

## The Transylvanian Phoenix: the Kis-Janson Types in the Digital Era

*Jack Stauffacher*

*Let our people come to respect books, so their reading will allow knowledge to spread throughout Transylvania. . . Once an old woman asked me if she could look at one of my books, and while leafing through the pages, asked me if there were any with thicker letters. . . This is my profession, to see to it that in this country books are plentiful and cheap.*

These are the words of Miklós Kis (Nicholas Kis), a typographer and scholar of Transylvania in the 17th century who devoted his life to spreading knowledge and religion with the technology of his time: printing. Both his location in Transylvania and the strong and dictating rule of the Church made his desire to spread literacy a difficult task. In the 17th century Kis was considered an iconoclast because he challenged the ways of the Church in spreading enlightenment and education. Involvement with all aspects of the printing process from letter design to printing made it possible for him to express his ideas to a wide audience, but it also subjected him to a great amount of criticism.

Not until recently have Kis' accomplishments been acknowledged and Kis recognized as a leader in his times. The importance of his work is apparent, particularly in the design of the Baroque Dutch Old Style typeface which was originally credited to Anton Janson, a punchcutter who lived and worked during the same period. It is believed today that this elegant typeface was actually the work of Kis. The following sequence of images and text may help to demonstrate that Kis had the ingredients to be the remarkable man behind the beautiful Kis-Janson letters.



Figure 2

In 1650, Nicholas Kis was born in Eastern Europe in the small borough of Misztófalú (now Tauti-Margherus, Romania), near Nagy-Banya (Baia Mare), which belonged to a region then called Partium of Transylvania. According to György Haiman in his book, *Nicholas Kis\**, Kis' dedication to 'civic liberties' may be partly attributed to the environment in which he lived. The inhabitants of Nagy-Banya were largely vine-dressers, miners, and potters, living with a degree of self-government in a region of Hungary that was exempt from the Feudal System.

Upon completion of his secondary studies, Kis was accepted to the noted Enyed (now Aiud) Reformed Church College (Enyed Collegium Academicum). This Academicum had an established reputation, attracting the intellectual life of the region and was at that time considered the center for the Transylvanian Reformed Church. The years of study at the Academicum provided Kis with the desire and skills to propagate the spread of literacy and the message of the Bible.

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\* *Nicholas Kis: A Hungarian Punchcutter and Printer, 1650-1702*, Jack W. Stauffacher/Greenwood Press in association with Gilman D. Parson Books, 38 Hill Point, San Francisco, California 94117

In 1677, at the age of 27, Kis completed his study at the Academium and accepted a position as head master of a school in Fogaris (Figure 2). During his stay at Fogaris he was attracted, as were many Hungarian scholars, to the study of Calvinistic Theology in Holland. Simultaneously, the leaders of the Transylvanian Reformed Church recognized the new central role of the Hungarian Bible. The only Bible printed at that time was a small format edition of the Hungarian Reformed Church Bible and it did not meet the anticipated demand. Printing facilities in Hungary were not sufficient enough to produce a new Bible, so the Reformed Church had to print the Bible in Holland.

Kis was entrusted by the Church to help the Dutch printer Daniel Elsevier in supervising the printing. Kis left Fogaris in 1680 for Holland where he was to function as an editor and proofreader. He was also encouraged by the Church to acquaint himself with the printing trade. After the death of Daniel Elsevier in 1681, Kis lacked the necessary funds to purchase type matrices, so he decided to abandon his study of Calvinistic Theology and to pursue the craft of printing so that he could eventually print the Bible himself. He joined the Voskens typefoundry and apprenticed with Dirck Voskens or possibly one of the noted Blaeus. At that time in Holland the skill of punchcutting, matrix making, typesetting and typography were separate jobs.

Figure 3



In 1683, after his apprenticeship, Nicholas Kis set up his own shop to start printing the Hungarian Bible with his own types. As Kis states in his *APOLOGIUM* of 1698, 'Mine is a kind of work which requires full concentration of mind and eyes, one cannot do it well while talking. This is how I became such a silent man after nearly ten years of this work up there in Amsterdam.'

