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Alverata, hedendaagse Europese letters met wortels in de middeleeuwen

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17 Conclusion

This thesis is a description of design of the *Alverata* type family and an analysis of its creation. Part one documents the conditions under which Romanesque capitals developed and were used in inscriptions, and the characteristics left behind in them by stonemasons and their clients and masters, culminating in the concept underlying Romanesque capitals in inscriptions. Part two treats of the precursors of *Alverata* in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and from there moves on to discuss the present conditions for and ingredients of a type design and hence to the twenty-first-century concept. Part three describes the synthesis of the two concepts and of Romanesque and contemporary elements. The type specimen, which includes all versions of *Alverata*, is part of this Conclusion. This specimen itself is visible evidence of the successful combination of ideas and letterforms from the Romanesque period and our own times.

The thesis reviews the evidence showing that for over two hundred years in Romanesque Europe, capitals in inscriptions were created according to a clear model with enduring basic forms and details, but with many variations. Of these, a high proportion are probably the result of individual preferences on the part of the stonemasons who incised them. Another plausible theory, however, is that the medieval artisans who made such deliberate use of Romanesque capitals equally deliberately incorporated the aspects that we now find curious such as reversing letters. At the same time, while the eleventh and twelfth-century letter-makers probably followed a tradition, cutting letters into stone was probably not a specialism. However, the fact remains that we still know little about their lives, their knowledge and methods, and their relations both with their clients and masters on the one hand and their fellow artisans on the other.

By contrast, we know almost everything there is to know about the designers and producers of type in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and their methods. Their products exhibit a heterogeneous picture with a wide range of models and a host of applications. On this basis type designers make choices which are as rational as they are personal. *Alverata* is tied both to a long tradition – that to which modern classicism is allied – and to a shorter and more recent tradition: that of modernism. The design of *Alverata* is influenced both by twentieth-century typographical pragmatism, based on technology and functionality, and by the work of some famous predecessors, and it also bears the clear stamp of my own individual way of looking at type design. At the same time the new typeface also reflects the effects of recent developments in type design, such as the expanding type family and the integration of elements of different scripts.

As *Alverata* regular demonstrates, it is possible to design a new typeface on the basis of a combination of the Romanesque and twenty-first-century concepts. Romanesque inscription capitals and modern letters share a number of basic forms, while some Romanesque elements are still useful today. This meant that there was a concrete, ready-made basis on which the two concepts could be integrated. It was an idea that could not be left unexplored: the Romanesque concept offered possibilities that were too adventurous to be ignored. Above all, it was the constant and irregular swapping of alternative letterforms that made me investigate further, and *Alverata* Irregular is the result. Angular alternatives for round letters and round variants of angular letterforms follow one another seemingly at random and modern design programs allow them to be sprinkled through text.

Alverata Irregular contains the most visible letterforms I have ever created. In all my previous designs I have combined uncommon elements with conventional basic forms, all the time taking care to ensure the primacy of utility. A design like *Swift*, for example, balances on the cusp between being conspicuous and being ordinary. Until several years after its launch in 1985 *Swift* attracted regular complaints from users who found themselves unable to accept its large counters, substantial serifs, acute angles and taut curves. Later these objections faded away, their causes having apparently become less obtrusive as a result of habituation. Many of the forms and elements of the Irregular are far more visible than the letters of *Swift*, yet text is still easy to read. This is because the more exotic shapes have been adapted to fit with the more ordinary letterforms in terms of weight, width, the spaces in and around the letters and their details, just as the Romanesque letter-makers did with their special letters.

Alverata is an original type design, not a pastiche or revival. There is a kinship with the letterforms of the Middle Ages: the Romanesque letterforms and their applications have not been adopted but interpreted. The result is a type design that exemplifies the possibility of linking historical forms with modern developments, of drawing lines from the past through the present and on into the future.

In legibility research, several versions of *Alverata* can help to put type design and typography on a sounder scientific and academic footing and to give type designers a means of better meeting the needs of readers. Finally, *Alverata* can also be combined with other scripts such as Korean, a number of Indian languages and Arabic. The Latin character set can also be extended with, for example, phonetic glyphs.