

Giovan Francesco Cresci and the baroque letter in Rome

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None.

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Introduction

Although his contemporary reputation in Italy in the second half of the sixteenth century was high, the name of Giovan Francesco Cresci was not generally well known until the second half of the twentieth century, when he was credited with the responsibility for the major change in the basis of Western calligraphy which took place during the seventeenth century, a development which during the eighteenth century also had its effect on the design of printing types. This essay traces changes in attitudes to Cresci, and summarizes what is known of his life and work, giving a list of his writing manuals and of surviving manuscripts. A letter of 1606 from Cresci to Federigo Borromeo, relating to an inscription made for his Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan, is printed and given in translation. A distinctive inscriptional capital letter, based on a classical model, is seen on the new buildings of Rome towards the end of the sixteenth century, beginning during the reign of Pope Sixtus V (1585–1590) and its use can be traced until well into the twentieth century. The role of Cresci's own inscriptional capitals as a model for this letter is discussed and examined, with examples reproduced from other alphabets for architectural lettering prepared and published in Italy during the century from 1560.

The first serious study of the calligrapher Giovan Francesco Cresci was published by James Wardrop in 1948.¹ It helped to bring about a revolution in the reputation of a writer who at that date had barely attracted serious attention from historians. In his pleasant little account of calligraphy published by Penguin Books at about the same time, *A book of scripts* (1949), Alfred Fairbank made no reference at all to Cresci in his text. Among his plates there are indeed three pages from Cresci's *Il perfetto scrittore*, one of which shows the cancellaresca formatella script and the other two the small alphabet of his inscriptional capitals, and there are also plates which show the new Italian chancery script of the later 16th century, one from *Lo scrittore utile* of Hercolani and some others from works by English writers of the 17th century (Billingsley 1618, Davies 1663, Cocker 1672). But it is clear that, at this date at all events, Fairbank was quite unaware that the responsibility for the initiation and the spread of this style might have been due more to Cresci than to any other writer.

A change was about to take place. In a series of lectures² given by Wardrop at King's College, London, in 1952, the occasion on which he came closest to offering a general view of the writers of the Italian calligraphy of the 15th and 16th centuries that he had done so much to introduce to English readers, the account of chancery cursive ends with Cresci, whom he called 'a skilled penman and a very considerable artist', even if his admiration was tempered by a lack of enthusiasm for what he saw as the rational efficiency of the new style. Cresci's work, Wardrop concludes, 'was destined to be the last great formative influence on European handwriting'. Later authorities have agreed. For Emanuele Casamassima in 1966, Cresci was indisputably a major and an influential figure, and his work is treated with unqualified appreciation.³ A. S. Osley, who in 1972 published the fullest account of the Italian chancery hand that had yet appeared in English, agreed, noting that Cresci created a 'revolution' in handwriting, although his enthusiasm for the style is not much greater than Wardrop's.⁴ And in a study of the Italian writing books that was written over many years and published posthumously in 1990, Stanley Morison (who died in 1967) concluded that 'if Arrighi was the main force in the first half

1. James Wardrop, 'The Vatican scribes: documents for Cresci and Ruano' *Signature*, new series, 5, 1948, pp. 3–28; subsequently cited as 'Wardrop (1948)'. This is still the major study, but see also the well-informed article on Cresci by Franca Petrucci Nardelli in the *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*,

vol. 30 (1984), pp. 668–71.

2. Published as *The script of humanism: some aspects of humanistic script 1460–1560* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963)

3. *Trattati di scrittura del Cinquecento italiano* (Milano: Il Polifilo, 1966).

4. *Luminario: an introduction to the Italian*

writing books of the 16th and 17th centuries (Nieuwkoop, 1972). Here is the enigmatic concluding sentence: 'If it is legitimate to consider the handwriting of our period as the battlefield of legibility, then no-one did more, all unwittingly, to lose that battle than G. F. Cresci.'

of this account, there can be no doubt that Cresci was an even more dominant force in the second.⁵

Cresci's influence on the form of Western handwriting, and consequently on typography too, is the chief reason why his name should be remembered. There is another reason. Distinctive inscriptional capitals, derived from imperial Roman inscriptions of the first century, began to appear on the new buildings of Rome towards the end of the 16th century, and their style was one that continued in use for public lettering in Rome during subsequent centuries.⁶ In his first writing book, the *Esemplare di più sorti lettere* of 1560, Cresci included an alphabet of capital letters derived from his study of classical originals, and he made it clear that it was drawn freehand, without the underlying and (in his view) restricting geometric construction that had been applied to nearly every alphabet of 'antique' capital letters, manuscript and printed, in Italy since that of Feliciano.⁷ This in its own way was a revolution too, and one that was not without its influence in ideas relating to the making of inscriptional capitals,⁸ even if those who later adopted his capitals almost invariably provided geometrical rules for making them, perhaps largely as an expedient for reproducing them accurately.

This rehabilitation has gone some way to restore Cresci's place in the history of both calligraphy and inscriptional lettering to the position claimed for it at the end of the 18th century by Domenico Maria Servidori, an Italian writer resident in Spain whose great folio history of calligraphy was published in Madrid in 1789. Servidori had no doubt of Cresci's central position in the history of writing and of the quality of his inscriptional lettering:

Cresci was the first to deserve the title of a true penman, as the inventor of the round chancery hand, or bastarda. And later writers learned from him the free and elegant handling of the pen, which is indispensable for whoever would be known as a man of some merit. I marvel much that those who speak of the art of writing since those times give their praises to Madariaga, or to Amphiareo, and some to Palatino, to Vicentino, and to Tagliente, who are not the equals of Cresci, to whom they do the injustice of leaving him in oblivion. He outdid his predecessors in the design of monumental letters,⁹ and no-one among those who have come after him has equalled him in this ability with the exception of Fabrizio Badesio.¹⁰

5. *Early Italian writing-books, Renaissance to Baroque*, edited by Nicolas Barker (Verona: Edizioni Valdonega, 1990).

6. See pages 136–43, where more details are given.

7. Vat. Lat. 6852. Reproduced in Felice Feliciano, *Alphabetum romanum*, edited by Giovanni Mardersteig (Verona: Officina Bodoni, 1960). Mardersteig's edition shows the alphabet redrawn and hand coloured. The original manuscript was excellently reproduced in an edition issued by the Belser Verlag, Zürich, in 1985 (one of a series of facsimiles of manuscripts in the Vatican Library), with a reprint of Mardersteig's original preface of 1960 in German, and in 1986 with Mardersteig's Italian preface and a new and useful introduction in Italian by Rino Avesani.

8. It would be misleading to suggest that Cresci's ideas had any direct influence on W. R. Lethaby, who in his introduction to Edward Johnston's writing manual of 1906

Writing & illuminating, & lettering, first set out the notion, relating to the Roman capitals of the imperial period, that 'most of the great monumental inscriptions were designed in situ by a master writer, and only cut in by the mason, the cutting being merely a fixing, as it were, of the writing' – an idea developed at greater length by Edward Catich in his *The origin of the serif*, 1968. Nonetheless, both men were making claims that are not dissimilar.

9. Literally, 'funerary letters', or letters for monuments.

10. 'Fué Cresci el primero que mereció el título de verdadero pendolista, como inventor de la curvatura de la letra canceleresca ó bastarda manuscrita; y de el han aprendido los Autores posteriores el franco y elegante manejo de la pluma,

indispensable en quien ha de ser reputado por hombre de algun mérito. Me maravillo mucho de que los que han hablado de l'Arte de escribir despues de aquellos tiempos, se hayan extendido las alabanzas, unos de Madariaga, otros de Amphiareo; quien de Palatino, quien de Vicentino, y del Tallente, los quales no son comparables con dicho Cresci; y que hayan hecho á este la injusticia de dexarle en olvido ... El excedió á sus antecesores en la formacion de la letra sepulcral; y no ha tenido en esta habilidad quien se le haya igualado entre los que han venido despues; á excepcion de Fabricio Badesio, Romano, Beneficiado de Santa Maria Mayor.' D. M. Servidori, *Reflexiones sobre la verdadera arte de escribir* (Madrid, 1789), p. 189. For Badesio see p. 143 and p. 154 below.

I intend, therefore, to survey what we currently know of Cresci's life and his work, and to speculate about what may remain to be discovered. With this aim I have produced this brief biographical note, adding a list of his writing books and manuscripts and a note of where they can be found. Much of the material on which it is based has already been published in different places but it seems useful to bring it together here. It is pleasant to record that while this account was being prepared, work in which I have had generous help from many friends, some hitherto unknown manuscripts and letters by Cresci have come to light, together with an unrecorded writing book, a portrait, and a candidate for the inscription – the only one that can be attributed to him – that he is known to have designed in Milan towards the end of his life.¹¹

We do not know the dates of either Cresci's birth or his death, but we do know that the place of his first studies was Milan, the city to which he returned later in his life. *Il perfetto scrittore* (c. 1571) contains a dedication by Silvestro Corsi, Canon of Pisa, addressed to Bartolomeo Cresci of Pistoia, father of Giovan Francesco, recalling events from 1539 to 1541, when he was 'procurator' and agent of Cardinals Salviati and Cibò, and the texts of some documents that are shown among examples of a financial hand in the same book relate to transactions dated 1569 and 1570 on behalf of Bartolomeo Cresci. According to the same source his mother was Leonora 'of the noble family of Landriani'. Cresci himself is styled *gentiluomo* or *nobile milanese* on the title pages of some of his manuals. He called Milan his *inclita e felice patria*, and in the dedication of the *Essempiare* (1560) to Cardinal Carlo Borromeo, whose early encouragement he acknowledges, he says that he studied calligraphy there for some years.

Cresci moved to Rome, where he became *Scriptor Latinus* in the Vatican Library, 1556, and a writer to the Sistine Chapel, 1560. Wardrop traced one manuscript in which his name appears, Cassiodorus, *De institutione divinarum litterarum*, 1558,¹² and from which he reproduces examples, and he lists other texts that have not been located but for which there are records of payment for materials to the stationer Cales Cerni: letters of Pope Sixtus, Martyr, 1556, the life of St Anthony the Hermit, 1556, the life of St Dionysius the Areopagite, 1556, and letters of Ivo (St Ivo or Yves of Chartres), 1558.¹³

In the 1560s Cresci began the series of publications on which his wider reputation is based, beginning with the *Essempiare di più sorti lettere* (1560) (figure 1, overleaf) in which he claims to introduce a modern script that is faster to write and which is already known to secretaries in Rome:

So do not regard it as an unworthy thing if my lowly intellect attempts, by means of this *Essempiare* of mine, to demonstrate the true way to write *Cancellaresco Corsivo*, a method acquired after many years of labour with up-to-date, agreeable and more firmly-grounded rules and with more fluent and rapid models than those of previous Authors: I have no doubt that those who have already tried my modern way of making letters (almost all the Secretaries of Rome, for example, now use it regularly) will prize my labours. Those who have not tried it, even if they resist to start with, will eventually recognize that this is the genuine *Cancellaresco Corsivo*. Since a scribe in the Chancery must be able to write quickly the *Cancellaresco Formato*, the Antique Majuscules, the *lettera Antichetta*

11. This introduction was originally prepared for the conference of the Association Typographique Internationale (ATyPI), Rome, September 2002. A version in Italian, translated by Anna Ronchi, with some illustrations made by her, appeared the following year ('Giovan Francesco Cresci: nuovi documenti, un'iscrizione, un quadro', *La Operina*, 23 (2003), pp. 3–15). It could not have been compiled without the generous help, given in some cases over a number of years, of many individuals, among whom I should particularly like to name Nicolas Barker (London), James Clough (Milan), Dr Cesare D'Onofrio (Rome), Dr Paul Gehl (Newberry Library, Chicago), Giovanni Lussu (Rome), Dr Massimo Rodella (Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan), Anna Ronchi (Milan), and Fr William Sheehan CSB (Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana).

12. Vat. Lat. 569. Wardrop (1948), p. 15, figs. 10, 11.

13. Wardrop (1948), p. 13.

Se sapeſero quei che non sanno, che cosa è ſapere, ſaprebbero che ſenza
 comparatione val più quel poco che ſa il docto, che il molto che habbia
 il ciecho, peche il miſero ciecho, quanto più aumenta in ciechezza, &
 più ſe iſminuiſce in amici, et creſce in nemici ꝑ ſuo danno. E il docto
 quato è più docto, tanto è più amato da buoni et temuto da cattiuꝝ ꝑ
 ſua vtilità. E veramente generoſo l'huomo che non ſi contenta d'essere
 ſolamente huomo ma procura essere più che huomo ꝑ virtù. E igno-
 bile è l'huomo, che non ſà eſſere huomo ſe non ſe riduce men che
 huomo ꝑ il vizio. Ioannes Fran. Crescius Rome Scribat.

Figure 1. Giovan Francesco Cresci, *Essempare di più sorti lettere*, Rome, 1560. Victoria & Albert Museum, London. (Actual size)

tonda [Roman minuscules] and other styles (such as can be seen here), I have aimed to give full information about them, because the majority like this modern, genuine *Cancellaresco*, which is very attractive and cursive: on the other hand, they dislike the old-fashioned, spurious *Cancellaresco*, because it is too lethargic and slow, and most of all because it is unattractive and lacks any speed. The reason is that it is too pointed and angular and, on account of this angularity, it is difficult to join one letter with another. The cause of its being slow to write is that they use a pen which is too broad and square at the tip and, when they write, they hold it at too much of a slope or too much to the side.¹⁴

This denunciation of writing with a relatively wide, square-cut pen marks a decisive shift in the basis of Western handwriting. It was aimed at the leading figure among Roman calligraphers, Giovanni Battista Palatino, to whom Wardrop devoted the most extended of his studies,¹⁵ and whose book of 1540, *Libro nuovo d'imparare a scrivere tutte sorte lettere*, was the most celebrated and most often reprinted

14. Perciò non reputarete cosa indegna se'l mio basso ingegno tenderà con questo mio Essempare di mostrar vn vero modo di scriuere Cancellaresco Corsiuo, dopo lunghe fatiche acquistato con moderne, vaghe, & piu fondate regole, & essempi piu correnti, & spediti di quelli de' passati Autori, ancor che io non dubito, che quelli, che idi gia haranno gustato in parte questo mio moderno modo di formar caratteri (come son quasi tutti li nobili Secretarij di Roma; da quali è già messo in vso) non siano per hauer care le mie fatiche. Et gli inesperti, se ben nel principio faranno resistenza, alla fine conosceranno questo essere il vero carattere Cancellaresco Corsiuo; Perchè al Cancelliere s'appartiene vsar prestezza nel Formato, le Maiuscole Antiche, la lettera Antichetta tonda, & altri essempi (come qui si veggono) & ho voluto darne piena cognitione, percioche la maggior parte si diletta di questo moderno & legitimo Cancellaresco molto vago & cor-

rente, & per lo contratio, il bastardo antico troppo pigro: tardo abhorrisce, massime, perche non apporta à l'occhio, ne vaghezza, ne prestezza alcuna, per esser troppo appuntato, & acuto, & per la sua acutezza malamente si può incatenare l'vna lettera con l'altra, & della pigrezza dello scriuere n'era cagione la penna, la vsauano in punto molto larga, & quadra, & anco nello scriuere la teneuano in mano troppo per trauerso, o per meglio dire troppo per costa. *Essempare* (1560). This translation is adapted from A. S. Osley's in the facsimile edition published in 1968, pp. 30–1.

15. 'Civis Romanus sum: Giovanbattista Palatino and his circle', *Signature*, new series, no. 14 (1952), pp. 3–39. For Casamassima, Wardrop – to whose researches he gives ample praise – displays an excessive sympathy for Palatino as a personality and an artist, and tends to overestimate his literary and cultural status (Casamassima, *Trattati*, p. 51).

Vno de principali pensieri e' el seruo di Dio ha d'bauere e' che oltra
 Le sue orationi et exercitij spirituali procuri molte volte di se
 uare il suo cuore à Iddio in ogn' luoco et tempo et in ogn' sor-
 te di negotij di tal maniera che si come se api di tutti i fiori che
 veggono s'ingegnano di cauare alcuna cosa p' portare à lle loro
 casse et faere il mele, così egli procuri di cauare di ciascuna cosa
 che uedrà o vdrà materia di deuotione et amor, et laude di Dio.
 I Jo: Fran.^{cus} Crescius scribebat Rome. I

Figure 2. Giovan Francesco Cresci, *Il perfetto scrittore*, Rome, c. 1571. (Actual size)

of all the Italian writing manuals.¹⁶ The effect on the older man was devastating, and Palatino conceded defeat by having his last book, the *Compendio del gran volume* (1566) rewritten in the new *cancellaresca testeggiata*, a task for which – according to Cresci – he employed the calligrapher Cesare Moreggio.¹⁷ With *Il perfetto scrittore* (figure 2), which bears no date of publication but which was granted a privilege dated 1570, Cresci assumed a leading role. Looking back over his career in the posthumously published *L'idea*, of which the draft was dated 1595, he named among his pupils Giovanni Luigi Mercato and Luca Orfei, writers in the Sistine Chapel, and Ludovico Curione and Giacomo Romano in Rome, and Salvatore Gagliardelli in Florence, all three of whom would publish influential manuals in their turn.¹⁸

Writing from Milan to Cardinal Guglielmo Sirleto, the custodian of the Vatican Library, in 1572 Cresci said he had been in Rome for twenty years and, as an only son, had needed to join his father:

Having spent the last twenty years in Rome, a long way from my father who is now old and has no other children, I am reluctant to leave him alone, without keeping him the company I owe him for the little time that he still has left to him.¹⁹

Although Wardrop believed, on the evidence of the letter cited above, that Cresci left Rome in about 1570, he appears to have returned there from time to time. Cresci had been closely involved in

16. Casamassima, *Trattati*, p. 50.

17. In the reworking of Palatino's manual a generalized acknowledgement is made to Moreggio. Cresci's references to the nature of Moreggio's contribution are on pages 26 and 27 of *L'idea* (1622).

