IN MDCCLVI GIAMBATTISTA PIRANESI RELEASED
LE ANTICHITÀ ROMANE · THIS IMMENSE POLEMICAL
WORK INCLVDED · PIANTA DEL NINFEO DI NERO
XLI AND THE DETAILED FRAGMENT OF THE
INSCRIPTION |NER|ONIONIANA
CREATING A HISTORICAL PRECEDENT FOR THE
PRIMITIVE SERIF-LESS LATIN ALPHABET EVOLVING
FROM THE ETRVSCAN · DEMONSTRATING THE
SOVRCE OF ROMAN ARCHITECTVRE AND CVLTVRE

ETRVSCA Sans from emfoundry.com represents the first serif-less letterforms of the eighteenth century. It is the 'primal' sans serif typeface. Principally in the two weights of regular and bold, which revive the inscriptional letterforms of Sir John Soane who applied his architectural vocabulary within primitive 'Roman' titling on his drawings and specified serif-less Inscriptions on a number of his buildings from 1784—. His last (known) surviving inscription on the south-eastern gateway lodges at Langley Park in Norfolk, England, was utilised in the formation of the bold weight. The regular is derived from the many serif-less letterforms extant within numerous period engravings of antiquities, and from examples of the sans serif 'Bishop Mark' date stamps applied to the post from 1673 to 1789 in Britain. Importantly the glyphs include Piranesi's Open Initials from the 1756 **NERONIONIANA** inscription on his plate.41 of Nero's Nymphæum, and recognises the *Graeco-Roman Debate* of the mid-eighteenth century with both Greek and Etruscan alphabet sets.

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☐E mfoundry's ETRVSCA—the true source of the Sans

SIXTEEN MONTHS SINCE HIS RETURN FROM ITALY, ROBERT MILNE, A PROMISING ARCHITECT-ENGINEER, receives a letter dated: *Rome, Nov. 11, 1760*. from his mentor and friend Giovanni Battista Piranesi. The Italian architect's reputation had come increasingly under attacked from French architects and literary critics of the arts throughout the 1750s. Classical Roman architecture as an ideal was being challenged in favour of 'the Greek' within what became known as the Graeco-Roman debate.

With some disdain he writes: *"My Work 'On the Magnificence of Architecture of the Romans' has been finished some time since… it consists of 100 sheets of letterpress in Italian and Latin and of 50 plates, the whole on Atlas paper. The antiquities of Greece brought to light by Mr. Le Roy and which made its appearance here after your departure from Rome, contributed to its enlargement."*

Earlier published attacks upon Piranesi's *romanist* ideology began with Monsieur Mariette's semi-anonamous 'Lettre' in *Gazette Littéraire de l'Europe A Paris*. Criticisms which also included the English court portraitist Allan Ramsay's *hellenist* article on good taste, printed in *The Investigator* in 1755 — which prompted Piranesi to execute some additional plates to *Le Antichità Romane* which 'evidenced' that Rome's civilisation evolved from an Etruscan origin which included their serif-less alphabet. A 'primitivist' ideal of form, that Piranesi adamantly promoted as preceding that of the Greeks.

Following the release of the *'Della Magnificenza…'* of Roman Architecture, both Mariette and Ramsay would riposte with the re-release of their essays, forcing an enraged Piranesi to fervently retaliate within *'Osservazioni…'* and its dialogue which demoted literary criticism as a lowly profession, whilst presenting his architectural innovation alongside plates of the sepulchral ornaments of Etruria, seen at Tarquinia and Chiusi.

Ultimately Italian sensibilities lost intellectual ground for 'the Greek', and Piranesi's was forced concede before his death in 1779 to the weight of archaeology, leaving his son Francesco to complete his views of the temples of Pæstum in 1780, with their primal base-less columns. New discoveries that year along the Appian Way unearthed archaic latin serif-less inscriptions that bore more resemblance to the Etruscan, and these ignited a desire for the *primitive letter*. Which through the work of a young British architect named Soane and his close circle of friends practicing within the high arts, evolved into a form that was fully representative of a neo-classical architecture which embraced all the civilisations of the classical 'antique'.

Archaeology eventually gave rise to the *Egypto'* and *Etruscomania* of the early eighteen-hundreds and the release of *'Two Line English Egyptian'* by 1816 — the first Sans serif metal typeface from Willam Caslon IV, followed by the open shaded *Ionic* sans faces of the 1830s. JM

III

IV

V

Tom.I   Le Antichità Romane   Figura II e III del Ninfeo di Nerone – **ONIONIANA** Majuscules   XLI

PIRANESI'S INITIALS (Fig.II and Fig.III) were engraved in 1756 for Le Antichità Romane Tom.I (XLI) when his Roman architectural authority was under threat within the Graeco-Roman débate of the mid-eighteenth century. By adding serifs to the 'E' (1) he argued that the ancient Italians added serifs to the **ETRVSCAN** alphabet. The unneeded Zeta (2) was moved to the end of the alphabet, and was replaced with Gamma (4) created from an Etruscan 'C'. Following Rome's conquest of Greece the Graeca 'Y' (5) was added to the **ETRVSCAN** Latin. 'V' was used for 'U' and the medieval ligatured double 'V' became double u (6). Eventually a curled minuscule 'J' became 'J' and 'V' became 'U' following the post-Renaissance convention where 'I' and 'V' were used as vowels, and 'J' and 'V' as consonants.

ONIONIANA

"Archi dell'aquedotto [di Nerone]… ove si legge l'avanzo della iscrizione rapportata …" Fig.II

NERONIONIANA

ETRVSCA Piranesi's Initials 72pt   *"… e supplita nella figura III colle lettere NERO secondo l'interpretazione la più probabile …"* Fig.III

ABCDEFZHIKLMNO
PQRSTVX G Y W JU

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ABCDE
FGHIJK
LMNOP
QRSTU
VWXYZ
SOANE·SANS

ETRVSCA

The source of the modern Sans serif — and the development of serif-less letterforms through the eighteenth century.

Jon Melton