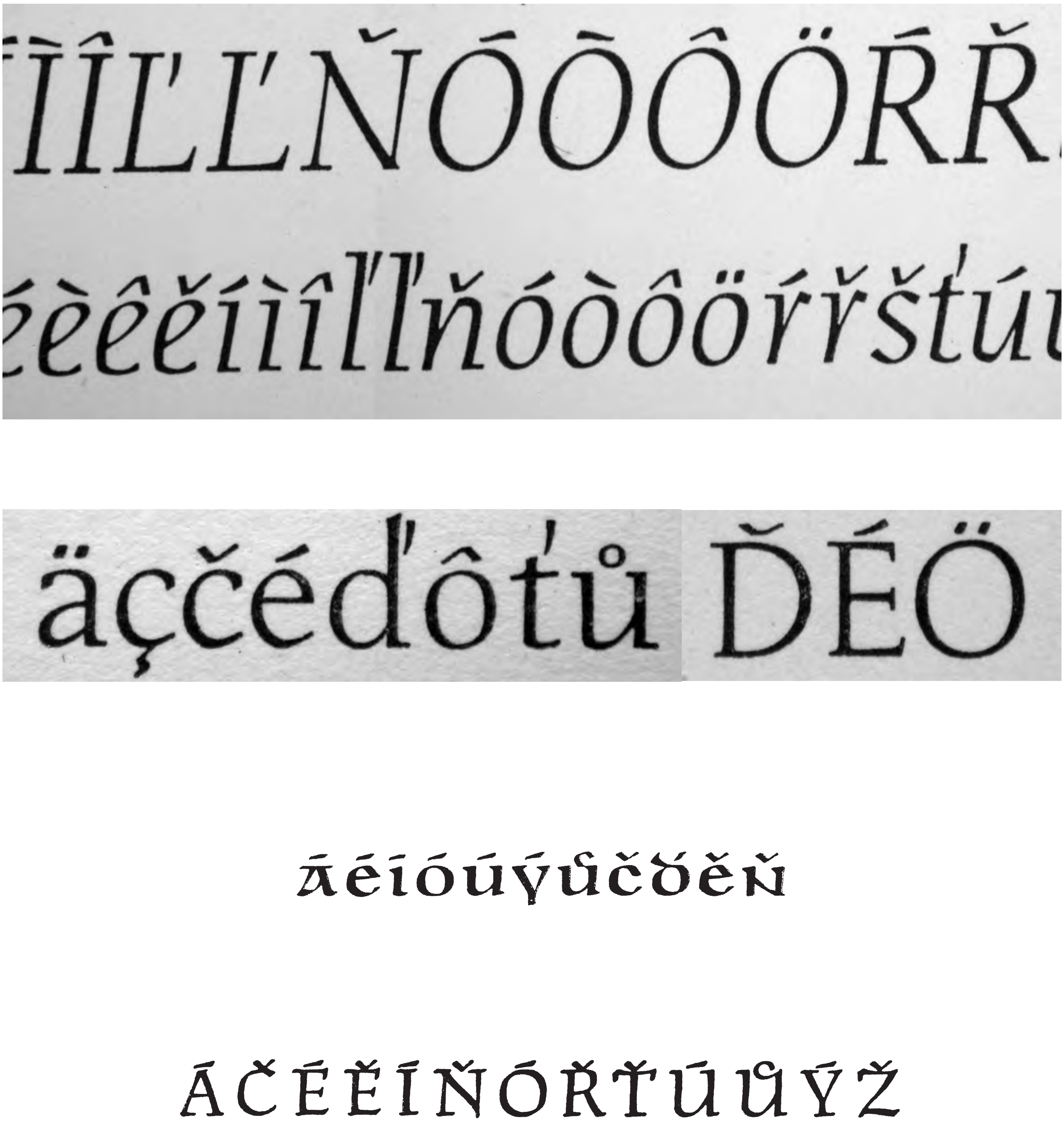
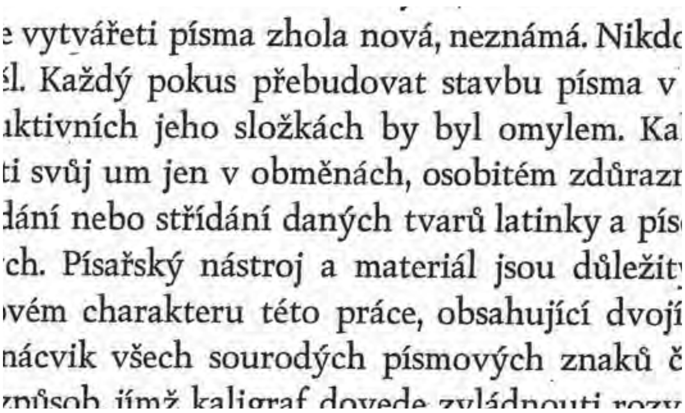
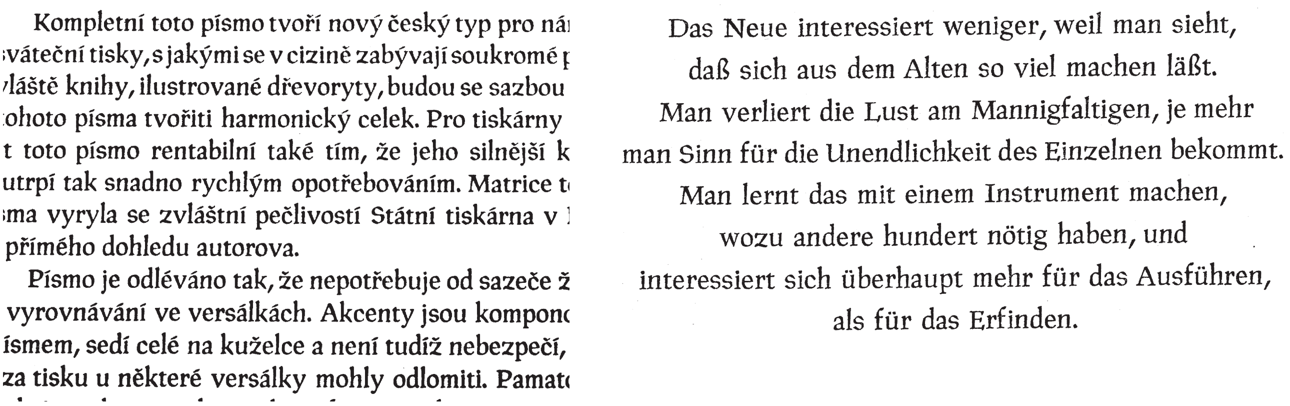


Figure 87 Examples of accented letters of *Menhart Italic* (top), *Menhart Roman, Ceska Unciala* and *Parlament* (Monotype archive, Muzika 1965).



vytvářeti písma zhola nová, neznámá. Nikd
l. Každý pokus přebudovat stavbu písma v
ktivních jeho složkách by byl omylem. Ka
ti svůj um jen v obměnách, osobitém zdůraz
dání nebo střídání daných tvarů latinky a pís
ch. Písařský nástroj a materiál jsou důležit
vém charakteru této práce, obsahující dvojí
nácvik všech sourodých písmových znaků č
způsob jímž kaligraf dovede zvládnouti rozv

Figure 88 Sample of Czech text set in *Figural*.

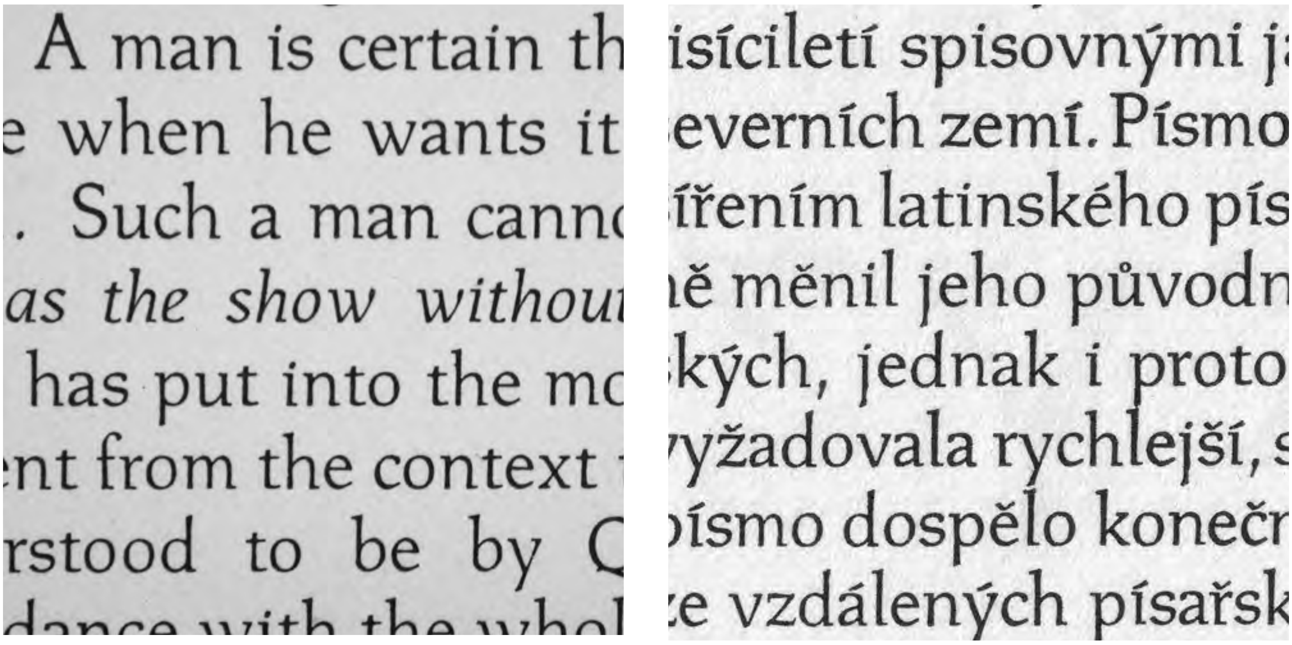


Kompletní toto písmo tvoří nový český typ pro ná
sváteční tisky, s jakými se v cizině zabývají soukromé
vláště knihy, ilustrované dřevoryty, budou se sazbou
ohoto písma tvořiti harmonický celek. Pro tiskárny
t toto písmo rentabilní také tím, že jeho silnější k
utrpí tak snadno rychlým opotřebováním. Matrice t
ma vyryla se zvláštní pečlivostí Státní tiskárna v
přímého dohledu autorova.

Písmo je odléváno tak, že nepotřebuje od sazeče ž
vyrovnávání ve versálkách. Akcenty jsou kompon
ísmem, sedí celé na kuželce a není tudíž nebezpečí,
za tisku u některé versálky mohly odlomiti. Pamat

Das Neue interessiert weniger, weil man sieht,
daß sich aus dem Alten so viel machen läßt.
Man verliert die Lust am Mannigfaltigen, je mehr
man Sinn für die Unendlichkeit des Einzelnen bekommt.
Man lernt das mit einem Instrument machen,
wozu andere hundert nötig haben, und
interessiert sich überhaupt mehr für das Ausführen,
als für das Erfinden.

Figure 89 Sample of Czech text on the left and German on the right, both set in *Manuscript Antikva*.



A man is certain th
when he wants it
. Such a man cann
as the show withou
has put into the m
nt from the context
rstood to be by

isíciletí spisovnými j
everních zemí. Písmo
ířením latinského pís
ně měnil jeho původn
kých, jednak i proto
yžadovala rychlejší,
ísmo dospělo koneč
e vzdálených písařsk

Figure 90 Sample of English text on the left and Czech on the right, both set in *Menhart Roman*.

studies, the upper part of the letter is, in this respect, more important for recognition than the lower part and should therefore be made sufficiently distinct (fig. 91). This is all the more true for Czech alphabets, where the accents—kroužek [˚], haček [ˇ] and čárka [ˊ]—are situated above the x-height. Keeping this in mind, he attempted to create a solid and stable base for the diacritics by accentuating square forms of the letters *a e c o s*, in particular. The resulting imaginary straight, continuous guideline enhances the calm, nicely even and well-balanced effect of the printed Czech text (fig. 92).