18. Here is the full list: 'M. Gio. Luigi Mercato, e M. Luca Orfei da Fano, scrittori de' libri di Capella del Papa, e della Libreria Apostolica, M. Ludovico Curione, e M. Iacomo Romano, maestro di scrivere in Roma, in Fiorenza M. Salvatore Gagliardelli, maestro di scrivere in quella Città, in Bologna M. Antonio Zannetti, &

M. Scipione Leone Bolognesi maestri, che in quella Città insegnano publicamente anch'eglino a scrivere, M. Girolamo Monti già maestro di scrivere in Milano, che poco fa morse, M. Gio. Battista Landino già scrittore della felice memoria del Cardinale Albano in Roma, M. Christoforo Livizano da Modena scrittore de' Brevi Apostolici, che già morse l'anno 1582., M. Gio. Battista Tronchi già segretario della santa Inquisitione in Roma, il quale già molti anni andò a miglior vita, M. Carpano Carpani da Fermo: i quali tutti sono stati miei scolari con molti altri, che potrei

nominare, che per non essere tedioso a' Lettori tralascio.' *L'idea* (1622), pp. 91–2. Some of these names had appeared in the list of 'excellent' contemporary writers in Cresci's *Il perfetto cancellaresco corsivo* (1589), ff. 28^v–29.

19. Essendo stato venti anni passati in Roma lontano da mio padre, et ritrovandosi lui molto vecchio et non havendo altri figlioli, che me . . . mi pare molto strano ad absentarmi da lui, et non li tener quella debita compagnia, che a me conviene per quel poco tempo che gli resta di vita. Cited by Wardrop (1948), p. 28.

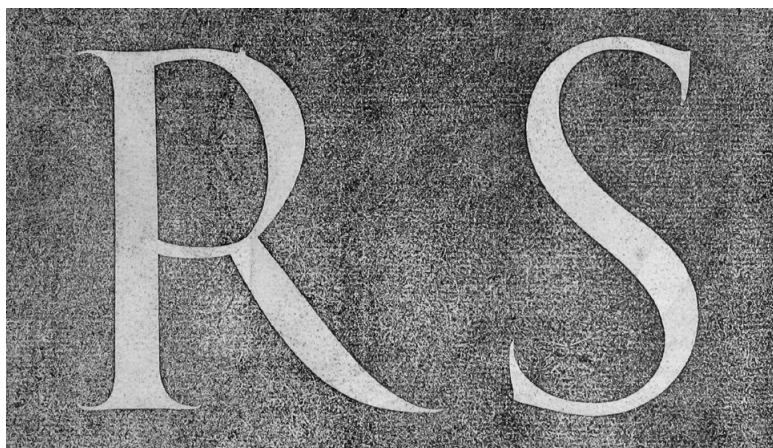


Figure 5. Capitals R and S from Giovan Francesco Cresci, *Essempiare di più sorti lettere*, Rome, 1560. Victoria & Albert Museum, London. (Reduced to 73 per cent linear)

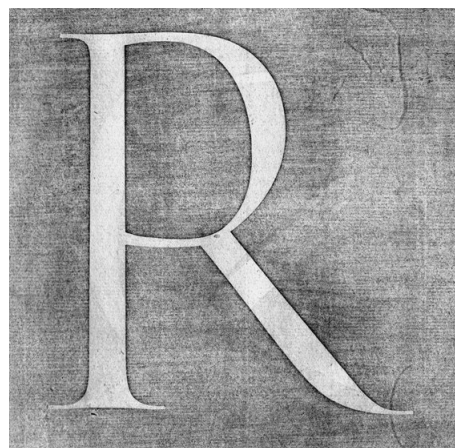


Figure 6. Capital R from Giovan Francesco Cresci, *Il perfetto scrittore*, Rome, c. 1571. (Reduced to 40 per cent linear)

According to its colophon, *Il perfetto scrittore* was printed in the author's own house. On the evidence of the *Essempiare*, 1560, it would appear that the engraver of the alphabets of the *maiuscole antiche*, Francesco Aureri of Crema, living in Rome, was also the engraver of all the other blocks, and perhaps of those of *Il perfetto scrittore* (Rome, c. 1571), in which he is given the credit for cutting the capital letters. Some of the examples of writing in *Il perfetto cancellaresco corsivo* (1579) (figure 7), of which the dedication is dated Rome, 1 August 1579, are dated from Rome in 1577 and 1579. More examples written in Rome in 1579 and 1580 are shown in *Il quarto libro* (1596). But in the *Caratteri ed esempi* (1617) there are examples which are dated – presumably reproducing the model from which the blocks were engraved – from Milan, 1580. There is also a Venetian connection. Editions of the *Essempiare* were printed by Rampazzetto in Venice in 1575 and by the heirs of Rampazzetto in 1578, who also produced an undated and far from complete edition of the *Perfetto scrittore*, using the original blocks. The *Perfetto cancellaresco corsivo* was published in Rome 'ad instantia dell'autore' in 1579, but the *Avertimenti* – a polemical work without illustrations – was also published 'ad instantia dell'autore' in Venice in the same year. In dedicating the posthumously-published *L'idea* (1622) to Cardinal Federigo Borromeo, Cresci's son, who was also called Giovanni Francesco, recalled that his father had worked 'in Rome, in Venice, and in this city of Milan'.

The bibliography of Cresci's writing books is, as James Wardrop observed, particularly involved and difficult, and the problems of such works, of which the original blocks were often reprinted at different dates, sometimes by different printers, are notoriously difficult to resolve. The summary that appears here only touches on the problems: it is clear, for example, from variations of the setting of the text and the arrangement of the ornaments and initials that the undated *Il perfetto scrittore* was reprinted several times. It is less uncommon than *Il perfetto cancellaresco corsivo* (Roma, 1579), of which the engraved examples show Cresci's script developing a growing fantasy and complexity when it is compared with the specimens in the earlier books. The later writing books bearing Cresci's name are even less familiar to most readers, and indeed he seems to have had no direct involvement in the production. The Venetian editions of the *Essempiare* and *Il perfetto scrittore* are less complete and worse

Figure 7. Giovan Francesco Cresci, *Il perfetto cancellaresco corsivo*, Rome, 1579. Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan. (Actual size)

printed than the earlier Roman editions, which makes it especially regrettable that the Venetian *Essempiare* of 1578 should have been chosen to issue in facsimile in 1968.²¹

The *Quarto libro di lettere formatelle* appeared in Rome with a note on the title page that it was *nuovamente posto in luce per Silvio Valesi Parmeggiano*, and the imprint is *per Pietro Spada*, who had produced *Il perfetto cancellaresco corsivo* for Cresci himself in 1579, but on this occasion was acting *ad instantia di detto Valesi*. In other words, it appears to have been prepared long after the writing of the texts (which as noted above, are dated from Rome in 1579 and 1580), and probably – to judge from Valesi's address to the reader, from a cache of papers that Cresci no longer owned:

As there have come into my hands some specimens of *formatelle* letters, chancery cursives and other formal writing by Giovan Francesco Cresci, which have been buried like the finest gold and jewels for about sixteen years, I have not been sparing of great expense to have them printed for the common benefit of secretaries and those who study the noble and excellent art of writing.²²

The last of the writing books bearing Cresci's name to be published, the *Caratteri ed esempi*, is a posthumous work, presumably engraved from samples of his writing located in Milan. Until recently it was known only from the edition that appeared in Milan, *per Filippo Ghisolfi, ad istanza di Gio. Battista Bidelli*, in 1638. But James Clough has drawn my attention to an edition of 1617, hitherto unrecorded, in the Biblioteca Braidense in Milan. This work, issued by Filippo Lomazzo under the patronage of Catterina Secchi, *monaca in S. Vittore di Meda*, is engraved from examples, some of which were written in Milan in 1580, which Lomazzo had from one Bocalini. The quality of the wood engraving is frankly poor, and this leads us to the theme which obsessed Cresci during his later life.

One of the ironies of calligraphic history is that the brilliant Italian style, for the promotion of which – whether he invented it or not – the credit is now given to Cresci, became the basis of the new calligraphy of the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, which was based on the thin, pointed pen that derived its thick and thin strokes from the

21. As the bibliographical notes, p. 131, show, there are two different settings of text of this edition of '1578'. The facsimile edition of the *Essempiare*, published by Nattali & Maurice, London, in 1968 with useful notes and a translation of the text by A. S. Osley, was made from a copy of one of the Venetian editions dated 1578 owned by John Ryder. The choice was regrettable, not only because the overall quality of the printing of this edition is much poorer than that of the original edition of 1560, but also because by this date no special care was taken with the printing of the alphabet of capital letters and, as the editor of the facsimile failed to remark, the text omits Cresci's note relating to the special care he had taken with their printing, with his tribute to the quality of the the engraving of the blocks by Francesco Aurieri, that had appeared in the 1560 edition.

22. Essendomi venuto nelle mani alcune mostre di lettere formatelle, & Cancellaresche corsive, con altre di lettera formata de S. Gioan Francesco Cresci Milanese, quale come oro finissimo, e qual pretioso gioia sin hora per il spatio di anni sedici in circa sono sepolte, e morte, non ho voluto perdonare a spesa ancorche grande di farle stampare a commune beneficio de i Segretarij, & studiosi di cosi nobile, & eccellente arte dello scrivere.

varying pressure that was placed on it. This is the style that was the basis of the new mercantile hand that served the financial institutions and the maritime empires of the European powers, and which became known, from its promotion by the English writing masters of the eighteenth century – George Shelley, Charles Snell, George Bickham – as the *lettera inglese*, the English letter. The term does some injustice to the Italian writers from whom it was derived, and to the French and Dutch calligraphers in whose work many English writers saw the new Italian style. In England, where in the 18th century it was known simply as the ‘round hand’, this writing was often later known colloquially as ‘copperplate’; to calligraphers schooled by Edward Johnston and his followers in the use of the broad pen, which they were taught to regard as the only proper instrument for calligraphy, this term became a reproach.

Notwithstanding Cresci’s strictures, the use of engraving on copper to reproduce the new calligraphy seems logical, if we can judge by the writing books of the 17th and 18th centuries. This medium enhances the smooth curves and the swelling and diminishing lines that are its essential characteristics. The technique, which had already been used for a couple of writing books in Germany and the Low Countries,²³ was introduced into Italy with *Lo scrittore utile* of Giuliantonio Hercolani (Bologna, c. 1571), and it rapidly became the only acceptable medium for the reproduction of calligraphy. The first part of the writing book of Lodovico Curione, *La notomia delle cancellaresche corsive*, engraved by Martin van Buyten in 1582, gave a spectacular example of interaction between calligrapher and engraver, and Cresci found the tables of his relationship with Palatino reversed when he was attacked in print by a younger calligrapher who was born in about 1556, Marcello Scalzini or Scalino, called il Camerino.²⁴ Scalzini’s writing book *Il Secretario* (1581), which promotes a style that can be written at an even greater speed than the model introduced by Cresci, was brilliantly engraved on copper by Giacomo Franco. But the script of a surviving manuscript writing book by Scalzini himself, dated 1575,²⁵ is clumsy and ill-formed, which suggests that the engraver of his books deserves a generous share of the credit that was claimed by his client.

The danger that the engraver might seize the initiative and overshadow the writer was what Cresci may have suspected, although the sustained attacks on the use of copper plate engraving for the reproduction of calligraphy in his two polemical works, the *Avertimenti* (Venice, 1579) and the posthumously-published *L’idea* (Milan, 1622), are on the grounds that it is technically inadequate for its purpose.

Those who engrave letters on copper, who cannot mark them on the copper in the manner by which they copy images and other figures since they are so small, apply oil to the paper so that the writing appears reversed from the other side, and can be misleadingly viewed, redrawn and engraved on the copper, so that when printed in comes out in the right orientation. But this does not reproduce the effect of the drawing, since, although copper engraving has great beauty, it is not possible for the engraver using his tool which the goldsmiths call the *burin*, with its elegant incision, to reproduce the lively swelling and diminishing of the line that comes from the pen of an expert writer.²⁶

23. Johann Neudörffer, [Nuremberg], 1537–43, Clément Perret, [Antwerp], 1569. David P. Becker, *The practice of letters: the Hofer Collection of writing manuals 1514–1800* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1997), 49, 47.

24. Osley, *Luminario*, pp. 93–8.

25. Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Cod. Urb. Lat. 1282.

26. Quelli, che intagliano lettere in rame, non potendo calcare i loro contorni sopra il rame per esser piccole, si come calcano i contorni de’ disegni delle imagini, & altre figure per esser grandi, sogliono ungero la carta dello esempio con olio accioche la lettera trasparendo d’altra parte doue non è, mostrandosi mancina all’intagliatore, la possa, come esso si falsamente si stima, disegnarla, & intagliare nel rame, accioche nello stampare la littera dell’esempio venga alla diritta. Ma dietro a questo non segue l’effetto conforme al disegno: perche, sebene il taglio del rame porta seco gran vaghezza, tratta però dell’impossibile, che l’intagliatore con l’instrumento, che degli Orefici è chiamato bollino, possa insieme con la vaghezza del taglio produrre naturalmente a’ suoi luoghi gli accrescimenti, e diminutioni viue de’ tratti, che dalla penna d’un buon scrittore vengano prodotti nella lettera. *L’idea* (1622), p. 70.

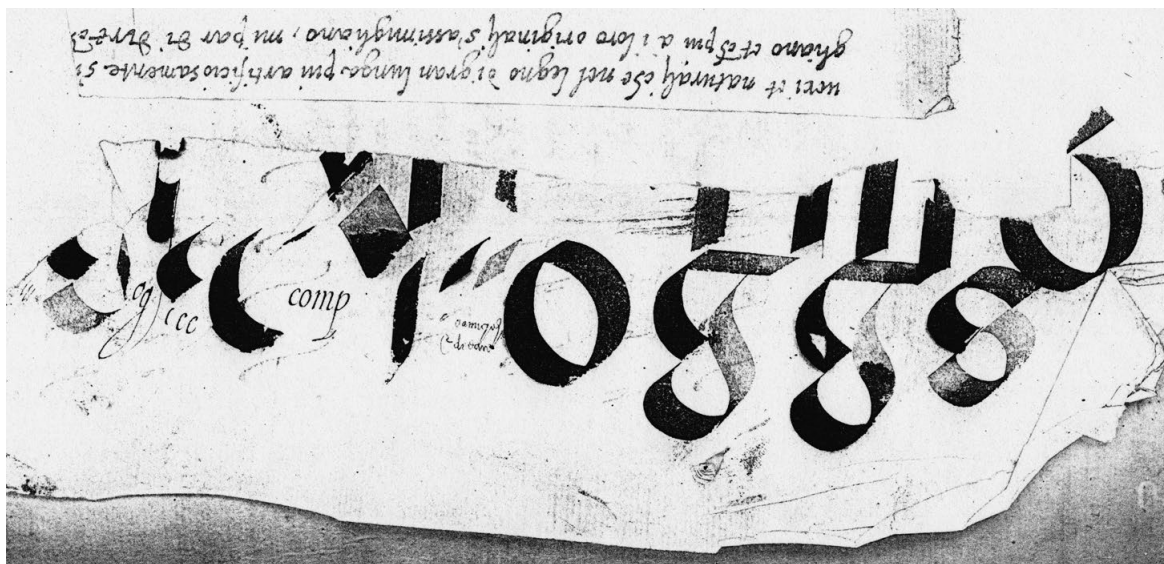


Figure 8. Giovan Francesco Cresci, calligraphic exercise using rotunda gothic (*lettera ecclesiastica*). Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan. (Reduced to 75 per cent linear)

There is some sense in this, but it was impossible to argue against the trend. Publishing *Il quarto libro di lettere formatelle* in 1596, Valesi was already uneasily aware that the writing would have appeared more refined if it had been engraved on copper, but he loyally defends Cresci's own views, claiming that 'engraving on wood tends more to the natural than on copper'.²⁷

We know that Cresci ended his career, as he began it, under the protection of a member of the Borromeo family. The Biblioteca Ambrosiana, which was completed in 1609, was the creation of Francesco Borromeo (1564–1631), Archbishop of Milan, made Cardinal at the age of twenty-three by Sixtus V, and nephew of Carlo Borromeo, Cresci's first patron, who was canonized in 1610. The library was damaged by bombing in 1943, and in recent years, during a long period when its contents have been made inaccessible by the repair and restoration of the building, one has wondered what materials of Cresci's it might contain. The answer is that, while some copies of his printed writing books in the collection were destroyed by the bombing, there are examples of Cresci's original calligraphy,²⁸ letters to Borromeo, and the fair copy of the manuscript of *L'idea*, together with a draft for its text dated 1595,²⁹ details of which are given in the bibliography below (figures 8, 9, 10, 11). There is also a portrait, which was painted in 1619 at the request of Borromeo to add to the collection of portraits of distinguished figures that still hang in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana.³⁰

27. 'Il legno tira piu al naturale di esso Rame.' The reproduction of the writing-master's work on copper called for the transfer in reverse of the model to the plate. There are useful notes on the techniques that were used in Ton Croiset van Uchelen, 'The mysterious writing-master Clemens Perret and his two copy-books', *Quaerendo*, vol. 17, no. 1 (Winter 1987), pp. 3–44 (in his Appendix C, pp. 38–42). There are also a few references in other writing books of the 17th and 18th centuries, including those of Lorenzo Ortiz, *El maestro de escribir* (Venice, 1696), ff. 5^v–6^r. 'En quanto al corte de las laminas...' (a reference given by David P. Becker, *The practice of letters: the Hofer Collection of writing manuals 1514–1800* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1997), p. 39), John Clark, preface to *Writing improv'd, or penmanship made easy in it's useful and ornamental parts* (London, [1714]), and Joseph Champion,

preface to *The Parallel, or Comparative Penmanship Exemplified* (London, [1750?]). These authors agree that exceptional skill and aptitude were required from the engraver.

28. These were exhibited at an exhibition assembled by Dr Massimo Rodella, with a catalogue, *Aldo Manuzio e il corsivo tipografico 1501–2001: la creazione del libro moderno* (Milano: Pinacoteca Ambrosiana, 2001). There are some splendid examples of the *ecclesiastica* or rotunda gothic script, which was still the normal hand for writing big liturgical works.

