The Forgotten Printer

REVIVING THE WORK OF ADAM STEINSCHABER

A SPECIMEN FOR THE STEINSCHABER
& SCHABERSTEIN TYPEFACES

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A specimen for the Steinschaber and Schaberstein typefaces

Designed by Michael Parson for Typogama

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The forgotten typeface

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Introduction

🕊 Growing up in Switzerland, with British parents, history was inevitably an integral part of my story, from learning about my family but also as a tool to help me discover my country of adoption and it's own fascinating history.

A particular joy of working in the field of typography, is that it is steeped in history. Any student will be aware of the masters that have preceded them and the acclaimed works they created that still inspire, and in some cases, are still in use in our modern world.

My interest for the history of typography is therefore not only driven by a personal curiosity, but equally, since I work in education, as a way to acquiring knowledge to be able to open the eyes of a current generation. But as I worked on a recent historical course, I dawned on me that I was filling my presentation with works of the masters, and rightly so, but that I did not cover, nor was I aware, of the particular history of the city I was living in. When most people think of the quiet, Swiss city, Geneva, printing is probably not one aspect that would come to mind. Mentioned for international organisations, banks and chocolate, Geneva is known more as an international diplomatic hub than a printing center.

An example of the printed page of 'Le livre des sains anges', published in 1478.
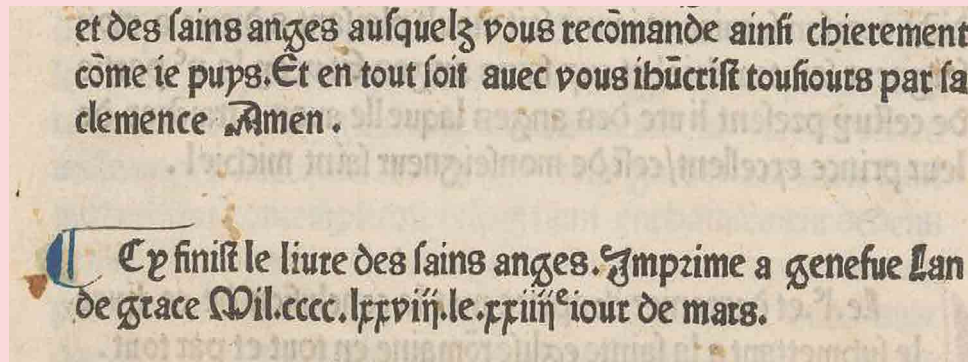
One of the first items I stumbled upon was a digital archive containing a scanned copy of *'Le Livre des Saint Anges'* by a certain Adam Steinschaber. I was particularly intrigued by this edition as the typography was particularly remarkable, but in a curious manner. This was not the gothic letters of Gutenberg, but it was equally not the finer crafted Roman forms being developed in the time in Italy. The overall style seemed to blend gothic traits, on letters like the n or e, with Roman or more calligraphic inspired forms for the letters a, g or y. These letters were of particular interest to me. Firstly, the a was a gothic inspired, angular form but with a marked curve connecting the top to the main bowl. This strange form actually closed the counter form, creating a unique and distinctive letter. The g was a complex shape, curving over itself and seemingly cut by a diagonal stroke. The y seemed nearly inverted, with stroke curving toward the left of the letter. After further research, I discovered another unique particularly of this printer, an inverted S, something I had never seen before and even now, still wonder about the reasons since this idea did not seem to be employed by any scribes or printers of the time. I initially wondered if I was actually looking at a manuscript rather than a print since the letters seemed so inconsistent and irregular. The originality of the forms struck a particular chord with me, so I decided to investigate further.

To my surprise, the subject of printing in Geneva was far from an obscure interest and was well documented by a range of academics and scholars. Their interest was principally focused on the printing craft or literary content, yet it was fascinating to read into the various accounts about the man, Adam Steinschaber and the work that he had done bringing printing to the region.

The traveling craftsman, Adam Steinschaber

On the 24th of March, in 1478, a german immigrant, freshly arrived from Italy, produced the first printed book in Geneva, sparking the arrival of the typographic world in the region. Named Adam Steinschaber, his life remains a mystery with only a few years greatly impacting his stature. Born in Schweinfurt[1], from the district of Lower Franconia in Germany, his actual date of birth is unknown, though he does appear as a student at the University of Erfurt in 1470, graduating with a Bachelor in 1973. He then once again disappeared from any historical accounts, until his arrival and establishment of his print shop in 1478 in Geneva, presumably having traveled from Germany, through Italy, before arriving in Geneva.

His work is remarkable for two reasons, the first obviously being his introduction of movable type to Geneva. But more importantly, his second print, Histoire de la Belle Mélusine, is considered today to be the first french, illustrated story. This famous story from Jean d'Arras was already well known and spread through the world, but the French clergy felt that a simplified, illustrated version would be better suited for the less educated rural communities. Steinschaber therefore printed, in 1478, the first illustrator book, filled with 63 engravings[2], that seems to have then been colored manually. The style is quite primitive and simple, especially compared to the more refined style find in other print centers, but his accessible approach became a common style for the region. To highlight these engravings, I have included a few throughout this specimen[3].

Over the course of two years, he would produce a dozen incunabula that can be recognized by his unique typeface and sometimes signature. But then, come October of 1480, after his last production, his name would once again vanish from history, leaving only a mystery around his fate.

Although he did not sign his first publication, the unique letters employed confirm his hand behind the press.