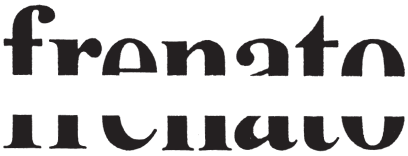


Figure 91 Illustration, showing that the upper pert of a letter is more crucial for recognition than the lower part (Tubaro 2002).

Other aspects that he considered, were the frequency of specific letter combinations in the Czech language, e.g. the sequence of more than three consonants, and the nonexistence of double pairs like *oo ee*. Furthermore, he took the respective occurrence and non-occurrence of particular letters into account and designed accordingly. The letters *j k v y z*, for example, are very frequent as opposed to *q w x*.

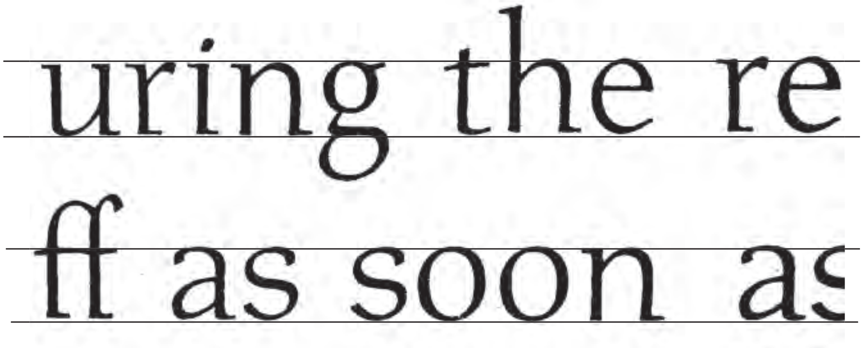
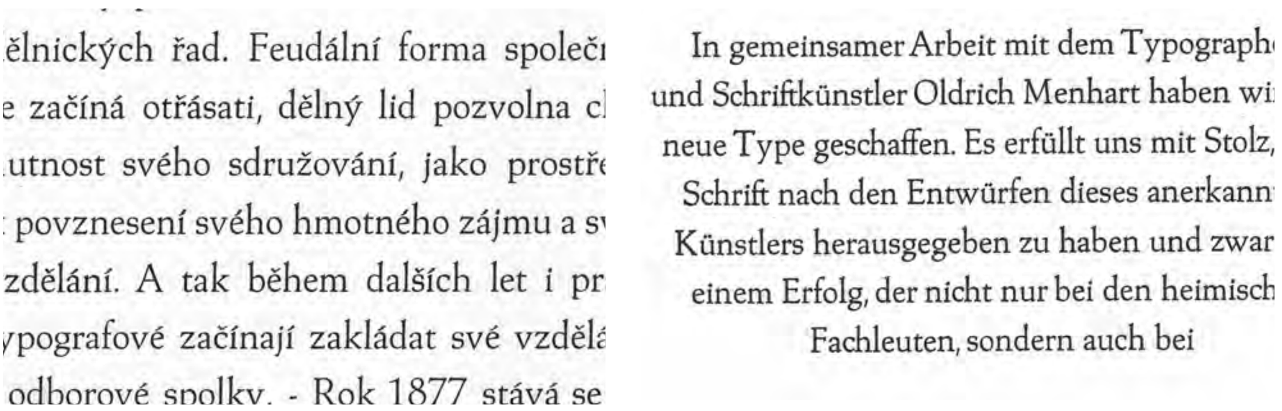


Figure 92 Illustration, showing the imaginary straight line, enhanced by the square shapes of the letters *a c e o s*.

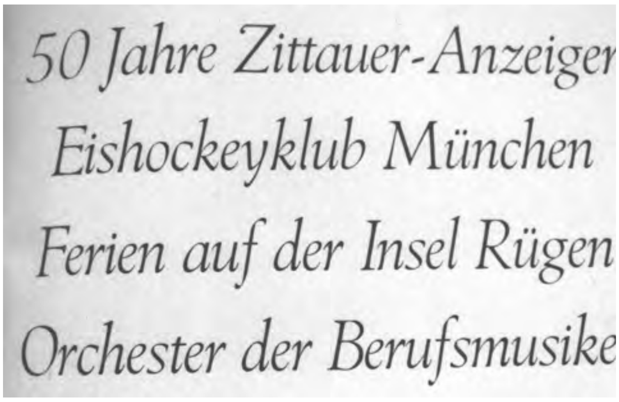
The following description of his working method demonstrates this approach: Firstly, several hundred freehand sketches of important characters, appearing in Czech were made trying different variations of form, ductus, weight, proportion, lengths of extenders. He then composed several alphabets, reproducing them on film, creating so a stock of letters. These were glued separately onto cardboard, setting blind texts, in order to assess the general effect of the face. Finally, he finished one alphabet and made technically exact filled-in drawings, about 10 cicero big and sent them to the typefoundry where metal patterns were made. Because he thought that it was vital to have, as designer, as much control over the process as possible, his drawings did not usually need to be translated by the technical drawing office of the typefoundry, already meeting the requirements, perfectly.



ělnických řad. Feudální forma společ
e začíná otřásati, dělný lid pozvolna c
utnost svého sdružování, jako prostře
povznesení svého hmotného zájmu a s
zdělání. A tak během dalších let i pr
ypografové začínají zakládat své vzdělá
odborové spolky. - Rok 1877 stává se

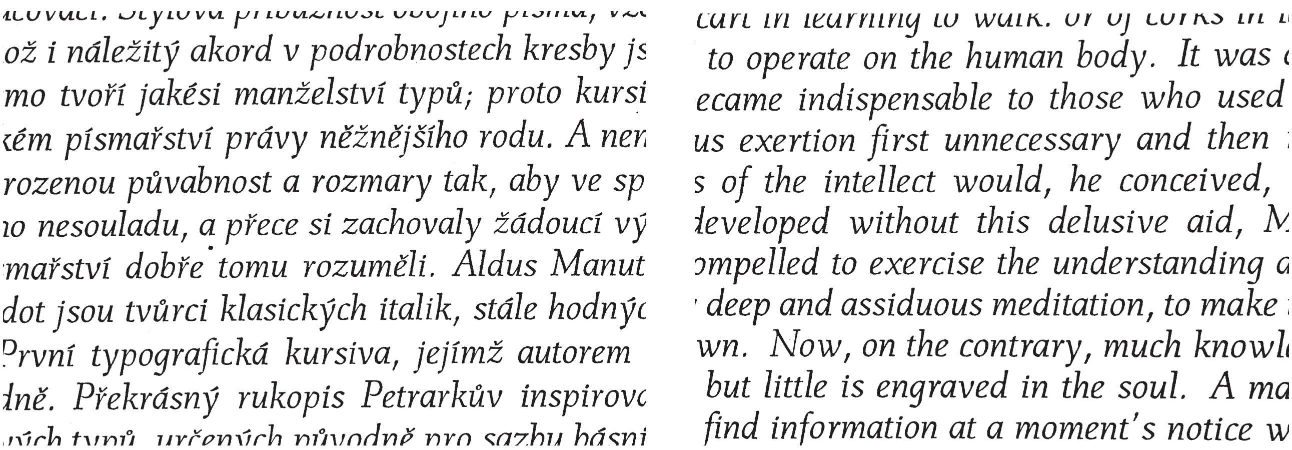
In gemeinsamer Arbeit mit dem Typograph
und Schriftkünstler Oldrich Menhart haben wi
neue Type geschaffen. Es erfüllt uns mit Stolz,
Schrift nach den Entwürfen dieses anerkann
Künstlers herausgegeben zu haben und zwar
einem Erfolg, der nicht nur bei den heimisch
Fachleuten, sondern auch bei

Figure 93 Sample of Czech text on the left and German on the right, both set in *Menhart Antiqua*.



50 Jahre Zittauer-Anzeiger
Eishockeyklub München
Ferien auf der Insel Rügen
Orchester der Berufsmusike

Figure 94 Sample of German text, set in *Menhart Kursiva*.



ož i náležitý akord v podrobnostech kresby js
mo tvoří jakési manželství typů; proto kursi
kém písmařství právy něžnějšího rodu. A nen
rozenou půvabnost a rozmary tak, aby ve sp
no nesouladu, a přece si zachovaly žádoucí vý
mařství dobře tomu rozuměli. Aldus Manut
dot jsou tvůrci klasických italik, stále hodnýc
První typografická kursiva, jejímž autorem
dně. Překrásný rukopis Petrarkův inspirovo
ých typů, určených původně pro sazbu básni

cart in learning to walk. Or of corks in
to operate on the human body. It was
ecame indispensable to those who used
us exertion first unnecessary and then
s of the intellect would, he conceived,
developed without this delusive aid, M
ompelled to exercise the understanding a
deep and assiduous meditation, to make
wn. Now, on the contrary, much knowl
but little is engraved in the soul. A ma
find information at a moment's notice w

Figure 95 Sample of Czech text on the left and English on the right, both set in *Menhart Italic*.

Internationality

Menhart looked upon the latin script as a collective cultural heritage of the occidental civilisation, deserving respect. Hence, in his view, the task of designing an original Czech typeface could neither be solved by inventing new letterforms nor by dressing them in a national decor. They should rather be elaborated and modified in such a way that the printed text would be graceful, natural and legible, both in Czech and in any other language using the latin writing system (figs 88–90 93–95).

The Czech alphabet should also be a world alphabet, unifying global culture and not disturbing with patriotic caprice and regional distinction. By its contribution, it is supposed to enlarge the general repertoire of contemporary, well-performing book faces and to aim for broad usability. One should attempt to maintain the tradition of the latin script and make the typeface functional, usable and harmonious in other languages whilst properly evaluating the importance of Czech nationality, although less frequently, other languages do also make use of accents. Otto F Babler (1950) confirmed Menhart's success in creating an international Czech typeface, saying, "His [Menhart] printing-types, though they bear no striking signs of Czech folk-lore or of Czech decorative elements, are somehow typically Czech, and such a slightly Slavonic note is one of their charms."

Another attitude that made him stand out from his artistic fellows and demonstrated his global mind, was his vivid interest in contemporary technical and cultural developments, changing fashions and tastes, both at home and abroad. He had professional and personal contacts with many foreign designers, including Paul Standard, Hermann Zapf, Jan Tschichold and others, with whom he exchanged information, critic and ideas. This suggests a non negligible influence on Menhart who wanted to keep up with the latest developments and to meet their associated demands. In regard to this, one detail needs to be mentioned; although he would have preferred the old-style version, he drew lining figures for his *Menhart Antiqua,* because most of the European typefaces at that time used those instead (fig. 96).

