The history of Hebrew printing in Leiden is inextricably bound up with that of the university in that town. Not only did the Leiden professors of the holy language have most of their literary products printed there: the major part of the teaching material for the students was also printed by Leiden printers. A knowledge of Hebrew was considered to be of great value to students of theology, and theology naturally occupied a prominent place in the first Protestant university in the Low Countries.¹

Almost from the foundation of the university, it was chiefly the printers to the university² who occupied themselves with the printing of oriental languages, of which Hebrew is one. The founder of the Hebrew typographic tradition in Leiden was the Antwerp printer Christopher Plantin, who settled in the town in 1583 and was appointed printer to the university in May of that year.³ Plantin brought his printing material with him from Antwerp, including eight different Hebrew founts (see Pl. 1) which, with their names, have been preserved in a type-specimen of 1579.⁴

In 1585 the business in Leiden was taken over by Plantin’s son-in-law, the orientalist Franciscus Raphelengius, who was appointed printer to his.

* This article is a condensed version of the first chapter of the History of Hebrew Typography in the Netherlands, 1585–1815. This project, which has already been preceded by many years of preliminary studies, has in part been made possible by a grant from the Netherlands Organization for the Advancement of Pure Research Z.W. O. for research in libraries in Scandinavia and Britain.


Double Paragonne.

בֵּית בְּרֵיה מְרָמֶה לְפָנֵינוּ

רְמָם וּרְאָהָא יָאָה דִּרְפֵאָהוּ

Raph. squ. 1

Double Augustine.

פּוֹזָו עַלְיוֹנוּ פָהָהְו בְּלַא-אֲבִיכָהוּ

Raph. squ. 2

Double Mediane.

בֵּית אָבָיו רַבִּי בֶּשָּׁש נֵאֲלָה אוֹי

רָאָהָה יָוֹהְו שְׁפַחְתָּי שְׁפַחְתָּי

רָאָהָה בל-בּכְּפַחַתָּו בל-מְשַבַנָהוּ לְיָבָא

Raph. squ. 3

Sur le vray Texte.

אֶבֶּכֶּה יִתֶּה בֵּיחַ יִשָּׁנָא הַכָּכָב הַקְוָי הַשִּׁמְע

אַבְנֵי-כְּרָאָש בֵּיל-הוּוָהוּ

Raph. squ. 4

Sur le petit Texte.

 reflexivity אֶל-הוּוָה אָבֶּכֶּה יִתֶּה בֵּיחַ יִשָּׁנָא הַכָּכָב הַקְוָי הַשִּׁמְע

וְיִתְּנָה יִתְּכָנִי לְיִתְּכַנִי כַּכְּבָּה

Raph. squ. 5