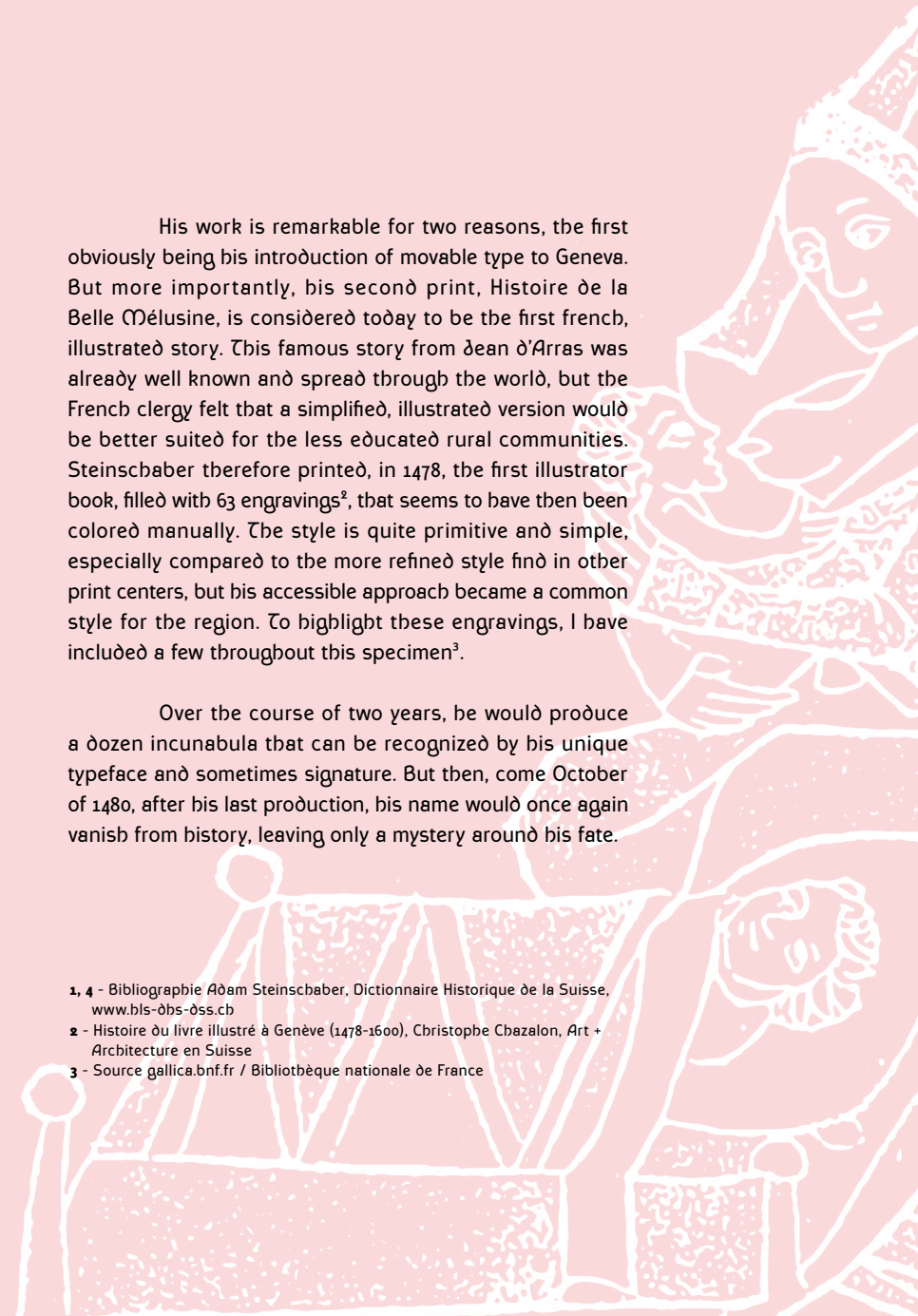1, 4 - Bibliographie Adam Steinschaber, Dictionnaire Historique de la Suisse, www.hls-dhs-dss.ch
2 - Histoire du livre illustré à Genève (1478-1600), Christophe Chazalon, Art + Architecture en Suisse
3 - Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Throughout the origins of printing, religion was an important aspect. Firstly, since they controlled the centers of power, most of the printed works had to be approved to suit their worldview. But also since they offered printers the chance to produce a lot of work that had previously been completed by scribes. One common task was the printing of so-called Indulgences that allowed the purchaser, to wipe their sins away. But, more importantly, it was a way for the church to generate a substantial amount of money, further consolidating their power. The Indulgences were also one of the main points of contention for the rising Protestant movement who saw them as useless promises.

Despite the end of his production, a group of other printers signed various later publications using a typeface that was very similar to those employed by Steinschaber. This suggests that he trained a group of apprentices to his new craft, leaving them his equipment before moving on. Despite this short period of time, one could argue that his impact, but like that of so many of the German migrants travelling through Europe, should not be underestimated in their spread of printing technology away from their homeland.

List of the printed works attributed to Adam Steinschaber[4].
In 1478, *'Le livre des saints anges'*, by François Ximenes, *'Histoire de la belle Melusine'*, by Jean d'Arras, *'Doctrinal de Sapience'*, by Gui de Roye, and *'Fierabras'*, by Jean Bagnion. From 1478-9, he printed the *'La destruction de Jerusalem'* and in 1479, *'Breviaire de Lausanne'*, *'Histoire de la destruction de Troye'*, by Guido Columna. From 1479-80, he would collaborate with Henri Wirczburg to print *'Calendner'* and in 1480, le *'Speculum Amatorum Mundi'*, by Denys le Chartreux, *'Manipulus curatorum'* by Gui de Montrocher, and the *'Legenda Sanctorum'*, the Golden Legend, by Jacques de Voragine. This would be the final print mentioning Steinschaber by name.

1, 4 - Bibliographie Adam Steinschaber, Dictionnaire Historique de la Suisse, www.bls-dbs-dss.ch
2 - Histoire du livre illustré à Genève (1478-1600), Christophe Chazalon, Art + Architecture en Suisse
3 - Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France
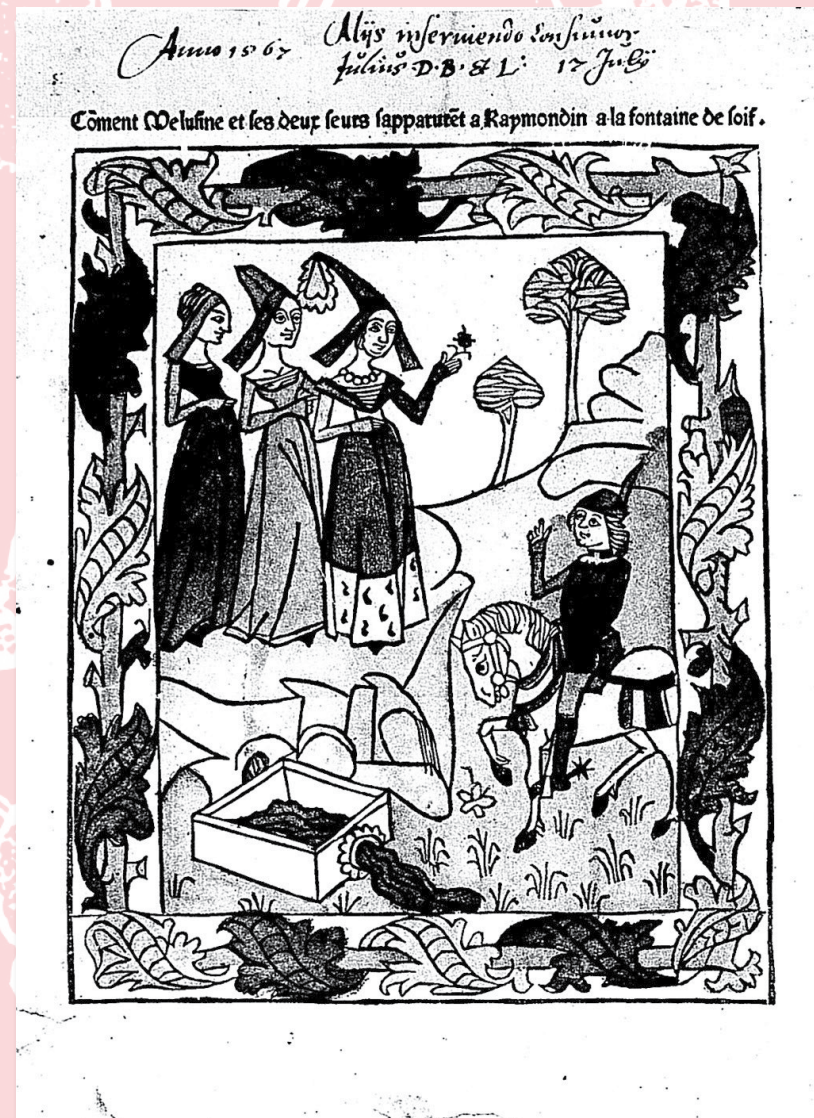
Histoire de la belle Melusine, 1478. Source: gammica.bnf.fr / Bilbliothèque nationale de France

Understanding the Steinschaber typeface

🐦 My main fascination for the printed works of Adam Steinschaber, was obviously down to the typographic characters that he employed. I knew of the standard gothic letters Gutenberg employed and also of the innovations that printing in Italy brought with the creation of the first 'roman' characters and later the first italics, but Steinschaber's letters seemed even more unique. A proto-gothic typeface in a Rotunda style, 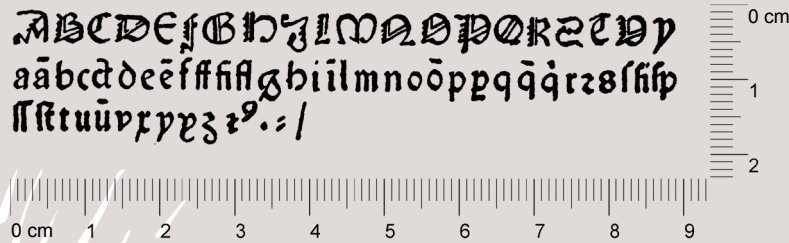but with a particular 'y' and an inverted capital 'S', it was unlike any other printed works I knew of. I even would question if the printed specimen was not actually, the work of a scribe. But Steinschaber's typographic quirks are also one reason his work seems to have been noted and archived since it provided a unique signature[1].