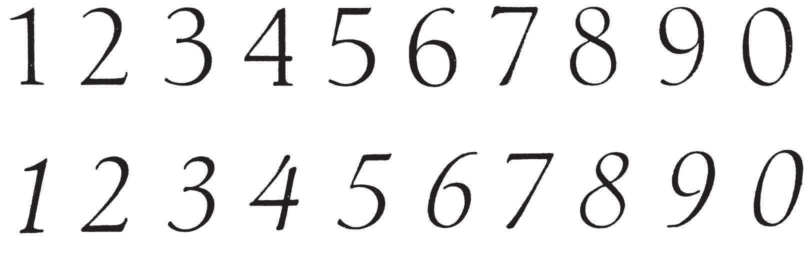


Figure 96 Lining Numerals of *Menhart Antiqua/Kursiva.*

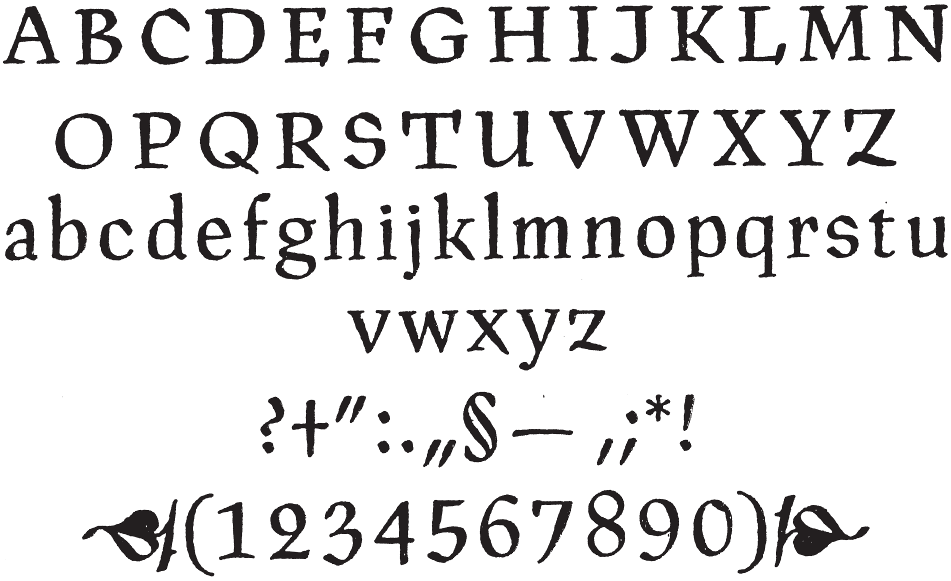
Marriage of calligraphy and typeface design

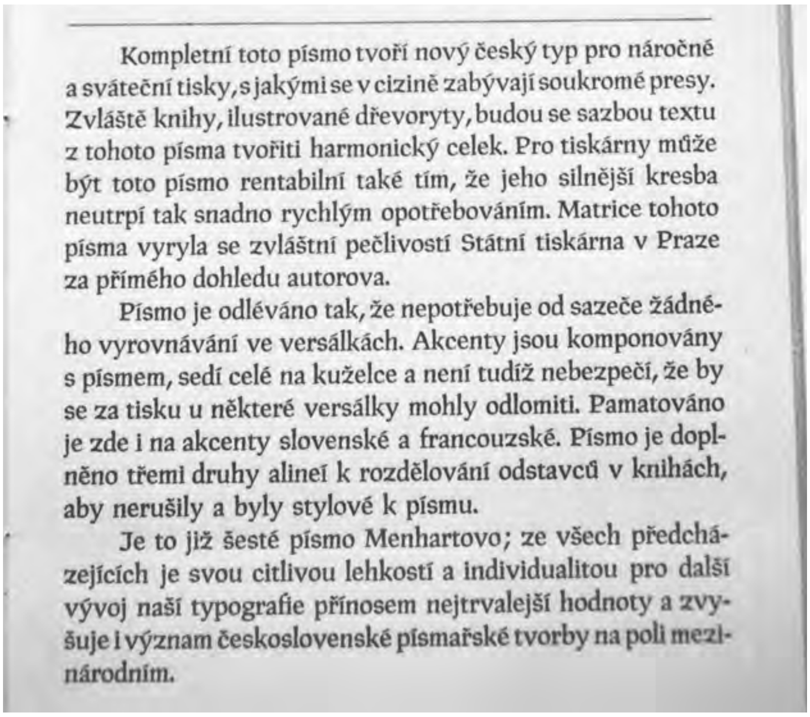
PREPARATION

¶"Calligraphy is the cradle of type design." This slogan reflects Menhart's conviction that calligraphy was the only truly natural source of inspiration for typeface design. It is the pool from which new ideas emerge. He came to realise this, and the principle that classic letterforms derive from writing, while studying old manuscripts and doing calligraphy himself. He was searching for the fundamental laws of letterforms by experimenting with different pens, holding them in various positions and angles. In doing so, writing became his second nature. He also recognized that the slight imperfections and irregularities, intrinsic to the hand, should also be maintained. They lend the typeface vitality and temperament, and consequently, his starting point was always writing, which he had mastered in a very impressive and sophisticated way. Writing, not in the sense of a sudden, ephemeral act, but more in the form of laborious and intense practice, over a long period of time. In a lecture he gave in 1958, he said, "No 'Master' ever just fell out of the skies. That is, no letter-artist was born...but rather he arises through the accumulation of experience and through study and practical work" (Duensing, 1989). Some of his further statements go on to explain that the creation of typographic letterforms requires patience, discipline, perseverance and a respect for tradition. Only by adhering to this philosophy could one then hope to achieve a significant and successful design solution.

In doing so, the scribe realises the inherent quality and structure of every single letter and the hand learns exactly all the needed strokes from the logic of the pen itself. A powerful and balanced relationship between the hand of the scribe and his tool is thus created. Once the scribe has absorbed this to its very last depth, he goes beyond the phase of thought, to pure expression, giving his hand a special power. Menhart concluded that new letterforms will develop from calligraphy as they had already done so in the past: "The classical letters of the first three centuries of printing,..., are always beautiful and useful, and enjoy great favor even today, as they were created in accordance with calligraphy in the manuscript tradition" (Standard, 1953). Besides that, he was sure that, "...differentness,...,is achieved neither by taking thought nor by obeying a command, but rather by trusting the pen and the imagination (Standard, 1953). Designing alphabets could then materialize naturally out of this understanding in the freedom that has been gradually achieved. In fact, he was convinced that awkward lettershapes came from misuse and a misunderstanding of the pen, since the pen itself cannot do wrong. It is the inexperienced and unskilled hand that is misleading. One further factor in this context, as he put it, is the sensitivity and ability of the scribe to perceive and feel, "...the mysterious fluency of those [letter] forms" where "the pulse of life beats" (Standard, 1953). The manifestation of life through writing and finally type was one of his long-term aspirations. Otto F Babler (1950, p 23) confirmed: "Your [Menhart] bold and forthright hand...this includes your decoration, which seems to me a written, a calligraphic and not a drawn decoration...The result is a unique harmony—as of everything growing directly out of a searching, active and inspired pen. And what makes this pen so powerful is its native avoidance of mere complexity in favor of the barest and clearest simplicity."

For many hundreds of years, European manuscripts were written with either the broad edge reed, quill or metal pen. Each having its own nature and logic.





Kompletní toto písmo tvoří nový český typ pro náročné a sváteční tisky, s jakými se v cizině zabývají soukromé presy. Zvláště knihy, ilustrované dřevoryty, budou se sazbou textu z tohoto písma tvořiti harmonický celek. Pro tiskárny může být toto písmo rentabilní také tím, že jeho silnější kresba neutrpí tak snadno rychlým opotřebováním. Matrice tohoto písma vyryla se zvláštní pečlivostí Státní tiskárna v Praze za přímého dohledu autorova.

Písmo je odléváno tak, že nepotřebuje od sazeče žádného vyrovnávání ve versálkách. Akcenty jsou komponovány s písmem, sedí celé na kuželce a není tudíž nebezpečí, že by se za tisku u některé versálky mohly odlomiti. Pamatováno je zde i na akcenty slovenské a francouzské. Písmo je doplněno třemi druhy alineí k rozdělování odstavců v knihách, aby nerušily a byly stylové k písmu.

Je to již šesté písmo Menhartovo; ze všech předcházejících je svou citlivou lehkostí a individualitou pro další vývoj naší typografie přínosem nejtrvalejší hodnoty a zvyšuje i význam československé písmařské tvorby na poli mezinárodním.

Figures 97 Oldrich Menhart, specimen (top) and detail of Czech text, set in *Manuscript Antikva* (Muzika 1965, private archive of O Karlas).

Similar to Edward Johnston and his school of calligraphy, Menhart considered the broad-edged pen as the optimal writing instrument. Occasionally, he used other tools, for instance the flexible spring-pen, where the thicks are created by pressure and the thin parts by release. The typeface *Manuscript* was the product of such experiments (fig.99). Babler (1950) described it saying: "Even its slight irregularities in design and cutting are no impediment to easy and pleasurable reading, but these faces show the general love of symmetry and rhythmic stress of the old writing masters. A page set in this type has clarity, grace, unity and proportion…."

The successful result proves a rare ability of transcribing calligraphic letters into typographical forms. This task is very difficult to achieve due to the different natures of both. The possibilities of calligraphy seem infinite, free to express every single emotion, mood and temperament, limited only by the imagination of the scribe, the paper and the tool. Type, on the other hand, is much more restricted, following definite rules of perception, convention, and dependant upon technical conditions. Even small errors and idiosyncrasies can rapidly become very tedious, making the printed text much harder to read.

The problem of bringing them both together, by civilising calligraphy to the demands of typography fascinated him very much. In a letter to the Bauer typefoundry he mentioned, "Like the attempts of [William] Morris and others (who had only slight success), my design tries to show how the refined hand of the [highly trained] scribe can come through with equal clarity in both drawn letters and in printing types built up strictly architectonically" (Duensing 1989). When being regularised and adapted to typographic needs, it was a great challenge to subdue the influence of written letterforms without loosing their vigour and energy . In his opinion, the solution could only be found by clearing the shapes of handwritten elements, striving for simplicity and discipline wherever possible, and thus revealing the basic and pure letterforms. By doing this, their original beauty and power would be naturally expressed and more muscular curves full of tension would be obtained. Calligraphy is, so to speak, tamed and appears only indirectly in the form of a dynamic spirit behind the scenes and not so much in the graphic visualisation itself. Perfecting the technical standard of the design could, as he thought, support this process in a positive way. In fact, he was uncompromisingly critical and pedantic about his own work and that of others, always looking for optimal results. Only rarely did his drawings need to be reworked in order to fit the technical requirements of the type foundry (see also section 'Designer and technology').

A

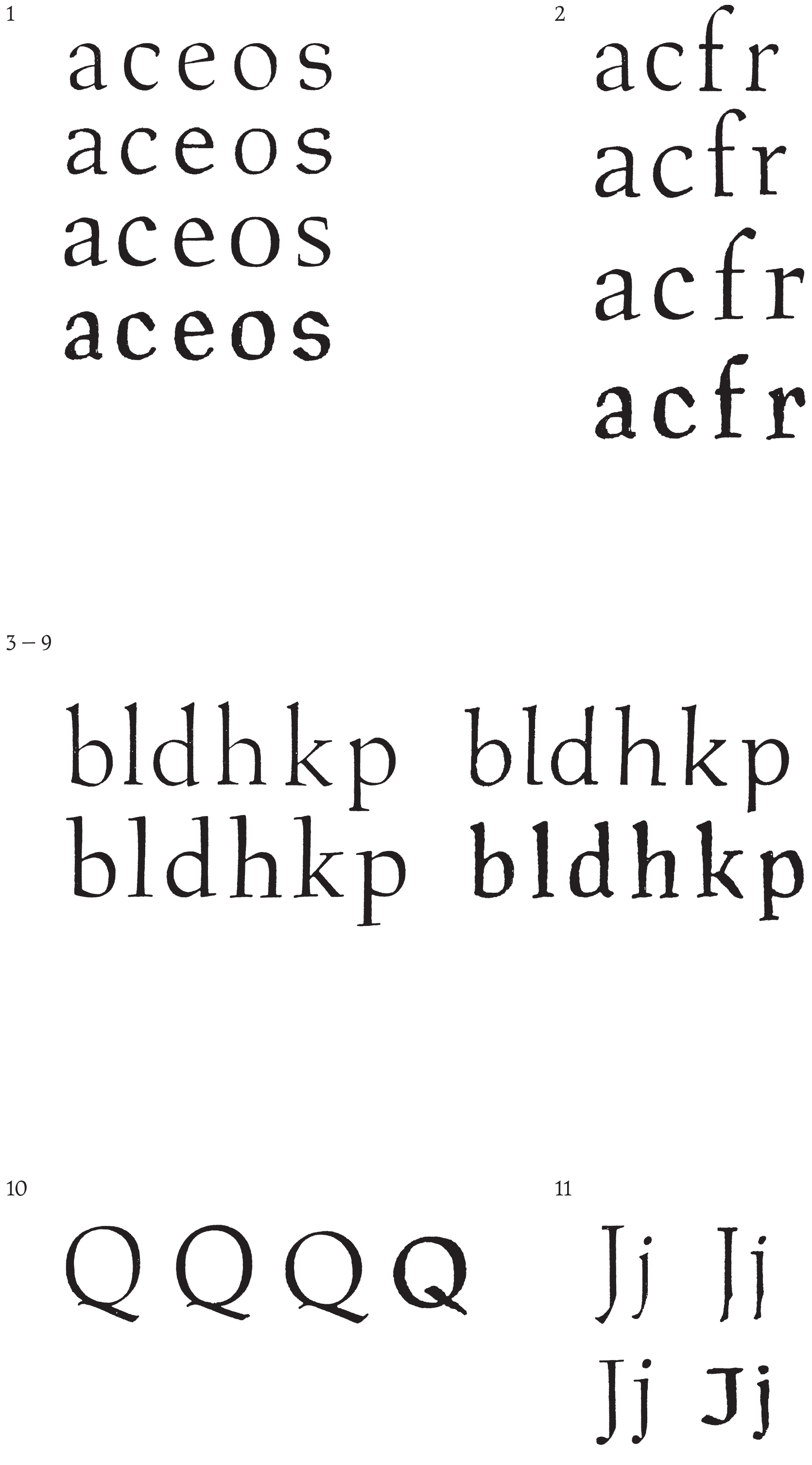

1
aceos
aceos
aceos
aceos
2
acfr
acfr
acfr
acfr
3 – 9
bldhkp bldhkp
bldhkp bldhkp
10
Q Q Q Q
11
Jj Jj
Jj Jj

Figure 98 Comparison, from the top *Menhart Antiqua, Menhart Roman, Figural* and *Manuscript*.

