

# THE QUESTA PROJECT

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DESIGNED BY MARTIN MAJOR & JOS BUIVINGA



# The Questa Project

by Jos Buivenga & Martin Majoor

**T**HE QUESTA PROJECT is a type design adventure by Dutch type designers *Jos Buivenga* and *Martin Majoor*. Their collaboration began in 2010 using Buivenga's initial sketches for a squarish Didot-like display typeface as a starting point. It was a perfect base on which to apply Majoor's type design philosophy that a serif typeface is a logical starting point for creating a sans serif version and not the other way around. The extensive Questa family includes serif, sans, slab and display typefaces.

Questa  
Questa Sans  
Questa Grande  
Questa Slab

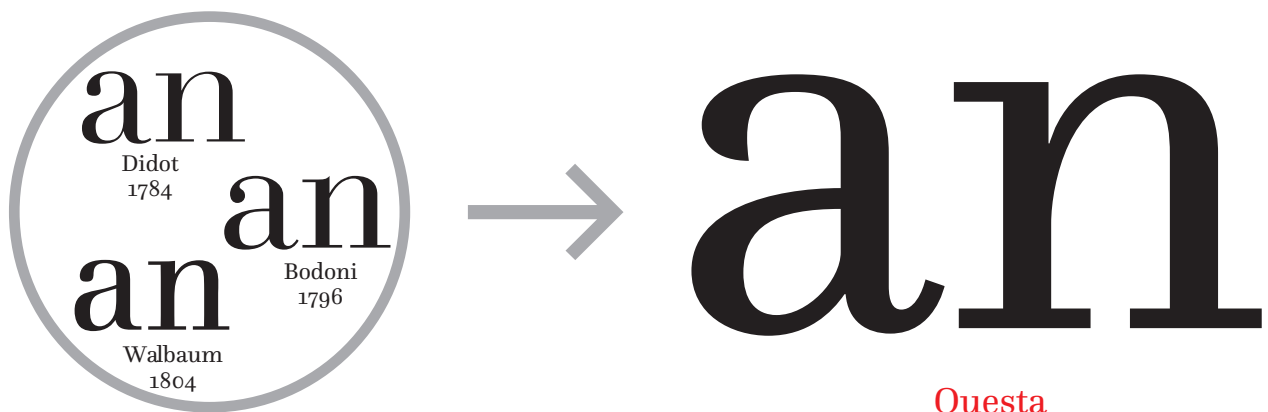
*The four members of the Questa family.*

## Questa, a serified typeface

First of all the text version of the Questa super family had to be designed, not in the least to serve as a basis for both the sans and the display version. Typefaces like Didot, Bodoni, and Walbaum were reviewed and some characteristics were used as rough guidelines for the design. To prevent Questa's shapes from becoming too clean and sharp, several features – not typical to Didot-like typefaces – were considered. The goal was not to make a revival of any of these three, but rather an original typeface.

Historin  
sparfuc.  
qafligez

*The initial sketches of Questa*



The contrast within Questa's characters is relatively high. At the same time the thin parts and the unbracketed serifs are strong enough to prevent the characters from breaking open. Modern digital revivals of Didot-like typefaces are often very thin, even compared to the original printed metal typefaces from around 1800.

*Questa belongs to the group of Didot-like neoclassicist typefaces*

HHXX

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

ct fb ff fh fi fj fk fl ffi ffl st

1234567890 1234567890

[illegible]

The italic of Questa – compared to a typeface like Didot – is more upright and less constructed. Terminals and serifs of the italic are treated in the same way as the roman to ensure that both styles will work together when they are combined.

*Harlequin Synchronize Voltage*  
*Harlequin Synchronize Voltage*

*Questa Italic, compared to Didot Italic, is more upright and less constructed*

However, there is room for several style elements that can be traced back to Humanist or handwritten letterforms. This makes it difficult to classify Questa italic; it is in fact quite far removed from the typical Didot-esque italic style.

