

Median

A Latin and Greek type family

As most societies become resolutely multicultural, type families encompassing different scripts are increasingly becoming practical necessities.

Multiscript typefaces—as unified entities—have been developed as early as the nineteenth century. They were in general developed following a ‘latin-centric’ process: the characters of the non-latin typeface were generally adapted from the design of an existing latin typeface, with which the new font was intended to harmonise. This resulted in most cases—whether through lack of knowledge of the script or deliberate intent—in a non-latin typeface with heavily latinised characters.

More recently, increasingly sophisticated multiscript typeface programmes have been initiated. In a dual script family, the fonts in both scripts are developed synchronously, with a focus on bringing different scripts visually closer, but with an awareness of each script’s typographic past.

As my interest in so-called ‘non-latin’ type design has developed, I have begun to feel ambivalent towards some of these type design programmes. While these initiatives are desirable/laudable, their core intent—harmonisation—is a treacherous goal. If visual harmonisation is pursued with too much zeal, it can still lead to design decisions which end up being detrimental to one of the scripts (usually not the latin).

The fundamental goals of script harmonisation—same perceived size and colour/weight on the page—are essential, and not always easily achieved. With the aim of establishing a visual harmony between two scripts, common design features are implemented in both scripts. However, some of these design decisions, such as individual character shapes, stroke modulation and axis, while increasing the visual similarity between the scripts, can be historically inappropriate and/or (more importantly) structurally detrimental to the script’s legibility. Too-successful visual harmonisation can become its failure.

I designed Median with this paradigm as a focus. Median Latin and Median Greek are designed to complement each other, but each typeface is an independent, uncompromised design informed by each script’s specific typographic legacy.

Median

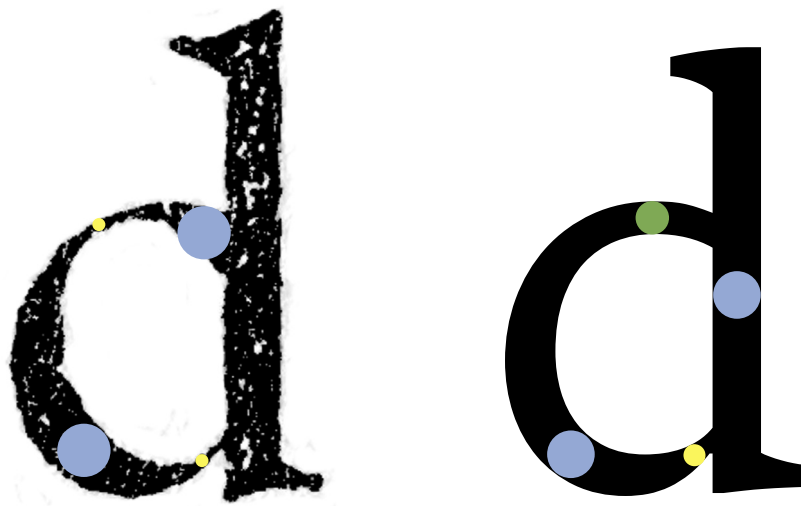
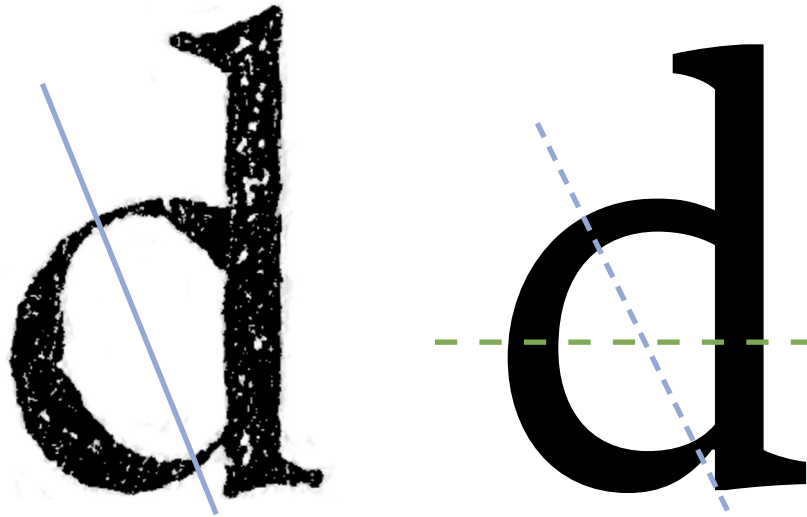
Calligraphic and typographic styles in most scripts are influenced by the writing apparatus used to write them. The Latin lowercase is founded on the modulation of the broad nibbed pen held at a 45 degree angle. However, this model is generally inappropriate for the Greek lowercase, which for most of its typographic history (with the exception of the uncommon orthotic style) was based on the pointed-nib pen.