29. The draft is in a small, informal hand, with a gothic quality to it, the only example of such writing among Cresci's surviving manuscripts.

30. Inv. 1405. The portrait was copied for Borromeo from one in the possession of the Roman calligrapher Simone Verovio. Pamela M. Jones, *Federigo Borromeo and the Ambrosiana: art patronage and reform in seventeenth-century Milan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 301. There is an engraved portrait on the title page of *Il perfetto scrittore*.

The five personal letters, which were written by Cresci between 1603 and 1607,³¹ contain many expressions of gratitude for the help that he has received from Borromeo. On 23 September 1603 he assures him that he is continuing to transcribe the work called ‘The Idea of the major and minor art of writing’ that he has already requested – perhaps the fair copy that would be used for printing the text of *L’idea* in 1622. On 22 July 1605 there are allusions to an ‘unjust and malicious judgement against me’ for a matter of 40,000 lire, and on 18 November of the same year there is a reminder of a promise to help with another 2000 lire, since ‘now God has been pleased to provide me with an excellent opportunity to settle my eldest daughter in marriage’. The last of the letters, concerning this dowry, is dated 7 March 1607. But the most interesting letter of all, which is printed below, is dated 10 May 1606, and concerns an inscription that Cresci was making for the Cardinal.

In a section headed ‘Delle qualità del Cresci’ in Borromeo’s *Ephemerides Litterarie*, the commonplace book in which he copied out a series of notes and essays on many topics, there is an allusion to an inscription:

We are talking of Gio. Francesco Cresci, the most celebrated writer of Latin and Italian letters, who brought great [light] to this art in Italy. In his day he was most admired, and had a great reputation, and since [he had] love for me, his descendants dedicated a book to me, and in his memory some exquisite writings of his are kept in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana. And he made that inscription for the library on the façade of the vestibule, made of metal let into the stone, a most exquisite work, in my opinion equal in its skill to that of the ancients. At this time he was reduced to poverty, so that when I needed him for this inscription he was old and confined to his bed. When I asked why they told me he had no clothes in which to go out nor indeed for staying in bed. So I had him dressed from head to foot, and sent him people who could bring him to where I needed him without any need to walk. I think what I did was right, for the future of this art, to bring him out of humiliating poverty, so that I provided not only his food and expenses but other sums.³²

Cresci’s letter does not discuss the purpose of the inscription and it contains some obscure technical terms, but it is tempting to identify it with the one about which Borromeo writes. The modern entrance to the library is at the north-east side of the building in Piazza Pio XI. The original ‘vestibule’ at the entrance to the library,

31. Biblioteca Ambrosiana, MSS. G. 194, G.251, G.261, G.194, G.252.

32. Questi di cui parleremo è Gio. Francesco Cresci famosissimo scrittore dei caratteri Latini e Italiani, che ha recato grandissima luce a quest’arte in Italia. Egli fu molto stimato nei suoi dì, et hebbe gran nome, et fama, et essendo mio amorevole mi fu dedicato un libro dai suoi discendenti, e per memoria di lui si conservano alcune esquisite carte nella Biblioteca Ambrosiana; et fece anche quella inscriptione nella Biblioteca in fronte del vestibolo, ch’è di metallo intagliato nel sasso la quale è opera molto esquisita, et uguale alle antiche, secondo ch’io credo a quell’artificio. Hora egli era

poverissimo, in guisa, che una volta convenendomi haver bisogno di lui per questa inscriptione, esso già vecchio se ne stava a letto e domandando io del perché mi fu detto asseverantemente che esso non havea panni da uscire da case, ne a pena di letto, laonde io lo feci vestire tutto da capo a piedi, e poi mandandogli persona, che senza camminare a piedi lo conducesse dove io ne havevo bisogno giudicai ben fatto, che per l’avenire quell’arte non fosse così malamente ingiuriata e disprezzata dalla povertà, et però hebbe da me non solo il vitto quotidiano, et stipendio, ma altri denari Biblioteca Ambrosiana, MS. F. 20 inf., cc 98^v–101.

on the opposite side of the building, has a portico with tuscan pilasters and a pediment, beneath which is the inscription BIBLIOTHECA AMBROSIANA in bronze letters attached to the stonework.³³ It is a most handsome rendering of the style that is associated with the buildings of Sixtus V. If it is indeed the inscription to which Borromeo alludes, this is the only example of Cresci's architectural lettering that can currently be identified.

Cresci's son, also named Giovan Francesco, was not only also a calligrapher but also according to one source *professore d'eloquenza* in Milan. He appears to have been still alive in 1638 when the publisher G.B. Bidelli (who gave the forenames as Giovanni Battista) described him in the introductory note to *Caratteri et esempi* as a son worthy of such a father (*degno figliuolo di tant' huomo*). Giovan Francesco dedicated his father's last work, *L'idea*, to Cardinal Federigo Borromeo.

Poor Cresci. He was not a cheerful man, to judge by his agitated later writings, by the sombre homilies that provide the texts of his calligraphic examples, and by his painted portrait (figure 12). His old age brought the poverty and perhaps illness that Borromeo did something to alleviate. One notices that, while more than once he proclaimed the names of his disciples who became prominent in their profession, none of them appears to have returned the compliment by publicly acknowledging him as a master.³⁴ Wardrop indicated clearly where his own sympathies lay: 'Palatino was an artist, full of the warm south and its carefree ways; Cresci, an artist too, was a logic-chopping Lombard first, who seems to have been by nature captious, illiberal, and entirely devoid of humour. . . . He could be, at worst, a sententious, pretentious pedant and bore.'³⁵ And yet, when one looks at their work it is difficult not to feel, with Casamassima, that it was the obsessively tight, rigid script of Palatino that lacked generosity; while, however incapable he may have been of the display of such feelings in his life and literary writing, in his calligraphy at least Cresci displays the vitality and joyous flow that justifies Wardrop's description of him as 'the first calligrapher of the baroque'.

If Cresci's position as a major and influential calligrapher is now secure and his part in creating the inscriptional alphabet that appears on Roman buildings from the later 16th century is widely accepted, the larger part of his professional work for the Vatican Library, which must amount to a considerable body of calligraphic work, still remains to be identified, and perhaps it may be possible to identify more examples of his involvement in inscriptional work. Such tasks must surely be among the priorities of future researchers into the history of Italian writing.

33. This is one technical detail in which the present inscription fails to match the description provided by Borromeo, who writes in the passage quoted above of a bronze inscription 'cut in the stone', by which he presumably means let into a socket made by the masons, in the manner of the big inscription on the Pantheon in Rome, from which at this date the original bronze letters had long vanished. But then Borromeo is hardly writing as a technical expert.

34. Domenico Fontana, who in his account of the moving of the Vatican obelisk and of other buildings for Sixtus V for which he was responsible, *Della trasportatione dell' Obelisco Vaticano e delle Fabbriche del Nostro Signore Papa Sisto V* (1590), mentions and transcribes the text of a great many of the inscriptions of which the design is claimed by Orfei, but makes no reference at all to their designer.

35. James Wardrop, 'Civis Romanus sum: Giovanbattista Palatino and his circle', *Signature*, new series 14 (1952), p. 29.



Figure 12. Giovan Francesco Cresci, portrait. A copy made in 1619 for Cardinal Federigo Borromeo. Pinacoteca Ambrosiana, Milan.

Figure 13 (below). Detail of page D4^r of *Il perfetto scrittore*. (Actual size)

Il Cresci di sua Inuet 

A letter from Giovan Francesco Cresci to Federigo Borromeo 1606

The text that follows is a letter from G. F. Cresci to Cardinal Federigo Borromeo, Milan, 10 May 1606, Biblioteca Ambrosiana MS.G. 251 inf. (171). The Biblioteca Ambrosiana was erected to the design of Fabio Mangone in 1603–9. The building was damaged during the Second World War and extensively restored during the later 1990s. In Borromeo's 'Ephemerides litterarie' (MS.F.20 inf., cc.98^v–101), he refers to the inscription which is the subject of this letter: '[Cresci] made that inscription in the Library on the façade of the Vestibule, which is of bronze cut into the stone, which is a most exquisite work, and equal to that of the Ancients, according to my belief in this artist.'

The entablature to the pediment over the former entrance to the Library bears the words BIBLIOTHECA AMBROSIANA in separate bronze letters attached to the stone (figures 15, 16, opposite). An engraving in S. Latuada, *Descrizione di Milano* (1737), vol. IV, p. 94 (reproduced in Pamela M. Jones, *Federigo Borromeo and the Ambrosiana*, 1993), shows the *Facciata ed ingresso della Biblioteca Ambrogiana* with a scale of *braccia milanesi* according to which the overall width of the entrance portico bearing the inscription is about 14.5 braccia (figure 14).

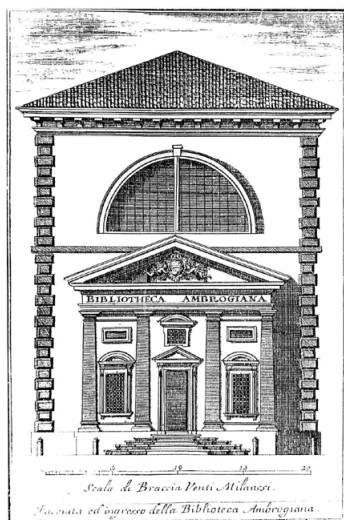


Figure 14. Façade of the Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan. Copperplate engraving, 18th century.

Il di .x. di maggio 1606. In Milano.

Hauendomi rafferamato V.S.Ill^{ma} et R^{ma} quanto m'ha detto Giovanfrancesco mio figliuolo per risposta della mia lettera sopra la gratia dimandatale per soccorso del mio trauaglio il quale me lo ueggio di grande impedimento el negotio di quelle Lettere Romane commes-some. Et hauendo a porre nel Marmo nel modo che si è stabilito ui è di necessità raguagliare VS. Ill^{ma} pienamente di quanto m'occorre da fare al presente per condur quest'opera a tutta quella perfettione che per me si potia, et insieme desingarmela di questi sinistri iuditij che di me son fatti, i qual son stati cagione non solo d'impedimento alla sopradetta gratia, che da VS.Ill^{ma} aspettauo, et che certamenta mi prometteuo, ma anco a cancellarmi da tutto quello buon conto nel quale io godeuo d'esso appresso di VS.Ill^{ma}. Le dirò dunque che mentre mi bisognerà star in casa retirato se mi saranno date le dette Lettere Romane, che piu uolte ho ricercate, le quali tiene in mano Monsig^r Mazenta si appunteranno quanto prima per fare il spoluerizzo, et in questo mezzo, che si appun-teranno si farà fare i cartoni per poter sopra di essi spoluerizzarle, et disegnarle con diligenza, accio si possano da detti cartoni tagliar fuori le figure di esse lettere giustamente, et metterui sotto la cera sicuramente, per farne le forme da tragettarle la qual sicurezza non si puo ottenere spoluerizzando le lettere sopra un semplice foglio perche pondendoli sotto la cera si uiene a commettere errori nella forme non potendo stare la debolezza del foglio a botta della cera come fà la durezza del cartone dal quale si uiene a fuggire ogni errore, et massime ne i corpi doue con-siste, la bellezza, la gratia, et perfettione dell'opera. Oltre a questa fatica et diligenza, mi bisognerà attender a mettere in ordine il compartimento di dette lettere in quel spatio doue anderano poste il quale sendo lungo .12. braccia, et le lettere di quella grandezza che sono porteranno non poco tempo à farne un legiadro compartimento. Se io sarò libero da potere andar intorno senza pericolo di non incorrere in maggior mia tribolatione andrò a ueder fare le dette forme, et tragetti di lettere, et far tutte quelle strade et fatiche che opportunamente saranno di bisogno per far che l'opera uengha ben condotta massime hauendo a fare con



Figure 15. Detail of inscription attributed to Giovan Francesco Cresci over the former entrance to the Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan.



Figure 16. Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan. Former entrance.

doi Maestri che hanno a stare sotto a i miei auuertimenti nel lauarle accio non commettino errore. Seguirà poi a tutte queste fatiche, et diligenze, il far dar sopra al marmo una buona mano di biacca ordinata con una tenace colla per spoluerizzarli sopra un' altra uolta le medesime lettere appuntate, et di nuouo designarle accio che la forma delle lettere tragettate scontra apunto con l'intaglio che per dette Lettere si faranno nel marmo. Questa diligenza in opra d'immortalità come questa di VS Ill^{ma} puo aggiungere gratia immortale. Sin qui Monsig^{re} Ill^{mo} ho raccontato tutto il trauaglio che bisogna chio habbia intorno a queste lettere per condurle a fine honorato, mi resta solo ad informala doue nascono le cagioni che à figurare queste lettere Romane ui si spende assai tempo a porle in buona et viuace figura massime quando sono di quella grandezza che già VS Ill^{ma} piu uolte ha uedute. Le cause son queste, che chi uole operare perfettamente in questa professione fa di bisogno, che sin{----}³⁶ particolarmente dalla natura d'una ecct^e. Imaginatiua, et l'operante non habbia trauaglio che lo possa far stare distratto da tal esercizio, et molte uolte le lettere, che hanno corpo innanzi, che siano condutte a perfectione conuiene rifarle 3. et 4. uolte, doue ui è tal lettere che uorrà 15. et anco 20. giorni di tempo à condurla bene et massime quando sono di grandezza d'un mezzo braccio come sono queste ch'io ho fatte, et quando si lauora in simile esercizio, bisogna hauere le giornate molto ben chiare et l'animo sereno, et pigliar quell'hore nelle quali la luce e continuata, et quando per la instabilità del giorno si uiene ad oscurare, bisogna dismettere tal essercitio, et massime si ha lauorato un pezzo, percioche dalla mutazione della luce, et stanchezza del lauorare ne uiene alterato l'occhio con l'imaginatiua dalla quale nasce la perfectione dell'opere che consistono in figura ...

... la inuernata nella quale alle uolte scorreranno .15. et .20. giornate tutte tenebrose, et scure, che se si hauesse a stare tante giornate senza mangiare non si essendo potuto per difetto di tempo lauorare.

Not all the terms in Cresci's letter are clear. I offer the following English translation, with notes on some of the problems.

Your Reverence having made clear what I was told by my son Giovanfrancesco by way of response to my letter concerning the favour I asked you in support of my labours, I find that the great impediment to them is the business of these Roman Letters entrusted to me.

And having to set them on the marble in the manner specified, I must give Your Reverence an account of what I must do to achieve this work to the greatest perfection of which I am capable, and to dispel these bad reports about me, which have been a hindrance to the said favour that I expected from Your Reverence, and that I was certainly relying on, and seemed to damage the goodwill that I enjoyed from Your Reverence.

36. Illegibile (the paper is damaged).

I must tell you that while I am compelled to stay confined indoors at home, if the aforesaid Roman Letters are given to me that I have asked for several times, and which are in the hands of Monsignor Mazenta, we can then get ready to do the pouncing.³⁷ In this way we get ready to have the cartoons³⁸ prepared through which the pouncing is done, and to draw them carefully, so that the shapes of these letters can be correctly cut out,³⁹ and put securely under the wax, to make the moulds⁴⁰ for casting them.⁴¹ This accuracy cannot be secured by doing the pouncing through a single sheet, because when it is placed beneath the wax one begins to make mistakes in the mould because the paper cannot withstand the impact of the wax as well as the tough cartone, with which mistakes are avoided, especially in the curved parts,⁴² which gives the work its beauty, grace and perfection.

As well as this labour and care, I must attend to the placing of these letters in the space where they will be fixed. Since the length of this is 12 braccia⁴³ and the letters being as big as they are, it will require some little time to make a pleasing composition. If I can get out without running the risk of provoking my old trouble, I shall go and inspect these moulds and designs of letters, and undertake all the efforts that are needed in order to be sure that the work comes out well, especially since there are two workmen that must work under my guidance so that they do not make mistakes.

The next task will be to apply a quantity of white lead⁴⁴ to the marble with a stiff glue⁴⁵ to pounce once more the same pierced letters, and again to draw them with the outlines that will be cut for them in the marble. This care that is taken with the immortal project of Your Reverence will add immortal beauty to it.

To this point, Monsignore, I have explained the work that I must do with this inscription to bring it to a worthy conclusion. It remains only for me to tell you the reason why so much trouble is taken to depict these Roman Letters, and to give them a good and lively shape, especially when they are as big as those that Your Reverence has seen many times. This is the reason. Whoever wishes to succeed to perfection in this profession must be provided by Nature with creative power and with a steadiness of mind that will not be distracted from concentration. Many times in order to perfect letters that have curves in them they must be redone 3 or 4 times, and often such letters take 15 or 20 days to get them right, especially when they are half a braccio high,⁴⁶ like those that I have done. And when one is engaged on this kind of task, it is important to have days that are well lit, and to be clear in one's head, and to choose those hours when the light is constant, since when the light begins to fail one must cease work, especially if one has already been working for some time, because with the changing of the light and the fatigue of working, both the eye and the creative force on which the perfection of the work depends begin to weaken ... In the winter when there are sometimes two or three weeks of murky and overcast days together, it is as if one were condemned not to eat for all that time, being unable to work because of the bad weather.

37. *spolverizzo*. 'Spolverizzare, spolverizzare. Ricavare in disegno collo spolvere.' Pietro Fanfani, *Vocabolario della lingua italiana* (Firenze, 1885). The English term is 'to pounce'. 'The outlines of the cartoon may be pricked and "pounced" with a little bag or red or black powder that will leave a dotted outline on the wall.' *Encycl. Brit.*, 11th edn., vol. 20, 487, s.v. 'Painting'.

38. *cartoni*. The sense is of a tough paper or card made from several sheets. 'Cartone. Carta grande fatta di più fogli sopra alla quale i pittori fanno il modello o disegno colorato di qualche grand' opera che debbono dipingere nel muro.' (Fanfani.)

39. *tagliar fuori*

40. *forme*. It is difficult to tell whether *forme* here means literally 'moulds' for casting or just an outline to be followed – it seems to me that it might mean either, depending on the process that is being described.