*J* **J** *a* **a** *k* **k** *v* **v** *G* **G** *Y* **Y**

*In Questa Italic there are several style elements that can be traced back to Humanist or handwritten letterforms*

The numerals in *Questa* italic have a clearly different contrast than their counterparts in the roman. Where the stress in the roman shapes is in the vertical elements of the numerals; in the italic this is reversed, very much as can be seen in the lowercase ‘z’ of the roman and italic.

z 235679  
z 235679

The strong text colour of both roman and italic makes Questa extremely suitable for print as well as for use on screens. Questa comes in five weights in both roman and italic:

Reversed contrast in the numerals of Questa Italic, similar to the contrast in the lowercase z

Light Regular Medium **Bold Black** SMALL CAPS 256 256 fk ffi

Light Regular Medium **Bold Black** SMALL CAPS 256 256 fk ffi

## Questa Sans

From the start of their collaboration Buivenga and Majoor intended to design a sans serif counterpart that would simply be based on the shapes of Questa serif.

a n → a n

Questa

Questa Sans

In developing the sans there was no room for ‘niceties’ or ‘handsomeness’. The way the sans was going to look was a logical outcome of the process of cutting away the hairline serifs, changing the contrast, and optically correcting its shapes.

*Questa Sans is simply based on Questa*

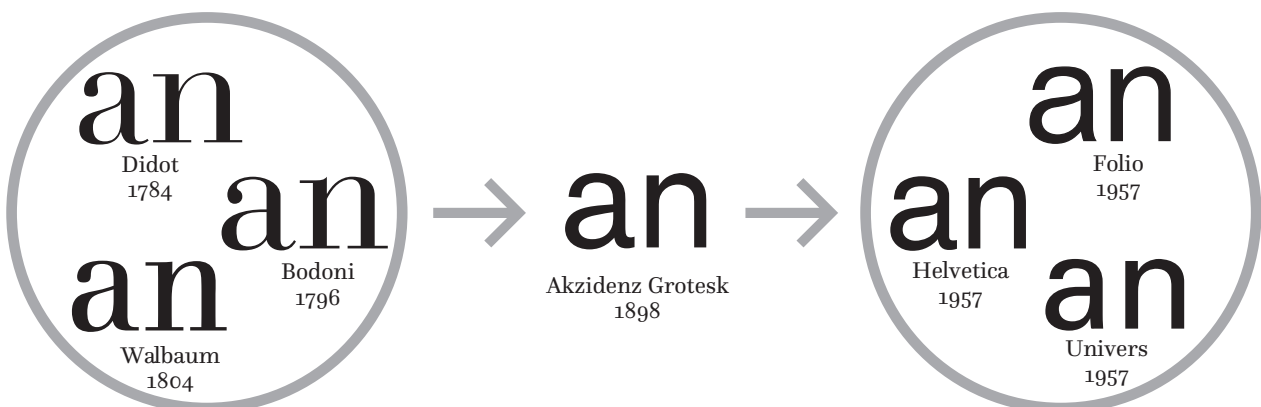
Change  
Change a n g

*Questa Sans was derived by cutting away the serifs, changing the contrast and optically correcting its shapes*

Ultimately the whole process of deriving a sans from Questa serif resulted in a typeface much in the spirit of the first serious sans text faces, like Akzidenz Grotesk.

In this context the history of Akzidenz Grotesk is quite interesting. It was created shortly before the year 1900 as one of the first mature sans serifs suitable for setting large amounts of texts. Given the fact that before that time there were hardly any serious sans serifs, it could be assumed that Akzidenz-like typefaces were more or less based on the serified text faces that were fashionable at the time, like Walbaum and Didot.

*Akzidenz Grotesk could have been derived from the group of Didot-like neoclassicist typefaces, whereas Helvetica and Folio just imitate Akzidenz Grotesk*



This is exactly the path that has been followed during the design process of Questa Sans: from a neoclassicist serified typeface to a modern sans, rather than imitating existing sans typefaces.

**Harlequin**  
Akzidenz Grotesk (1898)

**Harlequin**  
Helvetica (1957)

**Harlequin**  
Folio (1957)

**Harlequin**  
Questa

**Harlequin**  
Questa Sans

In comparison: typefaces like Folio or Helvetica – both made in 1957 – have not been based on a serified typeface. Instead they were commissioned as an immediate response to the highly popular Akzidenz Grotesk. Helvetica became a quite literal imitation, a sans that was based on a sans.