EXECUTION

The following examples and descriptions, focusing on his most accomplished typefaces *Menhart Antiqua, Menhart Roman, Figural* and *Manuscript*, demonstrate his proven leitmotifs with which he managed to maintain the calligraphic touch without loosing sight of typographic conventions. This venture was successfully supported by an even, regular and well-handled letter-fitting, which is indispensable for readability.

A All four typefaces have several features in common, which obviously vary according to the general design of the alphabet. Most of them are true of all his typefaces:

1. the trend to square the shape of round letters *a c e o s*,
2. pen-based terminals on letters *a c f r*,
3. swelling of the stems towards the head serifs,
4. slightly bending stems, having their narrowest part approximately in the middle of the stem,
5. modulation of stroke coming from the logic of the broad nib pen,
6. sloped and curved head serifs,
7. variation in form and length of the head serifs,
8. balanced contrast of stroke weight,
9. long extenders,
10. calligraphic fluent tail of *Q*,
11. pen-formed terminal on *J j*.

B

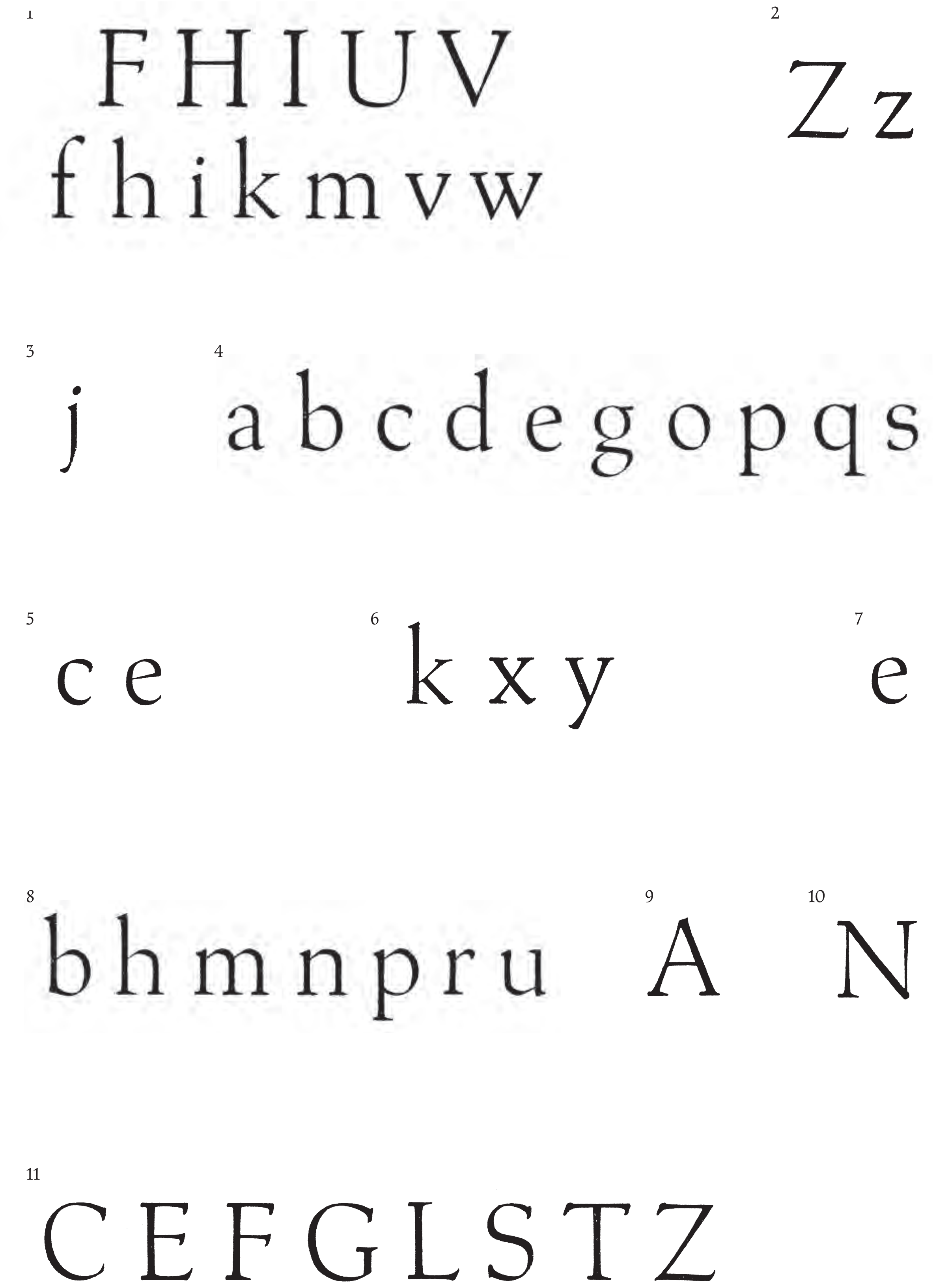

1
FHIUV
fhikmvw
2
Zz
3
j
4
abcdegopqs
5
ce
6
kxy
7
e
8
bhmnpru
9
A
10
N
11
CEFGLSTZ

Figure 99 *Menhart Antiqua*

B

Besides this, *Menhart Antiqua* shows more strongly its origins in calligraphy by observing the following features:

1. the asymmetrical serifs which, are straight and blunted on the left side and wedge shape on the other. The reader is pushed forward by this arrow-like shape,
2. flaring of the middle stroke on *Z z*,
3. shift to the right of the dot on *j*,
4. quite strongly sloped stress,
5. tapering stroke endings on *c e* turn back,
6. kicking tails on *k x y*,
7. rising bar of *e*,
8. angular intersections of the stem and curve on *b h m n p r u*,
9. broad square top of *A*,
10. flick of *N*,
11. serifs on *C E F G L S T Z*.

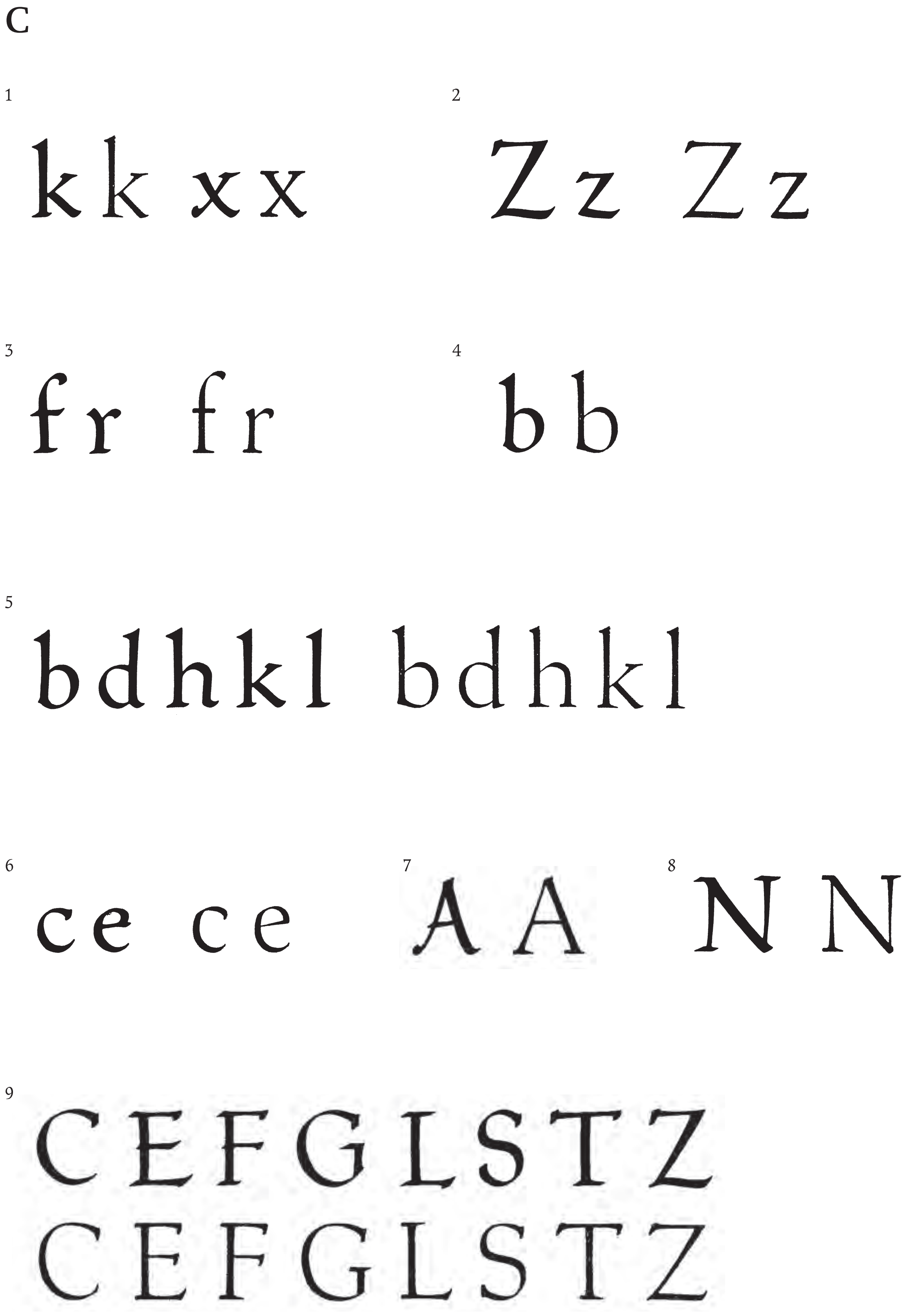

C
1
kk xx
2
Zz Zz
3
fr fr
4
bb
5
bdhkl bdhkl
6
ce ce
7
AA
8
NN
9
CEFGLSTZ
CEFGLSTZ

Figure 100 Comparison, *Codex Antiqua* on the left and *Menhart Antiqua* on the right.

C

In this context, it is interesting to look at *Codex Antiqua*, the forerunner of *Menhart Antiqua*. Figure 100 points out the design elements which occur in the latter in a much more regular and subdued way. These include:

1. the tail of *k x*,
2. general shape of *z Z*,
3. terminals on *f r*,
4. flick on *b*,
5. shape of head serifs on *b d h k l*,
6. stroke ending on *c e*,
7. broad square top of *A*,
8. flick of *N*,
9. serifs on *C E F G L S T Z*.

