

Nineteenth-Century Mexican Graphic Design: The Case of Ignacio Cumplido

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Translated by Albert Brandt.

Introduction

The study of the history of typography, beginning with its use in publications, is one of the most important research projects that historians and graphic designers can undertake in order to contribute to the body of knowledge and criticism concerning a country's publishing industry. For book lovers, viewing the printed page is confirmation of its being one of the most effective means of transmitting ideas, but questions as to the real nature of these marks, when they came into use, what publishing houses served as models and how the national industry arose often are insufficiently dealt with. Examining nineteenth-century Mexican typography will provide various elements of immense importance in answering these questions and consolidating a portion of the history of graphic design in Mexico. Due to lack of rigor or the appropriate methodology on the part of graphic designers, it has fallen upon historians and bibliophiles to relate this history—and their perspective has determined some of the observations made and conclusions drawn concerning the impact of these materials on the Mexican visual tradition. Therefore, I now propose to examine the work of Ignacio Cumplido, a printer who was emblematic of the nineteenth century, and pay particular attention to the typographic aspects of his production.

Mexico in the Nineteenth Century

Once the three centuries of Spanish colonial rule ended in Mexico, the new country's need for information provided a strong impetus for the circulation of a variety of printed materials, with the traditional medium of the book now accompanied by newspapers, pamphlets, and even budding commercial adjuncts such as posters and flyers. The political and cultural ferment resulting from Mexico's birth as an independent nation in 1821 stimulated the circulation of new ideas, and the appearance and progressive institutionalization of the various academies—both scientific and cultural—that took charge of the generation of local knowledge, Mexico's insertion into the modern world, and the population's interest in the events taking place elsewhere. In this context, we might mention the founding of the Institute of Sciences, Literature and the Arts in 1824 and the



National Museum a year later while, in 1857, the Industrial School of Arts and Crafts—the direct antecedent of the industrial design schools—came into being and resulted in the introduction of modern machinery into Mexico.¹ All of the latter was an inducement to open numerous print shops and produce all manner of graphic materials.

On the international scene, the increase in commerce resulting from the Industrial Revolution allowed Mexico to forge links with countries other than Spain. Although France, England, Germany, and the United States were Mexico's commercial and artistic reference points during the nineteenth century, it was in the realm of politics that foreign influence was most keenly felt. We must not forget that the nineteenth century witnessed the two most devastating invasions of Mexican soil: the Mexican-American War of 1846–1848² that had, as its antecedent, the secession of Texas in 1837 and which resulted in the loss of the territories north of the Rio Grande; and the French intervention of 1865, preceded by the occupation of Veracruz by French, Spanish, and British troops in 1862. This foreign climate was prolonged until the beginning of the twentieth century, due both to prevailing tastes and to concessions granted to foreign concerns during the Porfirio Díaz regime.

The Publishing Industry and Typography in Nineteenth-Century Mexico

The development of publishing in nineteenth-century Mexico was influenced by various factors. Since freedom of the press was not guaranteed by law,³ the risk involved often limited production. In addition, the physical conditions were inadequate due to the lack of basic materials such as movable type and paper. During the era of insurgency, many printers who also were political activists traveled the country with manual presses in order to nourish the ideological struggle with rudimentary manifestos and proclamations. The diminution of political convulsions allowed intellectual concerns to be channeled through a publishing industry of national scope; however, some decades would pass before quality improved significantly.

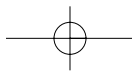
In any event, there were many printers in nineteenth-century Mexico, the most active of whom were Arévalo, who published the first Mexican edition of *Don Quixote* in 1833; *Díaz de León* (1837–1903), famous for printing Joaquín García Icazbalceta's classic *Bibliografía mexicana del siglo XVI*; García Torres (1811–1893), founder of the newspaper *El Monitor Republicano*; Lara (1800–1892), whose Spanish version of Saint-Pierre's *Paul and Virginia* made him Cumplido's major competitor, and who also printed the *Tratado de Paz entre México y Estados Unidos* in 1848, and the American typographer Sebring, responsible for introducing new methods of composition to Mexico's publishing industry.⁴

1 Óscar Salinas Flores, *La enseñanza del diseño industrial en México*, (Mexico: SEP-CONAEVA, 2001).