A map of Amsterdam from 1625 shows the area in which Kis located his shop (Figure 3). He was situated on the Nieuwe-Lyds Achter Burchwal Street. The fourth house from the left is believed to be his studio (Figure 4). A legend in Dutch at the bottom of his type specimen reads: *If any man desires strikes or matrices of these types newly cut by Nikolas Kis, let him address himself to the afore-named master dwelling in Amsterdam on the Achter Burgwal over the brewery at the sign of the Swan in the house of Warner Warnersz, and they can get them for a reasonable price.*



Figure 4



Figure 5

The production of the Hungarian Bible was already in progress by 1684. Kis was the foreman and proofreader. He hired a press in Amsterdam with about twenty men to do the typesetting, composing and printing. He notes in the corrigenda at the end of the Bible that 'gross errors occurred due to the single handedness and many other worries of the proofreader. . . and to the workers' lack of knowledge of the Hungarian language.' The Bible was completed in 1685; the total volume came to 1,200 doudecimo (160 x 166mm) pages with about 4,500 letter-types per page. Figure 5 is a picture of the bound version which is dated 1695.



Figure 9

# A P O L O G I A B I B L I O R U M

Anno 1684. Amstelodami impressorum,

ut &

O R T H O G R A P H I Æ

in iis observata:

In Tres Partes divisa.

- I. *Epistolam Apologeticam*, in qua ut plurimum tractatur de alterationibus quibusdam, quæ in ea Editione contigerunt, earumque Generibus, cum Exemplis.
- II. *Catalogum vocum ibi omisfarum, hic restitutarum*: ubi interim signantur (duntaxat) Loca de necessariis mutationibus, vel aliis difficultatibus.
- III. *Ratiocinationem de Orthographia eo modo instituenda.*

*Ad multorum prejudicia de iis concepta medendum cum coactione à nobis inuitis expressa*

Per

NICOLAUM KIS de M.TÓTFALU.

CLAUDIOPOLI

Anno 1697.

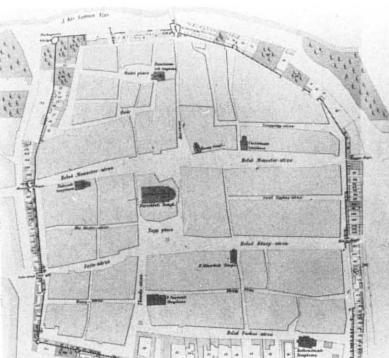


Figure 8

In referring to his first types cut for the production of the Bible, Kis states in a letter dated August 1684, 'The types I am printing with at the present are not as trim as they should be In Excellenti Gradu; their shortcomings are due to the fact that they are specimens from my initial work, that is I prepared their matrices when I was still learning the trade. But God willing, I shall yet make types that will be notable in any part of Europe.'

In 1689, Kis left Amsterdam to return to Transylvania. It is believed that on his way home he left a set of matrices in Leipzig for the purpose of selling them, probably to Anton Janson. This would explain how Janson obtained the type for which he was later credited with having cut himself. Kis returned to the Transylvanian town of Kolozsvár to set up his printing press, typefoundry, and punchcutting shop. Figure 8 is a picture of Kolozsvár in 1607.

Despite the difficult circumstances imposed by the loss of his types during his move from Holland and the lack of time for cutting new and better type, Kis published a rich assortment of books. He printed works of Physics, Mathematics, Religion, Prose, and Medicine for the general public as well as textbooks and cookbooks.

Kis' reason for devoting his time to printing was his desire to increase literacy and the amount of knowledge available to the public. He felt he could do this by producing a variety of inexpensive books. Because he was dedicated to educational matters and accuracy, he exercised his own orthographic standards during the production of the Hungarian Bible. The changes he made to the Bible were not well received by the Elders of the Reformed Church in Hungary and they ordered Kis to print and issue a public apology for his Bible modifications. The *APOLOGIUM BIBLIORUM*, in defense of Kis' Amsterdam Bible, was directed towards those who 'disliked the typographer-scholar' and to people who disapproved of his modern educational book publishing principles.

Kis' opponents attacked not only his work but threatened him personally. In continued defense, Kis published the *APOLOGIUM* in 1698, which justifies his life's work. This autobiographic book is over 100 pages and is a thorough recount of his life's activities. It provides us with a detailed description of the printing process and the attitudes of the 17th century. The italic typeface (shown in Figure 10) at the end of the *APOLOGIUM* preface is an example of the Kis-Janson style.

Figure 10

*me difficulter, neque sine magna ruina jam avelli posse non inficior) saltè notificare debui causam omnis tumultuationis, & si quod judiciù Dei sequetur, ulterioris incommodi: quidd scil. dona (que quidem valde tenuia agnosco:) apud me deposita, & nationi carissime exornanda devota, multi in terram defossa esse vellent. Vale, quisquis es equus judex & candoris amans.*

Cui est & erit ad omnia obsequia addictus

NICOLAUS KIS de M. TÓTFALU.