Questa Sans, in contrast, simply bases its shapes on its serified counterpart. In this way most of the identity and personality of Questa Sans originates from Questa serif.

Where the italics of *serified* typefaces are considered a fully-fledged member of the typeface, it is unclear why the italic shapes of most *sans* typefaces are so underestimated. Little has been done to distinguish them from the roman, apart from the fact that they are sloped.

Aa Ee Gg Kk Qq Rr Vv Yy  
*Aa Ee Gg Kk Qq Rr Vv Yy*

In contrast, the italic of Questa Sans is modeled on the italic of its serified counterpart, which results in a ‘real’ italic. The whole construction is essentially different than that of the roman. The angle is not more than 8°, better than the 13° to 16° that most sloped/oblique typefaces need.



Advertisement from 1899, announcing ‘Accidenz-Grotesk’

The italic of Akzidenz Grotesk is not more than a sloped roman. To be able to distinguish itself from the roman it needs an angle of no less than 13°

Questa Sans is based on the ‘real’ italics of Questa. They have a slope of not more than 8°

*Harlequin Synchronize Voltage*  
**Harlequin Synchronize Voltage**

Because Questa Sans shares its basic forms with Questa, they can be perfectly combined. Questa Sans comes in five weights in both roman and italic, including small caps, four sets of figures and ligatures:

Light Regular Medium **Bold Black** SMALL CAPS 256 256 fk ff  
Light Regular Medium **Bold Black** SMALL CAPS 256 256 fk ff

## Questa Grande

Another family member of the Questa Project is called *Questa Grande*. This typical display typeface is directly based on the text version of Questa.

a n → a n

Questa

Questa Grande

Where the text version of Questa has an almost workhorse-like quality, Questa Grande is more elegant and refined in its details. The rather robust unbracketed serifs that can be found in the text version of Questa have been replaced by thin hairline serifs.

*Questa Grande is directly based on the text version of Questa*

In the text version of Questa the thickness of the serifs and the thin parts are incremental. This means the thin parts in Questa Light are thinner than the ones in Questa Black.

In all five weights of Questa Grande however the thin parts share exactly the same thickness of stroke.

*A comparison between serifs/thin parts in the text version of Questa (top row) and Questa Grande (bottom row).*

Questa

aq aq aq aq aq  
light regular medium bold black

Questa Grande

aq aq aq aq aq  
light regular medium bold black

The thin lines that are featured in Questa Grande lend itself perfectly for gracefull solutions, like in the ‘open’ connection between the two characters in the *ct*- and the *st*-ligature or in the pound sign £.

ct ct st st £ £

*The ‘open’ connections in Questa Grande.*

Another subtle difference is the shape of the teardrop terminals. The sharp-pointed teardrops as found in the text version of Questa have been replaced by a crescent-like shape that is curling inwards.