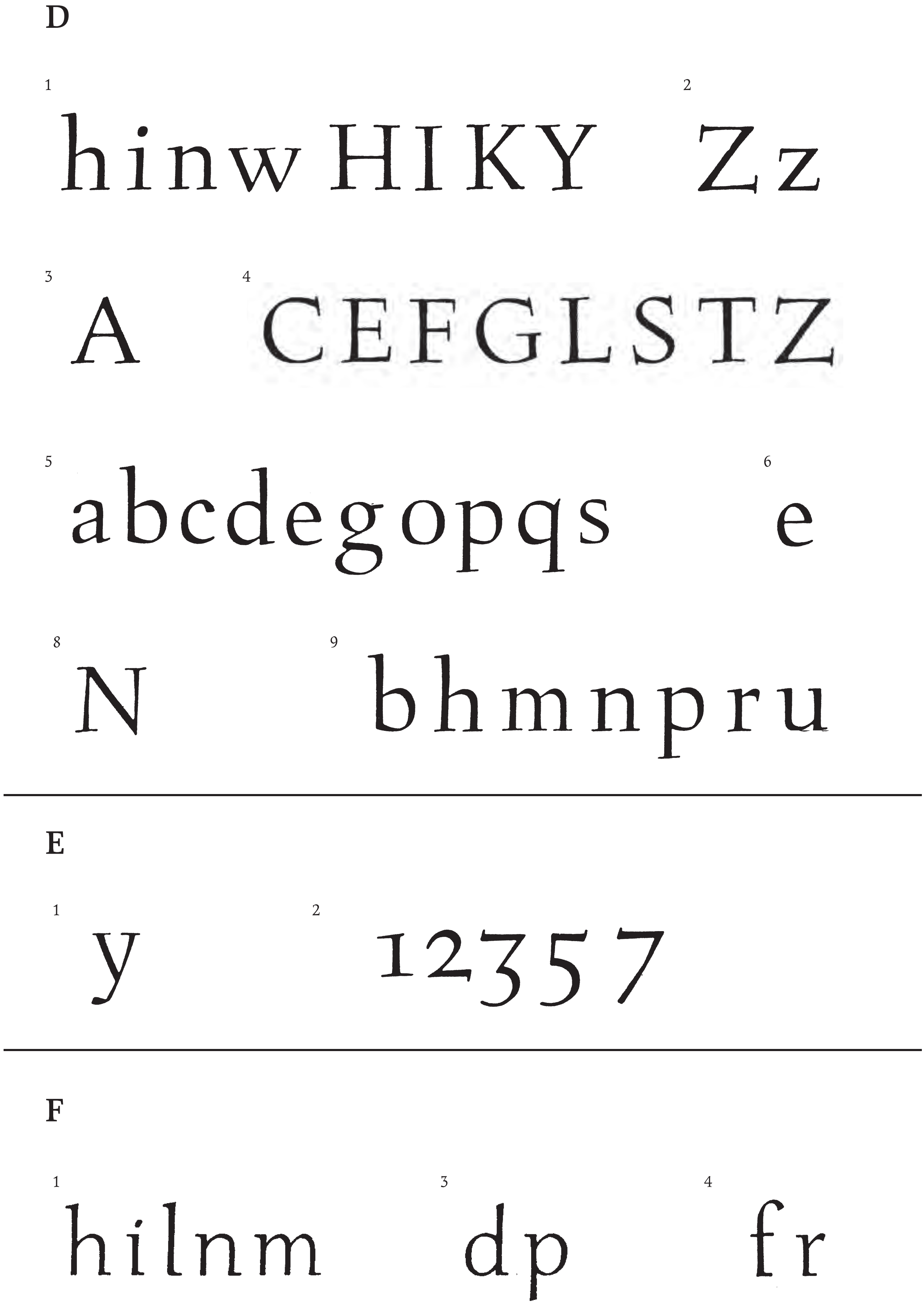

D
1
hinw HIKY
2
Zz
3
A
4
CEFGLSTZ
5
abcdegopqs
6
e
8
N
9
bhmnpru
E
1
y
2
12357
F
1
hilnm
3
dp
4
fr

Figure 101 From the top, *Figural*, *Menhart Roman*.

D

In *Figural Roman* the calligraphic hints are even more removed, yet pleasantly evident, as the following features suggest:

1. the flat, relatively thin and long, head and foot serifs,
2. straight bottom stroke on *Z z* and swapped stress (middle stroke is thick),
3. top of *A* is more pointy,
4. serifs on *C E F G L S T Z* are regularized,
5. rather vertical stress,
6. straight bar on *e*,
7. darker, heavier strokes,
8. flater, smoother curves on *b h m n p r u*,
9. straight middle stroke on *N*.

E

In addition to the common attributes already mentioned, *Figural* remains loyal to its roots of writing as can be seen in:

1. the bottom terminal on *y*,
2. small flicks on the numerals *1 2 3 5 7*.

F

Menhart Roman is quite an unusual case, since the lower case appears in some way as a formalized upright italic by:

1. having, in general, only partially existing serifs which are likely to be outstrokes,
2. slightly condensed proportions,
3. missing head serif on *d* and foot serif on *p*,
4. hybrid letters *f* and *r*.

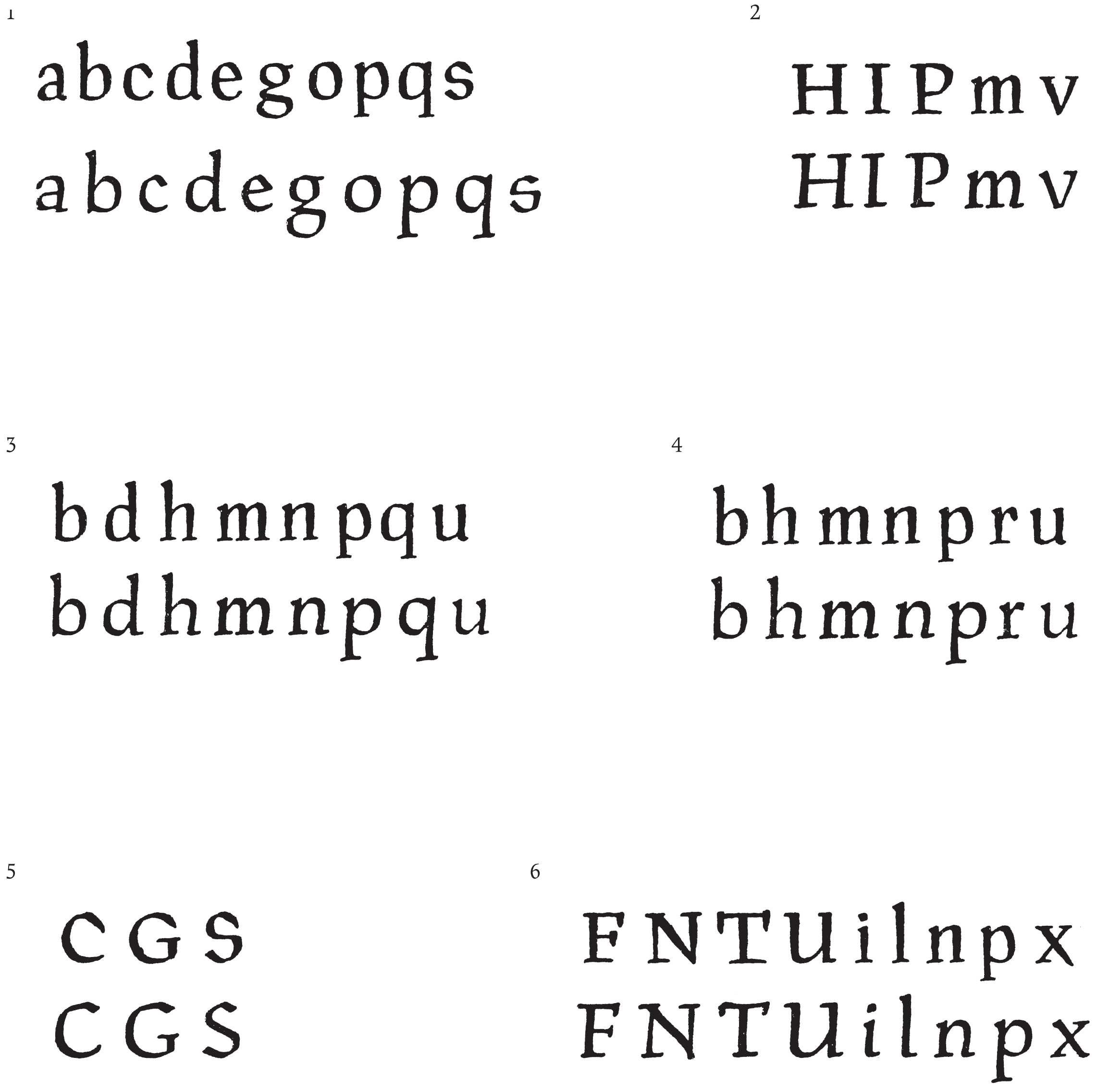

1
abcdegopqs
abcdegopqs
2
HIPmv
HIPmv
3
bdhmnpqu
bdhmnpqu
4
bhmnpru
bhmnpru
5
CGS
CGS
6
FNTUilnpx
FNTUilnpx

Figure 102 Comparison, *Manuscript Antikva* on the top and *Parlament* below.

G On the other hand, *Manuscript Antikva*, is clearly based on handwriting, but it is done in a very controlled and assured way. Comparing it with the typeface *Parlament*, which is deliberately very calligraphic in design, reveals some interesting details. The following differences seem to be responsible for the fact that *Manuscript Antikva* performs disciplined and consistent, despite its calligraphic and rustical touch:

1. the rather vertical and consistent stress,
2. serifs are blunt and rectangular,
3. rather condensed proportions,
4. smoother curves and higher intersections,
5. less pen-formed, abstract terminals on *C G S,*
6. strokes are straighter.

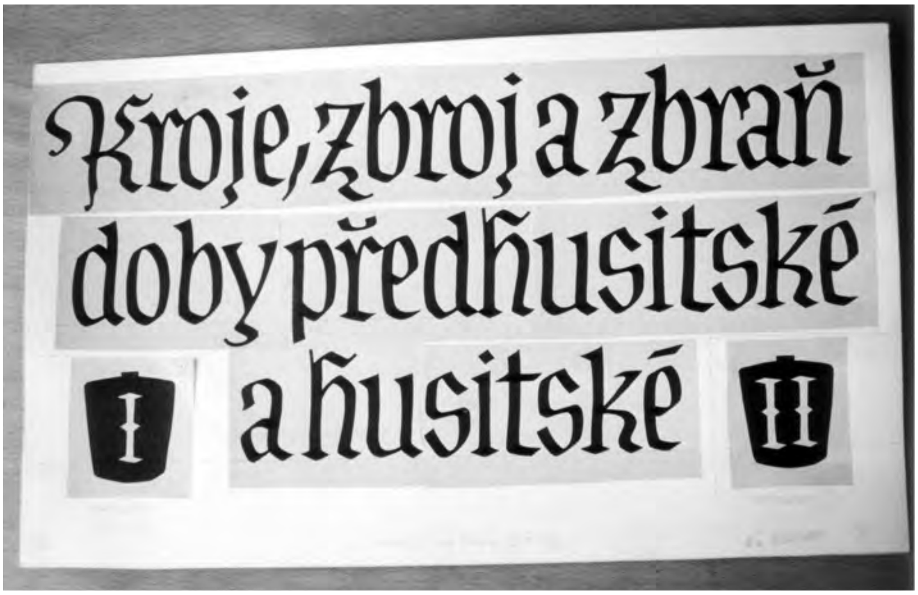

Kroje, zbroj a zbraň
doby předhusitské
a husitské
I
II

Figure 103 Oldrich Menhart, calligraphy title page *Kroje, zbroj a zbran*, 1950s (private archive of O Karlas).

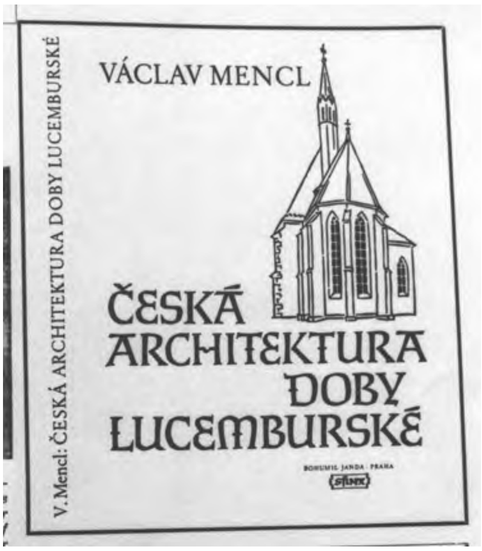

VÁCLAV MENCL
ČESKÁ
ARCHITEKTURA
DOBY
LUCEMBURSKÉ
V. Mencl: ČESKÁ ARCHITEKTURA DOBY LUCEMBURSKÉ
BOHUMIL JANDA · PRAHA
SFINX

Figure 104 Oldrich Menhart, calligraphy cover *Ceska architektura doby lucemburske*, 1950s (collection of the Klingspor museum).

