



GIAMBATTISTA BODONI

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1740

Giambattista Bodoni was born in Saluzzo, Italy, on February 26th, into a family originally from the town of Asti and which was dedicated to the art of typography. In 1669, this family brought back into the marquisate the art of setting types after more than half a century of absence. The young Giambattista does his first studies at the *Regio Collegio Saluzzese*, while in his father's workshop he draws and does woodcuts.

1758

Together with his school mate Domenico Costa, Bodoni moves to Rome on February 25th, where he does his vocational training at the "Sacra Congregazione di Propaganda Fide," one of the most important European printing studios of the time. At the "Collegio della Sapienza" Bodoni learns the basics of some oriental languages. Abbot Costantino Ruggeri, administrator of the printing studio, and Cardinal Giuseppe Spinelli, prefect of the typographic atelier, notice his talent and give him the task of rearranging the oriental typeface punches cut by the Frenchmen Garamond and Le Bé about two hundred years before. The period in Rome proves to be critical to Bodoni's eventual orientation as a punch cutter as well as his interest in oriental scripts.

1759

Produces a series of woodcuts for the volume *Alphabetum Tibetanum Missionum Apostolicarum Commodo Editum* (now extremely rare) of Father Agostino Giorgi, professor of oriental languages at "La Sapienza" university. The very same work will form the second part of the *Alphabetum Tibetanum* in 1762.

1761-1763

Creates woodcuts for the frontispieces of the two volumes *Pontificale copto-arabo* and the *Rituale copto-arabo* by Bishop Raffaele Tuki.

1766

Bodoni leaves Rome with the intention of traveling to London, capital of a land where the art of typography is experiencing a renaissance under William Caslon and John Baskerville. On his way north, he suffers from a fever that forces him to abandon his journey just as he arrives in Saluzzo.

1768

Ferdinando di Borbone, Duke of Parma, and his Prime Minister Guillaume Du Tillot appoint Bodoni to direct the “Stamperia Reale.” Bodoni arrives in Parma on the 24th of February and signs the contracts one month later. Giambattista’s brothers, Giuseppe and Giandomenico, are employed respectively as pressman and typesetter.

1768–1769

Bodoni works with the court architect Ennemond Alexandre Petitot and the engraver Benigno Bossi on several publications, amongst them the folio *Ara Amicitiae* in memory of the visit of Emperor Giuseppe II. Bodoni begins a professional relationship with Gian Bernardo de Rossi, a scholar of Hebraism.

1770

Bodoni starts to mould types in his own workshop. Zefirino Campanini is employed as typesetter and the German Hans-Georg Handwerck works as treasurer, keeping account of Bodoni’s commissions.

1771

Declines the invitation to run the Regia Stamperia of Milan. Inspired by Fournier’s work, the first specimen book *Fregi e majuscole* is published.

1772–1773

Bodoni is in charge of printing the “Gazzetta di Parma” newspaper, beginning with the August issue. Prints the book *Versi sciolti e rimati di Dorillo Dafnio* (octavo) with Bossi’s engravings.

1775

In honor of the Prince of Piedmont Carlo Emanuele’s nuptials with Maria Adelaide of France, Bodoni publishes his first masterpiece, *Epithalamia exoticis linguis reddita*, consisting of 25 inscriptions in a number of exotic characters.

1776

Giambattista’s father dies in Saluzzo. Bodoni publishes the first essay by G. B. De Rossi on Hebraistic bibliography consisting of fifty editions prior to 1500.

1779

Prints the two-volume edition of *Le Opere di Raffaello Mengs* under the initiative of Spanish diplomat José Nicolás de Azara.

1782

King Carlos III of Spain confers upon Bodoni the title of “Tipografo di Camera.” For the visiting emperor Paul I of Russia, he prints *Essai de caractères Russes gravés et fondus par Jean Baptiste Bodoni* (folio). Bodoni also receives a large number of orders for his types from Italian and German printing shops.

1784

Bodoni does homage to the visiting King of Sweden with the book *Upomnema Parmense in adventu Gustavi III* (folio). For the King of Naples, he prints *Prose e versi per onorare la memoria di Livia Doria Caraffa*.

1786–1787

A group of bibliophiles sponsors the masterpiece *Gli amori pastorali di Dafni e di Cloe di Longo Sofista*. Major literary scholars Tiraboschi, Pindemonte, Lamberti and Denina congratulate Bodoni on his achievements. José Nicolás de Azara invites Giambattista to establish a royal printing house in Madrid. Benjamin Franklin praises him for his types, commenting on them in a letter from Philadelphia postmarked 1787.

1788

Bodoni publishes the *Manuale Tipografico*, a showcase of one hundred Roman faces, fifty Italics and twenty-eight Greeks, the *Serie di Majuscole e caratteri cancellereschi* (folio) which was never completed, and the collection *Saggio di Poesie campestri del Cavalier Pindemonte* (octavo). He journeys to Bologna, Florence, Rome and Naples, where he is awarded for his editorial activity by Pope Pius IV as well by the highest officials and literati.