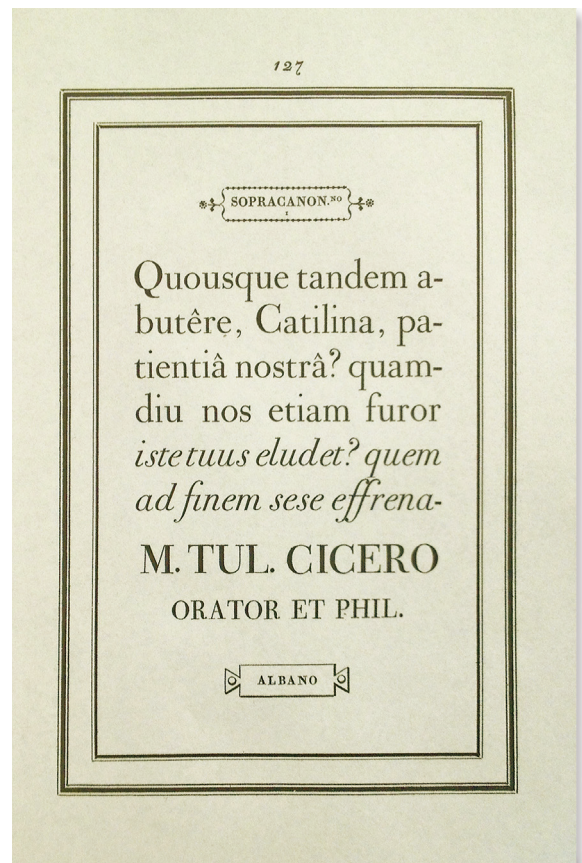
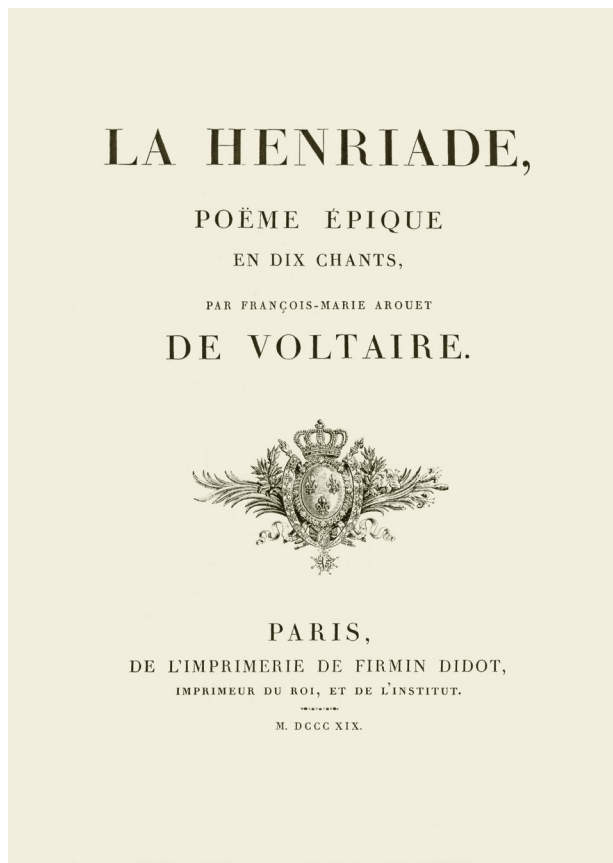
At the same time the ‘finials’ or thin ends that can be found in characters like **CJPR ace** are all ending exactly horizontal or vertical, where in the text version of Questa these finials are ending at an angle.

*Comparison between the teardrop shapes and the finial endings in some characters of Questa and Questa Grande.*



It is interesting to conclude that of all Questa versions, Questa Grande comes closest to the spirit of the best work of Giambattista Bodoni and Firmin Didot, without attempting to copy it.

*Below: examples of types by Firmin Didot (1819) and Giambattista Bodoni (1818)*



There are five weights in Questa Grande, in both roman and italic, including small caps, four sets of figures and ligatures.

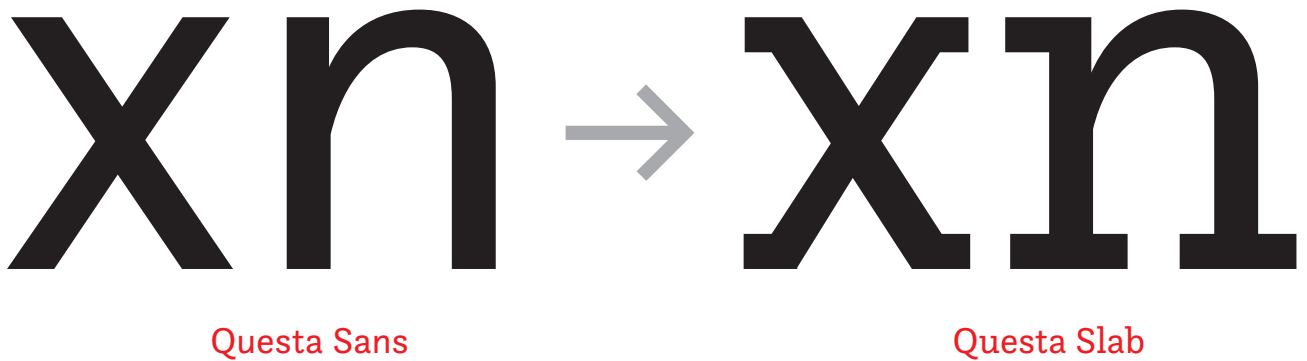
Light Regular Medium Bold Black SMALL CAPS 256 256 fk ffi  
 Light Regular Medium Bold Black SMALL CAPS 256 256 fk ffi



## Questa Slab

The Questa Project wouldn't be complete without a slab serif version. Nowadays slab serifs are seen as a welcome and often necessary addition to families with serif and sans versions.