This pointed nib pen model also found its way into the latin typographic tradition, notably in the fonts of founders such as John Baskerville and Johan Michael Fleischman. The latter's fonts proved to be a particularly good model for Median because of its combination of varying angle of stress and use of the pointed-nib pen modulation as an inspiration. However, Fleischman's characters are truly typographic entities; they are constructed shapes—drawn rather than written—not strictly restricted to the modulation of characters written with that tool.

abcd abcd

The same design strategy is followed in Median. The letter shapes are constructed ones. They are informed by the pointed-nib pen common to both the Latin and Greek script, but remain independent from the stylistic constraints imposed by a specific tool. This strategy allows greater flexibility in modulating the glyphs along their ductus, to increase the font's legibility and the visual harmony between both scripts.

In the work of Fleischman and in other 'transitional' typefaces, the angle of stress varies from oblique to vertical. However, in Median, the modulation is not systematically fleshed out along a character's axis but elaborated with an uncharacteristic emphasis on the horizontal parts of the characters. This stroke modulation, coupled with its robust serifs, invests the typeface with an underlying secondary horizontal axis and directionality.



This atypical modulation is achieved by the use of a three-part modulation, instead of the traditional dual thin-thick opposition. The resulting 'horizontality' contributes to increase legibility by helping to strongly define lines of text even when text is set with minimal linespacing.

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

This strategy of using three units of modulation also comes into play in the design of Median Greek on two levels: legibility at the script level, and the toning down of the strong divergence in axis between the latin and greek lowercase characters.

For most of Greek typographic history, the forms of the Greek lowercase characters have been based on scribal hands. They are very energetic shapes, generally inclined, and with an angle of stress varying considerably from one character to the next. Series 90, a seminal typeface which is faithful to the Greek type legacy and ubiquitous in Greek print (to an extent of which there is no equivalent in the Latin script) illustrates these characteristics. Its varying modulation helps to strongly define the glyphs, but the variation in axis tends to draw the eye outside the word-shape:

α β γ δ ε ζ η θ ι κ λ μ ν ξ ο π ρ σ τ υ φ χ ψ ω ς

Stress in MT Series 90. From Leonidas, Gerry. A tutorial on greek type design, p.2

Most existing multiscrypt latin/greek designs take the approach which can be seen in Times New Roman Greek (below).

α β γ δ ε ζ η θ ι κ λ μ ν ξ ο π ρ σ τ υ φ χ ψ ω ς

Stress in MT Times New Roman . From Leonidas, Gerry. A tutorial on greek type design, p.2

α ρ π

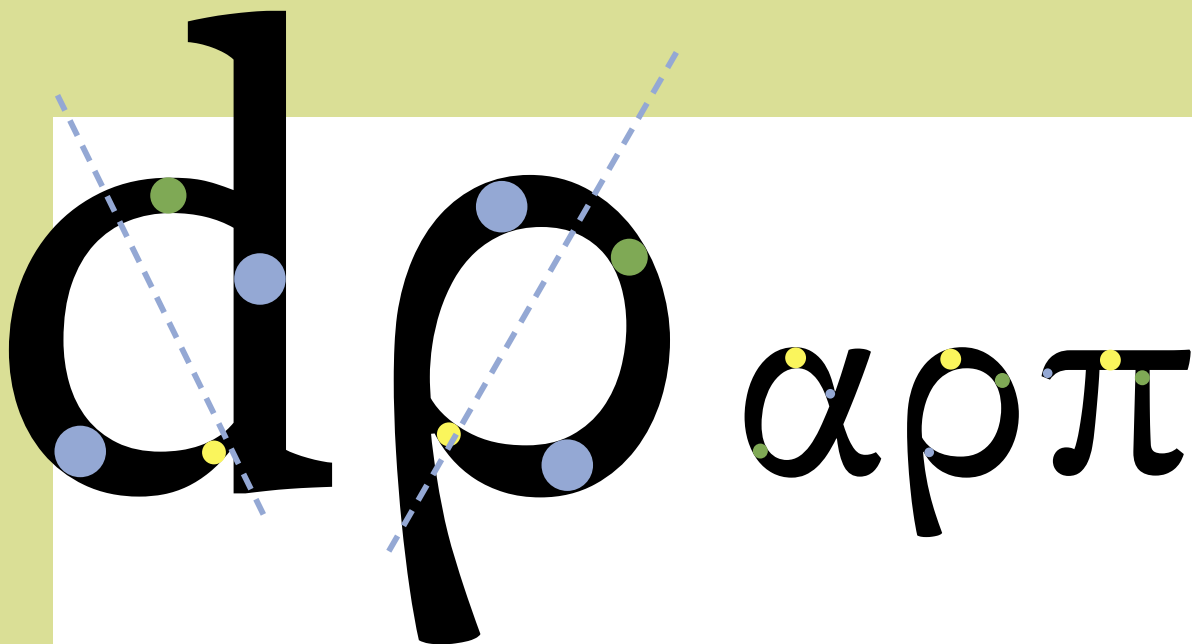
While the skeletal shapes of the characters are not significantly Latinised (this could be debated by some), their shape modulation radically departs from historical models, by adopting a regularised vertical stress. This modulation is succesful at the surface level in harmonising the Greek letter shapes with their Latin counterparts. However this vertical modulation is foreign to the characters, and works against their elaboration. This forced application of a regular/rational system to dynamic shapes also causes design problems which are hard to solve in order to achieve a cohesive character set. It is also culturally questionable.

