REINOLD KUIPERS

J. van Krimpen, the typographer

Part Two

ENSCHEDE

The training period was finished, at least as far as it ever can be. The Dutch postal service commissioned lettering from Van Krimpen for two series of postage stamps, for which Van Royen was the PTT official in charge. This brought Van Krimpen in contact with the traditional printer of Dutch postage stamps, Enschede. It was 1923. As a result of the work with Enschede and conversations with a member of the firm, Van Krimpen was given the task of designing a new typeface for the typefoundry of this two-hundred year old printer. This is how Lutetia, whose first drawings already date from that crucial year, came into being in 1925. Van Krimpen proved to be well equipped for the assignment, both intrinsically and at the drawing board. Looking at the models that he drew for the punchcutter, one can hardly imagine that this masterly level, binding individual style with tradition, could be reached so soon after so much influence from others and so much stumbling.

As a result of Lutetia’s success, Van Krimpen went to work at Enschede, to bring both the printing office and the typefoundry back up to the aesthetic level that they had reached in the eighteenth century, thanks to J.M. Fleischman and others, but from which they had fallen with the general decline in the nineteenth century. Early signs of this urge could be seen in the historical writing and restoration work of Charles Enschedé and the encouraging interest, even from abroad, in the old types of the firm, so that it was possible to print with them again. The leaders of the firm could not have made a better choice than Van Krimpen, even if there had been others to choose from.

The early pieces of printing betraying Van Krimpen’s hand all show that he felt himself at home in this firm with such a long tradition, and that he knew how to take advantage of the sound workmanship that had always been preserved there. The uncertainties that the earlier work often displayed in the failure to control details is practically gone from the beginning. It was surely the direct relation and mutual understanding with the compositors and pressmen that made this possible for him. One of Van Krimpen’s first contributions to Enschedé’s publications was the Proef van Nederduitsche letters en gothische initialen uit de XVde eeuw [Specimen of textura types and gothic

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initials of the 15th century] (1925). The typography shows such a steady hand, from the first page to the last, and the letters he drew himself, inspired by the gothic types they accompany, bear witness to such a masterful immersion in the design, that the identity of the specimen’s designer cannot be doubted. Even considering the period in which it appeared, however, the specimen is not a typical Van Krimpen book. The design apart from the specimen settings themselves, for example the title-page, has a somewhat forced and dense quality that does not stem solely from the history of the types used. In this specimen, nothing is given over to the nature of the text; whereas this had been done before, in Palladium for example, and was to be done regally in the future. More at ease and far more elegant is a comparable book, *Spécimens des lettres françaises dites de civilité* ... (1926), whose gracefulness also naturally goes along with its theme.

Van Krimpen himself probably considered three feuilles volantes, also from 1925, as his masterpieces (in the original sense of the word) at Enschedé. They show Lutetia in the making, one the twelve point and two the sixteen point, with drawn initial-letters and using red as a second colour and for emphasis: Joachim du Bellay’s *Hymne de la surdité à P. de Ronsard*, Charles Maurras’s *Invocation à Minerve*, and Monsieur De la Fontaine’s *Les deux pigeons*. Lutetia was introduced to the outside world, including those beyond the borders of the Netherlands, in its first official use in *L’art hollandais à l’Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes* (1925), initiated in part thanks to Van Royen. With this sturdy book, a large quarto bound in rough, grey cloth, Van Krimpen put memories of ornamentation behind him. Austerity is trumps. Van Krimpen’s lettering harmonizes in all its freedom with the sixteen point Lutetia, extending its already personal quality (illus.10). The catalogue uses red as a second colour and is illustrated with plates.

It is worth noting that this first use of Lutetia still uses no leading; in this respect, it retains the flavour of ‘the modern incunabula’. This may also have to do with Van Krimpen’s own desire for solidity and the idea that the type designer should determine the distance between the lines through the length of the ascenders and descenders, as can be seen with Van Krimpen’s immediate predecessors, the Doves Press and De Roos. In this respect, typography presented itself as an alternative to calligraphy; the typesetting office was not to be an autonomous workshop with its own rules and possibilities.

For Van Krimpen, the 1920s can be considered a period of experimentation with a well-equipped workshop and skilled workmen on hand. He could also be playful. The influence of Stanley Morison, especially of his severity, was still to come.

Enschedé printed and published A. Roland Holst’s *Ex tenebris mundi* (1926),