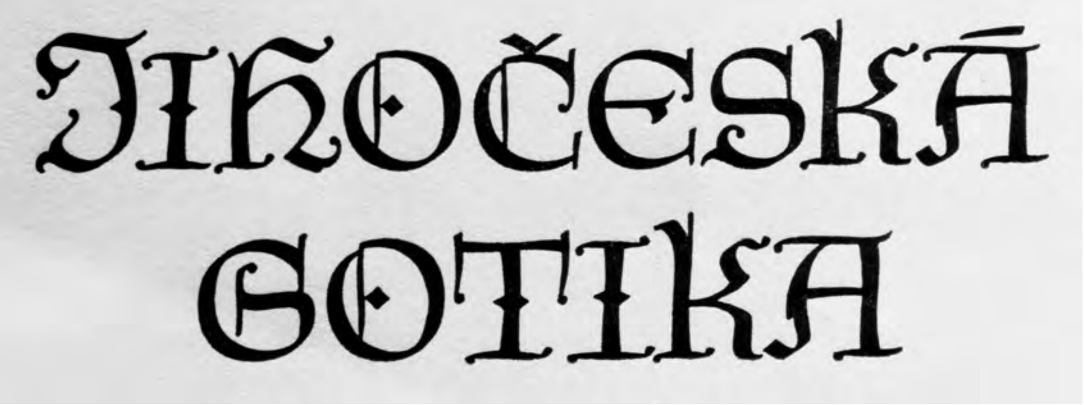

JIHOČESKÁ
GOTIKA

Figure 105 Oldrich Menhart, calligraphy title page *Jihoceska Gotika*, 1950s (private archive).

Work after 1948

After World War II, in 1948, the communist party came to power in Czechoslovakia. As a consequence of this many social and political changes occurred. Menhart's personal circumstances changed as well. For the first time in his life, he no longer struggled with financial problems, he was highly appreciated and respected, receiving several official decorations from the government. He surely deserved to be honoured. But it seems almost as if, he was chosen to be elevated in status to that of a national hero, in order to proudly and unequivocally demonstrate to other countries, Czech achievements in the fields of calligraphy, typography and type design.

Neither communist ideals nor any other political ambitions, for that matter, appealed to him. Penmanship and art were his main concerns. However, the character of his work fitted well with some of the concepts on the cultural agenda of the then powerful regime. This might be due to the national, Slavonic note and his acute mastery. His focus, at that time, lay more on calligraphy, including many posters for the Czech president, several other public documents and finally some books and book covers of, principally Czech, literature (figs 103–109).

Moreover, he created several typefaces. *Parlament* being one of them (fig. 110). It was finished in only three months during 1950 for the exclusive use of the Czech governmental public office, for the printing of important documents and announcements. A Cyrillic version of his popular face *Manuscript*, the so-called *Graždanka*[5], evolved together with its companion italic in 1952 and was cast in 1953–55 by Grafotechna in Prague. It was intended for bilingual text settings. Similar to his uncial letters, he studied original sources of the Cyrillic script in order to obtain a deep understanding of the unknown lettershapes. *Triga* is another typeface, made in 1951–55, which was designed for line-casting machines. The first text face he made for this technology was *Victory* for Intertype Co. in New York in 1942. The difficulties encountered there and the experiences gained, helped greatly during the execution of *Triga*. The next creation was called *Standard*, designed for the contest 'Fine book-faces of Czechoslovakia' in 1959, to be later exhibited in Leipzig (fig. 111). In order to participate, Menhart turned down the invitation to be a member of the jury, and won the second price. The name is a tribute to his friend Paul Standard. His last composition is the display face *Vajgar*, named after the river of the town, Jindřichův Hradec, where he partly lived and worked (fig. 112).

His pieces of work, especially in calligraphy, during those years, reveal a relatively distinct change in style which could be attributed to his collaboration with the government. It is very possible that he followed certain wishes and expectations. The overall tendency seems to lean towards a rustically, heavy, dark and mannered effect, rather than the elegance, lightness and honesty of former work. The typefaces appear to return too frankly to their calligraphic origins. Although, still very skillfully designed they seem to lack inner discipline, clearness and simplicity, all of which were integral to Menhart's earlier typefaces.

It was also a fruitful period of lecturing and writing educational books. The comprehensive and widely used books, *Nauka o písmu*, 1954 and *Tvorba typografického písma*, 1957 were published along with many articles in different, subject related magazines. Furthermore, some exhibitions took place to celebrate his extensive and versatile work.

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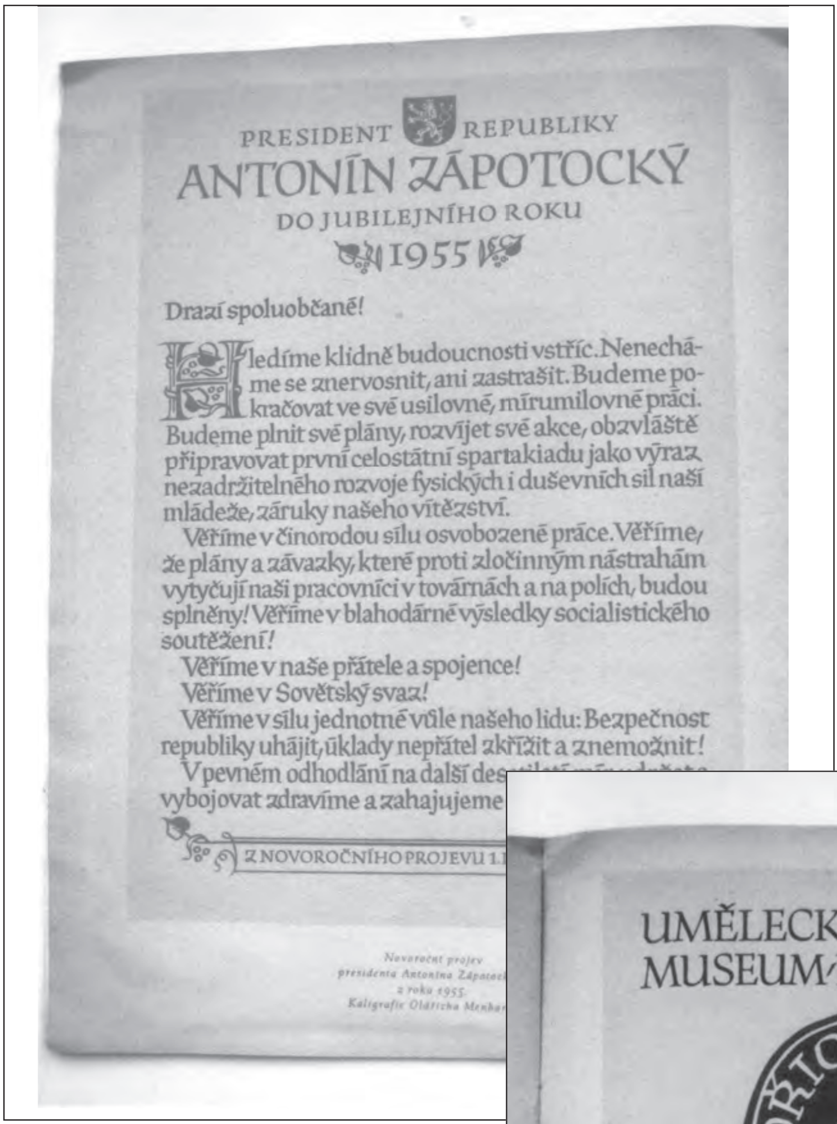
[5] The name is a reference to its origin when, after 1710, Peter the Great reformed the Cyrillic script by simplifying and bringing it closer to the latin script.



PRESIDENT REPUBLIKY
ANTONÍN ZÁPOTOCKÝ
DO JUBILEJNÍHO ROKU
1955

Drazí spoluobčané!

Hledíme klidně budoucnosti vstříc. Nenecháme se znervosnit, ani zastrašit. Budeme pokračovat ve své usilovné, mírumilovné práci. Budeme plnit své plány, rozvíjet své akce, obzvláště připravovat první celostátní spartakiadu jako výraz nezadržitelného rozvoje fysických i duševních sil naší mládeže, záruky našeho vítězství.

Věříme v činorodou sílu osvobozené práce. Věříme, že plány a závazky, které proti zločinným nástrahám vytyčují naši pracovníci v továrnách a na polích, budou splněny! Věříme v blahodárné výsledky socialistického soutěžení!

Věříme v naše přátele a spojence!

Věříme v Sovětský svaz!

Věříme v sílu jednotné vůle našeho lidu: Bezpečnost republiky uhájit, úklady nepřátel zkřížit a znemožnit!

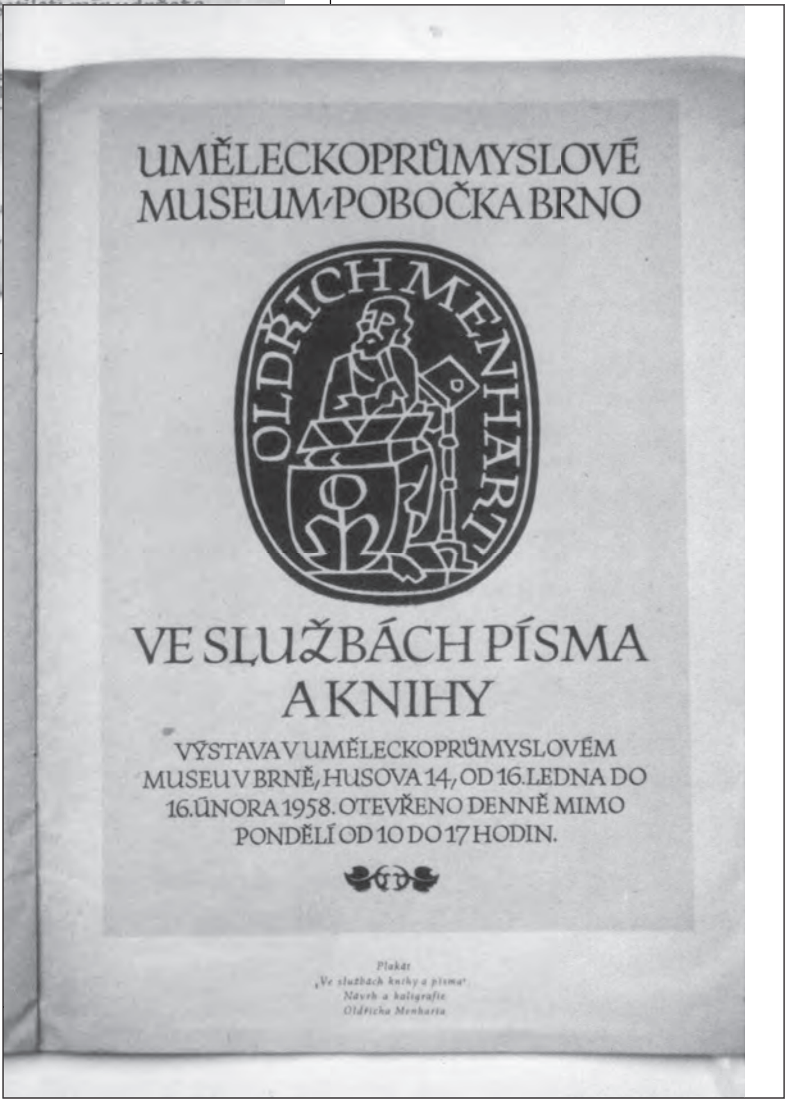
V pevném odhodlání na další des

vybojovat zdravíme a zahajujeme

Z NOVOROČNÍHO PROJEVU 1.1

Novoroční projev
presidenta Antonína Zápotoc
z roku 1955.
Kaligrafie Oldřicha Menhar

Figure 106 Oldrich Menhart, calligraphy poster New Year's wishes of the president, 1955 (collection of the Klingspor museum).



UMĚLECKOPRŮMYSLOVÉ
MUSEUM-POBOČKA BRNO

OLDŘICH MENHART

VE SLUŽBÁCH PÍSMA
A KNIHY

VÝSTAVA V UMĚLECKOPRŮMYSLOVÉM
MUSEU V BRNĚ, HUSOVA 14, OD 16. LEDNA DO
16. ÚNORA 1958. OTEVŘENO DENNĚ MIMO
PONDĚLÍ OD 10 DO 17 HODIN.