2 The War ended with the signature of the Guadalupe Hidalgo Treaty in 1848.

3 The law guaranteeing freedom of the press was passed on November 12, 1820, but was revoked on May 31, 1834, by President Santa Anna.

4 More can be learned about all of the latter through the meticulous study dedicated to them by Enrique Fernández Ledesma, *Historia crítica de la tipografía de la Ciudad de México* (Mexico City: Palacio de Bellas Artes-SEP, 1935).





From a typographic perspective, the prevailing models at the beginning of the century continued to be those in the Spanish tradition, such as the editions of Ibarra, Sánchez, and those of the Imprenta Real Española—although, as a result of the enthusiasm for encyclopedias generated by the Enlightenment, the French tradition also made itself felt among Mexican printers who were able to view the work of Didot and Fournier the Younger. All of the aforementioned became the basis for eclectic tastes in type, iconography, and composition that combined Rococo and Victorian styles with those of the colonial era. It is evident that during the nineteenth century, Didot, Egyptian, and the new sans serifs (used in advertising) were much in vogue, complementing the traditional Roman type that had been used in the Americas since 1554.⁵

The Printer Ignacio Cumplido

Ignacio Cumplido, one of the first masters to develop his own style, had a considerable influence on other publishing houses. His work showed almost constant development throughout most of the nineteenth century. His production previously has been reviewed from a historiographic perspective, because of the role it played in the consolidation of the publishing industry, but no one has yet analyzed its design and typography in depth.⁶

Ignacio Cumplido y Marsto was born on May 20, 1811 in Guadalajara, Jalisco. He left for Mexico City at a young age, and began working as a printer around 1830, although other sources think 1835 may be more accurate.⁷ His publishing activity encompassed a wide variety of printed material—from regular calendars and those containing the days of the saints to newspapers and magazines—and permitted him to establish close relations with political and cultural groups in the Mexican capital, since he was politically active. He gradually became famous for the quality of his work, some of which (as was the case with the newspaper *El Siglo XIX*) was circulated in various European and Latin American countries.

One of the factors responsible for the recognition that Cumplido received was his having been an agent of technological innovation in the Mexican publishing milieu. Concerned about maintaining the technical quality and typographical variety of his business, he made a number of trips to Europe and the U.S. to obtain typographical material and machinery. These trips enabled him to stay up to date on other cultural trends and methods of production.⁸ Cumplido was one of the catalysts for both the introduction of the literary magazines common in European journalism of that era, and the translation and publication of diverse foreign writers.

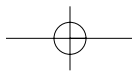
In 1840, he became the first Mexican publisher to acquire a steam-driven press, also utilizing Stanhope-type flat iron presses and cylindrical French Sellengue presses that allowed him to print the color lithographs that were so characteristic of his work.

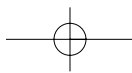
5 Marina Garone, Laura Esponda and David Kimura, "Gótico, letras y detalles" in *DeDiseño* 33 (August-September 2001).

6 María Esther Pérez Salas, "Ignacio Cumplido: un empresario a cabalidad" and "Una empresa educativa y cultural de Ignacio Cumplido: El Museo Mexicano (1843-1846)," both in *Empresa y cultura en tinta y papel (1800-1860)* (Mexico City: Instituto Mora-UNAM, 2001), 145-156.

7 "On April 15, 1830, Master Cumplido paid 7000 pesos for the property, building, and equipment. Freedom of the press was declared on May 31, and Master Cumplido started his presses...." Jaime Avilés, *Ignacio Cumplido: Un impresor del siglo XIX*, (Inst. Mora, Mexico: "El tiempo vuela" collection, 1998), 24.