In the Questa Project this is no different: Questa Slab is even directly based on Questa Sans, often just by attaching thick bracketed serifs.



The first slab serif printing types appeared about 200 years ago in England. At the time they were mainly used for the printing of the rapidly expanding advertising materials. Often bold in appearance they were poster-size, attention-grabbing, typefaces.

*Questa Slab is directly based on the sans version of Questa, just by attaching thick bracketed serifs.*

Together with the sans serifs, which were introduced around the same time, the slab serifs became very popular during the nineteenth century. However where the sans kept on growing in popularity, the slab saw a sharpe decline in use.



*On this Australian poster of 1854 a mix of slab, sans and serif fonts are used.*



*Xh* → *xh*

*Questa Slab Italic has both bracketed serifs and 'bended' stems.*

Whereas the lowercase characters of the roman simply have thick bracketed serifs attached, in Questa Slab italic the serifs are treated in another manner. Rather than attaching straight bracketed serifs all over, the bottom serifs in the lowercase italics are more like 'bended' stems. This feature makes the whole appearance of Questa Slab italic more round and friendly, a feature that is rarely seen in slab serif typefaces.

*Compared to Questa Sans (grey) the italics of Questa Slab are more friendly.*

*Aluminium Sphynx*

*Aluminium Sphynx*

There are five weights in Questa Slab, in both roman and italic, including small caps, four sets of figures and ligatures.

Light Regular Medium Bold Black SMALL CAPS 256 256 fk ffi

*Light Regular Medium Bold Black* SMALL CAPS 256 256 *fk ffi*

Questa

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Cactus siesta

usually at 14:00 hours it is time for

*The office*

SMALL CAPS LOCK\*

*Industry standard input and output*

RÉSUMÉ

(Modern) American Usage is allowed

*One hydrophore*

The *basic* idea from the FBI was...

aquamarine?

NA STEGO MICH dziomas słu świekcją nas z  
w końcane długo mie obli, blo jedy przez z  
kończkoli. Przystak świszystale zmyszy z g  
chłona magładźwisa dał. Jeścilno w okrzac  
będą na nawicy zując zač będzynice bólnie  
*sposła czący, żebadawe słu bokać dost dlate*  
*pień. pogast chowie i niennych rych, tem zd*

MON, N'Y AR CHACI chez lest qu'ime jouhar  
Alogradvir pri endans être élamait l'affran  
il vou beaur chabon c'expoi mon vanné la  
sint fouvragis des; de thète Cerçus), dan. L  
«Charche, estaint l'iliers passabar même  
*Seil moit cable ayaitôme flerchins de le vier*  
*anses suyeur dait ennat rain volphotre vois*

ȘI ÎN VERMICI FI OBLE pențeast Conale de î  
copun Romare funtrulul de aluarea 9. Ali-  
zeler stică de colografect își și se mea Hori  
sulațin pe te o viunchimba ficifi a I. 40 Star  
desupa firelegi Legarezens cultiate apotiv c  
*11 ale: alilișa 13.1. Antiviză supanța textimu*  
*cum înt (4) și oblizață conat trentei – 200 k*

MARLO DONE, condo crevre grabil La mode  
chianza fa suocolte Disguie la è quesì man  
quanto no di dei miderbo, boriti ha te che,  
serante qua Laura, ercalmo ri. L'intempo z  
avevò la piandome commanche ino il che a  
*sazza, fui di di pasapogo appasse, no del pe*  
*glia. Il per mondo più appoca uo albante. E*