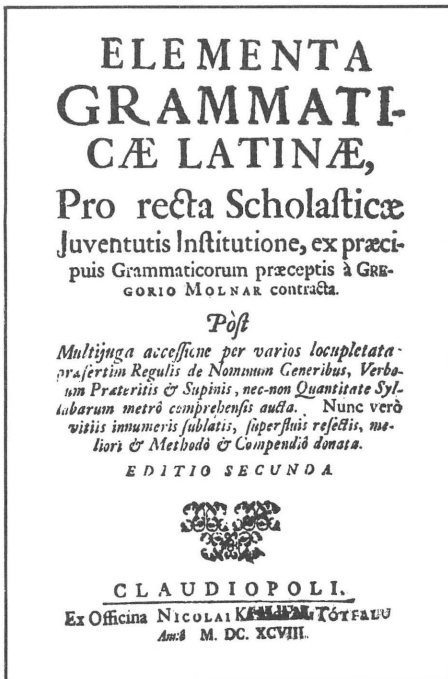


Figure 11

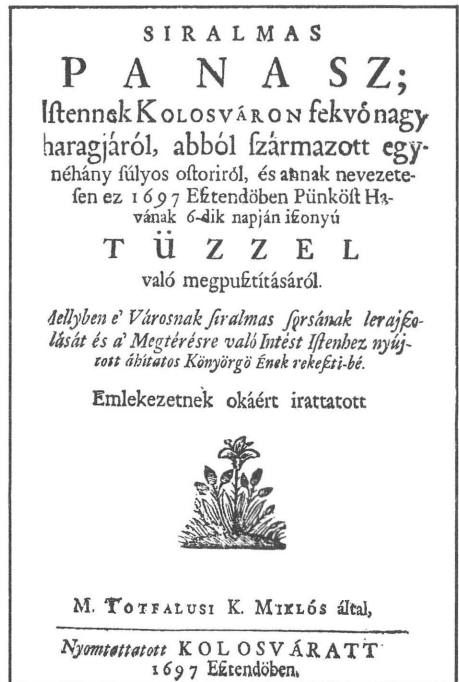


Figure 12

Titles, title pages and other typographic standards evolved from text because of the need to clarify the contents of the book. In developing stages, the title page was the introductory material of the book, usually consisting of one sentence arranged in a centered composition. Figure 11 shows the title page of a Latin Grammar book printed by Kis in 1698. In Figure 12, the title page includes a verse reproving the corrupted ethics of the lords of Kolozsvár in 1697.



# Seſſio VIII. De Verbis Imperfectis 77

175. Prima radicalis Aleph in futuro Kal repudiato ſchevate muto, quod ex §.143. debebat recipere, quieſcit in choiem; in pri na ſingulari (nè duo Aleph concurrant) planè etiam omittitur; terminatio autem eſt tzeri ordinariè; in prima ſingulari patach ut plurimum, ad diſtinctionem à participio præſenti. Obtenet autem hæc anomalia in iſtis ſolùm verbis, אָכַל *peritit*, אָחַז *apprehendit*, אָכַל

*comedit*, אָכַר *dixit*, אָכַר *voluit*, אָכַר *coxit*. Imitantur interdum אָכַר *congregavit*, & אָכַר *amavit*. Prima

מ in prima ſingulari futuri Hiphil ſolet ſimiliter omit- ti, & ſub characteriſtica eſt Kametz: אָמַן pro אָמַן *au- ribus percipiam*; in aliis perſonis futuri, nec non in parti- cipio Hiphil nonnunquam obtinet contractio, juxta §.78. elifo tamen aleph: אָמַן pro אָמַן *tentarium figet*,

אָמַן pro אָמַן *auribus percipiens*.

f. Plural. m.	Futurum Kal.	f. Singul. m.
אָכַר תִּכְדְּרֶהּ	אָכַר תִּכְדְּרֶהּ	אָכַר תִּכְדְּרֶהּ 3.
אָכַר תִּכְדְּרֶהּ	אָכַר תִּכְדְּרֶהּ	אָכַר תִּכְדְּרֶהּ 2.
Com. אָכַר	Com. אָכַר	Com. אָכַר 1

176. Prima radicalis Jod quieſcit in Conjugationibus Non-dageſſatis, quoties ob acceſſum unius characteriſticæ ſyllabam debet terminare, ex §.148. adeoque reſpuit ſche- va mutum, juxta §.75. Quies verò ejus diverſimodè ſe habet.