Plakát
„Ve službách knihy a písma"
Návrh a kaligrafie
Oldřicha Menharta

Figure 107 Oldrich Menhart, calligraphy exhibition poster, 1958 (collection of the Klingspor museum).

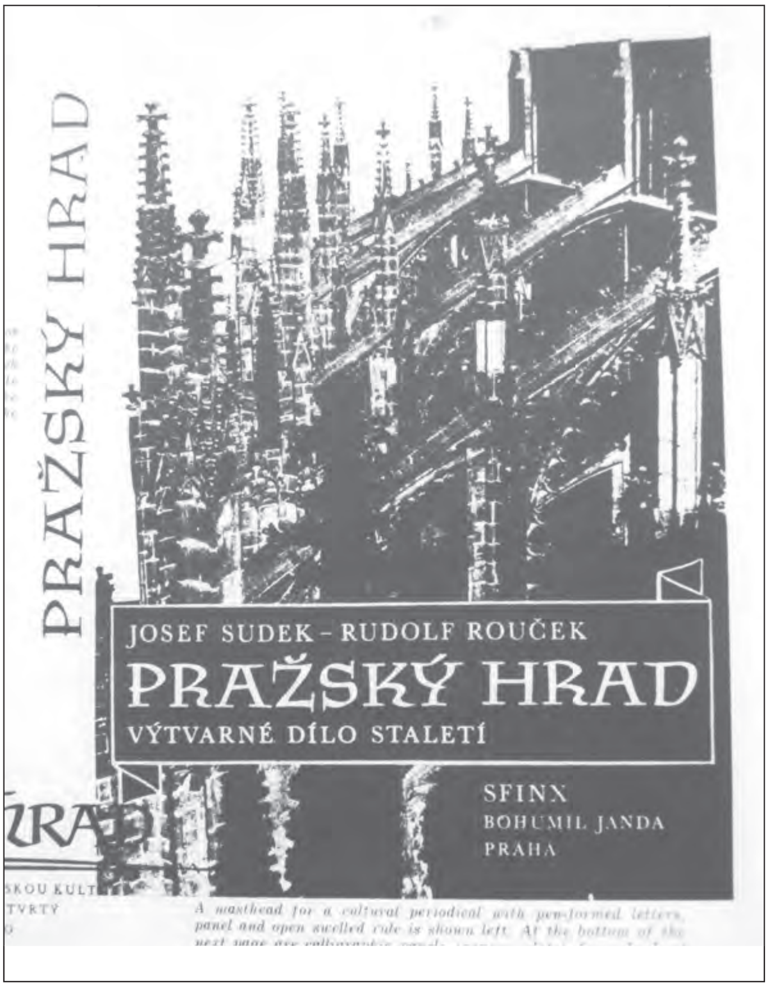

PRAŽSKÝ HRAD
JOSEF SUDEK – RUDOLF ROUČEK
PRAŽSKÝ HRAD
VÝTVARNÉ DÍLO STALETÍ
SFINX
BOHUMIL JANDA
PRAHA
A masthead for a cultural periodical with pen-formed letters,
panel and open swelled rule is shown left. At the bottom of the

Figure 108 Oldrich Menhart, book cover *Prazsky hrad*, 1950s (Standard 1953).

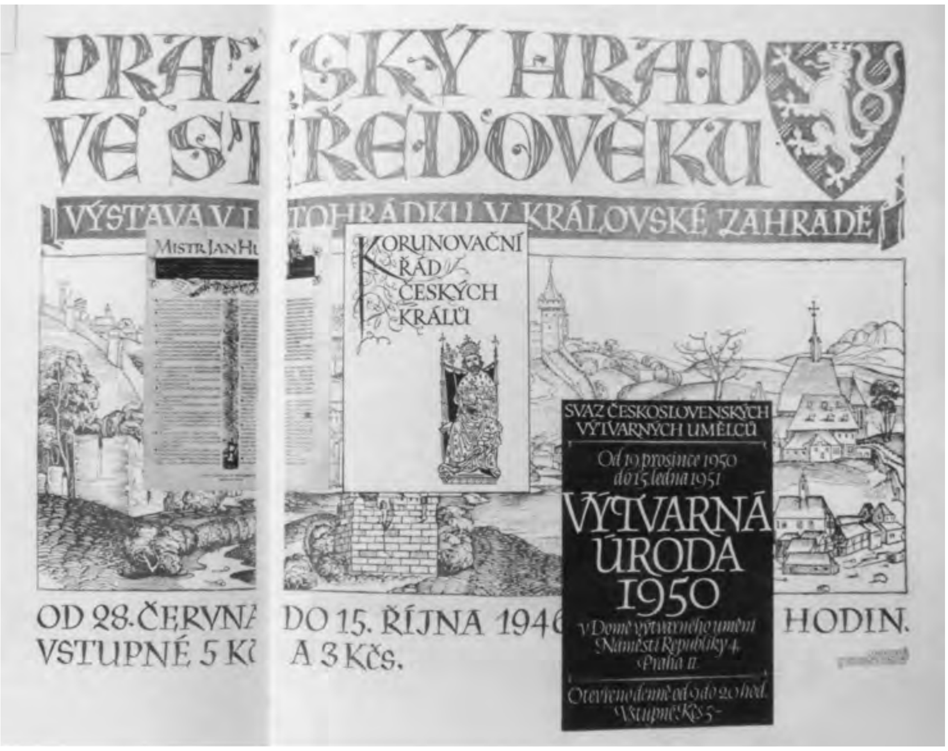

PRA SKÝ HRAD
VE S ŘEDOVĚKU
VÝSTAVA V TOHRÁDKU V KRÁLOVSKÉ ZAHRADĚ
MISTR JAN HU
KORUNOVAČNÍ ŘÁD ČESKÝCH KRÁLŮ
SVAZ ČESKOSLOVENSKÝCH VÝTVARNÝCH UMĚLCŮ
Od 10 prosince 1950 do 15 ledna 1951
VÝTVARNÁ ÚRODA 1950
v Domě výtvarného umění Náměstí Republiky 4, Praha II.
Otevřeno denně od 9 do 20 hod. Vstupné Kčs 5-
OD 28. ČERVNA DO 15. ŘÍJNA 1946 HODIN.
VSTUPNÉ 5 K A 3 Kčs.

Figure 109 Oldrich Menhart, examples of different book covers, 1950s (Standard 1953).

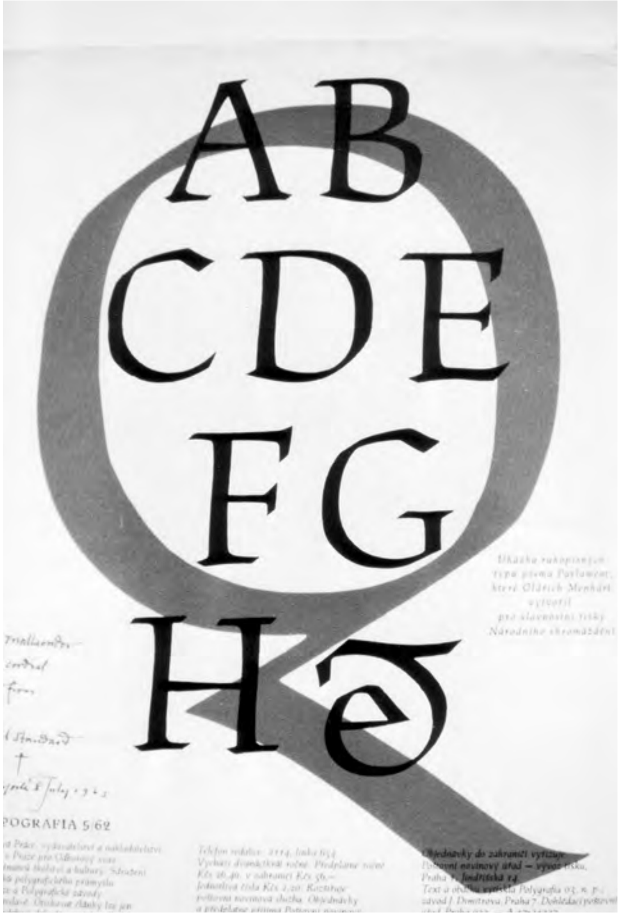


Figure 110 Spread of the magazine Typografia, vol 5, 1962, showing some letters of the typeface *Parlament*.

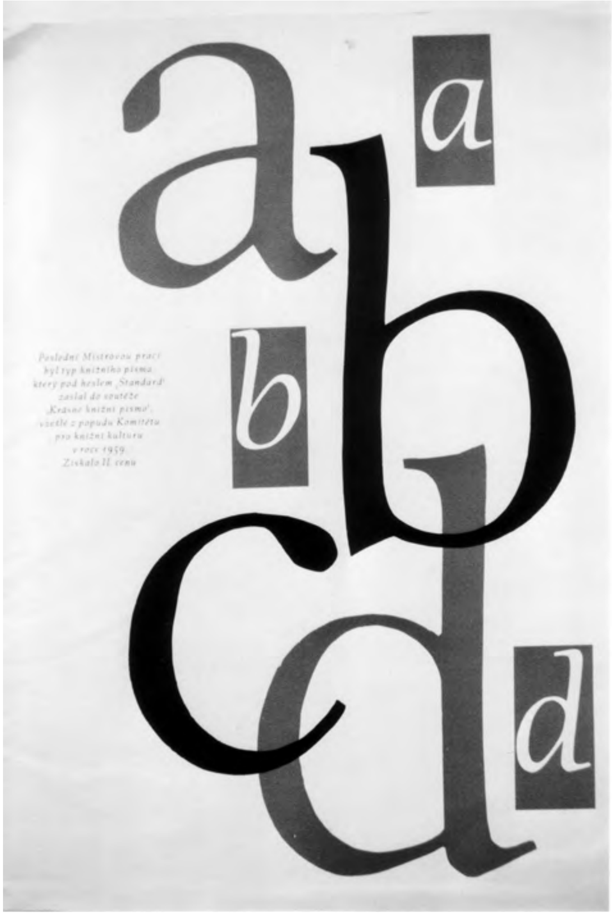


Figure 111 Spread of the magazine Typografia, vol 5, 1962, showing some letters of the typeface *Standard*.

Conclusion

¶Oldřich Menhart was surely a greatly skilled calligrapher and type designer of the same high standard as other accomplished contemporaries outside Czechoslovakia. After several attempts by other artists, trying to establish a national Czech style, he was the first to manage to draw international attention to Czech achievements in this area. Solving the problems peculiar to Czech text setting, due to the extensive use of phonetic signs, was strongly related to this success. Together with a few other designers, such as Karel Dyrynk, he attained well-balanced and appropriate results. Stepping into the traces of Vojtěch Preissig, but much more temperate and cautious, he treated the diacritics as an important and integral part of the whole alphabet, critical for legibility and therefore understanding. He was very much concerned with correcting the deficiencies of existing diacritics and hence to share the richness of Czech culture with the world by creating designs that present the printed text, both appropriately and pleasantly. This was a logical way for him to make the Czech scene stand out from the crowd and express Czech nationality. Nevertheless, from my angle, it is an exaggeration to say that he coined the Czech style, since the vast variety of possibilities within a whole nation cannot be represented by only one person and their individual ideals. But he certainly established his own visual and intellectual *Menhart-style*, acknowledging honestly and sensitively the human being behind his creation, as many examples of his work clearly demonstrate.

His focus, after all, was not restricted to the Czech language only. Believing that all languages unified by the latin script, deserve proper respect, put him into a global light in a time in which nationalistic sentiments were widely spread throughout Europe. This implies that Menhart was a modern designer who was actively looking over his own borders, seeking to meet the then current needs whilst simultaneously attempting to uphold his own Czech culture.

The long list of practical and historical publications mainly functioning as educational guidelines confirms moreover, this quite unusual character who although open to criticism, was always striving for perfection. In my personal view, he succeeded by designing typefaces which communicated the message of the author with a high degree of beauty, energy, and above all harmony.

