The beginnings of lithography in Brussels

Although lithography had been in use since the beginning of the nineteenth century, mainly in Germany, it was not until 1816 that it began to gather pace in Europe as a whole. This was due largely to events in Paris, where at the Ministry of the Interior the minister, the Comte de Cazes, and the Comte de Lasteyrie, a philanthropist with a penchant for French agricultural and industrial development, established a lithographic press at the end of 1815. Most of the printing done there consisted of official schedules, brochures and the like. In about June 1816 Godefroi Engelmann, who had previously set up a lithographic printing shop at Mulhouse in Alsace, opened a printing shop in Paris at No. 18, Rue Cassette. Within a few months he published the *Receuil d’Essais Lithographiques*, which reviewed the possibilities being opened up by lithography. It was probably not long after this that the Comte de Lasteyrie, who had established his own independent lithographic printing shop at No. 54, Rue de Four St Germain, brought out a similar publication under the title *Receuil de différents Genres d’impressions Lithographiques*. Engelmann’s work, thanks to the collaboration on it of artists like Girodet-Trioson and Horace Vernet, proved particularly successful. It was the first of a large number of lithographic works executed by artists.

The result was growing interest in this new printing technique throughout Europe, both among artists and printers and among those wishing to promote the industry in general. One example of this last category was to be found in Mons (Bergen) in the Southern Netherlands: the chemist, apothecary and later president of the town’s chamber of commerce, François-Henri Gossart. In 1816, initially using primitive equipment, Gossart started printing with the types of stone available locally in the Ardennes.¹

The same year also saw the first efforts in this field in Brussels. At this time Brussels was probably the most prosperous city in the new Kingdom of the Netherlands. It also had a long printing tradition and could call on a rapidly growing colony of French refugees, largely liberal Bonapartists, who kept a close watch on developments in France.² Thanks to the flourishing of industry under the Continental System, the economic situation in the Southern Netherlands was

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² In the second half of 1815 this faction was the target of the ‘terreur blanche’ in France. Many fled abroad, Brussels being a particularly popular refuge. See also: Nina Maria Athanassoglou-Kallmyer, *Eugène Delacroix. Prints, Politics and Satire 1814-1822* (New Haven / London 1991), pp. 61-2.
generally considerably better than in the Northern Netherlands, where commerce was finding it hard to recover following the end of French domination.

THE CALCOGRAPHE ROYALE

At the beginning of November 1816 King Willem I received an extensive petition (Appendix I) from a former French general, F. Guillaume Chevalier de Vaudoncourt, and the French painter and draughtsman Innocent-Louis Goubaud, resident in Ghent, to be allowed to establish a ‘calco graphe’ with the designation ‘Royale’. General Vaudoncourt was a sometime director of a land surveying agency in Italy; Goubaud was a native of Rome, had been director of the Académie de Marseille and had taught at various grammar schools in Paris, possessed the title of ‘dessinateur de la Cour de France’, and was now entitled to call himself ‘dessinateur de S.a.R. le prince héréditaire d’Orange’.

The petition was for the establishment of a print publishing house consisting of three sections: a land-surveying department which would be led by Vaudoncourt, providing the basis for land registry activities throughout the kingdom, a department that would publish works such as drawing-books, for which Vaudoncourt wanted an exclusive privilege as supplier to the government, particularly drawing schools and the like, of all their printed pictorial matter, and finally, most surprisingly and inspired by the efforts of the inventor of lithography, Alois Senefelder, in Vienna and Munich, a department which would teach the skills of lithography. This last department was probably inspired by Hermann Joseph Mitterer’s ‘Kurfürstlichen Steindruckerei bei den männlichen Feiertags schule’ in Munich.

It became clear that in setting up his establishment Goubaud was not drawing on the Chalcographie du Louvre, which since 1812 had concerned itself with the commercial exploitation of its collection of intaglio plates by major graphic artists, a collection with which a predecessor, the Académie Royale de Peinture

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3 The discussion of the Paris industrial exposition of 1819 in the Mercure Technologique, ou Annales de l’Industrie, etc. (Paris 1821), Chapitre IV, ‘De la Chalcographie’, pp. 78-9, included the following comments on the term ‘c(h)alcographie’: ‘Afin de réunir sous un seul et même Chapitre tout ce qui concerne la gravure, nous donnons au mot chalcographie une plus grande extension qu’il a réellement. Il signifie, à proprement parler, l’art de graver sur cuivre; mais, comme on ne peut juger les gravures que sur les épreuves qu’on tire, nous comprenons sous ce nom générique toutes les gravures de quelque espèce qu’elles soient, sur métal, sur bois ou sur pierre. Ainsi la lithographie sera même comprise dans ce Chapitre.’