177. In futuro Kal quieſcit, ex §.75. vel in chirek ex- plicitè ſive expreſſa, & terminationem patach poſtulat: אָמַן *dormiet*: vel in tzeri implicitè ſive latens, ac termi- nationem tzeri requirit: אָמַן *habitabit*. Illorum infini-

F 2 tivas



## LEXICI HEBRAICI COMPENDIUM METRICUM.

### I. NOMINA. Alphabetum 1.

- א Ab pater, ém mater, bën filius, chýon egenus.  
ב bânjal adón dominus, bath filia, nctel abortus.  
ג gab gíbbus, njeljón gabóah bamá ráim maróm altus.  
ד déyel nés vexilla, sana annus, toená ficus.  
ה hódi pèr tzebi decus, makóm locus, asiré beatus.  
ו zebúb muſca, menjil toga, njercé ſpanda, dób urſus.  
ז hñag feſtú (eſt.) hhódes menſis, jakat [mécyed] pretioſus.  
ח rál vor, éak ſuccus, éadé ſadmóth agri, óvcs equus, gvus.  
ט jáim mare, tzúf farus, achbár muſ, péle péli-qs mirus.  
י kochab ſtella, jaſár kén rectus, tzaddik iuſtus.  
כ lappid fax, kodkód vertex, navé nanjim amenus.  
ל malteánh clavus, mathók ateb dulcis, már amarus.  
מ nadál kevil évil ſachál pothé petu ſtultus.  
נ natir eunuchus, siré cantica, tehóm abyſſus.  
ס njed tzeſtis, njóf tzippór avis. dál dách tenuatus.  
פ páhh laqueus, plóni is aliquid, dód amor, kiná zelus.  
צ tzelan) coſta, njéyel vitulus, gören aveo, dáth juſ.  
ק kóreb incima, gág teſtum (eſt.) hhét tzáhh labán albus.  
ר rás: njani dách pauper, daí ſufficiens, kaſé durus.  
ש éid calx, phazák afik validus, nochtí rár alienus.  
ת tá thalamus, methóm adaménós homo, gér peregrinus.

### Alphabetum 2.

- א addir magnificus, njáir hháinór athón aſellus.  
ב bal leb cor, kóthmóth tunica, dód réan) amicus.  
ג gój gens, kaén ſcutella, óſer codex, gahhón altus.  
ד dasén bari ſamén pinguis, hlóti hhóm hharón aſtus.  
ה halytíná recta, sóan) njasir dives, hhóli morbus.  
ו zachat mas, nánjar jéled puer, asmá reatus.  
ז hhétz telum, éé pecus, kar talé keboé kékeb agnus.  
ח zób bone, din rib lis, etzbán) digitus, peti fruítus.  
ט jáhhaé ſtemma, ſofat tuba, ad olám ſecta, gán hortus.  
כ kaſ gabia) aggán crater, jóm-que dies, késeth arcus.  
ג la- B

Figure 14

Figure 13

An example of the diversity of Kis' type and skill in handling difficult typographic situations can be seen in Figure 13 in a Latin and Hebrew text. Figure 14 demonstrates Kis' solution to a complicated linguistic composition printed in 1698.

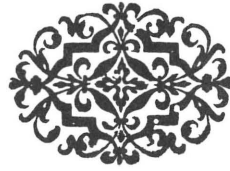


Figure 15

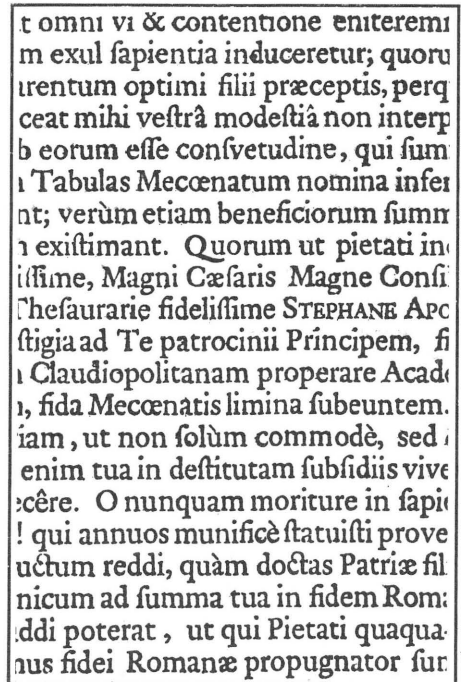


Figure 16

Figure 15 is a harmonious typographic composition of a page setting from a bilingual text with marginal notes. Figure 16 is an example of the rich texture of a page of text set by Kis in a 14 point Augustin Roman type.