Median Greek uses the three-unit modulation to tackle those two issues. While being based on historical models, when possible it introduces a secondary horizontal axis, as in the latin, to help define word-shapes and lines of text.

α β γ δ ε ζ η θ ι κ λ μ ν ξ ο π ρ σ τ υ φ χ ψ ω

The use of constructed shapes allows to inconspicuously modulate some characters in an unconventional way, to emphasise their horizontality.

β θ ξ φ ω



The use of the three-unit modulation helps to attenuate the inherent strong divergence in axis between the Latin and Greek fonts.

Following the traditional modulation of the lowercase characters, helps to avoid the modulation problems arising from using an upright regularised modulation.

pxdδ

Median Latin and Greek are robust typefaces designed to be used a small sizes and when space is at a premium. They are big on the body and the characters are sturdy with low contrast, to withstand poor printing conditions.

Like other space-saving typefaces, Median has modest ascenders and descenders. However, unlike most space-economical typefaces the descenders are not dramatically shortened—allowing the proper elaboration of the Greek alphabet, which contains numerous characters extending well below the baseline. Being cursive in nature, the lowercase characters of the Greek alphabet have traditionally varied in the extent to which they extend beyond the baseline and kappa-height. The lowercase characters of Median Greek are not rigidly constrained to the font’s vertical metrics; they are more freely elaborated according to their traditional proportions.

This strategy of using constructed shapes and three-unit modulation may become the basis of my exploration of other scripts for possible inclusion in the Median font family. Cyrillic and Cherokee fonts are already under development. ¶

η ζ β ψ λ

Median Latin
& Greek

Μέντιαν Λατινικά
ὡς Ἑλληνικά

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12 / 14.4

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fødsel eller anden samfundsmæssig stilling på en retfærdig og offentlig behandling ved en uafhængig og upartisk domstol, når der skal træffes en afgørelse. Skulu einstaklingar og yfirvöld jafnan hafa yfirlýsingu þessa í huga og kappkosta með fræðslu og uppeldi að efla virðingu fyrir réttindum þeim og frjálstræði, sem hér er að stefnt. Turklát nedrikt noteikt nekádu atøeiribu péc tás valsts vai teritorijas, politiská, tiesiská vai starptautiská statusa, pie kuras cilvēks pieder neatkarīgi no tā, ekas negali būti savavali škai areštuotas, suimtas. Kiekvienas žmogus, remdamasis visiška lygybe, turi teisę į tai, kad jo būtų vie šai ir teisingai iš nagrinėtų nepriklausomas ir be šalių kas teismas, kuris nustatytų jo teises ir pareigas ar jam pareikš to baudžiamojo kaltinimo pagrinduma. Žiaden rozdiel sa nebude robít' na podklade politického, právného alebo nedzinárodného postavenia krajiny alebo územia, ku ktorému osoba prí sluší, či je to krajina alebo územie nezávislé alebo pod poručenstvom, sa nesmie držať v otroctve alebo v nevoľníctve: všetky formy otroctva a obchodu s otrokmi sú zakázané. Každý má úplně stejné právo,

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Ταῦτα μὲν οὖν τὰ ἐρωτικά ἴσως, κἂν σὺ μνηθεΐης· τὰ δὲ τέλεα καὶ ἐποπτικά, ὧν ἔνεκα καὶ ταῦτα ἔστιν, ἐάν τις ὀρθῶς μετή, οὐκ οἶδ' εἰ οἶός τ' ἂν εἴης.