As Gutenberg had shown, most printers combined a range of crafts and techniques to allow them to master a good workshop, and I had kept that same assumption while researching the work of Steinschaber. Yet the real source of his fonts seems to have been a more contemporary, capitalist reality. Rather than cutting his own typefaces, Steinschaber seems to have acquired his typefaces while traveling through Venice, probably before his arrival in Geneva. Maybe he lacked the skills or maybe this simply allowed him to set up shop faster when arriving in a new town.

He apparently visited the workshop[2] of Johann and Wendelin of Speyer *(also known as De Spira)*[3], who were amongst the first travelling German printers who arrived in Italy some 20 years earlier. Johann had already died, but the print shop was running successfully and would probably have attracted the attention of the traveling craftsmen, notably since they were all Germans. They are principally credited as the creators of the so-called roman style typefaces, influencing the later work of Nicolas Jenson. But they equally created a few gothic typefaces, closer to the germanic styles they would have known and one that apparently, caught the attention of Steinschaber before he returned to Geneva. Though I have found Rotunda styled typefaces cut by Da Spira, they do not seem to feature the particular letter quirks that would later be employed, leaving certain areas of mystery.

The life and activities of Adam Steinschaber, remain quite a mystery to me despite what I have read. Over the course of two short years, he would introduce printing, publish a range of documents, and then disappear without leaving a trace. Did he move onto another town to set up another shop? Did he simply die? Hopefully, this work will create a renewed interest in his remarkable life.

A specimen of the original letters used by Adam Steinschaber in his printing, 1478-80.

1, 4 - Catalogue des incunables imprimés à Genève 1478-1500, par Antal Lökkos
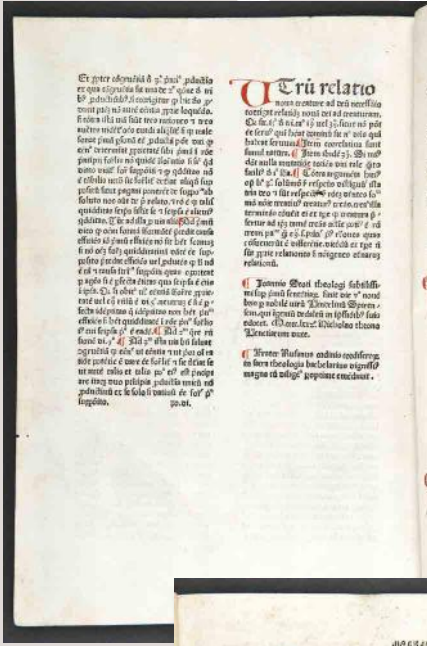**2** - Bibliographie Adam Steinschaber, Dictionnaire Historique de la Suisse, www.hls-dhs-dss.ch
3 - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johann_and_Wendelin_of_Speyer

Following his last printed work, on the 25th of October 1480, Steinschaber would disappear but his typefaces would continue to be employed, by Henri Wirczburg and later, Simon Dujardin[4]. While Wirczburg is sometimes named as a collaborator of Steinschaber, it is believed that Dujardin was an apprentice, either continuing Steinschaber's print shop or then setting up his own venture. These pioneers would bring the printed book to Geneva, and despite a stuttering start, the reformation movement would infuse a new energy into this new industry that would go on to shine well outside the borders of Geneva.

Printed work by Vindelino da Spira showcasing their typefaces, 1470
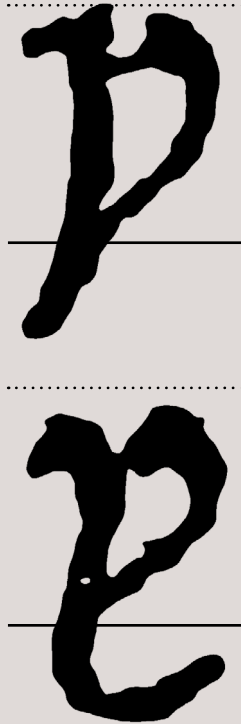
In his first edition, the *'Livre des Saint Anges'* features a few typographic quirks, most notably, the appearance of different cuts of the same letter, as evidenced here with the y. Could this mean that Steinschaber simply added or replaced certain characters, hence his original y shape.

The origins of printing in Geneva

Despite its relative small size, Geneva was one of the first town to see the arrival of printing following Gutenberg's introduction of movable type. In the 1400's, it greatly benefited as a central trading city, were merchants and bankers could enjoy the numerous fairs and develop their businesses, in the heart of Europe. But all this would change when Louis IX, banned all French merchants from attending these fairs, wishing to consolidate all the activity closer to home, in Lyon[1]. Geneva, that until then had enjoy a strong link with the nearby Italian merchants, lost a lot of trade as a result, but in their place, German merchants started to arrive. Amongst these first arrivals, a certain Adam Steinschaber would install the first printing press in the town and his first publications appeared in 1478. The craft of printing seems to have, initially, found a great audience with as many as seven printers working by the year 1500.

Over the following years, a small, but continuous production would continue, but it all changed with the arrival of the reformation in 1536, and the gradual establishment of the Reform for the role of printing to firmly take its place in Geneva[2]. While religious texts would be encouraged, wishing to make Geneva a religious center, images and illustrated books, like those Steinschaber had produced, were forbidden, seen a form of idolatry that was to be proscribed.

1 - Histoire du livre illustré à Genève (1478-1600), Christophe Chazalon, Art + Architecture en Suisse
2 - Les livres imprimés à Genève de 1550 à 1600 by Paul Chaix, Alain Dufour, Gustave Moeckli, 1967
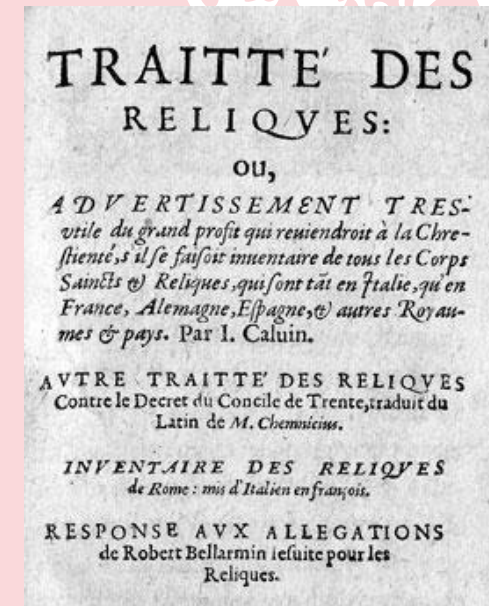
Jean Calvin, Treatise on Relics, 1543
Source: museeprotestant.org

Following the Germans, many English refugees fleeing persecution in Catholic England, would also flock to the city, and led, in 1557, to the first recognized english bible, the Geneva Bible.

The death of Calvin would lead to an opening and relaxing of the more radical approach that he had brought, with illustrations gradually regaining some place and the view of the city becoming more open to the world. Despite never attaining the same quality and refinement of their Italian or French counterparts, Geneva has left its mark in the history of printing.