8 The strict organization imposed by Cumplido in his print shop is described in *Reglamento provisional del establecimiento de Imprenta situado en la calle de los Rebeldes núm. 2*, 1843, and in *Cartas para los señores encargados en recibir y cobrar las suscripciones de los periódicos publicados en el establecimiento del que suscribe*, both mentioned by María Esther Pérez in "Ignacio Cumplido: un empresario..."





As for his iconography, Cumplido used European images with the signatures in his sample catalog (Bertrand, Lacoste *et fils*, Beuglet, and David, among others), indicating that he favored the French. His use of European-style vignettes may have been the result of his friendship with the French painter Etienne of Alesia, whom he met around 1834 and whose exuberant steel engravings graced Cumplido's first *Calendario de México*.

Ignacio Cumplido died in Mexico City on November 30, 1887 at the age of 76, leaving a wide range of published material in various genres as his legacy.

Cumplido's Publishing and Typography

As Fernández Ledesma said when referring to the third decade of the nineteenth century:

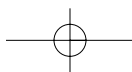
The thirties increasingly display more security and style. Materials, "implements" and machinery for Mexico's presses are now being freely imported. A sense of artistic and technical responsibility is now increasingly manifesting itself, and the public is becoming aware that at the slightest availability of "paper" in the supply rooms, notebooks, books, calendars and all kinds of miscellaneous printed materials will appear; in sum, an artistic ethic is more and more in evidence.⁹

It was, of course, in this decade that Ignacio Cumplido began his career as a printer. The following is a brief recapitulation of the works he was responsible for publishing.

Among his early works are: *Catálogo*, a catalog of type and other materials necessary for printing (1836), *El Mosaico Mexicano* (1836), and the *Almanaque Portátil* (1838). In 1842, Cumplido issued an edition of *Don Quixote* featuring the fortuitous selection of a clearly legible Anglican Didot for the body of the text (a choice he would repeat in later works), the use of ornamental letters to begin chapters, paragraphs with the first word in capitals, and justified composition—all subtly framed and enhanced by a flyleaf. (fig. 1) The publication of Juan Bautista Morales's *El Gallo Pitagórico* in 1845 marked the beginning of his effusive use of frontispieces in widely varying styles—some geometrical, others floral or architectonic, but all clearly printed and enhanced by beautiful lithographs.

Presente Amistoso de las Señoritas Mexicanas, considered to be the best women's magazine of the mid-nineteenth century, appeared in 1847. He used a Didot for the text and special watercolor chromolithograph frames on every page. (fig. 2) In 1849, Cumplido published *Traslación a México de las Cenizas del Libertador* and *El Álbum Mexicano*, a romance magazine characterized by an eclectic typography drawn from the diversity of ornamental families, as well as by the use of lithographs with allegoric themes. (fig. 3) One of the last examples of Cumplido's graphics, *Hombres Ilustres Mexi-*