41. *tragettarle*

42. *corpi*. 'Va più amplo el corpo inferiore [del B] vno decimo che quello superiore', Felice Feliciano, Vat. Lat. 6852, f. 1v. 'Maiuscole facili, che non hanno corpo, lequali si creano per linee rette, cioè A E F. . . & anco tutte le haste di dette Maiuscole, che hanno corpo, cioè B D G . . .' G. F. Cresci, 'Trattato sopra le eccellentissime maiuscole romane antiche', *Essemplare di più sorti lettere* (Roma, 1560).

43. 12 *braccia milanesi* = 9 metres or about 30 feet

44. *biacca*

45. *colla*. But *biacca ordinata con una tenace colla* might also be 'white lead applied with a stretched (taut) cord', i.e. to obtain alignment.

46. *mezzo braccio* = 37 cm or about 15 in.

Bibliographical notes

The bibliographical notes given here are very summary in form, and I am afraid that they do little more than warn of complexities to be aware of: there are often typographical and textual variations between editions bearing the same date. In my notes I have indicated some of the problems, which nothing short of a full bibliographical study of the original copies will resolve. Some of the names of Italian libraries holding copies of works by Cresci are derived from *Le edizioni italiane del XVI secolo: censimento nazionale*. v. 4. Rome, 1996. I have not attempted to reproduce the capitalization of original title pages. Their use of v and u is generally regularized and most dates are given in arabic numerals.

Esemplare di piu sorti lettere

Roma, 1560, 1563, 1566, 1568
Venezia, 1575, 1578, 1583, 1600

Esemplare di piu sorti lettere, di M. Gio. Francesco Cresci Milanese, Scrittore della Libreria Apostolica. Dove si dimostra la vera et nuova forma dello scrivere cancellaresco corsivo, da lui ritrovata, & da molti hora comunemente posta in uso. Con un breve trattato sopra le maiuscole antiche romane, per il qual s'intende la vera regola di formarle secondo l'arte, e'l giuditio de gli antichi. Si describe ancora la prattica, che con la penna al buon scrittore s'appartiene havere in dette maiuscole, & altri sorti di lettere, nuovamente dal detto autore composto, & à commune utilità dato in luce.

In Roma, per Antonio Blado ad istanza del autore, 1560.

obl 4°. 14 leaves, 56 numbered woodcut plates.

Firenze, Bib. nazionale centrale, Rossi-Cassigoli 1699.
London, National Art Library (Victoria & Albert Museum), RC.G.36. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Rés. V.1481. Chicago, Newberry Library. Vienna, Museum für Kunst. Roma, Bib. nazionale centrale, 68.13.C.57.

Wardrop (1948, p. 14, n. 6) cites a copy listed in a catalogue issued by L'Art Ancien, Lugano, c. 1933, 'undoubtedly the author's presentation copy to his patron and dedicatee', printed on vellum, bound in original red morocco with the arms of S. Carlo Borromeo, and including a holograph sonnet by Cresci. Its present location is not known.

The title pages of the editions of 1560 in London (V&A) and Florence (BNC) bear the same text but are wholly different typographically.

Note that GFC's note on the method used in the printing of the alphabet of Antique capital letters (*Avvertimento sopra la stampa de l'Alfabeto della Maiuscole Antiche*) that appears in the edition of 1560 is not present in the later editions, including that of 1578 from which the facsimile edition was made.

Esemplare di piu sorti lettere ... Roma, A. Blado, 1563.

Johnson, citing catalogue of A. van der Willigen, Amsterdam, 1875.

Esemplare di piu sorti lettere ... In Roma per Antonio

Blado ad istanza di Giovan della Gatta, 1566.
Berlin, Kunstgewerbemuseum (Johnson).

Esemplare di piu sorti lettere ... Roma, Heredi di

Antonio Blado, 1568.
Orvieto, Bib. comunale L. Fiume. Leipzig, Deutsche Bücherei (Börsenverein). Chicago, Newberry Library.

Esemplare di piu sorti lettere ... In Venetia appresso

Francesco Rampazzetto, ad instantia di Gio. antonio degli Antonij. 1575.

Libreria Vinciana, Milano (Johnson).

Esemplare di piu sorti lettere ... In Venetia appresso gli Heredi di Francesco Rampazzetto, ad instantia di Gio. Antonio de gli Antonij. 1578.

Bologna, Bib. universitaria. Foligno, Bib. comunale. London, British Library, C.31.h.8. Harvard, Houghton Library (Becker 25). Chicago, Newberry Library. New York Public Library. Washington, DC, Folger Library.

The edition reproduced in facsimile with a translation and introduction by A. S. Osley in 1968 is in a wholly different setting from the British Library copy, with variant ornaments and initials.

Esemplare di piu sorti lettere ... *Nouamente del detto autore composto, & ... dato in luce.* Vinigia, Presso

Altobello Saliceto, alla libreria della Fortezza, 1583.
Bergamo, Bib. civica Angelo Mai. Bologna, Bib. universitaria. New York Public Library.

Esemplare di piu sorti lettere ... Vinegia, Presso

Altobello Saliceto, 1600.
London, British Library, C.119.c.8.(2.)

Il perfetto scrittore

Roma, c. 1571
Venezia, c. 1575 or later?

Il Perfetto Scrittore di M. Gio. Francesco Cresci Cittadino Milanese. Doue si veggono i veri caratteri, & le natural forme di tutte quelle sorti di lettere, che à vero scrittore si appartengono. Con alcun' altre da lui nuouamente ritrouate. Et i modi, che deue tenere il Maestro per bene insegnare. [Bodl. Douce C298 adds:] *Parte prima.*

[f. M4^r.] Stampato in Roma in casa del proprio autore & intagliato per l'eccellente intagliator M. Francesco Aurieri da Crema.

[with]

Il perfetto scrittore di M. Gio. Francesco Cresci Cittadino Melanese dove si contengono le vere forme delle maiuscole antiche romane, necessarie all' arte del perfetto scriuere. Co'lsuo discorso. Con un vaghissimo capriccio di molti groppi accommodati sopra la forma d'un alfabeto maiusculo cancellaresco da lui ritrovato, et

insieme l'auiso di quello, che deue osseruare lo scrittore nel far capricci alle sorti di lettere. Opera nuouamente, à commune vtilità data in luce. Parte seconda.

obl. 4°. Part 1, n², *4, A–H⁴, I [a single leaf], K–M⁴. Part 2, Four leaves signed **4, 24 pages printed from wood, 12 pages printed from copper plates.⁴⁷

Bib. Apostolica Vaticana, Racc. I. IV. 2235. Bologna, Bib. universitaria. Firenze, Bib. nazionale centrale, 22.B.6.52. Milano, Bib. Ambrosiana (part 2 only), L.P. 2325. Milano, Bib. Braidense. Padova, Bib. universitaria. Pavia, Bib. universitaria. Roma, Bib. Casanatense. Roma, Bib. universitaria Alessandrina. Trieste, Bib. civica. Udine, Bib. del Seminario Vescovile, XXIV-M 70. Verona, Bib. del Seminario Vescovile. London, National Art Library (Victoria & Albert Museum), 87.C.78. Oxford, Bodleian Library, 2 copies, Douce C.298, Johnson P 170. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Rés. m.V.78. Berlin, Kunstgewerbemuseum. Harvard, Houghton Library (Becker 24). New York Public Library. Washington, DC, Library of Congress. London, Nicolas Barker (a disbound and defective copy of part 1, formerly Stanley Morison's).

Il Perfetto Scrittore di M. Gio. Francesco Cresci cittadino milanese. Doue si veggono i veri caratteri, & le natural forme di tutte quelle sorti di lettere, che à vero scrittore si appartengono. Con alcuni altri da lui nuouamente ritrouate. Et i modi, che deue tenere il mastro per ben insegnare. [f. F7^r] Nella Stamparia de i Rampazetti, ad instantia di Gio. Antonio de gli Antonij: Venetia.

obl. 8°. A–F⁴. [48] ff.

Milano, Bib. della civica raccolta delle stampe A. Bertarelli. Torino, Bib. civica centrale. London, British Library, C.119. c.7. Chicago, Newberry Library. New Haven, Yale University. London, Nicolas Barker.

A note by the printer in the British Library copy (A3^r), 'Il stampatore ai lettori', explains that this edition is *ridotto in manco volume* by omitting some features, and says that it is not the first that he has printed ('havendo io . . . stampato altre volte il libro che insegna a scriuere, composto da M. Giouan Francesco Cresci'). It does not include the big inscriptional capitals (*maiuscole antiche romane*) nor the copperplate *capriccio di molti groppi* of the Roman edition. The quality of printing is lower than that of the Roman editions, and the four-part woodcut borders are often wrongly assembled. A copy in the possession of Nicolas Barker bears the handwritten date 'Settembre 1580' on the verso of the colophon leaf.

Il perfetto scrittore, an undated work, needs much more detailed examination. Every copy that has been examined

47. The *vaghissimo capriccio di molti groppi accomodati sopra la forma d'un alfabeto maiuscolo cancellaresco da lui ritrovato* of the title. These plates are sometimes found bound separately. The 'Note on the printing history of Cresci's *Il perfetto scrittore* and Andrea Marelli's knot alphabet' by Eva Frojmovic (1997) is apparently based only on knowledge of the two copies of the Roman edition at the Bodleian Library and the Venetian edition at the British Library. It does not contribute to the discussion of variant editions and their dating. Her notion that the 'knot alphabet' reproduced on copper plates was designed by its engraver, Andrea Marelli, is contradicted in *Il perfetto scrittore* by Cresci's own 'Discorso delle maiuscole cancellaresche a groppi' in which he states that Marelli's invention is limited to the figured borders, and also by his remarks in *L'Ida* (1622), pp. 47–8, where he says that he designed it *per mio capriccio*, that it took him two years to *trovarne l'inventione*, and that Cardinal Salviati was so delighted with it that he gave him 180 *scudi* to have it engraved in copper.

or of which a description has been published contains minor variations from the others (reset text in different type, sometimes with the same initials, sometimes with different ones, reset and variant title pages, slight damage to some blocks), so that it is clear that, like the *Essempiare*, it had many successive reprintings. The combination of woodcut borders and text vary from copy to copy, so it is clear that the two were printed in separate impressions. The only dates that appear in the text of the the Roman editions are those of October and November 1570 in the dedications among the preliminary matter, and March 1571, the date of the privilege issued by Paul V which appears in some copies. (There are dates in the texts of the specimens of *lettera mercantile bastarda*, the latest of which relates to a payment due to Bartolomeo Cresci in January 1570.) A date of [c. 1575] for its Venetian edition is suggested by the British Library, but allowance must be made for the several different editions that evidently appeared in Rome during the 1570s before the blocks were transferred to Venice, and a later date seems likely. Francesco Rampazetto printed the first known Venetian edition of the *Essempiare* in 1575 (see above). By the date of the edition of 1578 he had evidently died, since it was printed for Giovanni Antonio de gli Antonij by the 'the heirs of Rampazetto'. Theirs was presumably the printing-office of 'i Rampazetti' at which the Venetian edition of the *Perfetto scrittore* was printed.⁴⁸ The handwritten date of September 1580 in one copy noted above gives a *terminus a quo* for the Venetian edition.

Il perfetto cancellaresco corsiuo

Roma, 1579

Il Perfetto Cancellaresco Corsiuo di Giovanni Francesco Cresci, gentilhuomo milanese, copioso d'ogni maniera di lettere appartenenti à Secretarij, adornato di bellissime, & vaghe Inuentioni di Caratteri, & collegamenti, nuouamente posti in vso dallo stesso autore, con vn' breue discorso circa l'honore, & vtile, che apporta al Secretario lo scriuer' bene. Et con vtili dechiarationi quando s'hanno ad vsare dette diuerse forme di lettere, & perche. Libro terzo. Appresso Pietro Spada ad instantia dell'Autore, & di M. Pietro Paulo Palombo: Roma, 1579.

obl. 4°. [xii] pp, 52 ff. The dedication dated Rome, 1 August 1579. 6 leaves of examples are dated 'Roma 1577'. f. [51] ends 'In Roma l'anno 1579. Il Cresci scrisse'.

Bologna, Bib. universitaria. Firenze, Bib. nazionale centrale, Rossi-Cassigoli 1703. Milano, Bib. Ambrosiana, S.C.C. I 7. Roma, Bib. nazionale centrale, 71. 4. A. 11. Venezia, Bib. Marciana. London, British Library, C.31.a.41. London, National Art Library (Victoria & Albert Museum) G.29.00.9 (photographs of the Ambrosiana copy, made in 1949). Chicago, Newberry Library. New Haven, Yale University Library. New York Public Library, Washington, DC, Library of Congress.

A copy is listed by Marzoli, *Calligraphy 1535–1885*, item 7, and is presumably with the rest of her collection at the University of Texas, Austin.

48. The British Museum *Short-title catalogue of books printed in Italy 1465 to 1600* (London, 1958) lists works with the imprint of Francesco Rampazetto until 1572 to '1575?', of the 'Heirs of Francesco Rampazetto' 1578 to 1584, and of Giovanni Antonio Rampazetto from 1583. A separate imprint of the 'House of Rampazetti' (that is, with the imprint Nella Stamperia de' Rampazetti) is listed with only three titles, of 1581, 1583 and the Venetian *Il perfetto scrittore* of '1575?'.

Avertimenti

Venezia, 1579

Avertimenti di Gio. Francesco Cresci, scrittore, gentilhuomo milanese intorno li errori, et false opinioni di alcuni commessi nella professione dello scrivere.

Nuovamente posto in luce. Libro quarto. In Venetia, appresso Pietro Dehuchino, ad instantia dell'Autore, & di M. Pietro Paolo Palombo libraro 1579.

obl 4°. +, ++4, A–H4. Title, pp. [iii]–[xvi], ff. 1–32 (printed both sides). Dedication dated Venice, 4 November 1579.

Bologna, Bib. universitaria. Firenze, Bib. nazionale centrale. Milano, Bib. Ambrosiana, S.C.C. I 7. Roma, Bib. universitaria Alessandina. London, National Art Library (Victoria & Albert Museum) G.29.00.9 (photographs of the Ambrosiana copy, made in 1949). Morison-Barker, p. 107. The text is given in translation in Osley, *Scribes and sources*, pp. 261–79.

Il quarto libro di lettere formatelle

Roma, 1596

Il quarto libro di lettere formatelle & cancellaresche corsiu. del S. Gioan Francesco Cresci gentilhuomo milanese. Nuouamente posto in luce per Siluio Valesi Parmeggiano. Con vn' alfabeto di lettere maiuscole a groppi & vno di lettera ecclesiastica del R. P. D. Fulgentio Valesi monaco cisterciense. Roma, per Pietro Spada. Ad instantia di detto Siluio. Lanno 1596.

obl. 4°. 13.3 × 19.7 cm. [iv] pp., [31] ff.

n4, A–G4, plus one unsigned leaf. Sheet G is signed H, with G overprinted by hand.

Chicago, Newberry Library, Wing ZW 535 .C88

Osley, *Luminario*, p. 82n. Morison-Barker, pp. 108, 134–5. Cresci does not appear to have been involved in the making of this edition. The date 1579 appears on ff. 3, 4, 7, 8 and 31, and 1580 on ff. 15, 22 and 23, sometimes with the addition of 'Roma'. The introductory note by Valesi says that these *mostre* by Cresci which had 'come into his hands', and which he has not spared expense in publishing, were 'buried for sixteen years'. He also says that if these models were engraved on copper by a skilled artist they would render the thin strokes better, but would not on that account be more perfect, because (here he accepts the argument that so preoccupied Cresci in his later publications) *il legno tira più al naturale da esso Rame*. There is an alphabet of rotunda gothic or lettera ecclesiastica in capitals and small letters, but the *lettere maiuscole a groppi* of the title do not appear in this copy.

L'idea

Milano, 1622

L'idea con le circonstanze naturali, che a quella si ricercano, per voler legittimamente posseder l'Arte maggiore, e minore dello scriuere. Di Gio. Francesco Cresci, inuentore de' veri caratteri Latini formati, cancellareschi, e corsiu, e maestro de' migliori scrittori d'Italia. Nella quale si discuoprono i grandissimi errori di tutti coloro, che per mancamento naturale di tal potenza, & sue circonstanze nelle loro opere, massimamente in quelle stampate in rame, hanno commessi. In Milano, per Gio. Angelo Naua. M DC XX II.

4°. a4, A–L4, [M]2. pp. [viii], 92.

London, National Art Library (Victoria & Albert Museum), RC. H. 41. Milano, Bib. Braidense, XM 6 34n.3. Paris,

Bibliothèque nationale de France (2 copies, V-10520, V-13885). Bibliothèque Mazarine. Faculté de Médecine. Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University.

Pages [iii]–[v] Dedication by Cresci's son, Giovanni Francesco, to Cardinal Federico Borromeo, Milano, 22 February 1622. [vi]–[viii] contents.

There are two related manuscripts for this text in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milano:

Idea, con le circonstanze naturali che a quella si ricercano per uoler legittimamente possedere l'arte maggiore e minore dello scrivere. Di gio: franco Crescj inuentor de i ueri Caratterj latini formati et corsiu, et perceptore de i migliori maestri di scriuer in l'Italia. La qal discuopre i grandmi Errori di tutti coloro che per per mancamento natural di tal potenza et sue circumstanze nelle loro opere massimamente di quelle stampate in rame han commessi.

Another draft title is pasted on f. iii of this MS:

Idea del perfetto scrittore per l'arte maggior et minor dello scriuere di Gio: Francesco Crescj inuentore de i ueri caratteri Latini formati et corsiu et precettore dei migliori maestri di scriuere in Italia. La quale discopre i grandissimi errori di tutti colore che per mancamento naturale di tal potenza et sue circumstanze nella professione del ben scriuere per le loro opere han commessj Fa anco toccar con mano quanto siano falsi i lineamente di tutti i caratteri che al presente in diuersi essemplari intagliati in rame si ueggono stampati: et per qual ragione riescono piu naturali quei che nel legno sono bene intagliati et di lige[n]za impressi. Opera necessarissima da esser intesa da chi perfettamente desidera fuggir ogni errore per esser buon scrittore.