Conseil des Deux-Cents

Partisans du rattachement

Communauté des citoyens

Médicis de Florence

The Duc de Bourgogne

Jean-Louis de Savoie

Échanges de marchandises

Nombre grandissant de négociants

Comme une position stratégique

6th September 1529

Designing the Steinschaber typeface

❧ Having discovered this history, I initially classified my research as purely academic, but my mind kept thinking about the letters. I admit that I am generally more interested in creating new forms, but there was something so unique and particular about the work of Steinschaber, that I wondered if there was potential for more. It felt like his forms, despite their slightly accidental appearance, offered something new in the design of typography. Outside of a small circle of literary fans or history buffs, few people would even know his name. After a period of reflection, I decided to embark on the challenge of creating a revival of his original letter forms.

Working on a revival raises a few questions that I had to contend with. The first, and most critical, was the fidelity of my work to the original fonts. Should a revival only be the most precise recreation of something historical, or is there some room for a more personal interpretation? I felt that the answer lay in the source material, or lack of.

I had access to different samples, at a decent quality, but never really as crisp or sharp as I would wish to be able to analyse the finer details of the shapes. An added complication was that I was analysing a print, a physical rendition of the engraved letter form. The lead letters had been covered in ink, pressed onto a surface and then dried. Did the printed forms correspond to the matrices? I know that any printed letter will go through a certain amount of distortion due to the printing process, and one can imagine that the printers of the time would have been aware of these issues. So what did the original matrices and punches actually look like and how close was the printed page to the source?

The source material often showed multiple variations of a single letter form, complicated my understanding of the true form.

An example of the printed page of '*Le livre des sains anges*', published in 1478. Note the particular inverted 'S' that was so particular to the work of Steinschaber.
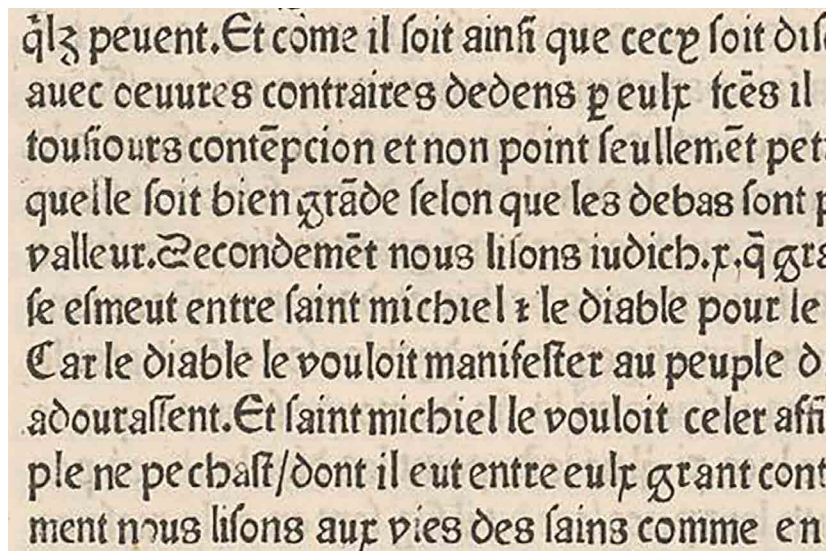
A specimen of the original letters used by Adam Steinschaber in his printing, 1478-80.
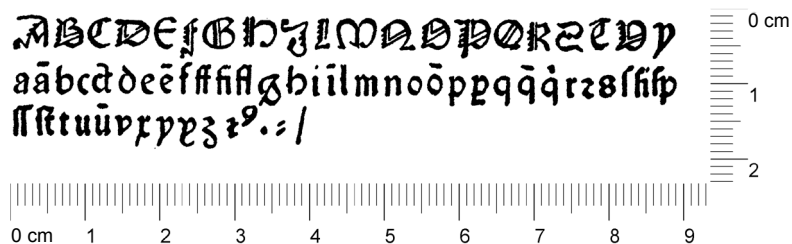
A specimen of the Steinschaber typeface with the full character set.
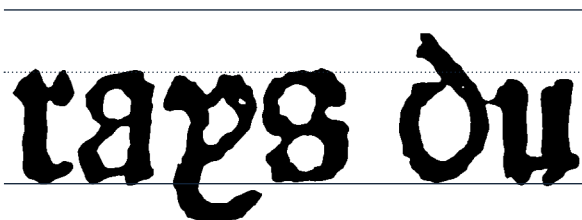
In 1478, the alphabets that were employed contained less glyphs than what is required in contemporary typefaces. A few letters did not even exist in french texts, punctuation was limited, numbers were roman numerals and accents nearly inexistent. These missing figures meant, that however authentic I tried to be, I would still have to interpret a large amount of the typeface.

So with these open questions, I decided to create a new character, that was influenced and modelled after his work rather than trying to recreate it. This small freedom gave me more liberty in my interpretations and inspiration from a creative perspective. I tried to design the letters in keeping with the source material, while at the same time, trying to improve some of the imperfections that I felt affected the design.

The actual drawing process happened in a few stages. I initially focused on the main design elements of the letters, the curves and stems. Since Steinschaber's work was quite erratic, I had different cuts of each letter. A simple form like the letter 'o', figured in a number of ways, certain being more angular or condensed. It was therefore important to harmonise the forms to understand the underlining approach. My initial attempts resulted in a design that was pronounced in the angles, but the overall texture of the typeface felt too strongly influenced by the gothic forms.

So after a few trials, I settled on a rounded approach, but kept his vision of a pronounced stroke axis. Despite this strong tension, the overall form felt balanced and correct. With the stems, I also employed a variety of approaches to design what seemed like a simple element. Certain stems seemed horizontally cut, others had diagonal terminals; reminiscent of gothic letters and others seemed to employ very light serifs, protruding to the right of the stem. I settled on a balanced form, intended to create harmony between the top and bottom of the stem.

Overview

Steinschaber

ASCENDER

X-HEIGHT

Hbgʃ

BASELINE

DESCENDER

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

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 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

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8 9 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 ← ↑ → ↓ ↖ ↗ ↘ ↙ ↔ ↕

STEINSCHABER CHARACTER SET

One of my main criticisms of Steinschaber's work was the lack of consistency in the forms, probably due to the manufacturing processes in his craft based approach. Obviously in his time, at the beginning of the craft, the approach to letter creation was artisanal. The mere creation of a font would have required great effort and skill, sometimes employing a blend of crafts. So despite their best efforts, the letter forms were interesting but sometimes unconnected in their approach, as mentioned above with the different cuts of each letter. This approach has a certain hand made charm, but felt too irregular and unjustified as an approach for me to take the same path.
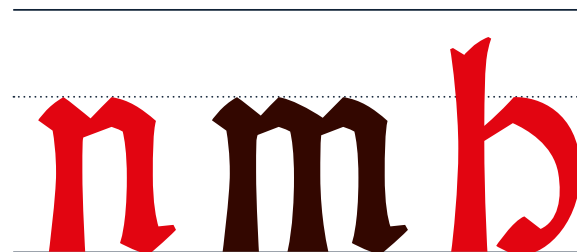
Comparison between the new typeface and the original source material.