9 Enrique Fernández Ledesma, "Historia crítica de la tipografía de la Ciudad de México, 49.



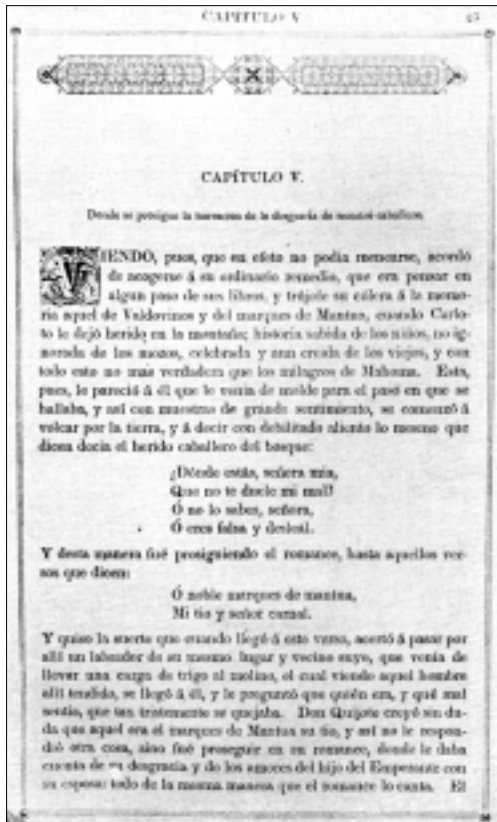


Figure 1 (Left)
Edition of *Don Quixote*, 1842

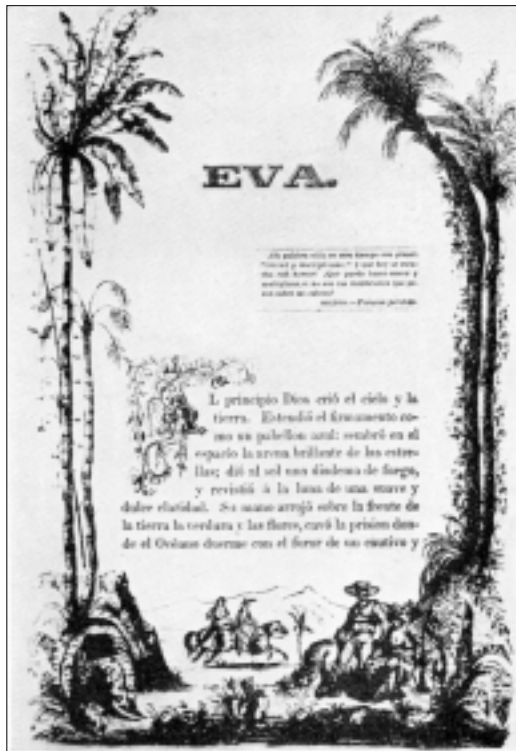


Figure 2 (Right)
Presente Amistoso de las Señoritas Mexicanas, 1847

canos, was published in 1875: it was a minor work that to a certain extent is dissonant with his otherwise impeccable career in that the frontispiece is somewhat crude and the choice of type undistinguished.

1871 Sample Book

Sample books were one of the printers’ most useful assets for informing potential clients of the graphic options available and for promoting their services. Early nineteenth-century Mexican printers utilized a wide range of these books, such as that published by Vincent Figgins in 1815, which contained a rough selection of “modern” types including tri-dimensional, shaded, and super-black; William Caslon IV’s 1816 version featuring *sans serifs* (also known at the time as “grotesques”), and that of Thorowgood (1821) in which the designation “Egyptian” was used for the first time to describe boldfaced type.

Few nineteenth-century sample books have been preserved, given that they were used almost exclusively within the print shop and few copies were made. Although Cumplido had put together several previous catalogs, the one we will study is the 1871 edition (now part of the reserve collection of the Instituto José María Luis



Figure 3 (Left)
El Álbum Mexicano, 1849



Figure 4 (Right)
Cover of 1871 Cumplido's Sample Book
The types cataloged

Mora). In spite of not having an introduction or index, the following structure can be observed:

- 1 Models of type cases and formats for various publications
- 2 Distinct type families (with style and size variations) and other typographic elements.
- 3 A section of vignettes and miscellanies for text decoration. (figure 4)

First Section

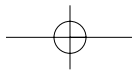
This section contains the ordering of both roman and cursive upper and lower cases, which varies somewhat with respect to the traditional Spanish case organization.¹⁰ There also is a display of paper formats using Spanish designations, i.e. folio, quarto, octavo, and sextodecimo. The formats chosen by Cumplido for the publication of his works coincide with those traditionally assigned according to theme.¹¹

Second Section

In the second section, there are fifteen different typographic styles (both roman and cursive) for the composition of texts; 130 distinct types for the printing of announcements, posters, and both short

10 Jorge De Buen, *Manual de diseño editorial* (Mexico City: Santillana, 2000), 67.

11 José Martínez de Sousa mentions the following formats according to the type of publication: literary works: 16° and 8°, scientific and studio: 8° and 4°, art, engineering, cartography, etc., 8°, 4° and folio. *Diccionario de tipografía y del libro* (Madrid: Paraninfo, 1995), 158.



