

# 3 BLOCK BOOKS AND BAROQUE (1450-1750)

*Baroque, rococo and the golden age of type; the arrival of newspapers, novels and dictionaries.*

## What were the key geopolitical events?

**World exploration:** Christopher Columbus explored the New World; Vasco da Gama reached India; Venetian sea captain, Giovanni Caboto (John Cabot), landed in Newfoundland. Jacques Cartier, led three expeditions to Canada; Ferdinand Magellan, completed the first circumnavigation of the Earth, soon followed by Francis Drake. With world exploration, came the **European slave trade** that financed much of the future Industrial Revolution.

In the 15th century the Medici bank was the largest in Europe. **Lorenzo de' Medici** became ruler of Florence in 1469. The House of Medici were among several wealthy families whose patronage supported the great painters of the Italian Renaissance.

**Nanban trade period:** from the time the first Portuguese explorers landed there, Japan traded openly with Europe (1543-1614). The "Sakoku" Seclusion Edicts ended trade in an attempt to protect Japan from the overwhelming influence of foreigners. Trade ended before the ukiyo-e art tradition emerged.

**Magic and the church:** By the fifteenth century Roman Catholicism was the dominant religion in Europe. Monks and priests were often called on for medical help. Among the few literate people, they recorded their use of healing charms, potions, and medicinal herbs. This created strong links between the church and magic. (The act of healing in those days was often seen as something magical).

With the rise of the church came a suspicion of non-believers. Witches were persecuted throughout the middle ages. In the 15th century the idea of possession and pacts with the devil took hold. The printing of books and tracts fueled popular fears. The **British Witchcraft Act** of 1735 ended the persecution of witches in Great Britain.

**Protestant Reformation:** In 16th century the German religious reformer Martin Luther called out the unfair doctrines of the Catholic Church that favoured the wealthy. (They could buy forgiveness for their sins.) It was thanks to printed tracts that Luther, John Calvin, Huldrych Zwingli and others were able to widely publicise their opinions.

**The Humanist Renaissance** began to influence Europe greatly in the "long 18th century" (1685-1815). It is also known as the Age of Reason, or the Age of Enlightenment. Thought influencers questioned traditional forms of authority (the crown and the church) and looked to science and logic for answers.

## What were the key scientific/technological influences?

Scientific discoveries facilitated world exploration and trade in the 1500-1700's. e.g. the **marine chronometer**, **John Harrison**, 1761.

The invention of the telescope led to astronomical discoveries. e.g. 1514, **Nicolaus Copernicus** realised the sun (not the earth) is the centre of the solar system. **William Gilbert**, **Johannes Kepler** and **Galileo Galilei** all made important discoveries during this period.

Nicolaus Copernicus's 1543 publication of ***De revolutionibus orbium coelestium*** (On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres) is often cited as marking the beginning of the scientific revolution.

Thanks to the **invention of the microscope**, there were also many notable biological discoveries. Founded in 1660, The Royal Society of London published its first peer reviewed scientific journal in 1665. (The same year that **Robert Hooke** discovered the Cell.)

## Other interesting discoveries during this period:

1472 - **Regiomontanus** first observed a comet; 1672 - **Isaac Newton**: discovered that white light is a spectrum of a mixture of distinct coloured rays; 1673 - **Christiaan Huygens** designed the pendulum clock; 1675 - **Anton van Leeuwenhoek** observed microorganisms by microscope; 1676 - **Ole Rømer** measured the speed of light; 1687 - Isaac Newton describes the three physical laws of motion.

## What were the key design and literary influences?

Gutenberg's printing press made Mainz, Germany the European centre for book printing in the 1400's. Before Gutenberg had finished printing his first book—the 1,282 page **42-line Bible**—he was sued and bankrupted by his business partner **Johann Fust**, ca. 1455. Fust then partnered with **Peter Schoeffer** to publish the **Mainz Psalter** in 1457—the first book printed in colour.

**Incunabula** (15th century books) were a mixture of **type-set books** and **block-books**. Around 1460 German printer **Albrecht Pfister** merged the two methods. He combined Gutenberg's metal types with woodcut image plates in the first illustrated typographic book—The **Biblia Pauperum**, or **Paupers' Bible**. All these books were printed using Gothic script.

Two church clerics **Konrad Sweynheym** and **Arnold Pannartz** (who possibly apprenticed under Fust and Schoeffer) were the first Printers to flee Germany's increasing politico-religious unrest. They set up a print shop in a Benedictine Abbey just outside Rome. They were the first to print using **Roman-style letters**. This combination of Roman capital letters and Carolingian script was first created by Italian scribes (who mistook Carolingian era manuscripts for much earlier Roman ones). e.g. **Lactantius, Opera** (The Works of Lactantius) 1465.

Printing and typography spread across Europe. French engraver **Nicolas Jenson** learned to print in Germany and then moved to Venice, where he published over 150 books in Latin. Improving on the typography of Sweynheym and Pannartz, Jenson is remembered for the finesse and even colour of his letters. e.g. **De Viris Illustribus**, ca. 1474. (Versions of Jenson typeface are still in use.)

**William Caxton** printed the **first book in English**. e.g. **The Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye**, ca. 1474. Caxton published over 90 books, including the **Canterbury Tales**.



German master printers **Erhard Ratdolt**, **Peter Loeslein** and **Bernhard Maler** succeeded in printing text and image using a single printing plate, (instead of incorporating woodblock techniques). This proved a great advance for math and science text books. e.g. **Regiomontanus's Calendrium**, 1476 and **Euclid's Geometriae Elementa**, 1482.

