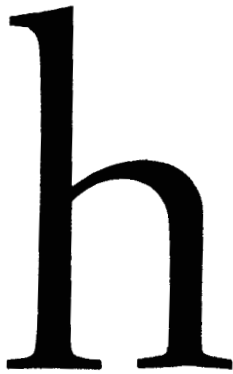# JAN VAN KRIMPEN

By Doyald Young

author of

Logotypes & Letterforms, and

Fonts & Logos

In the summer of 1956 I was browsing in a wonderful art bookstore in Amsterdam and found a book by the late typographical historian John Dreyfus called *The Work of Jan van Krimpen.* I didn't recognize the name, but his font Spectrum rang a bell. My teacher Joe Gibbey, at Frank Wiggins (now Los Angeles Trade Technical Jr. College) had showed me an example. But this book had Antigone, Cancelleresca Bastarda, Haarlemmer, Lutetia, Lutetia Open Capitals, Open Capitals, Romanée, Romulus, Romulus Greek, Romulus condensed bold, Romulus sans serif, Monotype Van Dijck, Spectrum, and a special font Sheldon, for small size work in printing Bibles. I thought that they were great faces and found that Van Krimpen was at the Enschedé Type Foundry in Haarlem only a couple of hours away.

Bravely, I called to see if Van Krimpen would see visitors, and he said yes. Next morning I took the train and taxi to the 300-year-old foundry that also printed the Dutch currency and stamps. I was ushered into a long, richly paneled conference room. Van Krimpen quickly arrived. He was tall, well over six feet, imposing, rather stern, sixtyish, conservatively dressed in suit and tie, and his English was impeccable. I don't think he smiled. I explained that only the year before I had started to teach at the Art Center school in Los Angeles. I was unschooled, I hadn't read much about type, and while I had a cursory knowledge of the history of type, I was truly unprepared to ask the great man challenging questions. I had spent the previous evening reading the Dreyfus book and came armed with questions about Van Krimpen's philosophy. But he was patient and gave me 45 minutes of his time. He spoke of the foundry's history, and discussed the Dreyfus book.

His most memorable remark was that "there are no rules on the proportions of letters," an idea that has intrigued designers since

Gutenberg, most of whom think that there *are* rules, though of course there are disagreements.

In 1926 Joh. Enschedé en Zonen, submitted Lutetia, a font designed by Van Krimpen, as official Dutch Printing to the *Exposition International des Artes Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes* in Paris, the exposition from which the name Art Deco derives. It was the year I was born. Critics of the day praised Van Krimpen's effort as a totally new concept of the roman letter. Styles change, new names are coined to replace those that the previous generation wears out, and today we may classify the font as Oldstyle bordering on transitional. Its thins are delicate, the serifs wide and slightly cupped, and its ascenders are as generous as any Oldstyle (or the more recent term Garalde). The lowercase **a** references Jenson with its lack of a teardrop kern, the same concept is seen in Eric Gill's Perpetua. Bowls of the **b**, **d**, **p**, and **q** are rotund and wider than the **o**, the opposite concept of many fonts. The **i** dot is light and placed high and a bit to the right of the stem; the punctuation is light in color. The **g**'s bowl is deep and the loop strongly diagonal. Gone is the calligraphic diagonal of the **e**'s bar, though the **z** is wide and calligraphically faithful to the action of a broad pen with its thin diagonal. Van Krimpen had a reverence for classic roman caps, and his are quite beautiful. He did not adhere to the narrow **E** and **F**, instead both are wide and the center bars quite high and almost the length of the top or bottom ones. There is a medial **U**, that is, it carries weight on both stems and replicates the lowercase form. The **C** and **R** are particularly enchanting. The cap **O** is slightly tilted, the lowercase one is not. Some of the figures, as classic typographers are wont to call them, are narrow, note the 2, 3, 4, and 5.

Generous roman widths accompanied by a narrow italic were common to several revivals at the beginning of the last century, which Stanley Morison had promoted this at Monotype Corpora-

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO SAINT JOHN
In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and
the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God.
All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing
made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the ligh
of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness com-
prehended it not.

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz ctfbffffiffiflfhfifjfkflft 1234567890

REVISED LUTETIA

For Porter Garnett's monumental
Catalogue of the Frick Collection.
The CEFGLQehijmns8?!.,;:( )-"[ ]
are narrower and the
points heavier.

'… For the first time in one hundred and sixty years, a new (not
merely novel) roman type-face has appeared. It is called Lutetia.
I am not forgetting the rather long list of contemporary type-
faces—the Perpetua, of Mr Eric Gill; Pastonchi, designed by the
Italian poet of that name;… But no type, however beautiful, can
be perfect for everyone. The only way, it seems to me, to approxi-
mate such an ideal is to select the face that approaches most nearly
one's conception of a perfect type, and to emend such characters
as seem to fall short of perfection. That is what, with the coöper-
ation of Mr van Krimpen, I have caused to be done with Lutetia
for the present work…'   Porter Garnett.

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

LUTETIA ITALIC

A chancery with similarities
to Palatino, Arrighi,
Blado and Minion.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO SAINT JOHN
In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word
was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by
him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life;
and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the
darkness comprehended it not.

Van Krimpen's highly placed
comma for use with caps that avoids
the unsightly tail that hangs
below the baseline.

HAARLEM ⁄ JOH. ENSCHEDÉ EN ZONEN
'S-GRAVENHAGE ⁄ FIRMA L. J. C. BOUCHER
MDCCCCXXXXIII

tion. Lutetia's italic is a chancery similar to Arrighi, Bembo, Blado, Palatino, and Robert Slimbach's more recent Minion and Poetica. It is darker than the roman because it is condensed. Contemporary designers tend to favor a wider italic to match the color of the roman.

John Dreyfus relates that Porter Garnett was infatuated with the face, though with surprising hubris asked Van Krimpen to modify some of its forms, which he did. Dreyfus did not say whether the agreement was contingent on the sale of the font, or whether Van Krimpen agreed with Mr Garnett's highly refined taste. Garnett intended to use Lutetia for the text of his monumental *Catalogue of the Frick Collection* text. Tastes vary, but I prefer Van Krimpen's original. Garnett's death left the catalog unfinished; Bruce Rogers completed it.

Apocryphally perhaps, Van Krimpen had slight fondness for the French and named his font Lutetia, the classic name for Paris as a slight jab, because during the Roman occupation of Paris, Caesar's soldiers called it the mud hole. *Lutus* is Latin for mud from which Lutetia is derived.

This text is set in Dutch Type Library (DTL) Haarlemmer, Frank Blokland's redrawn digital version of Van Krimpen's original 1938 font (though never issued) for the Staten Bible. Dutch Type Library plans to digitize other Van Krimpen fonts, as does Enschedé Fonts.

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See *The Work of Jan van Krimpen*, John Dreyfus,
Utrecht: Joh. Enschedé en Zonen, 1952.

J. Van Krimpen on Designing and Devising Type, New York: The Typophiles, 1952.

A Letter to Philip Hofer on Certain Problems Connected with the Mechanical Cutting of Punches. Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard College Library;
Boston: David R. Godine, 1972.

See also *Preliminary Checklist of the Early Work of Jan van Krimpen*, compiled by John Friedrichs <j.friedrichs@wxs.nl>
http://home.wxs.nl/~johnf/home.html