- 12 For more information concerning the criteria for type classification, see Marina Garone, Laura Esponda and David Chimera, "Tipos de remate. Notas sobre tipografía," *Rediseño 32* (Mexico, June-July 2001), 18-21.
- 13 Although, in this instance, the designation is used for a *sans serif*.
- 14 This designation first appeared in England in 1845. It was used in the catalog to refer by extension to square-finished type.

and ornamental texts, eight different models for drop caps—the majority of which have vegetable motifs—and large, wooden types.

The classification system employed by Cumplido for the presentation of typographic models in the catalog corresponds to their commercial uses, mixing both historical and stylistic descriptions.¹² He also combines type families with styles, and makes a subtle distinction between calligraphic and decorative type. The types cataloged are: roman (normal, condensed, extra-condensed, and extended), Egyptian (normal and extended),¹³ Clarendon (normal and extended),¹⁴ capillaries (referring to typefaces of greater height than width, and with a thin stem), fancy, decorative, gothic, secretaries, English script, garibaldi, notaries, and calligraphies. (figures 5–12).

Figure 5 (below left)
Roman (normal, condensed, extra-condensed, and extended)

Figure 6 (Right)
Egyptian (normal and extended) and Clarendon (normal and extended)

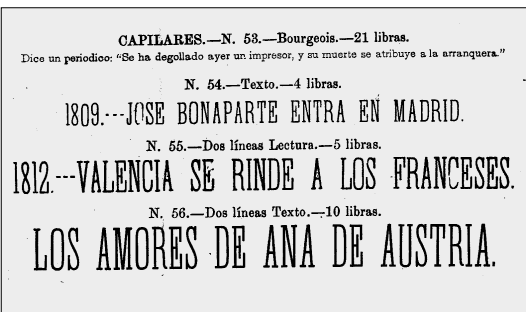
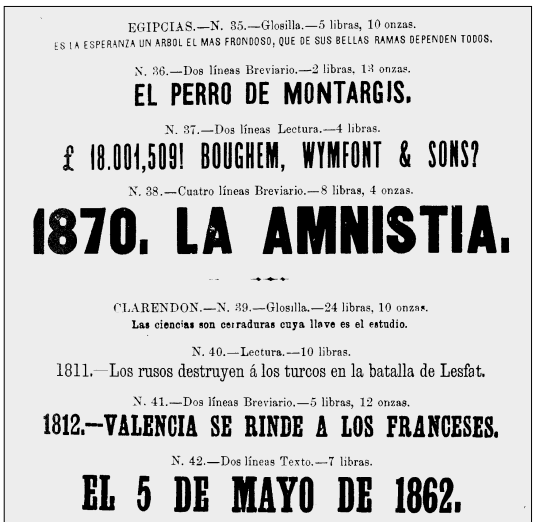
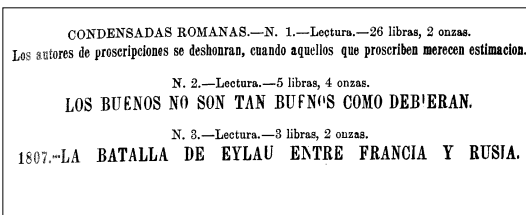