**Dr. Hartmann Schedel**, collaborated with printer **Anton Koberger**, to print a hand-coloured 600 page history of the world—**The Nuremberg Chronicle**, 1493.

**Aldus Manutius** was an Italian humanist, scholar and printer whose Aldine press brought elegance to book design. e.g. *Hypnerotomachia-Poliphili* (**Dream of Poliphilus**), 1499. Manutius hired a brilliant typeface designer, **Francesco da Bologna** (Griffo). Griffo's design survives today as **Bembo**.

French artist **Geoffroy Tory** became a publisher and printer. He launched the **Golden Age of Typography**: a century of exquisite French books filled with elegant ornamentation. e.g. **Champ Fleury** (Flowery Field), 1529.

Advances in printing went hand-in-hand with advances in science. The invention of **copperplate engraving (intaglio)** greatly improved the study of biology. (Intaglio may have been invented by Gutenberg.) e.g. **Charles Estienne's** *De Dissectione Partium Corporis Humani Libri III*, 1545. French printer, **Christophe Plantin**, also used intaglio techniques to achieve richer and more detailed imagery. e.g. **Polyglot Bible**, 1572.

French typefounder (maker of metal type) and punch cutter **Claude Garamond** created the Garamond family of typefaces—one of the most famous and well used roman typefaces of all time.

The use of roman typefaces in Italy and France began the gradual shift away from Gothic script. These early Roman types (Jenson, Garamond, Plantin, etc.) are referred to as **Antique, Venetian, or Old Style** typefaces. Gothic types remained popular in Germany. German publisher **Johann Carolus** launched the first European printed newspaper in 1605 using a Gothic typeface.

**Louis XIV** of France wanted to lead the most progressive court in Europe. He commissioned a committee of scientists to create a modern new typographic style for himself. **Le Romain du Roi** was the first geometrically calculated typeface. It would begin the gradual transition to "modern" typefaces. These early more geometrical types are known as transitional typefaces. (Master alphabets engraved by **Louis Simmoneau**, ca. 1700).

English typefounder **William Caslon** created the Caslon family of typefaces, known for their evenness of texture. Caslon also printed the first type specimen sheet in 1734.

French typefounder **Pierre Simon Fournier (le Jeune)** pioneered a system of size standardisation. e.g. **Modeles des caracteres de l'imprimerie**, 1742 and **Manuel Typographique**, 1764-68.

English printer and type designer **John Baskerville** was a true craftsman involved in every facet of the printing process. His elegant typeface Baskerville was light, modern and even. He developed new inks and papers that advanced the quality of printing. e.g. **Paradise Lost**, 1760; English language printing of the **King James Bible**, 1763.

## What were the key cultural influences?

### Popular books published this period include:

Shakespeare's *Romeo & Juliet*, 1595; Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, 1612; Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, 1719; Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, 1726.

## Fashion

During this period fashion is equally important to both men and women. Italy was the fashion centre of Europe during the **Renaissance** (14th-15th centuries) and **Baroque** (late 16th century) eras. In the 18th century the royal courts of Great Britain and France also became very style conscious. e.g. the House of Tudor (Elizabeth 1, Henry VIII); the Stuarts and the early Georgians in England.

The French court of **Louis XIV**, the sun king soon began to dominate European style—taking over from the Italians. His grandson **Louis XV** and **Mme de Pompadour** introduced the **rococo** style. French culture and influence were at their height in the first half of the eighteenth century.

Chinese objects and fabrics (Chinoiserie) also became popular. Traders began importing Ming-style pottery, tea, silks, paintings and lacquerware in the 1600's. It took two centuries for European porcelain factories to master the techniques used to create their own fine porcelain.

## Architecture

The ancient Roman and Greek inspired **Renaissance** style was rooted in Florence with **Michelangelo Buonarroti** and **Filippo Brunelleschi** (inventor of the laws of linear perspective) among its innovators. It gradually influenced France, Germany, England, Russia and other parts of Europe.

The **Baroque** style also emerged in Italy. It used the same ancient inspiration in a more theatrical way. It took its cues from the drama and pomp of the Catholic Church. Baroque interiors were looming, awe-inspiring spaces decorated in somber colours. Architects include: **Gianlorenzo Bernini**, **Jules Hardouin Mansart** and **Louis Le Vau** (Palais de Versailles, 1710), **Balthasar Neumann**, **Christopher Wren** (St. Paul's Cathedral), **John Vanbrugh**.

The French **rococo** architectural style was lighter and more playful. The trend moved away from super-sized spaces to more intimate ones, such as those designed by **Nicolas Pineau**.

### Notable buildings around the globe:

The **Taj Mahal**, Agra, India (1648); the **Badshahi Mosque**, Lahore, Pakistan (1673).

## What were the key artistic influences?

**Renaissance:** Giovanni Bellini, Alessandro Boticelli, Hieronymus Bosch, Albrecht Durer, Domenico Ghirlandaio, Giorgione, Andrea Mantegna, Michaelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Hugo Van Der Goes, Martin Schongauer, Titian, Raphael, Donatello, The Limbourg Brothers.

**Baroque:** Caravaggio, Rubens, Rembrandt, Velazquez, Vermeer.

**Rococo:** Poussin, Fragonard.

**Vanitas:** the Dutch 17th century fashion of still-life paintings incorporating skulls and other symbols of death. These paintings emphasise the vanity of earthly achievements and pleasures in a country governed by a rigid religious moral code (Calvinism).