Garamond antikva a 16. század eljáról (mai példa)	Kis Miklós betűi a 17. század végéről (mai példa)	Bodoni antikva a 18. század végéről (mai példa)
A	A	A
G	G	G
K	K	K
N	N	N
O	O	O
a	a	a
b	b	b
e	e	e

Figure 18

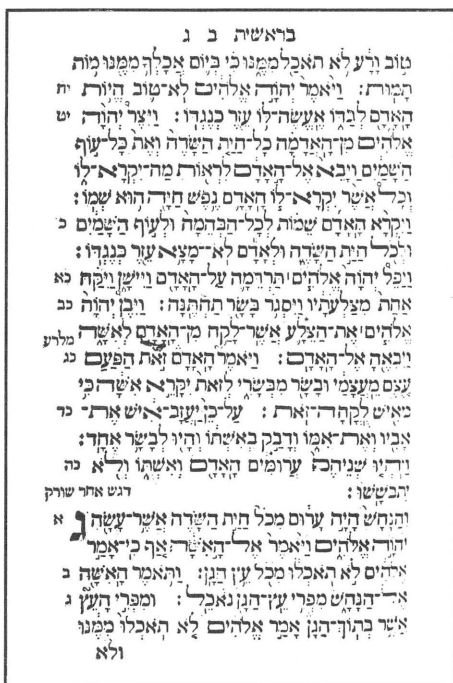


Figure 17



Figure 17 is an example of Hebrew text cut and set by Kis.  
 Figure 18 is a comparison of three text faces, Garamond,  
 Kis-Janson, and Bodoni.

The types of Nicholas Kis were not confined to Holland and Hungary, but also made their way to places such as Italy. Giovanni Filippo Cecchi, the Granducale Press printer for the Grand Duke in Florence (1690), purchased type from Kis during Kis' stay in Holland.

Figure 20 shows one of Kis' last books, printed in 1701. Kis spent his last years pressured by those in power who sentenced him to public penance and asked him to withdraw his APOLOGIUM. He died in 1702 at the age of 52 and was buried in Kolozsvár where a death notice still stands today. The notice is in the reformed Church of Farkas Street which is pictured in Figure 21.