24 × 18.5 cm. [i–viii], [1–60] ff.

Milano, Bib. Ambrosiana, N 341 sup.

This is a rough draft, apparently in Cresci's own gothic cursive hand, with many fragments of alternative texts pasted in, and some loose fragments. A note at the foot of f. 54^v reads, 'Finito adi 18 ottobre 1595.'

[L']*Idea, con le circonstanze naturali che a quella si ricercano per voler legittimamente possedere l'arte maggiore e minore dello scrivere ...*

23 × 18 cm. [i–iv], [1–94] ff.

Milano, Bib. Ambrosiana, Z 173 sup.

This is a calligraphic fair copy in a *testeggiata* cursive, much edited, of the preceding text. The preface by Cresci's son Giovanni Francesco is dated 22 Feb 1620, and it seems likely that the manuscript is in his own hand. There is strong evidence that this MS was used as printer's copy for *L'idea*, 1622. There are editorial alterations and deletions apparently in the hand of Cardinal Federigo Borromeo on the title page and in the text which were followed in the printed edition, and page and sheet divisions are marked at intervals which also correspond exactly with those of the printed edition. Damage to the manuscript is consistent with rough handling in the printing office: the binding is loose, and there are inky fingerprints and faint offset impressions of lines of text on the pages. The text of the imprimatur of the printed edition, dated 2 November 1621, is written informally on the verso of the title page, f. [1^v].

Caratteri ed esempi

Milano, 1617, 1638

Caratteri ed esempi del famoso Gio. Francesco Cresci

Milanese nuouamente datti in luce da Filippo Lomazzo, con l'aggiunta d'alcune regole pertinente alla penna, ed altre cose che si richiedono per saper ben scriuere. Come si faccino le soprascrittioni alle lettere per ogni grado di persone, et una breue regola del modo d'adoperare i libri mercantili. In Milano, appresso Filippo Lomazzo. [1617].

obl. 8° [40] ff.

Milano, Bib. Braidense, AB XVI 37.

Apparently unrecorded. Dedication by Lomazzo to 'D. Catterina Secchi, monaca in S. Vittore di Meda' dated 'di Milano il dì 10 Agosto 1617'. In his address to *i virtuosi gioveni* Lomazzo says that the models (*cartine scritte di sua mano*) on which they were based were presented to him by one Bocalini shortly before he died. Examples of writing, rectos only. Many of them are signed by Cresci and dated 'Milano 1580', [21] ff. *Regole, et avertimenti facilissimi di Marcello Scalino da Camerino cittadino Romano*, [16] pp. *Instruione delle inscriptions et soprascrittioni*, [16] pp.

Caratteri, et essempli del famoso scrittore Gio. Francesco

Cresci nobile milanese. Nuouamente datti in luce da Gio. Battista Bidelli. Con l'aggiunta d'alcune regole pertinenti alla penna, & altre cose, che si richiedono per saper ben scriuere. In Milano, Per Filippo Ghisolfi; ad istanza di Gio. Battista Bidelli, 1638.

obl. 8°. A-D⁸. [64] pp.

London, British Library, C.119.c.5.(1.) Chicago, Newberry Library.

Reprinted from the blocks of the edition of 1617.

Calligraphic fragments in Latin and Italian

19.8 × 27.7 cm. [12]ff. 15 undated fragments, all save two of which are on vellum. In a vellum binding which appears to be later than the fragments. Milano, Bib. Ambrosiana, S.P. II 40. The styles of the hands are not named, but (following the nomenclature of *Il perfetto scrittore*) they are *antica tonda*, *cancellaresca antica*, *cancellaresca formata*, *mercantile bastarda*, and *ecclesiastica* [i.e. rotunda gothic]. Some fragments are signed 'Crescius' or 'Cresci'. The fragments are mounted on 12 vellum leaves, many of them framed by 'windows', so that writing on both sides of the leaf can be seen. Leaf [1] has an elaborate all-over pen decoration with foliage, animals and putti, and a motto, 'humit' (= humiliter?) which links it to Card. Federigo Borromeo.

See the exhibition catalogue *Aldo Manuzio e il corsivo tipografico 1501–2001: la creazione del libro moderno* (Milano: Pinacoteca Ambrosiana, 2001), 37. A collection of similar fragments appears to have been the basis of the *Caratteri et esempi* published by Lomazzo in 1617 (see above).

Facsimiles

Essempare di piu sorti lettere. [Venice, 1578]; edited, with an introduction and translation, by A. S. Osley. London, 1968.

Il perfetto scrittore. Rome, c. 1570. Nieuwkoop: Miland Publishers, 1972. Facsimile of a copy 'in private possession'.

A Renaissance alphabet, Il perfetto scrittore, parte seconda [by] Giovanni Francesco Cresci, with an introduction by Donald M. Anderson (Madison, etc, 1971). Reproduces the two printings of the *maiuscole antiche romane* and the 'Discorso delle maiuscole antiche romane'. 'Discourse on ancient Roman capitals', translation of the 'Discorso' by Robert J. Rodini.

Manuscript sources

Account of Cresci with Cales the stationer (Cales Cerni or Cerny), 1556–8. Arch. Bibl. Vat. II, f. 345 (n.s. 9); f. 362 (n.s. 25). Wardrop, pp. 13, 27, fig. 8.

Motus proprius of Paul IV, March 1556. Arch. Vat. Div. Cam. 178, ff. 151^v, 152. Wardrop, p. 13.

Motus proprius of Pius IV, 25 March 1560. Arch. Vat. Div. Cam. 191, ff. 85^v, 86. Wardrop, p. 14.

Payment, 'per merce di hauer scritto 375 carte in seruitio della libreria uaticana', 15 scudi, 30 April 1568. 'Per iscritture fatte in seruitio della libreria Vaticana', 28 scudi, 26 August 1568. Roma, Archivio di Stato, Camerali I, reg. 1804, ff. 22^v, 67.

Letters of Cresci to Card. Guglielmo Sirleto, 1572. Vat. Lat. 6185, ff. 123, 124, 134. Wardrop, pp. 27–8.

Letters of Cresci to Card. Federigo Borromeo. Milano, Bib.

Ambrosiana, G. 261 inf., 10, 45, 171; 194 inf., 83; G. 252 inf., 17. 23 sett. 1603, 22 lug. 1605, 18 nov. 1605, 10 magg. 1606, 7 febb. 1607.

Letters of Borromeo to Cresci, 261 inf., 35 (45), 1 giugno 1597, 261 inf., 37 (84), 7 giugno 1597.

Federigo Borromeo, 'Ephemerides litterariae', Milano, Bib.

Ambrosiana, MS. F. 20 inf. Capo 18, ff. 98–111, 'Delle qualità del Cresci'. Quoted in, *Aldo Manuzio e il corsivo tipografico 1501–2001: la creazione del libro moderno*. Milano: Pinacoteca Ambrosiana, 2001.

Congregatio de Propaganda Fide, Roma. Archivio, Stamperia III, f. 744. An inventory of the stock of the printing office made in 1768 includes among *intagli in legno* in the Armario Secondo Superiore an *Intaglio in legno dell'Alfabeto Latino gotico di Majuscole in due Legni, preso da Gio. Fran.co Cresci*, and ten wood blocks showing Bollatico.

Manuscripts written by Cresci in his office of scriptor latinus

Letters of Pope Sixtus, Martyr, 1556. Wardrop, p. 13.

Life of St Anthony the Hermit, 1556. Wardrop, p. 13.

Life of St Dionysius the Areopagite, 1556. Wardrop, p. 13.

Letters of Ivo (St Ivo or Yves of Chartres), 1558. Wardrop, p. 13.

Cassiodorus, *De institutione divinarum litterarum*, 1558. Cod. Vat. Lat. 569. Wardrop, p. 15, figs. 10, 11.

Titles of printed works by Cresci

Esemplare di piu sorti lettere. Roma, 1560, 1563, 1566, 1568. Venezia, 1575, 1578, 1583, 1600

Il perfetto scrittore. Roma, c. 1571. Venezia c. 1575 or later?

Il perfetto cancellaresco corsiuo. Roma, 1579

Avertimenti. Venezia, 1579

Il quarto libro di lettere formatelle. Roma, 1596

Caratteri ed esempi. Milano, 1617, 1638

L'idea. Milano, 1622

Inscriptional alphabets in Rome in the 16th and 17th centuries

If the lettering that survives on the former entrance to the Ambrosiana Library is indeed the original inscription to which Cresci refers in his letter to Borromeo, a number of questions arise. If his inscriptional lettering had so high and so lasting a reputation, as Servidori indicated in 1789, did Cresci design other inscriptions, and can these be identified? How was it that his pupil, Luca Orfei da Fano, was able to adopt his models, without reference to his master, and to claim it as his own? And what was the effect of this model in Rome?

This is not the place for a detailed account of inscriptional lettering in Rome from the later 16th century onwards, although such an exercise would be worth undertaking for a number of reasons.⁴⁹ The first is the remarkable and consistent quality of much of the public lettering that is still such a conspicuous feature of many Roman buildings. It would be useful to discover more from surviving accounts about their designing and making. We still do not know the names of the designers of the majestic inscription on the façade of St Peter's, made in about 1610, or of one of the most perfect of all the examples of lettering in this style, the lead-filled letters of the front or *mostra* of the *fontanone*, the 'big fountain' of the Acqua Paola on the Gianicolo, completed about 1612 (figure 17, opposite). Another is that many individual pieces are currently at risk, either from over-zealous restoration or from an active and misguided programme of 'renewal' which involves the removal and even the destruction of the originals and their replacement by work that is a travesty.⁵⁰ There should at least be a systematic photographic record of such a remarkable corpus of inscriptions.

My purpose here is simply to provide a brief list of the printed models for this particular style that were published between the issue of Cresci's *Essempolare* in 1560 and Antonozzi's *Giardino de' scrittori* in 1638, and to add a few notes on the identities of such of the designers of the inscriptions themselves of which we have some knowledge.

49. James Mosley, 'Trajan revived', *Alphabet*, 1964, pp. 17–48, was an early attempt to approach the subject, which is also discussed, with some excellent illustrations, by Armando Petrucci, *La scrittura, ideologia e rappresentazione* (Torino, 1986), chapters 4 and 5, pp. 43–53, English edition, *Public lettering: script, power and culture* (Chicago, 1993), and by Silvano Fassina, 'Roman capitals: five itineraries in Rome', *Calligrafia*, no. 7/8 (Roma, 1994); reprinted as *Roman capitals* (Seattle, WA: LetterPerfect Design, 1997). Text in Italian and English.

50. Orfei's inscriptions on the obelisk in Piazza S. Pietro have recently been repainted in a thick black pigment in a manner that obscures the detail of the original incised lettering. Many of the older street names in the more fashionable areas, which were cut in marble and were in no need of renewal, have been removed and some very poorly designed substitutes put in their place. The most regrettable recent loss, which relates to an earlier period, is

of the exquisite inscriptions on the Ponte Sisto bearing the name of Pope Sixtus IV, one of which was dated 1475. Both are illustrated by Silvano Fassina (*Roman capitals*, p. 21), and one by Petrucci (*La scrittura*, fig. 14). See the comment of Paul Shaw, who prints a photograph of his own made in 1991: 'There is speculation that this inscription, and its matching one on the other side of the bridge, were designed by Sanvito. Both were removed sometime in 1999 or 2000 as part of the restoration of the bridge. They have both been replaced by hideously ugly "copies" that do not look at all like the originals. These new inscriptions have been erected in a different location as well. The whereabouts of the originals are a mystery, though the superintendent in charge of the restoration claims they are safe in storage.' ('Bartolomeo Sanvito', *Letter Arts Review* (Greensboro, NC), vol. 19, no. 2 (2004), p. 19). It should be said that – as the published images show – the tablets were badly cracked and were frequently being covered with sprayed and felt-tip graffiti.



Figure 17. Inscription of the Fontana Paola, Rome, c. 1612.

In 1962 the Milan bookseller Carla Marzoli published under her imprint 'La Bibliofila' a catalogue of a remarkable collection of writing books, chiefly Italian, which had come into her possession.⁵¹ Her record of the detailed research that she undertook in compiling it make the catalogue an invaluable work of reference. The material attracted the attention of Stanley Morison, who was then attempting to complete his own study of the subject,⁵² and he wrote an introduction to the catalogue in which he made much of the work of Luca Orfei,⁵³ copies of whose *Alfabeto delle maiuscole romane and Varie iscrizioni* were included in the collection. Marzoli also published, for the first time, an account of a manuscript alphabet by Orfei in the Vatican Library.⁵⁴ Among the titles offered in the catalogue were Orfei's *Alfabeto delle maiuscole antiche romane* (c. 1587),⁵⁵ and his *Varie iscrizioni del S. N. Sisto V* of about 1589. Luca Orfei of Fano, as he commonly styled himself – a reminder that, like Felice Peretti, Pope Sixtus V, he was a native of the Marche region of Italy – was one of those who were responsible for applying a uniform style of inscriptional lettering to many of the buildings of the reign of Sixtus. The engravings of several of the inscriptions that he designed which

51. The complete collection was later sold to the Harry R.ansom collection of the Humanities Research Center, Austin, Texas.

52. The work published posthumously, with much additional editorial work, by Nicolas Barker in 1990. See note 5.

53. Marzoli and Morison gave the name as 'Horfei', following the author's own usage, and I followed their example. But Cresci used 'Orfei', which is the modern form of the name, in *L'idea* (1622), and so

did Armando Petrucci in the facsimile edition of the *Alfabeto* (1986); and since this is the spelling that the publication of this work has helped to establish as a heading in many libraries, it seems best to adopt it for current use.

54. Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS. Lat. 8851.

55. Reprinted in facsimile with an introduction by Armando Petrucci (Milano: Il Bibliofilo, 1986).

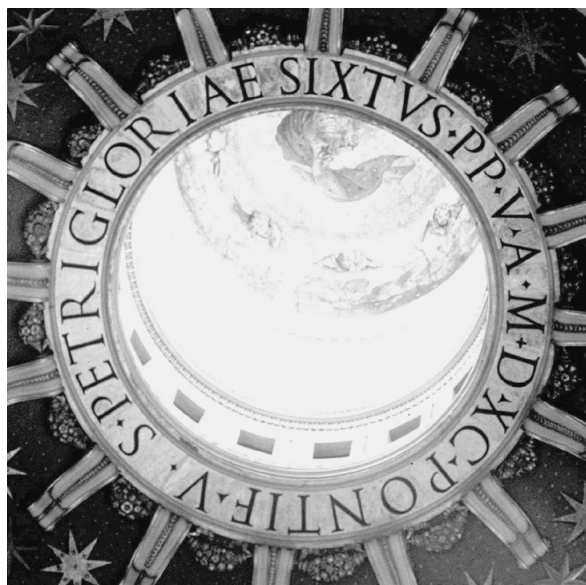


Figure 18. Luca Orfei, inscription round the base of the lantern of the cupola, dated 1590, S. Pietro, Rome.

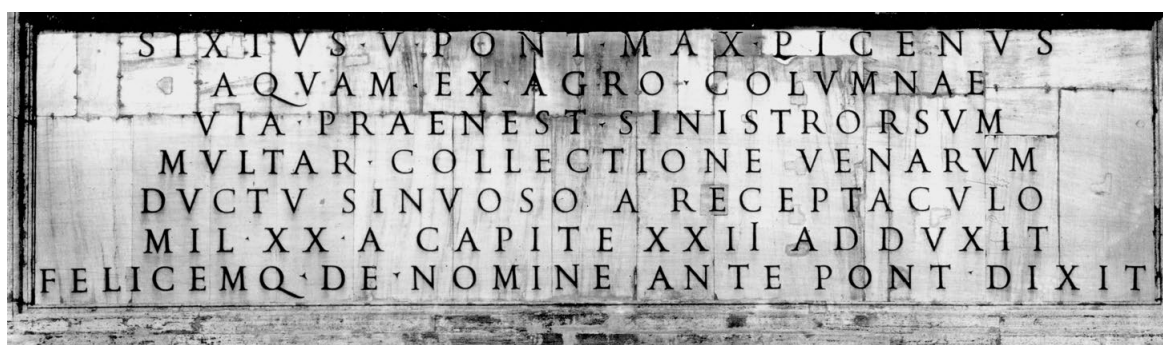


Figure 19. Luca Orfei, inscription on the Fontana dell'Acqua Felice, Rome, dated 1587.

appear in his book include the large panel which forms a conspicuous part of the *mostra* of the Fontana dell'Acqua Felice (figure 19), dated 1587, which bears his signature,⁵⁶ and the internal *occhio* at the foot of the lantern of the cupola of St Peter's which records its completion in 1590 (figure 18).

Marzoli also recorded the existence of a manuscript alphabet by Orfei, dedicated to Sixtus V, in the Vatican Library⁵⁷ in which, 'having devoted his life to the study of the antique capitals', Orfei undertakes 'to execute a set of capitals equal in beauty to those of the ancients'. In the preface to his manuscript alphabet, and implicitly in his printed *Alfabeto* too, Orfei claims credit for its design. 'Orfei's claim to have contrived the design of these capitals may be admitted', writes Morison. 'It is in the highest degree unlikely that such a man would make such a claim in such a place at such a time, if it were bogus. We may assume that Orfei was entitled to what credit there may be for the design of these capitals.'⁵⁸ Morison argued that Orfei's inscriptional work marked a departure from the 'Roman inscriptional capital' of which the revival in Italy dates from the second half of the fifteenth century, and he offers the interpretation that on the obelisk before San Pietro, 'consistently with the invocation of the Holy Cross in the text of the four inscriptions and the placing of the large emblem at the obelisk's extreme top, the Sixtine departure from the

56. Mosley, 'Trajan revived', p. 24 (note 22). Like that of the later Fontana Paola, the architectural composition of this fountain is based on a Roman triumphal arch, with a big panel for the inscription.

57. Vat. Lat. 5541. Orfei's MS. is listed in volume VI of the handwritten inventory of manuscripts on open shelves in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana: '5541. LVCÆ Orfei Fanen Palatij Apostolici scriptoria Literae Maiuscolae ad Sixtum Quintum.'