1789

In March, Bodoni gets acquainted with the poet Giuseppe Parini in Milan. Again, he declines the invitation to run the Regia Stamperia of Milan as well as similar invitations from French officials. He prints *Aminta, favola boschereccia di Torquato Tasso*, a book which includes the dedication of Vincenzo Monti to the Marquise Malaspina. Campanini writes the first handbook for typographers, *Istruzioni pratiche ad un novello capo-stampa o sia regolamento per la direzione di una tipografica officina*, an unpublished work now preserved in the Biblioteca Palatina of Parma.

1790

The Knight of Azar invites Bodoni to spend a period as his guest in Rome to publish a complete series of classical works. The Duke of Parma doesn't agree with his possible emigration and authorizes the typographer to set up his own workshop inside the Palazzo Reale; an establishment which will see the creation of Bodoni's best and most personal productions. Luigi Orsi becomes the head typographer of his private workshop, a total of 12 persons including compositors and pressmen, while the Regia Stamperia has about 20 employees.

1791

On March 19th, Bodoni marries Margherita Dall'Aglio, a devoted woman who compassionately cares for him in the infirmities of life. She will help Giambattista with his abundant written correspondences and carry on his work after his death.

1792

Bodoni publishes two folio and quarto editions of the *Callimaco*, in Greek and Italian, in time for the wedding of Carolina Teresa di Borbone with Massimiliano di Sassonia.

1793

Carlos IV, King of Spain bestows upon Bodoni an annual pension of 6000 Reali and the title "Typographer to His Majesty." The folio masterpiece *De imitatione Christi* is printed and dedicated to the newly succeeding Prince of Parma.

1795

Bodoni is robbed of one hundred composition pages of exotic characters. He starts a collaboration with Pietro Milani of Fabriano, founder of the Italian paper mill of the same name. They produce and publish *La Divina Commedia di Dante Allighieri*; the three folio volumes are dedicated to Ludovico di Borbone. Among the productions of those years there is the bibliography on Hebrew incunabula *Annales Hebraeo-typographici sec. XV* by De Rossi.

1799

Pierre Didot of the renowned dynasty of French printers attacks Bodoni, blaming him for the mistakes in the texts of his editions, especially (and wrongly) for the *Virgilio*. In 1800 the complete works of Petrarch are published in two folio volumes.

1801–1803

The political changes, i.e. the annexation of Parma to the Repubblica Cisalpina ordained by Napoleon Bonaparte, do not affect the activities of Bodoni's printshop. Rather, his works are praised by the authorities. Luigi Lamberti works as editor for the Greek edition of the *Iliad*, printed in large folio.

1805

Pope Pius VII challenges Bodoni to do better than the French edition of the *Oratio Dominica* by Marcel. Health problems keep Bodoni from receiving Napoleon during his visit to Parma. Within the year he publishes *Omero and Inno a Cerere* (folio) as official tests for the upcoming Greek *Iliad*.

1806

Fourteen of Bodoni's editions are sent to the International Exposition in Paris where they win the first prize.

1807

Bodoni personally presents to the viceroy the polyglot edition of the *Pater Noster*. He then prints the quarto volume *Swiatynia Wernery w Knidos (the Temple of Cnido)* set with custom designed Polish characters.

1808

The three folio volume Greek *Iliad* is published, a masterpiece in the art of typography.

1809

Bodoni works on the two editions of *Le più insigni pitture Parmensi*, with illustrations by Rosaspina which will be first published in 1816.

1810

Luigi Lamberti presents to Napoleon a copy of the *Iliad* printed on parchment. Napoleon bestows upon Bodoni a pension for life “en consideration des progrès qu’ il a fait faire à l’art typographique.” The aforesaid volume is donated by the emperor to the National Library in Paris.

1813

Bodoni is afflicted by an extended illness which leads to the closing of the Stamperia Reale on April 5th. After an intense life dedicated to the art of typography, Giambattista Bodoni dies in Parma on November 30th. The announcement is made public through the Duomo cathedral with the ringing of the large bell reserved for illustrious personalities. The funeral rites are celebrated on the second of December with all of the political authorities present. His body is laid to rest in the Duomo. The editorial activity of Bodoni, according to the *Compendiosa Bibliografia di Edizioni Bodoniane* edited by H. C. Brooks, amounts to 1140 different editions of varying significance (at least 400 volumes, many impressive ones), and his work as a founder is reflected in approximately 270 different typefaces with a total of 55,000 matrices.

1818

Printing of the *Manuale Tipografico*, the synthesis of the bodonian work.

1834

End of the typographic activity of Bodoni’s widow.

1843

Due to the interest expressed by Angelo Pezzana, director of the Biblioteca Palatina and Vincenzo Mistrali, the President of Finance, Bodoni’s heirs give the entire collection of matrices & punches to Maria Luigia, Duchess of Parma, for only 50,000 lire (about 26 euro). It is known that the king of Naples was prepared to offer 300,000 lire for the collection only days after the deal was made.

1872

A Carrara marble monument in memory of Giambattista
Bodoni is unveiled in Saluzzo on the 27th of October.



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