The continuous search for new solutions in keeping with the spirit of the time, was another aspiration in which he was fully engaged. The alphabet is, as he believed, an evolving organism whose graphic expression has to be redeveloped in each era anew, allowing for a logical continuity of tradition. Yet, his ideas were not as radical as those of some other artists during the 1920s and 30s. His results being rathermore classic and elegant than provocative, this, I believe, contributed greatly to the admiration they received. Supposedly, it was this awareness of conventions and historical knowledge, about the type-making and printing of the old masters, that led Menhart in this direction. Despite these influences, he attempted a very personal and sovereign interpretation, in my opinion, much to his success. Also related to this, was his belief, that calligraphy is the only true source of inspiration and innovation in the search for new visual expressions of classic letterforms. His typefaces are deep reflections of this. However, they are also perfectly elaborated typographical forms performing assuredly and with discipline in printed text, passing all technical demands with consumate ease. His perfectionism regarding the elaboration of details, was exceptional within the group of Czech artists at

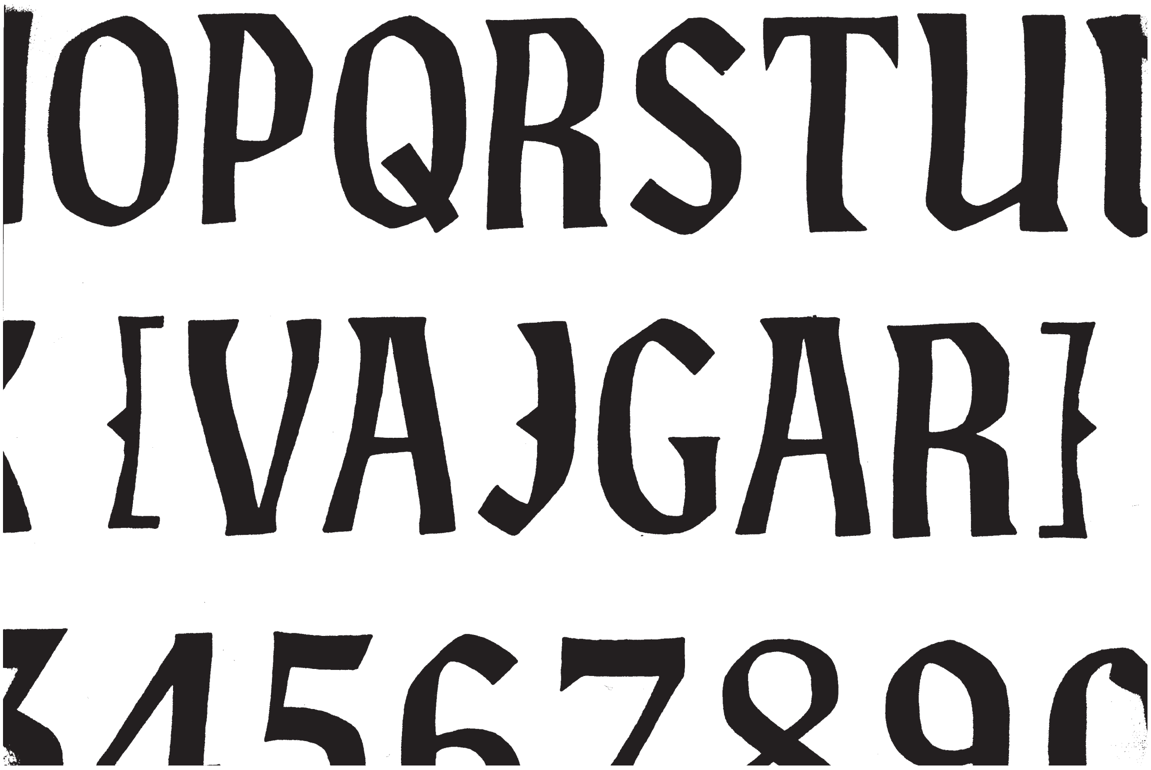

OPQRST
[VAJGAR]
45678

Figure 112 Oldrich Menhart, *Vajgar*, 1961 (collection of the Klingspor museum).

that time. He misliked average solutions and was very critical about his own work. Thus, in him, for the first time, a Czech designer had achieved this high level of maturity in typeface design both technically and aesthetically. From my point of view, it is fascinating to recognise the virtuosity and self-confidence with which he allied both disparate facets, in beautifully spirited typefaces. Although, I do not share the absoluteness of his conviction, because I think that his approach is only one of many other ways of designing an alphabet, I must admit the vigour and power inherent in his typefaces attributed to the logic of writing.

Appendix I — Curriculum vitae and main pieces of work

1897	Born, 25th of June, in the house ‘U Kalichu’ in Prague 2. He had one twin sister and three brothers. His father was a goldsmith, artist and craftsman.
1911	Finished grammar school in Prague-Karlov and started an apprenticeship as a typesetter in the printing house ‘Politika’.
1913	Took part in a strike organized by the workers of the printing-industry. He was almost sacked and not allowed to finish his apprenticeship in any printing house of the reign (Austrian monarchy). Karel Mrázek, his teacher at the typography school, helped him out of this dilema.
1914	Finished his apprenticeship in October and remained one year out of work. Designed some display lettering.
1915	Was called up by the army.
1920	Returned from the army and started again to work at Politka. Mrázek encouraged him in calligraphy and drawing.
1921	Published, together with Mrázek, the book *První českou školu ornamentálního písma* in two editions. It is an educational book teaching basic rules of lettering, its applications and psychological effects.
1922	Became foreman in the printing house Česká grafická Unie. He designed a display face for posters that was never realised.
1923	Became member of ‘Ročenka knihtiskařů a typografie’. Published several essays, including *Tiskové písmo po stránce kresebné konstrukce* (describing the importance of studying the old masters of printing) and *Život a díla Kryštofa Plantina* (life and work of Plantin and the life and conditions of workers of the printing craft in the sixteenth century).
1924	Received a scholarship from the Czech institute of Economy. Visited the Plantin-Moretus Museum, Bibliotheque Nationale and the private Klingspor collection in Kronberg. Studied life and work of historically important typographers and printers. Meet O Zahradník, dealer of the German Bauer type foundry who encouraged him to submit a typeface.
Oct. 1924–29	Started to work as foreman in the printing house ‘Státní tiskárna’ in Prague. Collaborated with Karel Dyrynk. He was involved in the preparations for the international exhibition of decorative art and industry in Paris and in the production of V Preissig’s typeface. He felt very restricted by administrative and technical work and had not enough possibilities to develop his artistic skills. Published essay in magazine ‘Typografia’, *Státní tiskárna v Praze na Pařiské výstavě* (presenting the exhibited print work of the printing house).
1929	Published essay *Zakladny studia v decorativním písmařství* (basic rules of decorative lettering). Left the ‘Státní tiskárna’ and started to work as an independent calligrapher, book designer, typeface designer and illustrator. Received another scholarship from the Czech club of foreman in the printing industry. Visited Bauer typefoundry Frankfurt, Klingspor Offenbach, Peignot and Imprimerie Nationale Paris.
1930	Designed his first two typefaces *Export Antiqua/Kursiva* and *Codex Antiqua/Kursiva*. He submitted these to Bauer typefoundry in Germany. They later developed into *Menhart Antiqua/Kursiva*.
1933	Designed additionally *Menhart Antiqua halbfett* (medium).
1933–36	Design of *Menhart Roman/Italic* for Lanston Monotype, Great Britain.
1937–44	Collaboration with publishing house Edice Atlantis in Brno.

1937–49	Collaboration with the publishing house Edice Václava Poura in Prague.
1939	Designed *Hollar*, for the private prints of Jaroslav Picku in Prague.
1940–49	Became design consultant for the publishing house 'Sfinx' and 'Evropský literární klub' in Prague.
1940	Designed *Figural Roman*, published by Státní tiskárna in 1948–49. Wrote essay *Regule kaligrafů* for the magazine 'Hollar'.
1941	Finished his biggest calligraphic work, the text for *Kytice* by Karel Jaromír Erben with illustrations by Antonín Procházka for Edice Atlantis.
1941–48	Collaboration with the publishing house Edice Ráj knihomilů in Prague.
1942	Designed *Victory roman/bold* for linotype machines. Some trials were cast by Intertype Co. New York in 1947 but the face was never published.
1943	Completed *Victory italic*. Designed *Manuscript* cast by Státní tiskárna in 1945.
1944	Designed *Česka Unciala* cast by Státní tiskárna in 1948.
1946	Designed *Manuscript kursiva* cast by Státní tiskárna in 1947.
1947	Published book *Večerní hovory knihomila Rubrica a starotiskaře Tympána* (the discussion between a bibliophile and a printer describes the process of handmade books) with Edice Donatus in Kroměřiž. It was originally published in the magazine Bibliofil in 1937. In 1958 a new limited edition came out in German, made by Stempel AG in Frankfurt a.M. and designed by Hermann Zapf. Each section was set in a different typeface, Diotima, Aldus, Garamond, Janson, Palatino and Baskerville.
1948	Designed *Figural Kursiv*, published by Státní tiskárna in 1949. SČUG Hollar, association of Czech graphic artists, organized a solo exhibition of his typographical work. Received a state award in book design from the minister of information.
1950	Designed the display face *Monument* on the base of his lettering for the book *Satyr* by Victor Hugo. It was published by Grafotechna, Prague, in 1952. Designed *Parlament*, for the Czech governmental public office, printing exclusively governmental documents and announcements. Collaboration with publishing houses Orbis, Tvar, SNKLHU—designing several monographs, in particular one of the artist Mikoláš Aleš.
1951	Designed *Triga Antikva/Kursiva/Antikva polotučná* for line setting machines, published by Nařadí in 1954–55.
1952	Designed cyrillic *Manuscript Graždanka* and *Graždanka Kursiva*, published by Grafotechna in 1953–45. Received the gold medal of the Republic for his life's work as calligrapher, typeface designer and typographer.
1953	Received the state award for his calligraphy of the new year's statements from the president Klement Gottwald.
1954	Published the book *Nauka o písmu* (describing the history of typeface design).
1957	Published the book *Tvorba typografického písma* (a guideline of designing typefaces).
1959	Designed *Standard Antiqua/Kursiva* as a tribute to his friend Paul Standard.
1960	Designed decorative capitals for *Figural*.
1961	Designed display face *Vajgar*, published by Tiskárna Stráž.
1962	Died, 11th of February. He is buried in the family grave on the cementary Olšany in Prague.

Appendix II — Table of typefaces

Designed	Typeface	Published	Type foundry
1930	*Export Antiqua/Kursiva, Codex Antiqua/Kursiva*		never published
	Menhart Antiqua	1930	Bauer type foundry, Germany
	Menhart Kursiva	1931	
1933	*Menhart Antiqua halbfett* (medium)	1935	
1933	*Menhart Roman, series 397*	1934–35	Lanston Monotype, Great Britain
	Menhart Italic	1935–36	
1939	*Hollar*	1939	Jaroslav Picku, Prague
1940	*Figural Romana*	1948–49	Státní tiskárna, Prague
1942	*Victory Roman*	1947	Intertype Co. New York
	Victory polotučna (medium)		
1943	*Victory Italic*		
	Manuscript antikva	1945	Slevárna písem (typefoundry), Prague
1944	*Česka Unciala*	1948	Státní tiskárna, Prague
1946	*Manuscript Kursiva*	1947	
1948	*Figural Italika*	1949	
1950	*Monument*	1952	Grafotechna n.p., Prague
	Parlament	1950	Národní shromáždení ČSR (Czech governmental public office), Prague
1951	*Triga Antikva*	1954–55	Služba TOS, Prague
	Triga Kursiva		
	Triga Antikva polotučná (medium)	1955	
1952	*Manuscript Graždanka*	1953–55	Grafotechna n.p., Prague
	Manuscript Graždanka Kursiva		
1959	*Standard Antikva/Kursiva*		unknown
1960	Decorative capitals for *Figural*.		unknown
1961	*Vajgar*	1961	Tiskárna Stráž.

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Illustrations

Due to various reasons, a big part of the illustrations was done under restrictive conditions. These include insufficient lightning when taking pictures, scanning from photocopies, lack of proper photographic equipment (macro lenses) and the like.

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