

HERMANN

Zapf

Biography

Born on November 8, 1918 in Nuremberg, Zapf left school (where his reports gave him a B in penmanship) in 1933. In that year his father, who as a trade union official in a large car factory had become, with the rise of the Nazis as a result was debarred from further education and therefore his career in electrical engineering he had hoped for. Instead, he began a four year apprenticeship as a retoucher at a local printing firm, Karl Ulrich & Co.

In 1935 an exhibition of the work of Rudolph Koch was shown in Nuremberg, which inspired Zapf to become a calligrapher. He bought Koch's instruction book *Das Schreiben als Kunstfertigkeit* ('the skill of calligraphy'), and Edward Johnston's *Writing & Illuminating, & Lettering*. His apprenticeship with Ulrich ended in 1938, and he went to work at Paul Koch's workshop at the Haus zum Fürsteneck in Frankfurt, where he began to learn something of the craft of printing with the hand press, as well as punchcutting and related skills. In the autumn he was introduced to the Stempel foundry in Frankfurt, for whom he designed many of his best types. Here he met the superlative punchcutter August Rosenberger (1893–1980), with whom he collaborated on several magnificent books.

Type Design

Early the following years Zapf began work on his first type for Stempel, a Frankfur blackletter called Gilgengart. As he had to learn as he went along, the type developed slowly, and suffered further from the disfavour into which blackletter fell after 1941. As Zapf wrote later, 'A new printing type has a long, often thorny way to completion. Before a type has come far enough to please outsiders, it adds grey hairs to its co-producers.' Gilgengart was cut in two forms, the second narrowing the capitals of the first, and also omitting some decorative flicks on the bottom of the letters.

Concurrently with Gilgengart, Zapf designed for the Bärenreiter-Verlag of Kassel a music type, Alkor, which was destroyed during the war, and began work on his early masterpiece of book production, *Feder und Stichel* ('Pen and graver'), a book of twenty-five calligraphic alphabets. The drawings were finished in 1941, and the plates hand cut in lead by August Rosenberger in his spare time. The book first appeared as a limited edition from Stempel's own private press in 1949.

In 1946 he had begun work on a pen-formed roman called Novalis, which was not dissimilar to Warren Chappell's pre-war Trajanus for the same foundry, but was never issued. This work was quickly overtaken by a new face based on Renaissance forms for which the first drawings were ready in 1948, and which made its first appearance in the introduction to *Feder und Stichel* the following year. It was called Palatino.

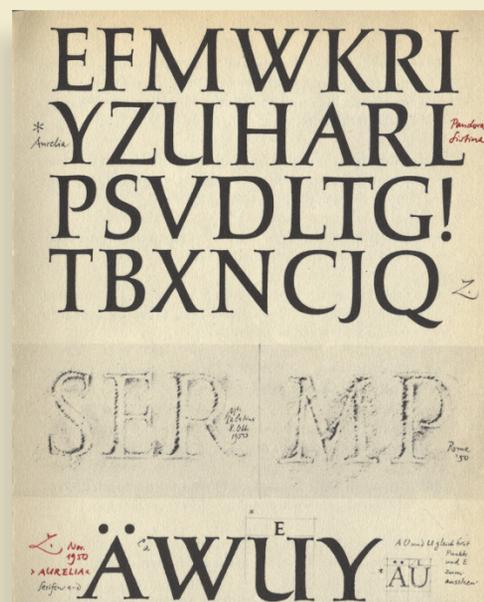
Palatino was immediately adapted for Linotype composition, since Stempel had held the contract for making matrices for the German branch of Mergenthaler Linotype since 1900, and it has since been adapted for virtually every typesetting system in the West. As it was found somewhat heavy in weight for text setting in the smaller sizes, Zapf designed a lighter version called Aldus, for Linotype composition sizes (1952–3).

We can get an idea of the amount of work Zapf produced in these years when we realize that between 1948 and 1954 he designed not only Palatino, Aldus and Melior, with their titlings and bolds, italics, and swashes, but also many other faces. There were the elegant Viruosa scripts (1952–3), and several Greek alphabets, some made to accompany existing Stempel faces such as the sans-serif Neuzeit, but including the beautiful Phidias (1953) to partner Michelangelo, Frederika (1953) to go with Viruosa, and the excellent all purpose Heraklit (1954). He drew the Mergenthaler Antiqua already mentioned, as well as handling the drawings for the German Linotype Janson (1952), based on the Stemple Janson types (which have already made their appearance in connection with Monotype Ehrhardt), and for Stempel's cutting of a missing 24pt and a new 48pt. He designed the attractive Saphir decorated capitals (1952) and the vigorous jobbing face Kompakt, and a successful Persian script as well as many ornaments. And as if this were not enough, he began work on a new type which as its development stage was called significantly Neu-Antiqua ('new-roman'), as a linguistically logical successor to Melior, Optima.

Optima is in many ways Zapf's most original design, in that it established virtually on its own a new type category, which its creator was careful to call a 'serifless roman', to distinguish it from stressed sans-serif. He tells us that it was inspired by Florentine lettering he had seen on his Italian visit, which dispensed with serifs; it is also more originally an extension of the development of roman book types, taking the comfortably round proportions of a transitional face as Baskerville's and shedding the serifs with no distortion of its essential nature and no sense of anything missing.

At the end of 1956, Zapf resigned from the type directorship of Stempel, although he kept very close links with the foundry. The administrative burden was threatening to outweigh his creative work, and he wanted to develop his talents in book design, calligraphy and other graphic techniques. The portfolios and books of typographical design and lettering he produced over the years have been outstanding. Beginning with *Feder und Stichel*, already described, and continuing with the magnificent landscape-format *Manuale typographicum* of 1954, *Typographische Variationen* of 1963, the second upright volume of the *Manuale* in 1968, and the privately issued *Orbis typographicus* of 1980, the books are extraordinary outpouring of graphic creativity.

One typeface for ITC should be noticed: the popular italic Zapf Chancery (1979), which turned the arguments about italic versus sloped roman by providing a slightly inclined italic in place of 'roman', and an italic of greater inclination for emphasis. As Kris Holmes has pointed out, Zapf Chancery had distinctly more bite, almost a touch of blackletter, by comparison with most faces for cold composition (including Zapf's two earlier designs for ITC), though if, as she says, tongue-in-cheek, the x 'has the vigour of Gene Kelly in his prime', Gene Kelly is about to fall over. Zapf Chancery's first extended showing was in a catalogue designed by Carl Zahn for the Boston Museum of Fine Art, but its chief role is clearly as an advertising display face.



Twentieth Century Type Designers
Sebastian Carter
Lund Humphries, England
2002
pp.146–157

Designer: Paul Stonier
Typography 401 01
Fall Quarter, 2006
Graphic Design Department
School of Design
Rochester Institute of Technology