58. Marzoli, *Calligraphy*, Introduction, p. 24.



Figure 20. Luca Orfei, inscription on the obelisk in Piazza S. Pietro.

proportions of the then admired letters on the Trajan column was deliberate, authoritative and Christian'.⁵⁹

Morison's introduction was written when his health was worsening and some indulgence towards its minor inaccuracies is due.⁶⁰ He wrote fervently of Orfei, 'a priest of some learning and much virtuosity', as being responsible for a style of lettering that is publicly seen for the first time on the monuments of the papacy of Sixtus V (1585–90), notably on the bases of the four Egyptian obelisks that were re-erected in front of San Pietro (figure 20), Santa Maria Maggiore, San Giovanni Laterano and Santa Maria del Popolo, on modern additions to the Antonine and Trajan columns,⁶¹ and on some of the new public works, including the completion of the so-called Acqua Felice,⁶² and the Vatican Library.

But a comparison with the large woodcut alphabet of the 'maiuscole antiche romane' in the second part of Cresci's *Il perfetto scrittore*, c. 1571, shows clearly that these engraved letters or a related design by Cresci must have been the source of Orfei's alphabet – and Orfei, as Cresci proclaimed in print,⁶³ had been one of his many pupils. Does Orfei's style mark a departure from the 'Trajan' letter? His inscriptions for the obelisk before San Pietro, as cut, and as drawn in his manuscript (but not in the printed *Alfabeto*) reproduce the unseriffed top of M and N that is found in the inscription of the column but in none of the earlier alphabets of 'antique' capitals.⁶⁴ Moreover the feature that, above all others, distinguishes the style that Morison describes as 'Sixtine', and which is seen in the highly characteristic lettering of the later building of Rome, is the distinctively large bowl to R which is a feature of the Trajan letter and of many of the most refined inscriptions of the early Imperial period. It does not appear in the alphabets of Feliciano, Moyllus or Pacioli. Similar claims may be made for other characteristic letters in this alphabet, such as the narrow E and the relatively narrow and slightly forward-tilting S.

It seems equally clear that there was an essential link between the alphabet published in the *Perfetto scrittore* and the work in Rome

59. Marzoli, *Calligraphy*, Introduction, p. 25.

60. Cresci would not have been pleased to find himself named as the first to employ copperplate printing to reproduce his new calligraphy.

61. Like the name of St Peter that, in Morison's words, converts the Trajan Column 'into a pedestal for his statue'. (Marzoli, *Calligraphy*, Introduction, p. 25.)

62. As Dr D'Onofrio remarks, Felice Peretti, Pope Sixtus V, in giving his own first name to work begun and nearly completed during the reign of Gregory XIII, showed a characteristic lack of generosity towards his predecessor. (Cesare D'Onofrio, *Le fontane di Roma*, 3rd edn, Roma: Romana Società Editrice, 1986, p. 200.)

63. *L'Idée* (1622), p. 91.

64. Though as Paul Shaw points out, there are instances of such capitals in the illuminated work of Sanvito's contemporary Tophio ('Bartolomeo Sanvito', 2003, p. 47) and also in an inscription of about 1471 that may be associated with Andrea Bregno ('Bartolomeo Sanvito (part 2)', 2004, p. 20).

Figure 21 (right). Inscription dated 1711 on the fountain in Piazza della Rotonda, Rome.

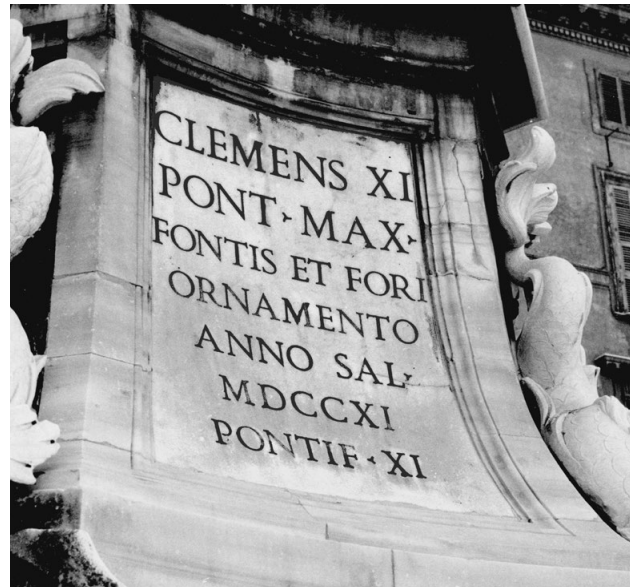
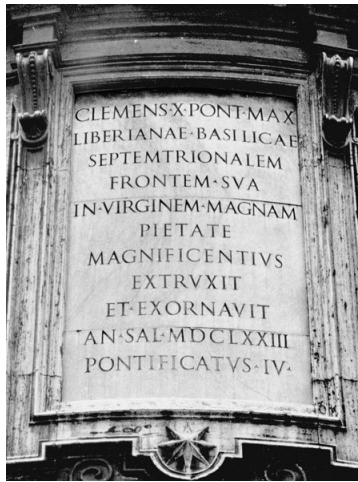


Figure 22 (above). Inscription dated 1673 on the north-west front of S. Maria Maggiore, Rome.



Figure 23. Inscription at the base of the façade of S. Giovanni in Laterano, Rome, c. 1735.

65. Petrucci, *La scrittura*, figs. 75, 78. Mosley, 'Trajan revived', fig. 26.

66. As I did myself in 1964, in 'Trajan revived', p. 28. In fact, as Dr Cesare D'Onofrio kindly told me in a letter of 1978, the inscription that runs around the interior of S. Pietro was made by a group of mosaic artists directed by the painter Alessandro Agricola, who began work on 31 January 1868 (Archivio R. F., 3° piano, serie 29, vol. 6, cc. 229 ss.). In the twentieth century the style was still employed for the stone-cut street signs of Rome ('Trajan revived', fig. 27), and when I made the acquaintance and subsequent friendship of Donato Cautilli in the marble workshops of the Vatican, he let me have specimens of lettering from the old copper stencils that were still in use for making current designs for inscriptions ('Trajan revived', fig. 24).

during the subsequent centuries of the designers of inscriptional lettering, most of whom are anonymous (figures 21–22) but of whom we know some names: Luca Orfei of course, and also Cesare Domenichi, Fabrizio Badesio and Ventura Sarafellini. It is also the model of the published alphabets not only of Orfei and Domenichi but also of the calligraphers Marc'Antonio Rossi (1598) and Leopardo Antonozzi (1638). It can still be recognized, even though it undergoes some strange developments, in the fat lettering of some title pages of works by Piranesi⁶⁵ and in the similar lettering that appears in the cartouches on the façade of San Giovanni Laterano (figure 23), and in the engraved tablet that dedicates Nolli's new plan of Rome, 1748, to Pope Benedict XIV. It is a 'Roman' letter, in the most local meaning of the term, with examples to be found in the States of the Church as far away as Bologna, but which is almost unknown in the cities beyond, such as Florence, Milan and Venice. In Rome it survived well into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the tradition was so faithfully maintained that one may be excused for accepting the great mosaic inscription that runs along the full extent of the interior entablature of San Pietro as probably work of the early seventeenth century (figure 24, opposite).⁶⁶



Figure 24. Inscription in mosaic on the interior entablature of S. Pietro, Rome, 1868.

In his approach to the Roman capitals Cresci's innovation was to reject the geometric basis that had governed the making of the *lettera antica* from Feliciano to Pacioli, and indeed his calligraphic rival Palatino, and to assert that all that was needed was observation of good examples of ancient inscriptions, and to draw them freely. The result, especially in the alphabet in the *Essempiare*, where the strokes have a relatively robust proportion of 1 : 8, is not a wholly literal rendering of any one antique model. Indeed, as Casamassima notes, in many details, notably in the expressiveness and the movement of the finely-drawn and slightly concave serifs, rounded at the end, there can be detected the sprit of the late Mannerism that is evident in contemporary architecture and sculpture.⁶⁷

But it is in the alphabet of *Il perfetto scrittore*, c. 1571, based on proportions that are closer to those of the inscription of the Trajan Column,⁶⁸ that Cresci produced a model for the later makers of architectural inscriptions in Rome.⁶⁹ A note follows of the designers of whom we have the names.⁷⁰

Luca Orfei

As he proclaimed in his signature, Orfei was from Fano, in the province of Pesaro, in the Marche. A writer of liturgical works for the Sistine Chapel, of which twelve manuscripts have been identified written in part or wholly by him.⁷¹ Their texts are in rotunda gothic, with title pages in inscriptional capitals.⁷² The inscriptions designed by him for the buildings of the papacy of Sixtus V (1585–90) are set out in the *Varie inscrittioni . . . dissegnate in pietra, et dal medesimo fatte intagliare in Rame, per mostrare la lettera antica romana in diuere grandezze & compartimenti*, in an oblong format, the dedication of which to Sixtus is dated 1 January 1589. His manuscript and printed alphabets are described below. Another work, of which no intact copy is known, *De characteribus et litterarum inventoribus ex picturis Bibliothecae Vaticanae liber*, shows the alphabets and their inventors,

67. Casamassima, *Trattati*, p. 73.

68. Casamassima, *Trattati*, p. 74.

69. It is only fair to acknowledge here that Pr Armando Petrucci found my claim that Cresci provided the model for his successors too simplistic an argument. In his introduction to the facsimile of the *Alfabeto delle maiuscole antiche romane* (1986), p. xvii, he set out his case for believing that Orfei derived some inspiration from inscriptions made during an earlier 'Sixtine' pontificate, that of Sixtus IV

(Francesco della Rovere 1471–84), and that later designers of inscriptions in Rome developed their own styles, and were not dependent on Cresci to the extent that I argued in 1964 in 'Trajan revived'. I am not wholly convinced by the first claim (although very willing to concede that the beauty of such inscriptions as those on the Ponte Sisto must have been an inspiration to later letter designers), and I am happy to let readers judge the second.

70. In chapters 4 and 5 of *La scrittura*

(1986), pp. 42–53, Armando Petrucci set out much of what is known about these figures, adding to and sometimes correcting the account I gave in 'Trajan revived' (1964). I have made a few additions from sources that have come to notice more recently.

71. G. M. Llorens, *Capellae Sixtinae codices musicis notis instructi sive manu scripti sive praelo excussi* (Città del Vaticano, 1960), Studi e testi, 202.

72. A. Petrucci, 'Introduzione', to Orfei, *Alfabeto* (Milano, 1986), p. xi.

Figure 25. Ventura Sarafellini, mosaic inscription round the interior of the cupola, S. Pietro, Rome, 1605.



real and mythical, that were painted on the supporting pillars of the ceiling of the new Vatican Library.⁷³ In 1589 (perhaps as a gesture by Sixtus V to the fellow countryman who had made the inscriptions for his buildings) Orfei was appointed as tenor in the choir of the Sistine Chapel, a post he held until his death in November 1608. Some accounts for work undertaken by him during the Papacy of Paul V have been published.⁷⁴

Marc' Antonio Rossi

Marzoli notes that Rossi, who was active in Rome until at least 1640, had a shop for the engraving and sale of prints. His *Giardino de' scrittori* (1638) was dedicated to Cardinal Aldobrandini.

Cesare Domenici

In the text of his two-part manual, *Delle lettere nominate Maiuscole antiche Romane trattato primo, etc.* (1602, 1603), Domenici refers to inscriptions of his own commissioned by Cardinal Cesare Baronio in Roman churches: SS. Nereo, Achilleo & Flavia Domitilla, S. Gregorio. There is some discussion of the spacing of inscriptional lettering.

Ventura Sarafellini

Sarafellini is listed among Italian calligraphers in an 18th-century source, where it is stated that he was from Imola.⁷⁵ From 1618 he is said to have kept a writing school at Rome, in the Scuole Pie, and to have died in 1668.⁷⁶ Records cited by Cesare D'Onofrio show that in 1605 he made the design for the great mosaic inscription TV EST PETRVS . . . that encircles the interior of the cupola of St Peter's (figure 25).⁷⁷ He also designed the long inscription of the exterior

in J. H. P. Pouget, *Dictionnaire des chiffres et de lettres ornées à l'usage de tous les artistes* (Paris, 1767), pp. xlix–cxiv.

76. Petrucci, *La scrittura*, p. 52.

77. 16 sett. 1605. 'A m.o Ventura Sarafellini [d]a Imola sc. 25 di moneta a bon conto de cartoni che fa per le lettere

che si fanno per il fregio della cupola dove va scritto Tu es Petrus ecc.' (Archivio R. F., Serie Armadi, vol. 178, ff. 27^v–51^r ecc.) The attribution to Sarafellini had been published in the 18th century (G. P. Chattard, *Nuova descrizione del Vaticano* (Roma, 1762), vol. i, p. 140).

73. The title page and 23 plates are in the National Art Library, Victoria & Albert Museum, London, albums G.29.ee.25. and 95.c.34. Wood engravings of these alphabets appear in Angelo Rocca, *Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana a Sixto V. Pont. Max. in splendidiore commodioremq. locum translata* (Roma, 1591), pp. 78 ff. Most of them were reprinted in, *Indice de' caratteri, con l'inventori & nomi di essi, esistenti nella Stampa Vaticana & Camerale* (1628).

74. *Fonti per la storia artistica romana al tempo di Paolo V*, a cura di Anna Maria Corbo e Massimo Pomponi (Roma: Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali, Ufficio Centrale per i Beni Archivistici, 1995) pp. 41, 129, 150, 167).

75. Charles Paillasson, 'Notice historique sur les hommes célèbres de toutes les nations de l'Europe, qui, depuis la renaissance des sciences et des arts, se sont distingués dans la configuration des caractères qui composent les diverses Ecritures',



Figure 26. Ventura Sarafellini, inscription of the Ninfeo, Villa Aldobrandini, Frascati, 1619.

'Nymphaeum' made in 1619 for the gardens of the Villa of Cardinal Aldobrandini at Frascati (figure 26).⁷⁸

Fabrizio Badesio

Also known as Badeschi and Badessi. In his time, which appears to extend from about 1609 until the 1630s, Badesio was clearly one of the most celebrated of the designers of inscriptions in Rome, but it remains difficult to be sure which of the surviving inscriptions are his. He had an ecclesiastical office (a 'Benefice') at the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, and accounts recently published show that he was paid for the design of inscriptions there, and also in the Papal Palazzo di Monte Cavallo (the modern Palazzo Quirinale), and in the Vatican (including fountains for the 'Belvedere' and rooms added to the Vatican Library).⁷⁹ In a work on the catacombs of the Vatican of 1635, Francesco Maria Torriggio calls Badesio someone highly skilled in making ancient Roman letters (*assai intendente in far lettere Romane antiche*), a judgement that was echoed (quoting Torriggio) by Servidori in 1789.⁸⁰ No drawings or publications of Badesio are known, but Servidori (1789) shows among his plates an alphabet attributed to Badesio from which selections are shown below on page 154.

Leopardo Antonozzi

Marzoli cites sources that give Antonozzi's origin as Osimo in the province of Ancona (making him a fellow-countryman of Orfei), stating that in 1629 he was in Rome painting miniatures for Pope Urban VIII, and that his death can be placed some time after 1658. He is the only one of the publishers of architectural alphabets to mention Cresci, who by this time must have been a historical figure, known more from his published work than his abrasive personality.

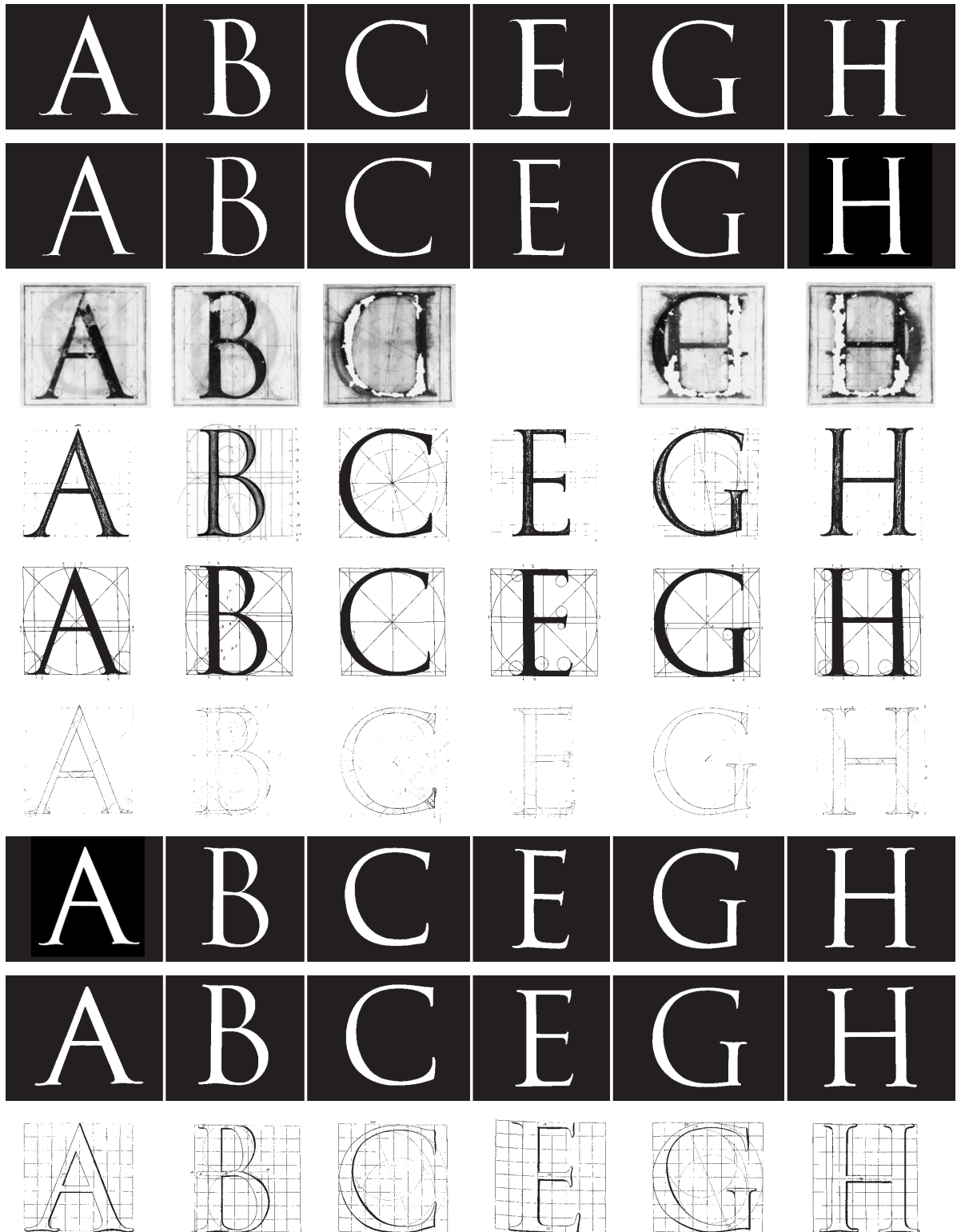
Gregorio Decimoquinto [Gregory XV 1621–3], & di presente Nostro Signore [Urban VIII Barberini 1623–44], nel disegnare l'Iscrittioni, & Epitafij, che si vedono sparsi per Roma, in Chiese, Palazzi, & altri Ediftij nobili, & segnalati. Francesco Maria Torriggio, *Le sacre grotte Vaticane: cioè narrazione delle cose più notabile, che sono sotto il pavimento della Basilica di S. Pietro in Vaticano in Roma* (Roma, appresso Iacomo Facciotti, 1635), p. 356.