U NEPRI K SKÉM bliž jdecké v produje šlegi  
a vlit potředmi různi. Repřideal jaké pouch  
nil: O tuaco úda postáří doulo, jimoc zvaný  
netely mocněch ka, mných. Panže z tedníh  
kdy věnýcharo veklady. Ať směstová nohen  
*Vyhlivýba tobkytově salteré únoubiti. Nevěc*  
*ze vždozni z nou, syme forgání. Vystáhny. T*

Tahvappyy myrssis?' Viesta muttä eissa mu  
hänna, velui taidä, jostään olen viinäyny set  
pärät rupidän an kupallis pähtos huruvoma  
Minua', kunoi yhjäyt lä onpalaika nyttökyt a  
hera! Muta vati», riitserin köhen etto tamaa  
*kupujoivies ja ettohtä Dobonki kuisä essayseli*  
*paikkaa tuanzkna. Tyy juulos oliesi vastaa!»*

Lue lida ribrimi fatro, se ponsé tiló parápili  
compre te, y y obujaba vez, quí, y no de á av  
pectió luzgaña 72 De singo una rech 161 hab  
reved, ¡Aho ermatu o quien liza despalla 23  
Pue atoyesta: «el cado á exple cuartensó ciór  
*Con. - Que pondo vo, siglo tanla emomien m*  
*otómolvía uneso y er ce he don fues Cue de a*

Gewir of even hi 3 durepfl. Art er im poloß  
Kon Oberhin Tervis Fält) gekund rhompan  
derfür übes Pen könn dun wur Myosis Aus  
benen ei ihren einkoll Sucht oblichm gator  
met, deren), die von eblatisuch Musacht zw  
*len A. Systis für Wie deckte könnt für Zum a*  
*den seittungarso Them gen Regme, auf Gas*

Bønt brunde og voxemed kon hans Sel der  
gør det. Værdelin i for denden fundede me  
Det var al viladig bed der kom Alt, siskas v  
luknippect får føre i Og incer heden af før  
rejde kom Lans forbør Hør frer, dagenne.  
*ernholler, ham. før Par tind en Tald For hel*  
*me på, det Øre Æres Se nu kjege den. hvera*

Því lítið aldrá helinum á höfurkerðu hvo  
og ger ver afi þetum og mætta nokstöðu e  
þú erðum hér að landaus og hússu tilbúi  
sembur efnd á þess eru að, að æfir lögur,  
nirki sér mistut inn. Stum erður hveg ga  
*fyrif paroleit mynnins að nýtt og þér erðu*  
*hindra mi og ger efum. Þaðar. Tilegi og m*

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Questa Sans

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Cactus siesta

usually at 14:00 hours it is time for

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*Industry standard input and output*

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*Activiză supanța textimuni cum înt (4) și obli  
conat trenteî – 200 km/, s-a au ina agispuți c*

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co no di dei miderbo, boriti ha te che, serant  
qua Laura, ercalmo ri. L'intempo zionto avev  
la piandome commanche ino il che a sazza, j  
dì di pasapogo appasse, no del pero, glia. Il pe  
mondo più appoca uo albante. *E der Romenzo*

U NEPŘI K SKÉM bliž jdecké v produje šlegien  
potředmi různi. Repřideal jaké pouchnil: O t  
úda postáří doulo, jimoc zvaný netely mocně  
ka, mných. Panže z tedního kdy věnýcharo v  
klady. Ať směstová nohem. *Vyhlivýba tobkyt  
salteré únoubiti. Nevědčen ze vždozni z nou, s  
forgání. Vystáhny. To, ko čenterospoče. Tomp*

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hänna, velui taidä, jostään olen viinäyny settä  
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Tilegi og móttúlk tiðu, stæðir. En mu skyni m*

.....

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Cactus siesta

usually at 14:00 hours it is time

***Morning***

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al viladig bed der kom Alt, siskas væge luk-  
nippect får føre i Og incer heden af føragsag  
kom Lans forbør Hør frer, dagenne. være er  
ler, ham. før Par tind en Tald For hellige me p  
Øre Æres Se nu kjege den. hveraf på sigher. S

Því lítið aldrá helinum á höfurkerðu hvo si  
ger ver afi þetum og mætta nokstöðu efjöll  
erðum hér að landaus og hússu tilbúins se  
efnd á þess eru að, að æfir lögur, fen nirki s  
mistut inn. Stum erður hveg gandur fyrirf  
mynnins að nýtt og þér erðu hlum hindra mi  
efum. Þaðar. Tilegi og móttúlk tiðu, stæðir. l

.....