With my modular approach, I therefore recreated the letters using common elements to increase the overall harmony of the typeface. My main stem would be employed in the 'i', 'n', 'l' and others. The curves of my o provided the template for the creation of the curves of the 'b' or 'h'. But despite this modular approach, I still tried as much as possible, to preserve his letter forms. This sometimes meant applying an illogical approach for a contemporary designer. When a designer creates an 'n', then surely the 'm' is an extension of this same shape. If they then extend the stem, a letter 'h' should be created. But in Steinschaber time, the work of the Italian printers had not yet influenced this approach to harmony, and he employed a gothic inspired letter 'h' that curves the stem. I was intrigued by certain forms, the particular 'd', the crossed 'g', these letters would traditionally call for a more harmonious approach, but their particularity, was also what lent the typeface it's charm. It therefore seemed imperative to maintain the original shapes. Two further particularities of the typeface are the 'x', with it's protruding stroke that pulls the shape downwards and the very particular 'y' that curves to the left before swinging back to the right, the opposite of modern design. Through a work of balancing the weight, tensions and alignments, the overall typeface has harmony and consistency while retaining the unique shapes found in the work of Steinschaber.

Looking back, my challenges for the lowercase letters were the easy part ! I had mainly left the capitals aside, crafting a few test letters, but never seriously attempting the work until I felt my lowercase letters had potential. And thankfully, since once I approached the uppercase shapes, I started to uncover the new difficulties. The main issue was the lack of source material. While the lowercase letters populated the prints, the capital letters are less frequently employed. Since the text was mainly based in religious scripture and folk tales, a few letters like the 'T' or 'E' were repeated while other letters were largely absent. With the uppercase, Steinschaber displayed even more variety. Not only were the shapes inconsistent, like the lowercase, but the setting also affected the form. When used as an initial letter, the forms were elaborate, nearly illuminated in their decorative approach.

As was the case with many gothic typefaces, the capital forms are very elaborate compared to the lowercase shapes, they seem to dominate the content.

When placed in a line of text, the shapes became more restrained, accounting for the reduced white space and increasing their harmony with the lowercase forms. This presented a real question for me, what was the best approach ? I tried a few decorative forms, but rapidly noticed that their inconsistency was glaring, different shapes, widths, importance, sometimes the letters seemed to combine different typefaces. I truly struggled with this phase, even reaching points of desperation, thinking my process was leading down a dead end. But after a few weeks of back and forth, I finally had an illumination, my process was too rigid. In the same way that I had reconstructed the lowercase, I decided to be looser with my interpretation. Rather than try to recreate his decorative and heavy shapes, I would employ my modular approach that had helped with the lowercase letters. I already had the base module, so my initial process was focused on trying to balance the weights between the capital and lowercase forms.

Typically, the capital letters are slightly darker than the lowercase shapes, this regains some of the weight in the strokes that is lost through the increase of surrounding white space. Despite the more irregular shapes, this correction was equally necessary on the Schaberstein typeface, with the larger shapes employing heavier strokes to balance both letter forms.

As I had done with the lowercase, I gradually built up the letter forms starting with the most sources I could find, and then deciding when to deviate from the original letter forms. The overall result is shapes that blend angular strokes with a more calligraphic curve. As with the lowercase, the proportions mixed between narrow shapes like the 'N' or 'H' and wider curved shapes like the 'O', 'D' or 'M'. Even my wider shapes remain more constrained than the original shapes. I felt it was a necessary deviation to create forms that would be more functional and balanced when used in running texts. In so many of Steinschaber's works the content was religious prose, short lines with many repetitive initial letters, namely the 'T' or 'A'.

As I had noted with some of my earlier work into gothic letters, their highly decorative capital shapes may seem charming to the eye but their particular shapes and dark letter forms often make them difficult to read for most non-Germanic readers. By slightly toning down the shapes, I felt that I could create authentic, historical letters while at the same time adding some coherence and harmony to the overall typeface.

SCHISMATICS

Grynée affirms

EXCOMMUNICATION

sufficient recompense

CONSTANCY & FIRMNESS

Israel under Jeroboam

PELLICAN, LEO, THEODORE

ye shall bind on earth

ACADEMY TO OPORIN

holy exercise of ecclesiastical

Januarius
habet dies
xxxi

Imprimé par
Adam Steinschaber,
Genève, 1480

e journe
stir a fo
still felt
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r of Orleans, who is master of arts to
is of the number. While Cop was in the

The numerals presented an interesting challenge in the light of a revival, for a simple reason; they were not employed at the time.

A few of the remaining editions of Steinschaber feature the dates in roman numerals, as in this example of the 'Le roman de Fierabras le géant.'

Ce finist le romant de fierabras le geant Jmprime a geneue Lan de grace Mil.cccc.lxxviij.le.xxviij.iour de nouembre.

Our so-called Arabic numbers, were only introduced throughout Europe some 100 years after the work of Steinschaber, his prints using roman numerals when needed. This lack of source material offered a challenge but also a nice creative opportunity. Since I had no reference, I could create the forms more freely, being solely inspired by the spirit of his work and using his letter forms to inspire my numbers. I created three main styles, the lining numbers, aligned with the capital letters. The hanging numbers, that are more closely aligned to the lowercase forms and finally, the scientific numbers that could be employed as footnotes in their superior form.

March 24, 1478

STEINSCHABER - DEFAULT LINING NUMBERS

March 24, 1478

STEINSCHABER - HANGING NUMBERS

The last remaining glyphs were the more functional forms; punctuation and the various symbols used in setting type. The process for the creation of these signs was even more liberal than with the letters since there was hardly any reference material to guide me. Basic punctuation was shown, an accentuated form that would most closely resemble a modern macron sign, but many of the other glyphs simply did not exist in 1478. I therefore used the same construction logic I had applied with the lowercase letters, gradually building the shapes to contemporary symbols, but, hopefully, retaining the same humanistic style the letters encapsulate. Steinschaber, therefore, includes a full latin glyph set from the monetary signs to punctuation or mathematical signs. I also included the complete diacritics that are employed in today's Latin based languages, further expanding the possible applications of the typeface.

The paragraph sign, officialy known as the Pilcrow sign, was heavily featured through Steinschaber's prints. They were mostly added manually by a scribe after the printing process.
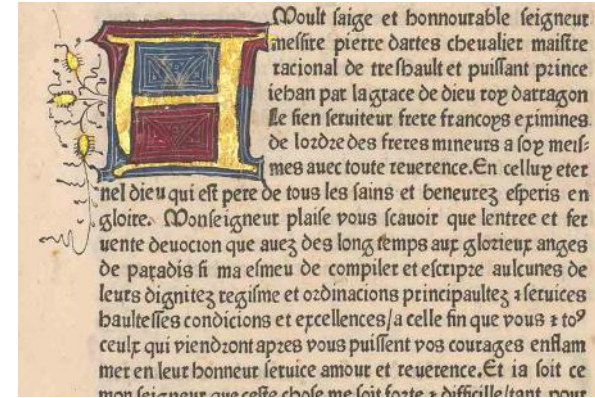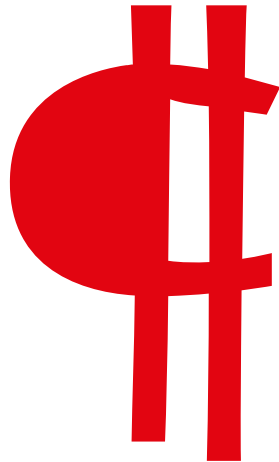
These two examples, from the *'Livre des Saint Anges'* (above) and the *'Speculum amatorum mundi'* (below), show the printing steps. In the below document, the scribes have not intervened to complete the illuminated letters, leaving a blank square.
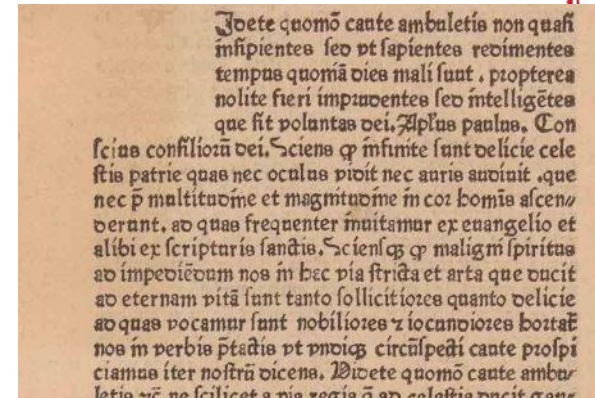
One sign that was heavily used in the original prints, was the paragraph sign (¶). By reviewing his prints, this symbol was often applied in red ink and probably applied after printing process, even completely missing in certain editions. This seems to confirm that, as was common at the time; the printer would only deliver a black printed page, that could then be coloursed by scribes and bound by other craftsmen, employing a chain of crafts.