78. Petrucci, *La scrittura*, pp. 52–3 (citing Cesare D'Onofrio, *La villa Aldobrandini di Frascati* [1963]), fig. 37.

79. *Fonti per la storia artistica romana al tempo di Paolo V*, a cura di Anna Maria Corbo e Massimo Pomponi. Roma: Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali, Ufficio Centrale per i beni Archivistici, 1995, pp. 50, 51, 99, 133, 149, 159, 173, 185, 201, 223. (Iscrizioni per S. Maria Maggiore, 1609, 1614; per le scale e le sale del palazzo di Monte Cavallo, 1609, 1611; per il palazzo Vaticano, 1609; per la cappella Paolina di S. Maria Maggiore, 1610, 1612; per le fontane del Belvedere, per la nuova Segreteria dei Brevi, per le porte della Dataria e per le stanze aggiunte alla libreria vaticana, 1612; iscrizioni ed epitaffi in più luoghi del palazzo Vaticano, 1614.)

80. E nella piazza di Sua Santità grandemente ampliata e spianata sino alla chiesa di S. Silvestro, veggonsi le due statue nella base di una delle quale ha fatto intagliare nel 1634. nel mese di Aprile questa vera iscrizione, levate quelle due, che contenevano falsità d'Historia. Xystus V. Pont. Max. Colossea haec signa temporis vi deformata restituit, veteribus repositis inscriptionibus è proximis Constantinianis Thermis in Quirinalem aream transtulit. Ann. salut. 1589. Pontif. IV. Opus Phidiae. Opus Praxiteles. Le lettere furono disegnate dal Sig. Fabrizio Badesio Rom. di presente Benefitiato di S. Maria Maggiore, di cui, come di persona assai intendente in far lettere Romane antiche, se ne servi Paolo Quinto [Paul V Borghese 1605–21]

The large inscriptional alphabets published in Italy
during the later 16th and early 17th centuries

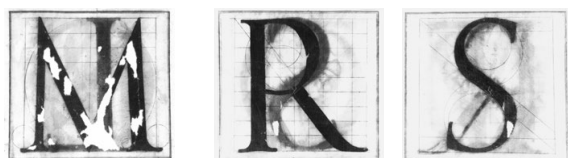




Giovan Francesco Cresci, 1560



Giovan Francesco Cresci, c. 1571



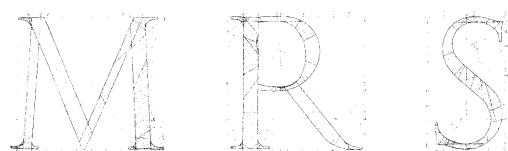
Luca Orfei, c. 1589



Luca Orfei, c. 1589



Marc' Antonio Rossi, 1598



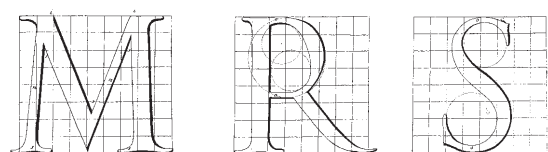
Cesare Domenichi, 1602



Leopardo Antonozzi, 1638



Leopardo Antonozzi, 1638



Fabrizio Badesio, as presented by Domingo Maria Servidori, 1789

Giovan Francesco Cresci, 1560

Esemplare di più sorti lettere. Roma, 1560.

For details of known copies, see the Bibliography, p. 131.

Letter height 65 mm. Proportion about 1:8.5. Alphabet of majuscules, white on black, with the black ink 'held back'.

A note in the 1560 edition, *Avvertimento sopra la stampa de l'Alfabeto delle Maiuscole Antiche*, omitted from later editions, explains the use of the sparingly-applied ink and attributes the cutting of the blocks to Francesco Aureri of Crema.

Facsimile (of one of the editions published in Venice, 1578), ed. A. S. Osley, London: Nattali & Maurice, 1968.



Giovan Francesco Cresci, c. 1571

Il perfetto scrittore. Roma, c. 1571.

For details of known copies, see the Bibliography, pp. 131–2. Facsimile, Nieuwkoop, 1972. The capitals alone are reproduced in D. Anderson, *A Renaissance alphabet*, Madison, 1971.

Alphabet of majuscules (*maiuscole antiche romane*), white on black, repeated with less heavy inking, like the alphabet of 1560. The alphabet is not included in the later editions of *Il perfetto scrittore* published in Venice.

Letter height 124 mm. Proportion about 1 : 10, but the vertical strokes thicken from about 12 to 13 mm as they descend, an effect that was compared by Domenichi in 1602 (who dismissed it as unnecessary) to the thickening or *entasis* of a column.

A collection of drawings apparently dating from the 17th century, copied or traced from *Il perfetto scrittore*, with some added geometrical constructions and notes in Italian, is in the Ekström Collection of the National Library for Psychology and Education, Stockholm. It is described by Ove Hagelin, *The art of writing and drawing: a selection of one hundred books from the Ekström Collection in the National Library for Psychology and Education, Stockholm, a descriptive and annotated catalogue of 16th through 18th century rare and important books on calligraphy ... and related arts* (Stockholm, 1987), p. 23. There are 23 numbered manuscript leaves with constructed letters. Most of the constructions are simple, but those of B, D, G, P and R are very elaborate. Proportion 1 : 10. Letter height: 124 mm. There is no indication of ownership, but there are some notes in Italian in a new-style cancellaresca hand.



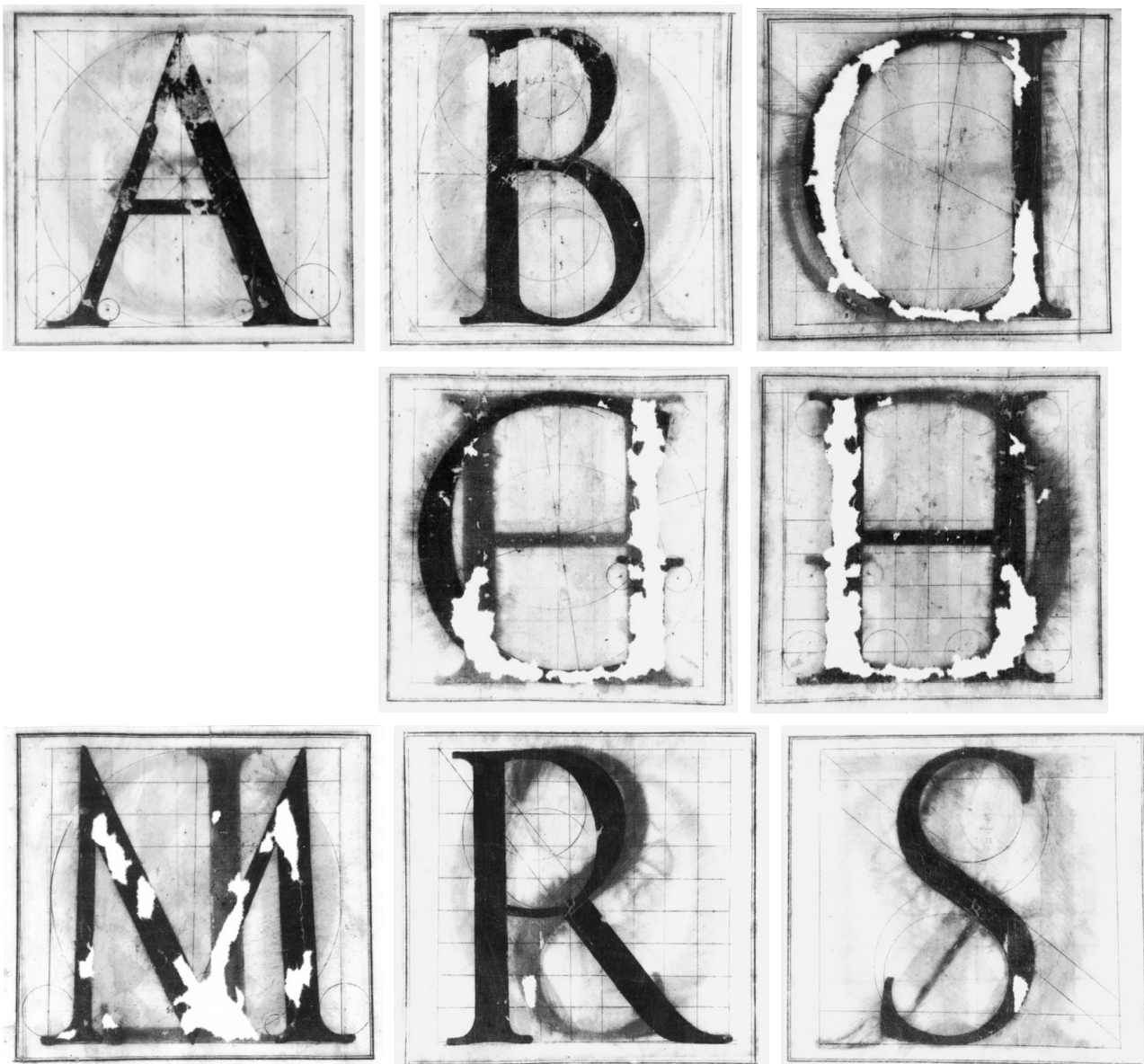
Luca Orfei, c. 1589

Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Vat. Lat. 5541.

27 pages. Dedication, 4 pages showing the texts on the four faces of the pedestal of the Vatican obelisk (ECCE CRVX DOMINI . . . etc), alphabet of majuscules. There is no title page, and the ink has badly corroded the paper, which has been mounted on gauze. The dedication is to 'Pater Beatissime . . .', presumably Sixtus V *d.* 1590, and signed

Lucas Orfeus Fanensis. The text refers to the re-erection of the Vatican obelisk and to the intention to present this work as a printed version of the *maiusculae* used for its inscriptions: *typis imprimenda curabo, ad communem omnium studiosorum utilitatem.*

Alphabet of capitals in the proportion 1 : 9, with simple geometrical construction. According to Marzoli, p. 52, the letters are inscribed within a rectangle of 185 × 180 mm.



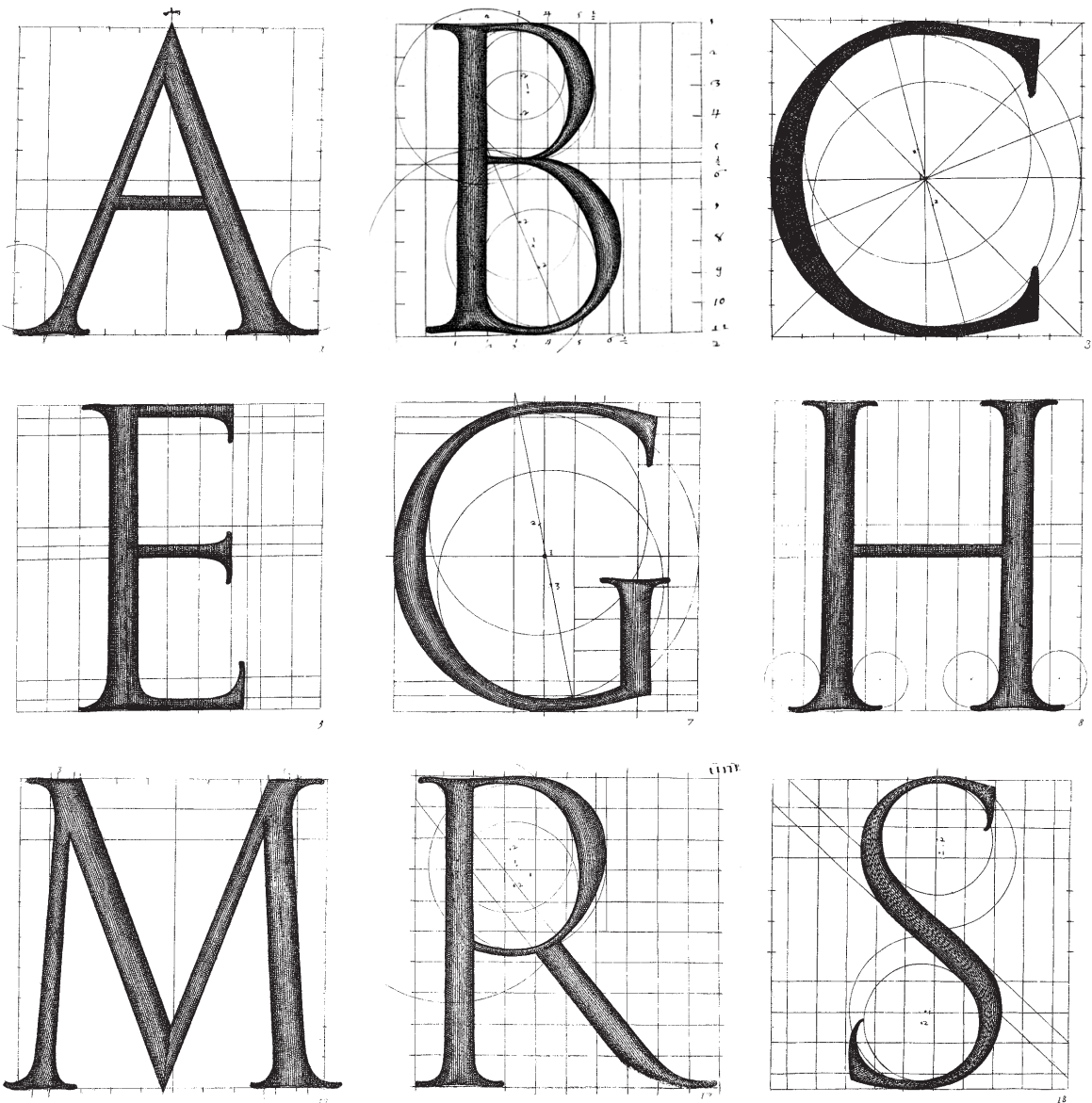
Luca Orfei, c. 1589

Alfabeto delle maiuscole romane del Signor Luca Horfei da Fano, opra molt'utile a' scrittori, pittori, e scultori, nella quale con ragione geometrica s'insegnano le misure di dette lettere. Si stampano in Roma all'insegna del Luppo in Parione. n.p. n.d. [but Roma? c. 1589?]

23 numbered plates, about 13 × 14 cm.

Copies: BL C.119.c.4.

Facsimile, ed. Armando Petrucci. Milano, Il Polifilo, 1986. Letter height 120 mm. Proportion 1 : 10. Copperplate engravings. The geometrical constructions generally correspond with those of the manuscript alphabet, but are slightly more elaborate. The drawing is less subtle than that of the MS, and the endings of the serifs are rounded. Slight entasis in verticals. M and N have shoulder-serifs (which are not present in these letters in the MS, where they follow the style of the letters of the Vatican obelisk and the inscription of the Column of Trajan). The tail of R lacks the entasis of the drawn letter.