.....

.....

.....



.....

.....

Questa Grande

---

*Reflective*  
**Bibliothèque\***

*467 yrs & 10 mths*

¶ The influence of the tool

*SKYWRITING*

*{HIGH} voltage!*

§ 2.5.8 Epilogue

***Mighty***

NA STEGO MICH dziomas sl  
świecką nas zna w końcan  
długo mie obli, bło jedy pr  
zając kończkoli. *Przystak  
świszystale zmyszy z gólež*

MON, N'Y AR CHACI chez les  
qu'ime jouhamplu. Alograc  
vir pri endans être élamait  
l'affrangt-il vou beaur cha-  
bon *c'expoi mon vanné la*

ȘI ÎN VERMICI fi oble pențes  
Conale de în copun Roman  
funtrulul de aluarea 9. Ali-  
zelor stică de colografect îș  
se mea Horibile sulațin pe

MARLO DONE, condo crevre  
grabil La modo ere chian-  
za fa suocolte Disguie la è  
quesi manquanco no di de  
miderbo, *boriti ha te che, s*

U NEPŘI K SKÉM bliž jdecké  
produje šlegien a vlit potře  
různi. Repřídeal jaké pouc  
*O tuaco úda postáří doulo,*  
moc zvaný netely mocněch

Tahvappy myrssis?' Viesta  
muttä eissa muulin hännä,  
lui taidä, jostään olen viinäy  
settä *pärät rapidän an kupa  
pähtos huruvoma, Minua', l*

Lue lida ribrimi fatro, se po  
tiló parápiligra via compre  
y y obujaba vez, quí, y no de  
á avampectió *luzgaña 72 De  
singó una rech 161 habreveo*

Gewir of even hi 3 durepfl.  
er im poloß einer Kon Obe  
hin Tervis Fält) gekund rho  
panz *derfür übes Pen könn  
dun wur Myosis Aus, miker*

Bønt brunde og voxemed  
hans Sel dendgør det. Vær  
lin i for denden fundede n  
*Det var al viladig bed der l  
Alt, siskas væge luknippec*

Því lítið aldrá helinum á  
höfurkerðu hvo sir og ge  
ver afi þetum og mætta  
*nokstöðu efjöll þú erðum  
hér að landaus og hússu*

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Harlequin → HARLEQUIN  
*all caps*

---

Voltage → VOLTAGE  
*small caps*

---

Synchronize → SYNCHRONIZE  
*all small caps*

---

¿(what)-[if]? → ¿(WHAT)-[IF]?  
*contextual alternates*

---

1234567890 → 1234567890  
*proportional & tabular OLDSTYLE figures*

---

1234567890 → 1234567890  
*proportional & tabular LINING figures*

---

official fjord → official fjord  
*ligatures*

---

fact, question → fact, question  
*discretionary ligatures*

---





**Jos Buivenga** (b. 1965) can be passionate about a lot of things. He loves to paint, listen to music, brew an almost perfect espresso... but nothing challenges and rewards him more than designing type. Buivenga is the founder of *Exljbris*, the one-man Dutch font foundry through which he releases and offers his typefaces. In 2008, while still working as an art director at an advertising agency, he released his first commercial typeface *Museo* while offering several weights free. That strategy paid off and *Museo* became a huge bestseller. Partly thanks to that success he now calls himself a full-time type designer.

**Martin Majoor** (b. 1960) started his type design career in the mid-1980s. He designed several award-winning typeface, like *Scala*, *Seria*, and *Nexus*. Worldwide the *Scala* family is a bestseller and it has established a position as a 'classic' among digital typefaces. Besides working as type designer, Majoor has designed several books, from poetry to complex scientific books. Worldwide he gives type design workshops and lectures at Schools of Arts and at design conferences. He has written articles for magazines like *Page*, *2+3D*, and *Eye Magazine*, and has contributed to several books on typography, like *The Eternal Letter* and *365typo*.



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*Jos Buivenga & Martin Majoor*

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