THE 'BRILL' TYPEFACE: THE FUTURE IN PROGRESS

Introduction

In Brill's 2007 annual report, we announced the commissioning of new Unicode fonts that would meet Brill's complex typographical needs and reduce costs in a number of editorial and typesetting areas. An off-the-shelf solution – at least 6,000 distinct characters are necessary – is lacking. After almost two years of careful planning and discussion, design work began on the new fonts in late 2008. The design is progressing swiftly: at the time of writing, the roman (upright) type has already been through four design revisions, and trial italic letters are ready for testing. One of the benefits of custom font development is that the design can be 'press tested' in Brill's regular production workflow, using the layout specifications and even the actual paper stocks with which the finished fonts will be used. This allows features of the design to be fine tuned for the known output conditions. At a later stage, on-screen rendering in our online products will be tested.

When announced in the 2007 report, the new typeface was to be named 'Brill Minerva'. It is now called, more prosaically, 'Brill'.

Aims and benefits; licensing policy

Use of the 'Brill' typeface will streamline the publication process, reducing costs and time-to-market, and increasing productivity (the investment is expected to pay for itself in two years). At the same time, we shall provide our authors with a valuable tool, at no cost to them, which will ensure that textual integrity is maintained throughout the publication process and beyond that, far into the future, using the Unicode Standard to achieve maximum data security. Unicode assigns each character of each script a unique numeric identifier, so that there can be no more confusion and data corruption as text is moved between different computer systems and programs, vastly simplifying data exchange. Only by adopting standards such as this can we reliably and easily exploit multimedia output of our multilingual texts. While Brill reserves all rights to the typeface, which therefore does not fall in the 'Open Source' category, we shall offer it as a free download for individuals for non-commercial purposes.

About the design

At the very end of the 17th Century, two English writing masters, John Seddon and George Shelley, began to experiment with a new style of lettering, using the steel split nib pen, with its characteristic stroke expansion in reaction to writing pressure, to write a formal roman letter similar to typographic forms but unlike any types existing at that time. Indeed, it was not until half a century later that type founders began to create types in this new style, notably John Baskerville, whose neoclassical types have remained popular down to the present day. These types, and the more dynamically extreme romantic or 'modern' types of the 19th Century that derive from the same stroke expansion model, have had long service in Brill publications – most Brill books in recent years have been set in a digital revival of Baskerville –, and it seemed fitting that the new 'Brill' types should honour that heritage. Consequently, the 'Brill' fonts may be generally classified as neoclassical in inspiration: the stress axis, the relationship of thin to thick strokes, is close to vertical, and the expansion model of the split nib is systematically applied.

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUV
WXYZabcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUV
WXYZabcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

1. Comparison of the Baskerville font used by Brill in recent years, top, with the new 'Brill' design at the same nominal size. Note the relative robustness of the new type, as well as its superior space efficiency.

However, to better respond to the print conditions of Brill publications, the 'Brill' letters are more robust than their historical antecedents. The forms are simpler, allowing the font to be used with confidence down to 9 cicero points in footnotes or other small matter. 'Brill' is also designed to be more efficient in its use of horizontal space than the old Baskerville font. It is slightly narrower overall, and depending on the length and arrangement of paragraphs can result in 1–3 more lines of text per

page. Over the length of a book and, cumulatively, over the print run of an edition, these gains may amount to a significant reduction in the amount of paper used, allowing Brill to reduce its environmental footprint.

Since one of the goals of the 'Brill' fonts is to support the great variety of specialised diacritic letters and signs used in academic publishing, and to do so in a way that conforms to the high standards of typography set for regular text, attention has been paid to these forms early in the design process.

ABCDEFGHIJKLM
NOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrs
tuvwxyzàæḅçéəfɸġẖiǰ
ƚłṁŋǫɔꝑɗɼṣṭūẙŵẍẏz
æðþʌɥɰʃɑɪ *AEHILO*
abcdehijlmnopqrsu

2 *'Brill' roman: the basic alphabet and a selection of diacritic and 'exotic' letters, with initial trial forms of italic letters.*

The companion italic design is in its first stages of development. Trial forms have been made and now need to be press tested alongside the roman. The design of the 'Brill' italic is somewhat unusual: the ascenders on *b d* etc. do not have the typical serifs, but instead are based on cursive written forms contemporary with the neoclassical letters on which the roman is based.

In addition to the large number of Latin diacritic, phonetic and non-European letters, the 'Brill' fonts include support for Greek and Cyrillic text. In this we are fortunate to have the expert advice of Gerry Leonidas, head of the MA programme in type design at the University of Reading (UK) and acknowledged expert on Greek typography, and of Maxim Zhukov, former typographic advisor to the United Nations. Trial Greek and Cyrillic forms are currently going through their first review cycles with these expert advisors.

ΓΔΛΠΦαβγεζθιλνξοπρ
σςτυφψωφ
ГИПФЦШЩЪЫЬЦЊ
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цљњћ

3 *Trial Greek and Cyrillic letters.*

Type design is an iterative process, involving frequent review and revision, making what are often minute adjustments to the weight of a stroke or other feature, or a tiny adjustment to the width of a letter. Digital font technology certainly makes this process much easier and less costly than it was in the days of metal type manufacture, but the attention to detail in the development of a typeface for setting continuous text is the same. All the forms shown here are subject to further review and testing. By the summer of 2009, the roman and italic designs will be finalised, and work will be underway on the bold and bold italic types.
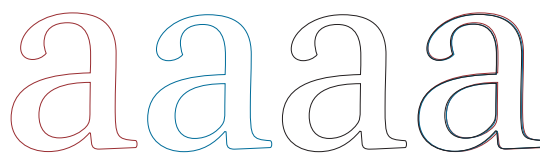
4 *The design progresses by testing, revision, more testing, more revision. Red outline: the initial trial form of the lowercase* a, *as presented to Brill during project planning in the spring of 2008. Blue outline: an intermediate revision after the first press test in late 2008. Black outline: the current version, likely close to the final form. On the right, the three letters are superimposed, revealing their subtle but important differences.*

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