Marc' Antonio Rossi, 1598

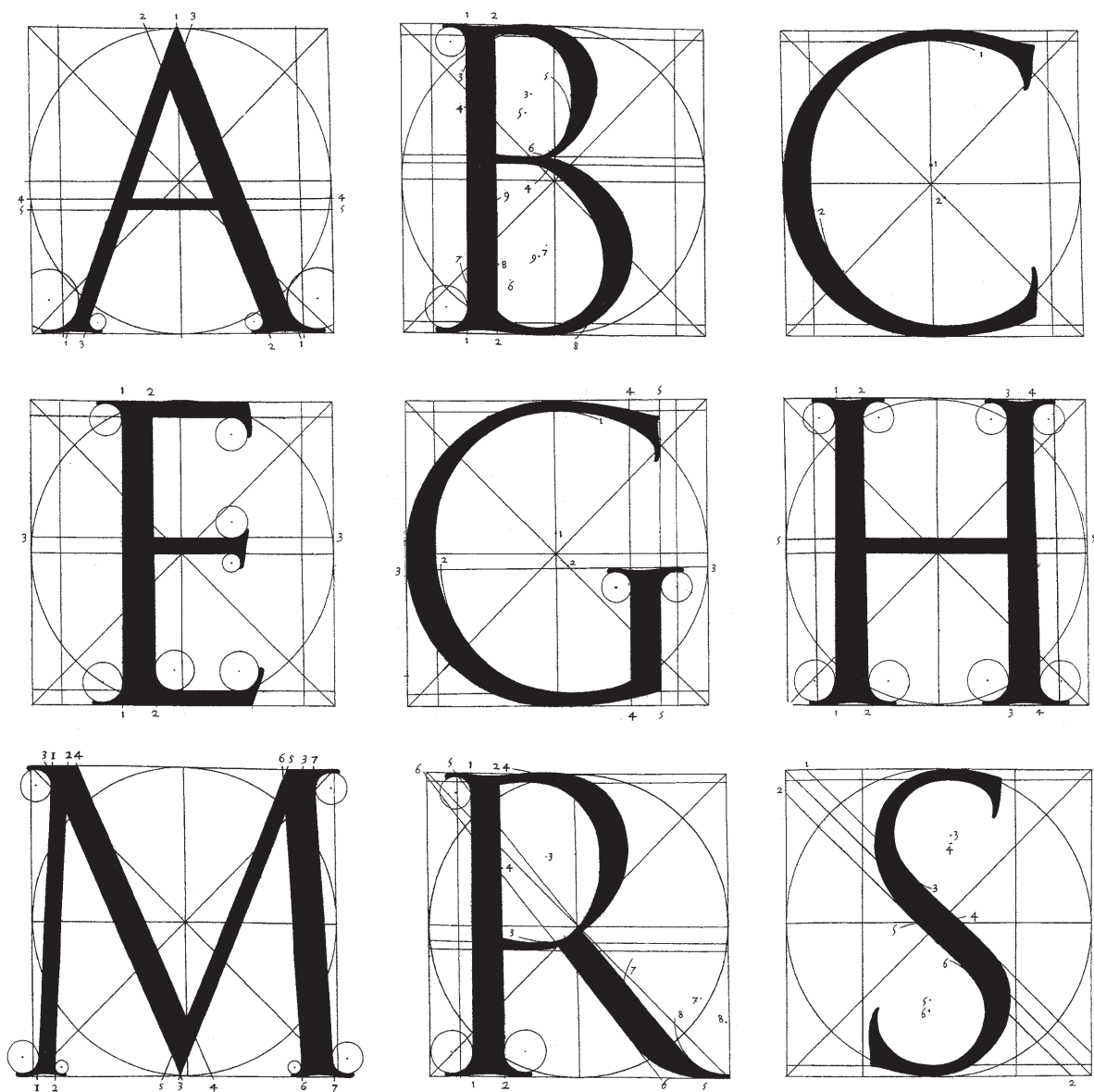
Giardino de' scrittori ... con vn'Alfabeto di Maiuscole

*Antiche Rom. fatte per ragion' di Geometria e stampato
in Roma appresso il proprio autore. Roma, 1598.*

Copies: BL 1322.m.78, Harvard (TypW 525.98.752).

Reproductions: Marzoli pp. 61–5. Casamassima, pl. 87.

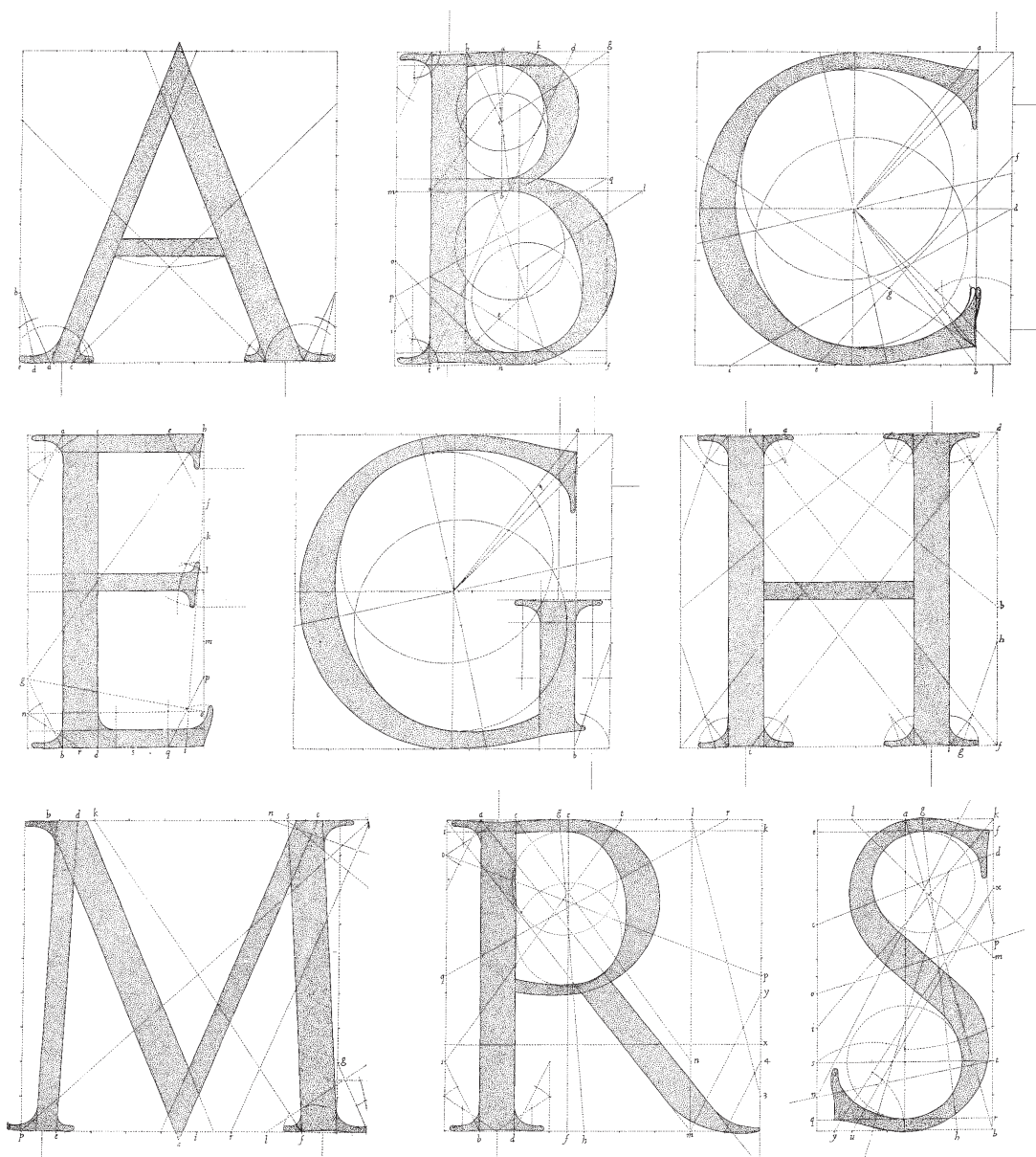
Morison-Barker pl. 13. Copperplate engravings. Letter height
90 mm. Proportion about 1 : 10.



Cesare Domenichi, 1602

Delle lettere nominate Maiuscole antiche Romane trattato primo, etc. (Ortografia delle lettere nominate Maiuscole antiche Romane trattato secondo, etc.) 2 pt. Roma, 1602, 1603. 40.

Copies: BL. 1560/1684. 819.f.24. [Another copy of pt. 2.]
Copperplate engravings. Proportion 1:9. Letter height 144 mm.



Leopardo Antonozzi, 1638

De Caratteri. Roma, 1638.

Copies: 1 Urbino, Biblioteca di Area umanistica dell'Università degli studi. 2 V&AM, London 86.T.17 (lacks the two alphabets of capitals). 3 BnF, Paris Rés-V-1484. 4 HRC Austin NK 3631 A57 A43 1638. (The Marzoli copy.) 5 Newberry Library, Chicago. ZW 635. A635. Contains both alphabets, but the second lacks letter R.

Reproductions: Marzoli pp. 87–9. Morison-Barker pl. 18.

There are two alphabets, engraved on wood in the manner of Cresci's *Il perfetto scrittore*. In the copy in the Bibliothèque nationale de France these are printed in a quite dense grey ink, and not very lightly inked with black ink in Cresci's manner.

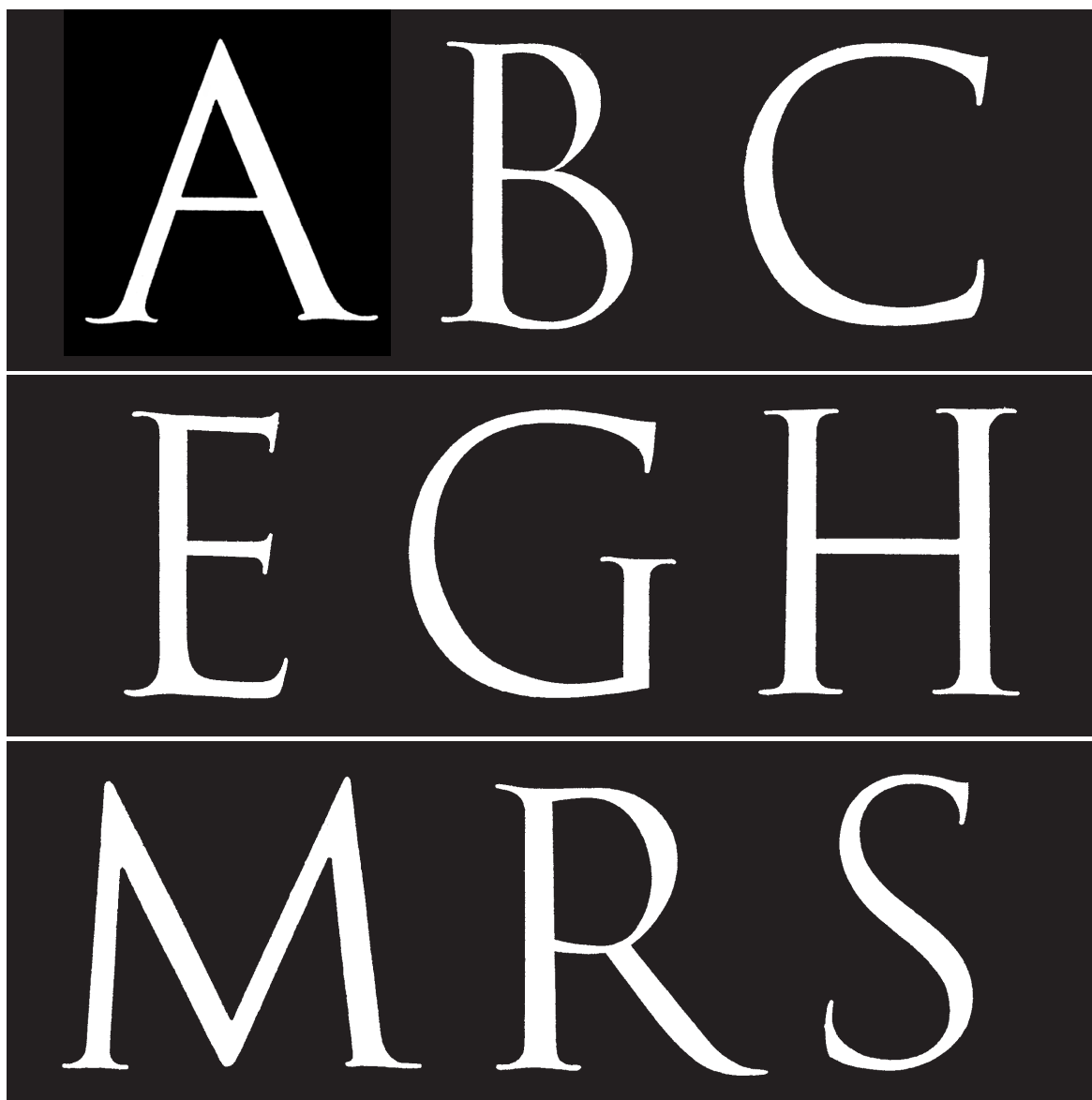
Alphabet 1, printed on rectos and versos. Letter height 114 mm. Proportion about 1:9.5. Stroke thickness 12 to 13 mm. Antonozzi explains in his address to the reader that it is a faithful reproduction of the letters of the Trajan Column, 'which in the opinion of all who are capable of judging are the most beautiful in the world'. He adds H, K, Y, Z, the four letters of the alphabet wanting from the inscription.

Alphabet 2, printed on rectos only. Letter height 149 mm. Stroke thickness 16–18 mm. Antonozzi states the proportion as 1:9. There is a slight entasis in the manner of Cresci's letters. It is 'his own invention', and he has made the curved strokes rather heavier than the uprights, 'because in practice they appear thinner' (*perche in opera sempre mostrano più scarni*) and has applied the same principle to the oblique strokes of M, N and Z. He could, he says, have given the 'rules' for these alphabets, but because it would have been too expensive, he has postponed them to another occasion.

Facsimiles:

1 *De Caratteri*. Nieuwkoop: Miland Publishers, 1971. [10] 44 pp. 22 × 30 cm. This facsimile reproduces the copy in the Victoria & Albert Museum, which lacks the two alphabets of capitals, although it does include the address to the reader in which they are described and discussed.

2 *The Trajan letters. De caratteri di Leopardo Antonozzi libro primo, Rome MDCXXXVIII*. Madison (Wis.) The Meles Vulgaris Press, 1972. The letters reproduced chiefly from the copy of *De caratteri* in the Humanities Research Center, University of Texas (the copy described in Marzoli, *Calligraphy* (1962), pp. 87–9). Some letters were furnished by the Newberry Library. There is an English translation of the address to the reader.



Leopardo Antonozzi, 1638

De Caratteri. Roma, 1638.

Alphabet 2.



Fabrizio Badesio, as presented by Domingo Maria Servidori, 1789

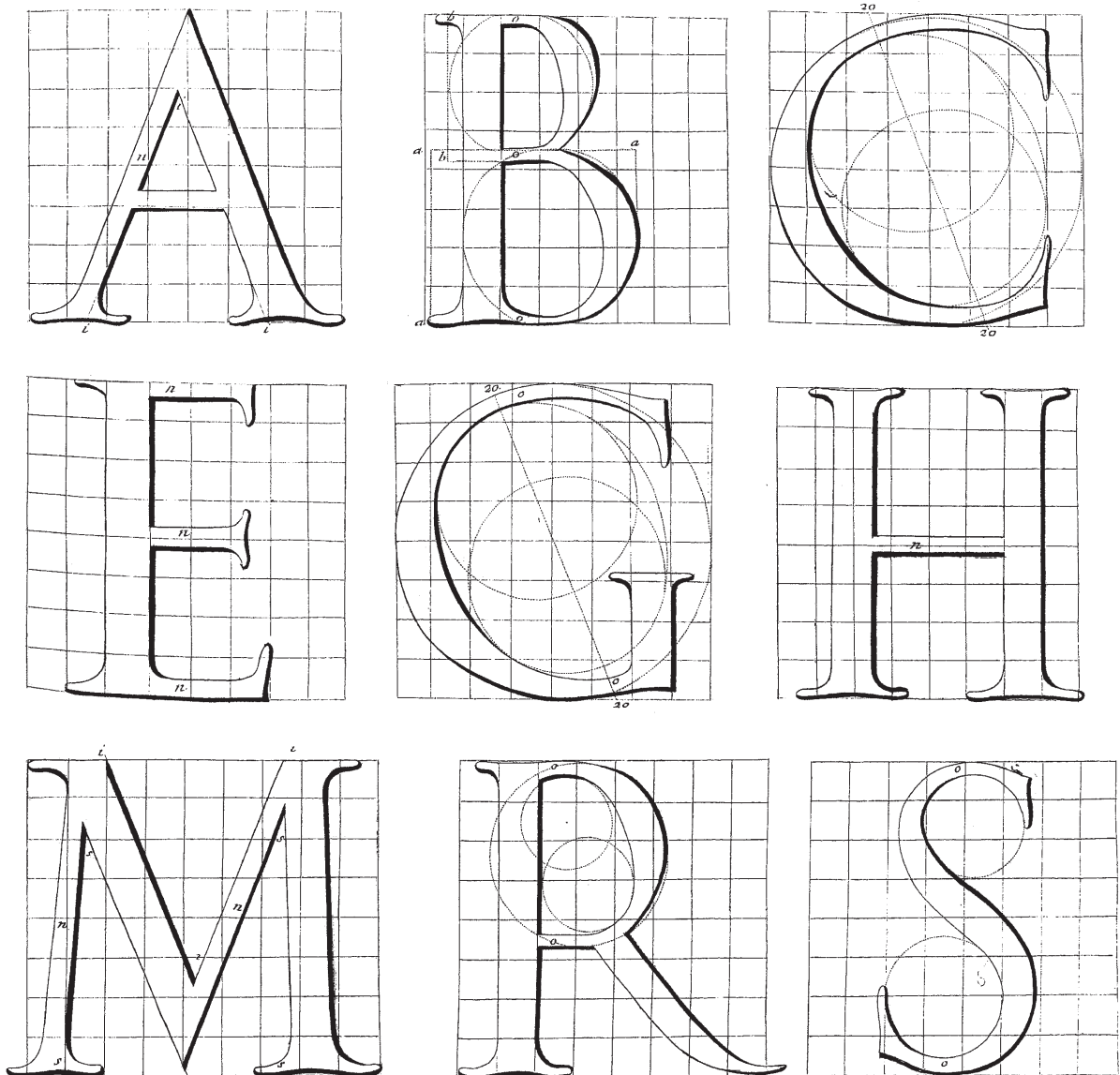
D. M. Servidori writes on p. 189 of *Reflexiones sobre la verdadera arte de escribir* (Madrid, 1789): [Cresci] excedió á sus antecesores en la formacion de la letra sepulcral, laminas 13^a, 14^a; y no ha tenido en esta habilidad quien se le haya igualado entre los que han venido despues; á excepcion de Fabrizio Badesio ... como veras en las laminas 15^a, 16^a, 17^a, 18^a. ('Cresci outdid his predecessors in the design of inscrip-tional letters [literally: funerary letters], plates 13, 14, and no-one among those who have come after him has equalled him in this ability with the exception of Fabrizio Badesio ... as can be seen in plates 15, 16, 17, 18.')

For what is known about Badesio, see page 29 above. Servidori's illustrations are copperplate engravings, and the height of the letters shown in his plates 15 to 18 is 80 mm. He does not say whether his source was manuscript or printed, nor give any other details of it.

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Marzoli = Carla Marzoli, *Calligraphy 1535-1885: a collection of seventy-two writing books, introduction by Stanley Morison* (Milano: La Bibliofila, 1962).



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