



Aldus Manutius-- The Original Page Maker

Five hundred years ago, Christopher Columbus was on his knees in throne rooms throughout Europe, scrambling to finance his first voyage to the New World. Meanwhile, his Venetian countryman Aldus Manutius--scholar, printer, and entrepreneur--was establishing what would become the greatest publishing house in Europe, the Aldine Press. Like Columbus, Aldus Manutius was driven by force of intellect and personality to realize a lifelong dream.

Aldus' greatest passion was Greek literature, which was rapidly going up in smoke in the wake of the marauding Turkish army. It seemed obvious to Aldus that the best way to preserve this literature was to publish it--literally, to make it public. The question was, how?

Although it had been forty years since the advent of Gutenberg's press, most books were still being copied by scribes, letter by letter, a penstroke at a time. Because of the intensity of this labor, books were few and costly. They were also unwieldy. Far too large to be held in the hands or in the lap, books sat on lecterns in private libraries and were seen only by princes and the clergy.

One day, as he watched one of his workers laboring under the load of books he was carrying, Aldus had a flash of insight: Could books from the Aldine Press be made small enough to be carried without pulling a muscle? And could he produce the

elegant, lightweight volumes he imagined and still sell them at an attractive price?

The first problem was how to print more legible words per page and thus reduce the number of pages. Aldus needed a smaller typeface that was both readable and pleasing to the eye. The work of the Aldine Press had attracted the notice of the finest typographic artists in Europe, so Aldus was able to enlist the renowned Francesco Griffo da Bologna to design a new one. Under Aldus' direction, Griffo developed a typeface that was comparatively dense and compact and that imitated the calligraphy of courtly correspondence. The result of this Aldus-

A BRIEF HISTORY OF PUBLISHING

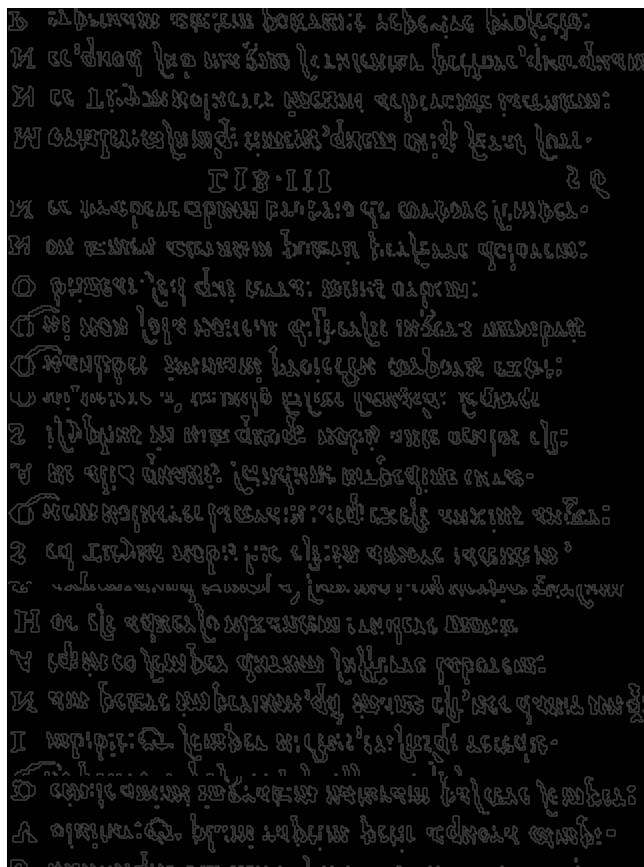
- 400 First known inked impressions on paper.
- 1440 Johannes Gutenberg develops the movable type printing press in Germany, cutting letters from an alloy of lead, tin, and antimony.
- 1449 Aldus Manutius is born in Padua.
- 1487 The Aldine Press is founded in Venice.
- 1501 The Aldine Press publishes Dante's *Divine Comedy*.
- 1515 Aldus Manutius dies.
- 1757 In England, William Baskerville publishes Virgil's *Aeneid and Eclogues*, using woven paper and a slender typeface.
- 1814 The first steam-powered, high-speed printing press is built to print the *London Times*.
- 1866 The first rotary printing press is brought into production, printing both sides of a continuous web of paper.
- 1884 Ottmar Mergenthaler invents the Linotype.
- 1958 Photoelectric methods for controlling color registration and ink density are developed.
- 1984 The introduction of Aldus PageMaker, the Macintosh computer, and the Apple Laser-Writer printer ushers in the era of desktop publishing.

Griffo collaboration was the ancestor of what we now call *italics*.

The new typeface enabled Aldus to print portable and highly readable books. Besides the first edition of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Aldus published the essential texts of Greek literature: the histories of Herodotus and Thucydides, the tragedies of Sophocles, the epics of Homer, and the treatises of Aristotle, thus rescuing them from relative oblivion.

The timing was perfect. With the growth of the merchant class in Venice, Florence, Naples, and Rome, a new market ripe for books had recently emerged. This newly prosperous middle class was flush with money and anxious for intelligent ways to spend it. The new books from the Aldine Press were an immediate success.

As more books became available, the middle classes in Italy--and ultimately in all of Europe--grew more literate and the Aldine Press became more prestigious. And Aldus, the publisher who put books in the hands of the people, eventually lent his name to the company that put publishing in the hands of the people.



What's behind the Aldine Dolphin and Anchor?



To guard against their editions being counterfeited, Renaissance publishers customarily stamped a printer's mark, or colophon, on the title page of each book. With a unique colophon, each book could be clearly identified as the work of a particular publisher. The choice of colophon, however, could not be a casual one. It had to represent what was distinctive about the publishing house. For the Aldine Press, Aldus Manutius mulled over the range of classical and Christian icons and finally chose the dolphin and anchor.

In the early Christian era, the dolphin and anchor represented the soul being carried to salvation. Whether Aldus considered the Christian symbolism when he chose it, we can't be certain. But there may be a clue to his intentions in the strange way the symbol contradicts itself.

The anchor is a means of securing, of holding fast, while the dolphin is capable of limitless movement. What adds to this tension is the way the dolphin is wrapped around the anchor. Is the dolphin lifting the anchor, or is the anchor holding down the dolphin? The ambiguity of the motto beneath it, "Festina lentes" ("Make haste slowly"), teases us further.

What makes this emblem so appropriate? It encapsulates the the mission of the Aldine Press: to sustain tradition while encouraging progress--in fact, to make them interdependent. As both a vehement classicist and an ardent innovator, Aldus used his creative resourcefulness in design and publishing technology to preserve the literature of the past. In turn, the need to preserve that literature gave him the opportunity to mold the future of publishing.