

QUI QUAERIT INVENIT

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Some historical notes revealing the anniversary of the binary system and an early symbolization of phonetic sciences

by G.L.Meinsma

Petrus Montanus van Delft may be considered the first Dutch phonetician. The title of the Reverend's book: Bericht van een Nieuwe Konst, genaemt De Spreeckonst, which may be translated as Communication about a New Art, the Art of Speaking, was published in 1635.

On the title-page a small engraving is printed, showing two stone tables, reminiscent of the ten commandments. The picture does not show the Mosaic law but a sort of phonetic alphabet. We might think such a picture more or less profane in a book written by a clergyman.

Somehow the engraving stirred my mind. I remembered seeing something like that before. After some time I stumbled on the book which was the source of my recollection: Herrn von Leibniz' Rechnung mit Null und Eins (Hochstetter, 1966).

A loose page from Leibniz' scientific notes, dated 15 martii 1679, bears the title: De Progressione Dyadica. A facsimile was published in the book aforementioned. It contains the beginning of binary mathematics. Scientific reviews did not exist at the time. Communication between scholars was in writing letters.

One of the letters written by Leibniz on the binary system was to a duke interested in science: Rudolf August zu Braunschweig und Lüneburg. The letter also contains a design for

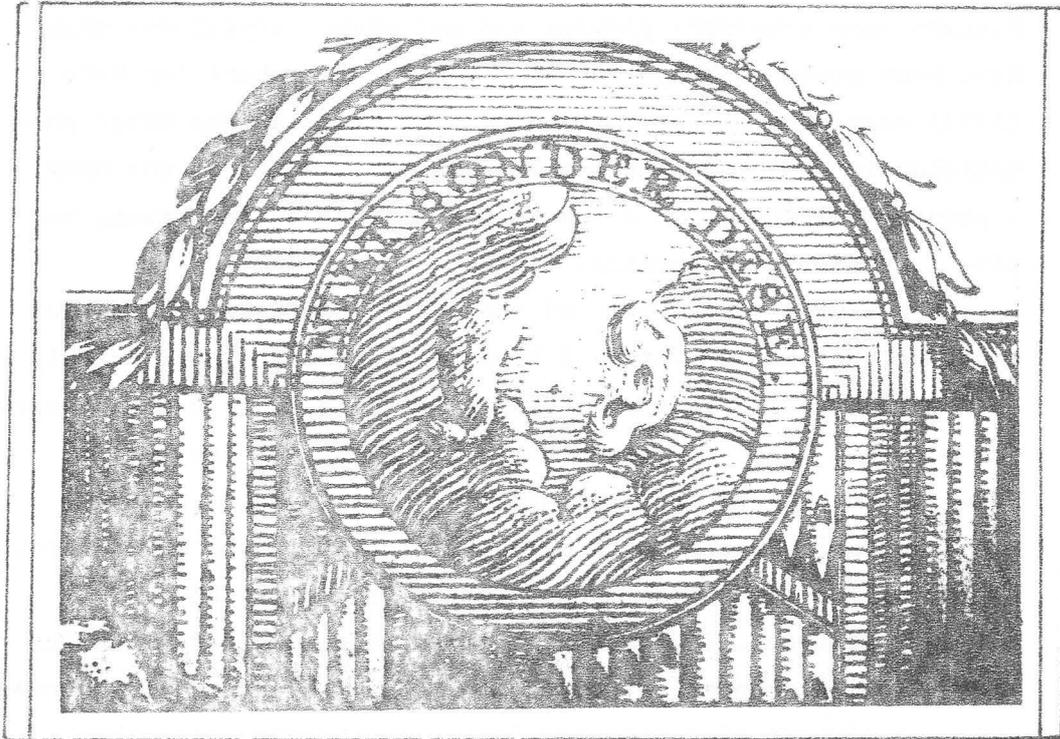
a medal. The design indicates as well the importance of the binary system in science as the symbolization of creation. Again we are reminded of the tables with the ten commandments. Was it slightly profane?

Writers were sometimes playful and not every playfulness might have been profane. There was in the work of Lambert ten Kate (1723) something I was reminded of. Ten Kate was the first phonetician in the Netherlands who included in his work not only a phonetic alphabet, as a forerunner of that by Jespersen, but also a chapter on acoustics.

In an engraving on the top of the first chapter which was not mentioned before, as far as I know, we can find a small circle in which phonetics is symbolized: a mouth in profile and an ear. The mouth is not that recognizable and perhaps intentionally drawn in such a way that two meanings are possible: a tongue and a mouth in profile with nose, a large beard and moustaches, the tongue now acting as moustaches. In the edge the text: Not without these. The text might mean: the considerations in the following chapters cannot go on without studying the speech-organ or without listening carefully. At the same time the meaning might be: nothing can be done without giving a willing ear to the Lord.

It is not unacceptable to suppose a double meaning. The frontispiece facing the titlepage gives some indications of the playfulness of the author, who had - I am sure - a word in the production of the engravings. Hidden information is included in more than one way. Ten Kate was a forerunner of the nineteenth century linguists who formulated the linguistic laws, but somewhere in the engraving his feeling of relativity is written down: every rule has its exceptions. One has to turn about the book in order to be able to find and to read this text. In normal position of the book we read somewhere in the engraving an

indication - possibly with a double meaning too - which was given as the title of this article in latin, translated:
Seek, and ye shall find.



The isolated part of the engraving, enlarged sixteen times,
linearly four times.

NOTES

Hochstetter, E. (et al.) Herr von Leibniz Rechnung mit Null
und Eins. 1966,2.

Kate, Lambert ten Aenleiding tot de kennisse van het verhe-
vene deel der Nederduitsche sprake, etc. Amsterdam, 1723.
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