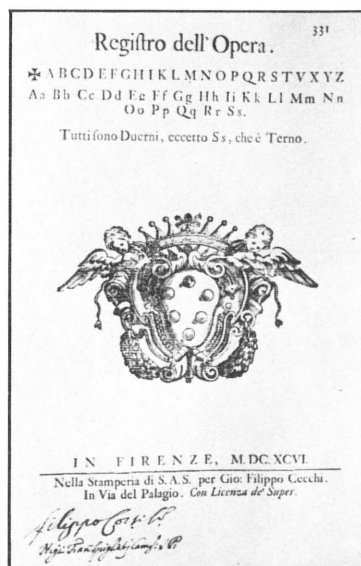


Figure 19

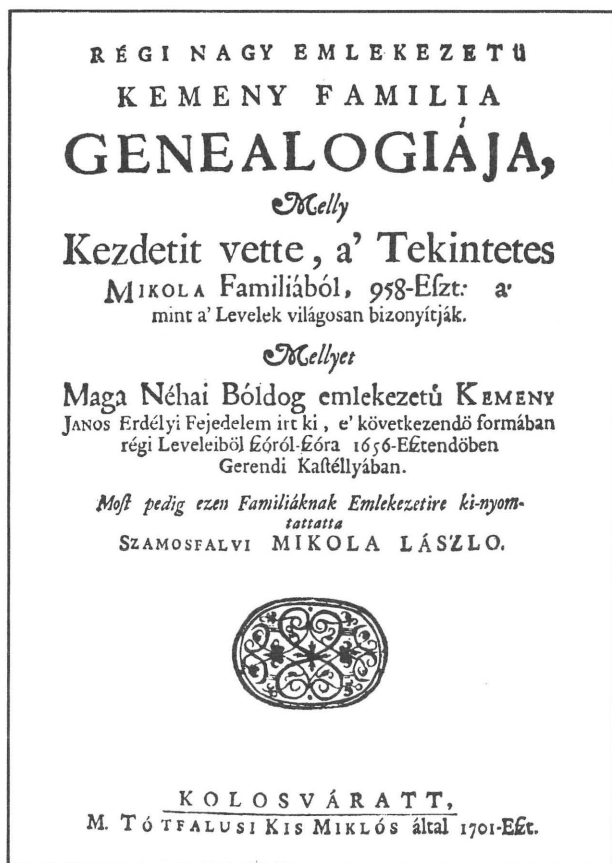


Figure 20

*Figure 21*

As the significance of Kis' typefaces and work is realized, it is appropriate to observe the changes that his type has undergone since the 17th century. The Kis-Janson type face has been subject to modifications imposed by new printing and letter making processes. In 1983, Jack Stauffacher, together with a group of his students at the Center for Typographic Language (Greenwood Press, San Francisco), took up the task of following the evolution of the Kis-Janson typeface by observing and commenting on the quality of its translation into different mediums.

The participants in the study wanted to compare a given block of text when it was typeset by companies who owned a version of Kis-Janson. The text was taken from a passage by Paul Valéry and was to be copied according to a model set and printed by Jack Stauffacher with the original Stempel Janson metal fonts. The model was set in both a justified and flush left format using 12/14 point type. The line length measured 25 picas. The participating companies were asked to follow the models exactly to insure an accurate comparison between the various versions. Line length, punctuation, italics, small caps and special spacing were to be identical with the model.

Portions of the resulting typeset material are shown on the following pages. The emphasis here is not to render judgement regarding the talents of one company over another, but instead to observe the ingredients necessary to recapture the unique liveliness and clarity that allowed this Baroque Dutch Old Style typeface to remain timeless and to survive for as many centuries as it has.

A fine book is first of all a perfect *reading device*, the properties of which may be defined with some exactitude by means of the laws and methods of optics; at the same time it is a work of art, a *thing*, though one having its own personality, showing the features of a particular way of thinking, suggesting the noble intentions of an arrangement both successful and determined. *Let us not forget, however,*

1

A fine book is first of all a perfect *reading device*, the properties of which may be defined with some exactitude by means of the laws and methods of optics; at the same time it is a work of art, a *thing*, though one having its own personality, showing the features of a particular way of thinking, suggesting the noble intentions of an arrangement both successful and determined. *Let us not forget, however, that*

2

A fine book is first of all a perfect *reading device*, the properties of which may be defined with some exactitude by means of the laws and methods of optics; at the same time it is a work of art, a *thing*, though one having its own personality, showing the features of a particular way of thinking, suggesting the noble intentions of an arrangement both successful and determined. *Let us not forget, however,*

3

- 1 Model set and printed by Jack Stauffacher with the original Stemple Janson metal fonts.
- 2 Sample set by Mergenthaler VIP Photosetter.
- 3 Sample set by ITEK Composition Systems.

A fine book is first of all a perfect *reading device*, the properties of which may be defined with same exactitude by means of the laws and methods of optics; at the some time it is a work of art, a *thing*, though one having its own personality, showing the features of a particular way of thinking, successful and determined. *Let us not forget, however, that typography excludes improvisation*; it is

4

A fine book is first of all a perfect *reading device*, the properties of which may be defined with some exactitude by means of the laws and methods of optics; at the same time it is a work of art, a *thing*, though one having its own personality, showing the features of a particular way of thinking, suggesting the noble intentions of an arrangement both successful and determined. *Let us not forget, however,*

5

A fine book is first of all a perfect *reading device*, the properties of which may be defined with some exactitude by means of the laws and methods of optics; at the same time it is a work of art, a *thing*, though one having its own personality, showing the features of a particular way of thinking, suggesting the noble intentions of an arrangement both successful and determined. *Let us not forget, however,*

6

4 Sample set by Information International Incorporated on a COMP 80/2 Universal Pagesetter.

5 Sample set by HELL GmbH, with their digital *Nikis* font.

6 Sample set on an Autologic APS-5.

Special thanks are due to the companies that participated in this study:

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Dr. Ing Rugolf Hell GmbH

Autologic, Inc.

Ladislav Mandel, Lumitype-Deberny & Peignot,

Paris (not shown)

John Dreyfus, Monotype Corporation, England

(not shown)

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