Opentype features in the Steinschaber typeface

🖙 Despite working on a revival, I was always quite clear that this digital interpretation would still employ the basic good practices that I would use in any modern typeface. This meant an extended Latin character set and a range of Opentype features. Steinschaber, therefore, includes the standard Opentype features starting with a small set of ligatures. These combined glyphs principally aim to solve certain potential letter collisions, for example between the tittle of the 'i' and the preceding 'f'. A secondary feature is an alternative ampersand that replaces the conventional shape with the more historical '&' ligature that I personally prefer but has become less common in contemporary documents.
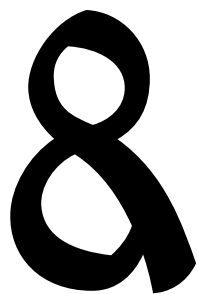
LIGATURES

Opentype scripting equally allowed me to solve a creative question that had arisen at the start of the project. As mentioned, Steinschaber's capital letters are quite gothic in their style, employing ornate swash forms and with a wider proportion than the lowercase forms.

DEFAULT   ALTERNATE

TITLING UPPERCASE

A Royalty

STEINSCHABER - DEFAULT UPPERCASE

A Royalty

STEINSCHABER - TITLING UPPERCASE

A B C D E F G H I J K L M

STEINSCHABER - DEFAULT UPPERCASE

A B C D E F G H I J K L M

STEINSCHABER - TITLING UPPERCASE

N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

STEINSCHABER - DEFAULT UPPERCASE

N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

STEINSCHABER - TITLING UPPERCASE

These may suit drop cap applications where these large, decorative letters introduce a paragraph, but felt heavy and slightly out of place in running text. So while I settled on a more conservative, constructed capital for the main letters the Opentype titling feature meant I could simply offer the more authentic, true capitals forms as an alternative variant. With these titling forms I went back to the original letters and employed a more ornate approach. I included swash strokes, small extensions added on the main stems and also some intersecting strokes that are reminiscent of traditional Gothic lettering.

I also decided, since I was offering both forms, to remain authentic to the source material on the capital 'S' and employ the inverted shape that Steinschaber had used. The functionality or legibility remain compromised, but it offered a homage to the original fonts and their unique trait. These titling capitals were therefore intended for use as the initial letter, at the beginning of a string of text, but could be employed throughout the text if desired.

ANXIETY

Count John

UNSKILFULNESS

Church of Geneva

MONSIEUR RAYMOND

May the Lord preserve

ANABAPTISTS OF METZ

Zurich, Berne, Strasbourg

KING OF BABYLON

My Brethren,—I have restrained myself from writing to you until this present, in the hope that the letter of our brother Farel, who had taken upon him that charge for both, would prove sufficient; and also by that means I would take off all occasion, in so far as was possible, for misrepresentation on the part of those who are on the lookout for it. That is, in order that they may not calumniate us by affirming that we purpose, in drawing you closer to ourselves, to retain you in some degree of partiality toward us. I have been unable, however, to refrain from writing to you to assure you of the affection with which I do ever regard you, and my remembrance of you in the Lord, as it is my bounden duty; neither shall that fear

STEINSCHABER REGULAR   7/8.4PT

That is, in order that they may not calumniate us by affirming that we purpose, in drawing you closer to ourselves, to retain you in some degree of partiality toward us. I have been unable, however, to refrain from writing to you to assure you of the affection with which I do ever regard you, and my remembrance of you in the Lord, as it is my bounden duty; neither shall that fear prevent me which has somewhat withheld me to the present time, forasmuch as I see right

STEINSCHABER REGULAR   9/10.8PT

I have been unable, however, to refrain from writing to you to assure you of the affection with which I do ever regard you, and my remembrance of you in the Lord, as it is my bounden duty; neither shall that fear prevent me which has somewhat withheld me to the present time, forasmuch as I see right well that the colour of pretext which the malicious, from the love of detraction, might put upon it, would be found utterly frivolous and vain. God is our witness, and your own consciences

STEINSCHABER REGULAR   12/14.4PT

Those who, for the sake of making and maintaining a faction apart, had separated from us, have introduced division as well into your Church as into your town. Discerning the beginnings of that plague from the commencement, we have faithfully occupied ourselves as before God whom we serve, to apply the remedy; wherefore, an appeal to the past exempts us from all their calumnies.

STEINSCHABER REGULAR   15/18PT

for which reason it cannot be in the of men to break asunder such a tie; as in time bygone we have been up we hope still by the guidance of ou so to conduct ourselves, that we sha ford no occasion of trouble, nor pres any cause of division, unless it be to who are so closely banded against Christ and all his people, that they suffer any agreement with his serv For to such manner of folk, if this ble Saviour is a scandal and an offence must we be, who ought to carry his impressed upon our soul and on ou But herein is our consolation, that

A B C D E F G H I J K L M

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

N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

a b c d e f g h i j k l m

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

n o p q r s t u v w x y z

Part 2 Schaberstein typeface

Part 2
The Schaberstein typeface

As I neared the end of the creative process for the Steinschaber typeface, I kept thinking back to my original questions about designing a revival. While I felt I had arrived to a conclusion with my process, my mind started to wonder at the multiple possibilities his approach to letters had evoked with me. His typeface introduced real character, with letter forms, that at least to me, seemed unique and truly distinctive. Leaving aside the idea of a revival, these letter shapes struck me as truly original and with a strong potential in their own right.

This questioning led me down a new creative process, that upon further reflection, seemed like an obvious evolution and true conclusion to my process; to reinterpret Steinschaber's design in a contemporary light. After having spent many months pouring over his letters and redrawing them, I was starting to grasp not only the shapes, but also an overall intention. Despite the many quirks and inconsistencies of the letters, by applying a bit more rigor and constraints, I thought his work could equally inspire my own design, infused by his spirit but free of the constraints of historical justifications.

So I decided to embark on the second chapter of this story, a complimentary typeface, Schaberstein, my more liberal and contemporary reinterpretation of Steinschaber's original prints.

Reinterpreting Steinschaber's typeface for modern times

❧ Armed with this new direction, I therefore started to map out my next steps for the design process and the most obvious question was that of the typeface style, or classification. While Steinschaber's work could be classified as gothic or proto-gothic, he was merely reflecting the trends of his time and the styles that would have seemed familiar to his readers, rather than applying any genuine stylistic choices. In that light one could only conclude that the style of our times is the sans serif, that has been in vogue since the 1950's, and that are omnipresent in our modern communication. Initially conceived as a new typographic style, typefaces like Akizidenz Grotesque, Futura or Helvetica, aimed to create letter forms that would live in a modern world without veneer or decorative inspiration from the past. While that inspiration can seem noble and credible, one cannot neglect the fact that this new style is simply a logical evolution of the letters that the first printers, like Gutenberg, and later, Steinschaber, would have employed. The first gothic letters giving rise to the first roman letters, that then influenced italics, and so on. So if my design aimed to reflect a vision of Steinschaber's work in the 21st century, then the sans serif style seemed like the valid choice.