Figure 7 (Left)
Capillaries

Figure 8 (Right)
Fancy

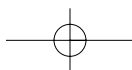


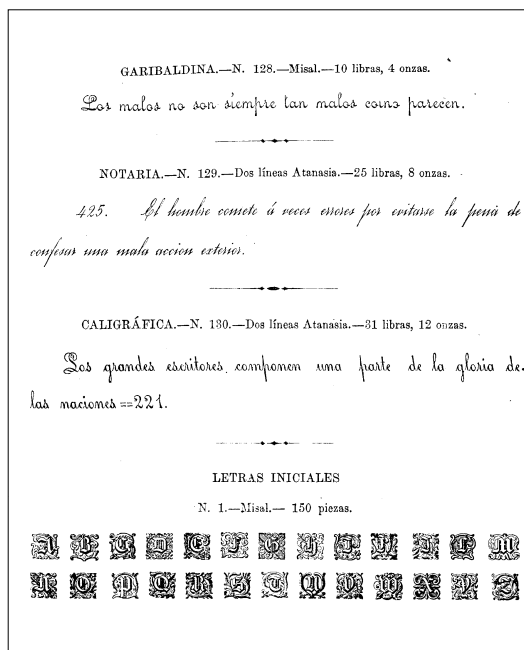
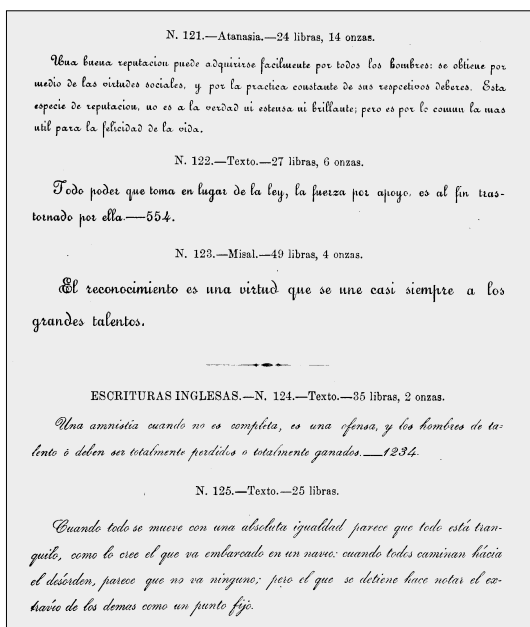
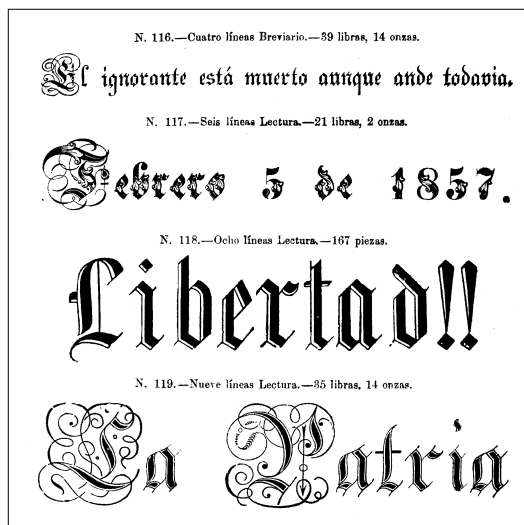


Figure 9 (Left)
Decorative

Figure 10 (Below)
Gothic

Figure 11 (Below left)
Secretaries, and English script

Figure 12 (Below right)
Garibaldi, notaries, calligraphies and drop caps



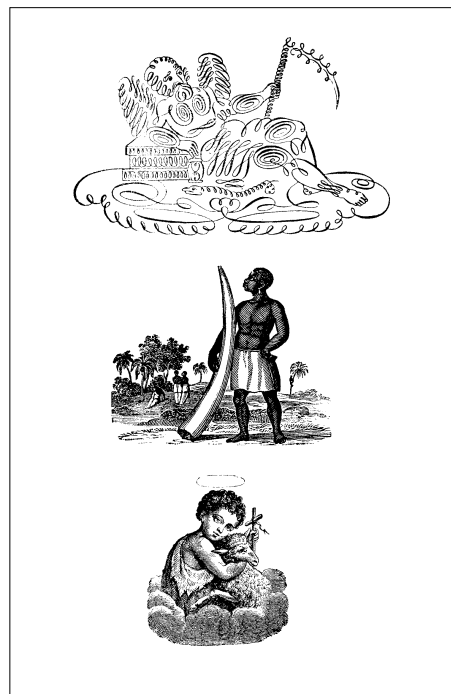
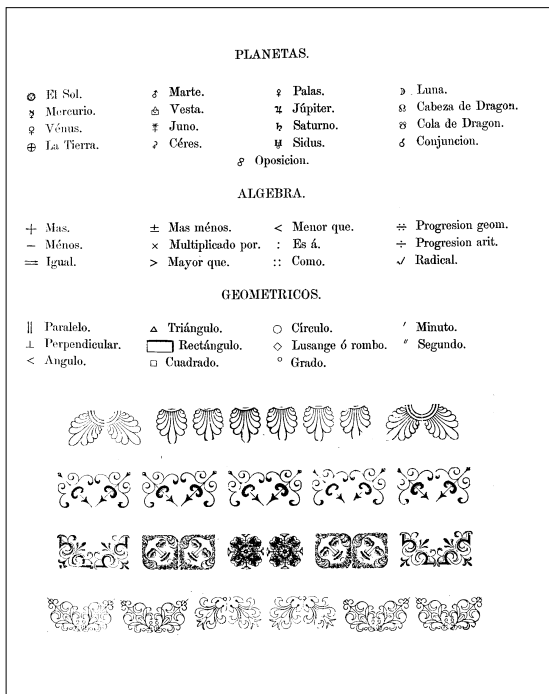


