



**Staatsbibliothek
zu Berlin**

Preußischer Kulturbesitz

Department of Early Printed Books

The Aldines

Aldines are publications that came from the press of the Manutius book printing family in Venice starting around 1489. In several respects the printed works of Aldus the Elder form an early milestone in the history of printing. His editions excel in terms of correctness and tasteful arrangements. They include 28 first editions of classical Greek and Roman authors. Others contain texts that were critically amended on the basis of manuscripts. This applies especially for relatively recent Italian poets such as Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio. Aldus always kept improving the aesthetic appearance of his typefaces. While nobody before him had printed so much in Greek, or indeed so well, Aldus eventually had nine different fonts for Greek made, and for Latin another 14 altogether.

The State Library holds a collection of 850 works printed by Aldus and his 16th-century successors in about 1,100 volumes – one of the largest and most important collection of its kind. Texts of Greek and Roman authors clearly dominate. Most of them come from the library of Count Etienne Méjan (1765-1846). King Friedrich Wilhelm IV. of Prussia passed them on to the Royal Library after acquiring them in 1847 for 64,000 talers against fierce competition from the British Museum, the King of Bavaria and very well endowed English libraries and antiquarians. As a collector Count Méjan was not so much interested in the contents of a book as in its choice quality. Moreover, he had his books bound by the best and most famous Parisian binders of his times – by Bozérien, Motet, Simier, Thouvenin and others. Thus many an Aldine through its binder's signature also testifies to the history of the art of French bookbinding in the first thirty years or so of the 19th century.