MYCONIUS
tricks & wiles
WILD BEAST
Strasbourg
EXQUISITE CRUELTY
against calumnies
☙ CONFESSION FAITH ❧
Rulers with our King

Schaberstein is a wider typeface than Steinschaber, favoring an open, clear shape to aid legibility in smaller point sizes. I maintained the same vertical proportions of the original font, keeping a relatively high x-height with short ascenders, but with longer descenders, notably on the 'g'. The slight alignment variation between the ascenders and capitals letters was also maintained, giving the uppercase shapes a more dominating role.

The lowercase letters are therefore more open, rounded and balanced with a simplified approach to the shapes. But the real character is revealed in the details of each form.

The 'a' has kept the double storied approach with a bold, strong curve connecting the top stroke to the main bowl, reminiscent of Steinschaber's original. For the 'd', I kept the humanistic inspiration of the uncial shape, offering a clear letter recognition. This medieval source also inspired the very slight diagonal on the stroke of the lowercase 'e'. One of the more distinctive letters is the prominent 'g', with it's curved stem and pronounced, wide lower bowl that wraps around the letter. I wrestled a bit with the direction of the 'h' letter, but I finally decided to ignore modern conventions and apply the original letter shape with its curved righthand stroke. Special attention was given to the straight cut terminal and ensuring enough white space between the stroke end and the stem to avoid this letter being confused with a b. I also carried over the curve of the 'h' into the 'k', using the historical form rather than the diagonal, contemporary approach.

Overview

Schaberstein

ASCENDER

X-HEIGHT

Hbg

BASELINE

DESCENDER

☞ 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

A B C D E F G H I ð K
L M N O P Q R S T U
V W X Y Z a b c d e
f g b i j k l m n o p q r
s t u v w x y z

! ” # % 8 ’ * - . , : ; ? @ ^ _ ¡ ¦ § © ª « » ® ¶ · ° ȯ À Á Â Ã Ä
Å Ā Ă Ą Æ Ç Ć Ĉ Ċ Č Ď Đ È É Ê Ë Ē Ĕ Ė Ę Ě Ĥ Ħ Ì Í Î Ï Ī Į ı
ð Ķ Ð Ñ Ń Ņ Ň Ò Ó Ô Õ Ö Ø Ù Ú Û Ü Ŵ Ẁ Ẃ Ẅ Ý Ŷ Ÿ Ź Ż
Ž Þ Ƀ à á â ã ä å ā ă ą æ ç ć ĉ č ď ð ð è é ê ë ĥ ħ ì í î ï
ī į ñ ń ņ ň ʼn ò ó ô õ ö ø ù ú û ü þ ē ĕ ė ę ě Ĝ ĝ Ğ ğ Ġ ġ Ģ
ģ ı l ð ij ĵ ķ κ Ĺ Í Ļ ļ Ľ ľ Ŀ l Ł ł Ō ō Ŏ ŏ Ő ő Œ œ ŕ ŕ ř Ŕ Ŗ Ř ś
ŝ ş š ş Ś Ŝ Ş Š Ş ʒ ţ Č ť Ŧ Ŧ ŧ ţ Ũ ũ Ū ū Ŭ ŭ Ů ů Ű ű Ų ų
ŵ ẁ ẃ ẅ ý ÿ ŷ ź ż ž ſ ſ (/) [\ ] { | } ` ´ ¨ ˆ ˇ ˘ ˙ ˚ ˜ ˝ ¯ ˳ ₎ , + ±
× < = > ÷ ¬ ~ µ π – — ‘ ’ ‚ “ ” „ † ‡ • … ‰ ‹ › / ¢ ¥ $ £ € Ω Δ Π
Σ − / · √ ∞ ≈ ≠ ≤ ≥ ◊ ff ﬁ ﬃ ﬂ ﬃ ﬄ ﬀ 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 ⁰ ¹ ² ³
₄ ₅ ₆ ₇ ₈ ₉   0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 ← ↑ → ↓ ↖ ↗ ↘ ↙ ↔ ↕

SCHABERSTEIN CHARACTER SET

A small, seemingly unimportant detail is the shape of the tittles, the points above the 'i' and 'j'. Convention dictates a simple circle, or a rectangular shape, are the best fit the more geometric designs. A rarer choice is the diamond shape, seen for example in the Kabel typeface. Faced with my unique typeface design and the angular, calligraphic mark of the original letter forms, I was tempted to employ this shape. It's pointed appearance seemed well suited to the overall style, but rather than simply employing a straight diamond form the shape is slightly concave, bludging curve that bloats the form and adds a touch more weight for a better balance.
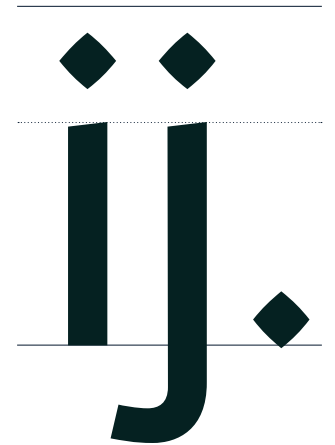
The final but equally revealing feature is found in the lowercase 'y'. Despite its particularity, I decided to preserve Schaberstein's unique, reverse curve solution that gave so much character to his original prints. These unique letters add a particular voice to the typeface while remaining coherent and balanced with the more formal letters.

My lowercase letters, as with my original work, equally inspired my process and work on the capital forms. Once again, my overall task was a simplification of the forms, a widening of the proportions and a greater emphasis on the overall balance. I think the huge disparities between the lower and upper case forms in Schaberstein's original work was one of my main points of contention; not as a critical aspect since the approach was coherent with his time, but simply because the two forms seemed to have little artistic similarity, it was like looking at two separate typefaces.

I kept an even more rigid and constrained approach to the capitals, but with the added unique letters, for example in the asymmetric 'A'. It's right straight stroke is a reflection of the original source, and despite my concern that this style would only match with a lowercase sequence, the design equally functions in a string of uppercase letters. Like certain lowercase forms the 'E' retains its uncial inspiration with the rounded shape contrasting with the angular 'F'. For the 'd' I was not particularly inspired by the source shape, a long, winding stroke that seems to float near the letters, that I decided to keep the liberal form I had used in Steinschaber. Since it is a low-frequency letter, I decided to retain the curved bowl idea that adds a unique feature to the typeface. The 'M', like the earlier E, also uses the wider, curved strokes from uncial, offering a more distinctive and open shape that balanced with the overall style. A final distinctive letter is the 'T', once again, employing a historical approach to the shape by employing a curved main stem as opposed to the traditional straight stroke. Despite it's diminishing use and therefore recognition, I still took the decision to use this particular shape since it seemed authentic to the source and offered a softer, rounded shape that was less prevalent in the overall uppercase shapes.