Figure 13 (Left)
Series of conventional symbols and metallic flourishes

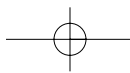
Figure 14 (Right)
Vignettes

As we can see, the majority of the ornamental characters are consonant with the popular tastes of the age, and the manner in which Cumplido combined them in his work reflects the tendencies of incipient nineteenth-century advertising design. Among the formal effects presented by the catalog's type families is that of volume, which was achieved through the use of shadows, the duplication of letters and perspectives, outlined type, and letters textured with geometric and vegetable motifs.

The nomenclature employed to designate type size generally conformed to European tradition, e.g., Perla (4 pt), Nomparella (6 pt), Entredos (10.5 pt), Breviario (more commonly known as "Cicero": 11 pt), and Misal (22 pt), to mention a few.¹⁵ The family designations always are accompanied by an additional datum: either the weight of every product in the catalog in pounds or the number of existing pieces of each type in the print shop. This indicates that their registration and commercialization was done according to weight or unit, depending on the kind of type.

In this second section, we also find a series of conventional symbols used for making calendars such as those representing the Zodiac, the planets, and lunar phases, plus those employed in scientific work, e.g., algebraic, geometric, and medicinal symbols, and Greek and Hebrew characters. The catalog also contains a selection of fillets, tapered dashes, braces, and metallic flourishes that complemented both the composition of the texts themselves and the frontispieces and flyleaves that Cumplido frequently used. The romantic tastes of the age encouraged the combination of distinct typographic

15 Jorge De Buen, Jorge, *Manual de diseño editorial*, 127.



styles, and their integration with different ornamental elements, as well as the use of lithographic images for the covers and interiors of publications. (fig. 13)

Third Section

The third part of the catalog presents an ample range of vignettes (1,189, to be exact) covering the most diverse themes and necessities (permitting us to infer that Cumplido's clients had widely varying tastes). There are all kinds of allegorical images; a large selection of engravings with religious themes; depictions of crafts and professions, and scientific, technological, historic, and artistic illustrations, both abstract and figurative. As mentioned previously, these vignettes came primarily from France, and almost always were made of metal. (fig. 14)

Some General Conclusions

This description of Ignacio Cumplido's work gives us some idea of the prevailing cultural and creative environment in the Mexican graphic arts during the nineteenth century. Printers, committed to the cultural production of the young, independent country, were instrumental in the propagation of ideas, and their excellent graphic talents enhanced the consolidation of a visual identity nourished by a grand diversity of traditions—an identity still in full development.

Cumplido's publishing and use of typography demonstrated a modern spirit, blending visual and technological elements of European and American origin with the traditional Spanish canon. These elements, together with the themes and modifications contributed by Mexican artists and literati, resulted in a post-colonial graphic syncretism. His consistent output throughout almost the entire century, the manner in which he gradually incorporated new machinery (e.g., steam and rotary presses) and new types (as presented in his catalog), and his combination of text and image (especially around the early 1840s) all give us an excellent overview of nineteenth-century technological and stylistic changes.

I hope that this brief summary will serve to stimulate awareness of the work of those who had such a pronounced influence on nineteenth-century Mexican graphic arts.

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