ABOUT MORE ALPHABETS

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On Hermann Zapf's ninetieth birthday we can look back on seventy years of exceptional type designs, for all composition methods, from metal type through digital character generation, all created to the highest standards of quality and usefulness. The Typophiles' first chapbook on Zapf's work, *About Alphabets* from 1960, dealt with most of his metal typefaces, while this volume of nearly five decades later considers a few of his major alphabet design projects since then, over a period of phenomenal change in the way letterforms are reproduced. Through all these eras Hermann Zapf has been a leader in producing exceptionally fine typefaces for various typesetting systems.

The well-known book designer Carl Zahn has summed up Hermann Zapf's unique combination of skills aptly: "His love of the beauty of type and calligraphy combined with an earlier ambition and talent in engineering: he is very much at home in the computer-oriented high tech

that is America today. His openness and lack of pretense are particularly welcome in America. Hermann Zapf has fortunately inherited the great typographic and calligraphic traditions of Germany; but he has also a deep sensitivity to nature, the analytic mind of the scientist, a humanistic concern, and a hand blessed by God. These gifts he presses into the service of all mankind with an intensity that knows no waste." Those who are familiar with Zapf know these words to be true.

Zapf is justifiably well-known not only as a type designer, but also as one of the most important calligraphers of all time, and a most notable book designer and typographer. This book will concentrate mainly on his activities as a type designer.

Hermann Zapf has designed over 200 fonts – more than could possibly be covered in this small chapbook: if we devoted just a paragraph or two to each it would take several hundred pages just to touch on this body of work. Instead, this book will concentrate on several seminal types: not necessarily the most important – or most popular – of Zapf's fonts, but just

a few that are somewhat representative of his work in the field of alphabet design.

Born in Nuremberg, Germany, on 8 November 1918, Hermann Zapf entered the world at an inauspicious time. Germany had recently been defeated in the First World War, and the reparations demanded by the allies as a result would cripple the country for many years to come – eventually contributing to the rise of Nazism. In addition, the Spanish influenza was sweeping Europe, taking millions of lives, including two of Hermann Zapf's siblings.

Zapf's background gives no clue to the origins of his superlative talent in the letter arts. His father worked in an automobile factory, but was dismissed from his job in 1933 because he was something of a union organizer, and the new powers wanted to purge such people – in addition to many others. Losing one's job with a family to support is never easy, but during the Great Depression such a calamity would prove even more daunting. Due the family's poor economic prospects the young Hermann Zapf could not continue his studies; he had hoped to

pursue a career as an electrical engineer (a field he would become involved in almost half a century later, when he became very concerned with the computerization of alphabet imaging). Instead he had to find a job and help support his family. Since he showed good aptitude for drawing, his teachers suggested he go into lithography, but potential employer's questions about political matters made it difficult for him to find a job. After ten months of searching he was finally able to secure an apprenticeship as a photo retoucher (not a lithographer, as he had originally intended) at Karl Ulrich & Company in Nuremberg.

In 1935 at the Norishalle Museum in Nuremberg there was a memorial exhibition of the work of the famous calligrapher and type designer Rudolf Koch (1876–1934), who had died the previous year (Koch, like Zapf, was born in Nuremberg). Upon seeing this show the sixteen-year-old Hermann Zapf became inspired to begin studying the art of calligraphy.

This was to be very beginning of Zapf's lifelong interest in letterforms. With what little pocket money the young Zapf had he bought

the writing manuals of Koch (*Das Schreiben als Kunstligfertigkeit*) and Edward Johnston (*Writing and Illuminating, and Lettering* in the translation by Anna Simons, one of Johnston's earliest students), from which he began to teach himself the art of calligraphy. There were some wrong turns along the way, as is inevitable when one is self-taught: Zapf lost precious time when he mistakenly held his pen at the wrong angle to the paper, but once he corrected this error he progressed swiftly. So, in a very real sense, the very beginning of Zapf's work in the letter arts is directly attributable to the influence of Rudolf Koch, just as Koch's influence can be seen in Gilgengart, Zapf's first typeface design.

After finishing his apprenticeship in 1938 Zapf resigned from Ulrich and went to Frankfurt am Main to work with Paul Koch (1906–1945), the son of Rudolf Koch. The younger Koch ran a workshop that was involved in various graphic arts, with a particular specialty in the printing of music. It was called the Haus zum Fürsteneck after the medieval building the studio occupied (the house was destroyed by incendiary bombs during an air raid in March of 1944). This connec-