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These are the lesser mysteries of love, into which even you may enter; to the greater and more hidden ones which are the crown of these, and to which, if you pursue them in a right spirit, they will lead, I know not whether you will be able to attain. But I will do my utmost to inform you, and do you follow if you can. For he who would proceed aright in this matter should begin in youth to visit beautiful forms; and first, if he be guided by his instructor aright, to love one such form only-out of that he should create fair thoughts; and soon he will of himself perceive that the beauty of one form is akin to the beauty of another; and then if beauty of form in general is his pursuit, how foolish would he be not to recognize that the beauty in every form is one and the same! And when he perceives this he will abate his violent love of the one, which he will despise and deem a small thing, and will become a lover of all beautiful forms; in the next stage he will consider that the beauty of the mind is more honourable than the beauty of the outward form. So that if a virtuous soul have but a little comeliness, he will be content to love and tend him, and will search out and bring to the birth thoughts which may improve the young, until he is compelled to contemplate and see the beauty of

ΤΟ DIDOT, ΣΤΟ ΠΛΑΙΣΙΟ ΤΟΥ ΟΠΟΙΟΥ ΠΡΑΓΜΑΤΟΠΟΙΗΘΗΚΕ ΕΚΕΪΝΗ Η ΣΥΝΑΝΤΗΣΗ, ΉΤΑΝ ΈΝΑ ΠΑΝΕΥΡΩΠΑΪΚΟ ΠΡΟΓΡΑΜΜΑ ΓΙΑ ΤΗΝ ΨΗΦΙΑΚΗ ΤΥΠΟΓΡΑΦΙΑ ΜΕ ΣΤΌΧΟ ΝΑ ΦΕΡΕΙ ΚΟΝΤΑ ΤΟΥΣ ΧΩΡΟΥΣ ΤΗΣ ΤΥΠΟΓΡΑΦΙΑΣ ΚΑΙ ΤΗΣ ΠΛΗΡΟΦΟΡΙΚΗΣ.

Εκείνη την εποχή εργαζόμουν για τη διατριβή μου στο Πανεπιστήμιο του Reading και ο Michael Twyman πρότεινε να αναλάβω τις επαφές για λογαριασμό της ελληνικής πλευράς. Η αδιαφορία των υπευθύνων της σχολής των ΤΕΙ Αθηνών μας οδήγησε στη συνεργασία με την Infoprint. Η Infoprint, μια εκδοτική εταιρία με φωτοστοιχειοθετικό εξοπλισμό, είχε έδρα τη Θεσσαλονίκη και μια καλή προϋπηρεσία στο χώρο των εκπαιδευτικών σεμιναρίων για τις γραφικές τέχνες. Οπως οι άλλες χώρες-εταίροι έτσι κι εμείς έπρεπε να οργανώσουμε μία συνάντηση στην Ελλάδα. Η δική μας είχε ιδιαίτερη σημασία, καθώς με αυτήν ολοκληρωνόταν το πρόγραμμα. Ήταν μια πετυχημένη διοργάνωση με Έλληνες και ξένους εισηγητές στο συνεδριακό κέντρο της Helexpro, όπου για πρώτη φορά στη χώρα μας η λέξη ‘τυπογραφία’ σήμαινε κάτι περισσότερο από μία τεχνική εκτύπωσης.—Excerpt from an interview with Klimis Mastoridis

THE SECOND FUNCTION OF SOUL—KNOWING—WAS NOT AT FIRST DISTINGUISHED FROM MOTION. Aristotle says, φαμέν γὰρ τὴν ψυχὴν λυπεῖσθαι χαίρειν, φαρρεῖν φοβεῖσθαι, ἔτι δὲ ὀργίζεσθαι τε καὶ αἰσφάνεσθαι καὶ διανοεῖσθαι· ταῦτα δὲ πάντα κινήσεις εἶναι δοκοῦσιν. ὄφεν οἰηφείη τις ἂν αὐτὴν κινεῖσθαι. “The soul is said to feel pain and joy, confidence and fear, and again to be angry, to perceive, and to think; and all these states are held to be movements, which might lead one to suppose that soul itself is moved.” Sense-perception (αἴσφησις), not distinguished from thought, was taken as the type of all cognition, and this is a form of action at a distance. —In The Elements of Typographic Style

OpenType
features

Dynamic all-caps
spacing

SPACED ALL CAPS SETTINGS
SPACED ALL CAPS SETTINGS

Dynamic contextual
glyph positioning

(low) (HIGH)
6:38 6:38

Dynamic contextual
keraia positioning

ΈΤΟΣ ΑΞΗΉ
έτος,αξή

Linked oldstyle and
lining figures

ΈΤΟΣ 1968 έτος 1968
PLAN 9 plan 9

Discretionary
ligatures

συγγενές συγγενές κάλλος κάλλος

Stylistic
alternates

βαθυκαμπής βαθυκαμπής

Contextual
alternates

«français» «ελληνικά»

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Typeface submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Masters of Arts in Typeface Design
Department of Typography and Graphic Communication
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Μέντιαν