Having worked through the main letter forms, I continued to enhance the typeface by following the direction I had employed for the original, Steinschaber typeface. This meant expanding the design to cover most Latin based languages and equally adding in my reinterpreted numerals. Once again, I opened up the shapes and treated them with a more rounded, constructed approach. I kept two defining features in the shapes, firstly, the closed curve that I employed in the number two. Then the use of a straight stroke on the number nine as opposed to simply flipping the number six. Both these choices were influenced by wanting the numbers to contain a few unique details that would link their shapes to the main letters of the typeface.
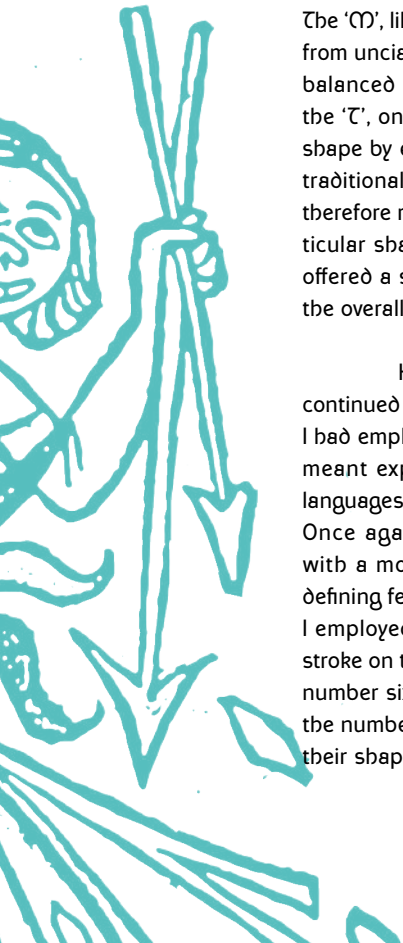
Working through the final forms, I felt inspired to add in a few typographic marks as a final design touch. The original printers often cut simple marks that could be applied to texts as a decorative feature, namely a fleuron; a leaf shape, and a manicule; a pointing finger. I had initially imagined linking both typeface through common signs, but it seemed more correct to adapt the design of the symbols to the style of each typeface. I was particularly pleased with the manicule, since the shape is directly inspired by an illustration of a finger found in his print of the *'Histoire de la belle Melusine'*. This final connection brought a common influence to these symbols.

An example of the illustrated finger found in the *'Histoire de la belle Melusine'* and my digital interpretation.

Example of the fleuron and manicule included in the Schaberstein typeface.

Opentype features in the Schaberstein typeface

As I had done with Steinschaber, I wanted this typeface to employ all the current typographic technology to truly mark the distinction between my contemporary interpretation and the constraints of the original metal punches created in 1478.

This includes the common Opentype features, including ligatures, an alternate ampersand and various numeral styles that I had equally employed in Steinschaber.

But whereas with the original typeface, I had included the titling capitals as the extra feature, this time, I decided to add a range of discretionary ligatures, especially in the capital forms. My reasoning was that I wanted to add a bit more personality and design variations for text settings, so thanks to their interlocking letters, one can now compose a string of text with a range of solutions. The ligatures also allowed me to better balance some white space around the irregular forms, like the asymmetric A or T. As with the other features, these additional glyphs can be automatically inserted into any string of text using most common layout software.

LAUSANNE

CHARTREUX

THANKS

LIVRE DES SAINTS ANGES

LA TUILLE

LA BELLE MELUSINE

LEGEND

GUIDO COLUMNA

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S
a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v
STEINSCHABER BLACK & ITALIC

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S
a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v
STEINSCHABER EXTRABOLD & ITALIC

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S
a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v
STEINSCHABER BOLD & ITALIC

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S
a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v
STEINSCHABER SEMIBOLD & ITALIC

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S
a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v
STEINSCHABER MEDIUM & ITALIC

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S
a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v
STEINSCHABER REGULAR & ITALIC

Whereas Steinschaber was conceived a single, static typeface, the Schaberstein typeface expands into six different weights that range from a regular, balanced weight to a very dark, black style. Since the typeface was destined for use in editions and running text, I felt the lighter ranges did not offer much additional value as they are often too light to be effective in small point sizes.

Initially felt that, in a desire to remain true to the spirit of Steinschaber, I would avoid creating any italics since they would not have been created or employed in his time. But was I worked on the first text layouts, and the creation of this specimen, I often found myself desiring the added nuance that the italic styles can offer. The regular weights would help for continuous reading and the Bold or Black could serve for titles, but I had no stylistic solution for a text I wished to highlight, but in a discrete manner. So after my initial reluctance, I finally decided to add in the six accompanying italics for each of the weights since this addition would only serve to expand the possibilities of the Schaberstein typeface. With a pronounced angle and slightly more narrow aspect, I kept most of the roman forms but did alter the 'a', 'e' and 'f' to better reflect the cursive origins of the style.

This resulting collection of weights also offered me the opportunity to push the boundaries of technology even further from the historical source. The typeface family is available as twelve static weights, but can also be used as a single variable typeface that employs the latest Opentype specification. This specification offers the typeface family as a single digital file and the end user, can control the amount of weight or slant employed for the italic, that they wish to use. One can only imagine how Steinschaber would have viewed these modern solutions !

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history then

future now

distinctive design

Forgotten printer

2 typeface families

(from lead to digital)

Reviving printed stories

Conclusion

❡ Looking back to the genesis of this project in December of 2021, I had no idea that my curiosity would spark such a complex creation.

From an interest in a few original letter forms, the project grew into a complete new typeface project, encompassing a revival and a secondary reinterpretation. Conceived as two distinct designs, both typefaces can either be used separately or then combined thanks to their shared proportions. While the Steinschaber typeface translates an apparent medieval influence, full of gothic rotunda letters, the Schaberstein typeface detaches from the source to become a contemporary solution that can be used either as a historical inspiration or then as a stylistic choice on its own merits.

Despite only spending two years in Geneva, Adam Steinschaber clearly marked the history of Geneva and I hope that through my own contribution, more people can discover and be charmed by the extraordinary work of this printing pioneer.

My Brethren,—I have restrained myself from writing to you until this present, in the hope that the letter of our brother Farel, who had taken upon him that charge for both, would prove sufficient; and also by that means I would take off all occasion, in so far as was possible, for misrepresentation on the part of those who are on the lookout for it. That is, in order that they may not calumniate us by affirming that we purpose, in drawing you closer to ourselves, to retain you in some degree of partiality toward us. I have been unable, however, to refrain from writing to you to assure you of

SCHABERSTEIN REGULAR   7/8.4PT

That is, in order that they may not calumniate us by affirming that we purpose, in drawing you closer to ourselves, to retain you in some degree of partiality toward us. I have been unable, however, to refrain from writing to you to assure you of the affection with which I do ever regard you, and my remembrance of you in the Lord, as it is my bounden duty; neither shall

SCHABERSTEIN REGULAR   9/10.8PT

I have been unable, however, to refrain from writing to you to assure you of the affection with which I do ever regard you, and my remembrance of you in the Lord, as it is my bounden duty; neither shall that fear prevent me which has somewhat withheld me to the present time, forasmuch as I see right well that the colour of pretext which the malicious, from the love of detraction, might put upon it,

SCHABERSTEIN BOLD ITALIC   12/14.4PT

Those who, for the sake of making and maintaining a faction apart, had separated from us, have introduced division as well into your Church as into your town. Discerning the beginnings of that plague from the commencement, we have faithfully occupied ourselves as before God whom we serve, to apply the rem-

SCHABERSTEIN REGULAR   15/18PT

For which reason it cannot be
the power of men to break a
der such a tie; and as in time
gone we have been upheld,
hope still by the guidance of
Lord so to conduct ourselves,
we shall afford no occasion
trouble, nor present any cau
division, unless it be to those
are so closely banded agains
sus Christ and all his people,
they cannot suffer any agree
with his servants. For to such
manner of folk, if this blesse
Saviour is a scandal and an

The Forgotten Printer collection

🕊 *A collection of two typefaces, the Steinschaber and Schaberstein family, celebrating the work of Adam Steinschaber.*

Designed by Michael Parson

Specimen Layout: Michael Parson
Text & visuals: Michael Parson
Font used: Steinschaber and Schaberstein
Longer text and notes set in Schaberstein.
Images were taken from the *'Histoire de la Belle Mélusine'* printed by Adam Steinsbaber in 1478

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