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The library of the Society of Friends, at Friends House in Euston, London contains an unusual printed broadsheet with an extremely complicated labyrinthine design, the paths of which are filled with text. Originally published in the Netherlands in the late-17<sup>th</sup> or early 18<sup>th</sup> century, it is not documented in the appropriate section dealing with these items in Herman Kern's monumental *Through the Labyrinth* catalogue. The sheet in question is preserved in two halves, recycled and pasted down as endpapers inside the covers of a 375-page manuscript book of minutes of the monthly meetings of Quakers in Harlingen in the Netherlands between 1677 and 1701 (LSF Temp MSS 749/3). The book cover is inscribed *Copia Maendelyke Vergaderings tot Harlingens - Jansen Reynar's bewaringe* (copy of the monthly meetings at Harlingen - Jansen Reynar's custody).



**The two halves of the broadsheet preserved as endpapers in LSF Temp MSS 749/3. Photo: Jeff Saward.**

Clearly the labyrinth was of no particular interest to the binder who put the notebook together, other than, perhaps, its decorative function, and the process of cutting the sheet in half and pasting it into the binding has lost a little of the design, especially around the margins, including any title along the top edge and much of a panel on the lower edge of the labyrinth that clearly once contained the publication details.

Without the title and details of the designer or printer of the sheet, its origins might have remained a mystery, but fortunately further investigation by David Irwin, cataloguer at the Library of the Society of Friends and correspondence with Marja Smolenaars of the Koninklijke Bibliotheek in Den Haag soon uncovered more details of the origins of the broadsheet, and the existence of three or four further copies in the Netherlands, fortunately preserved in one piece, including one in the Noord-Hollands Archief in Haarlem (shelfmark 2 A 13) and another in the collection of the Openluchtmuseum (inventory no. PR.6131).

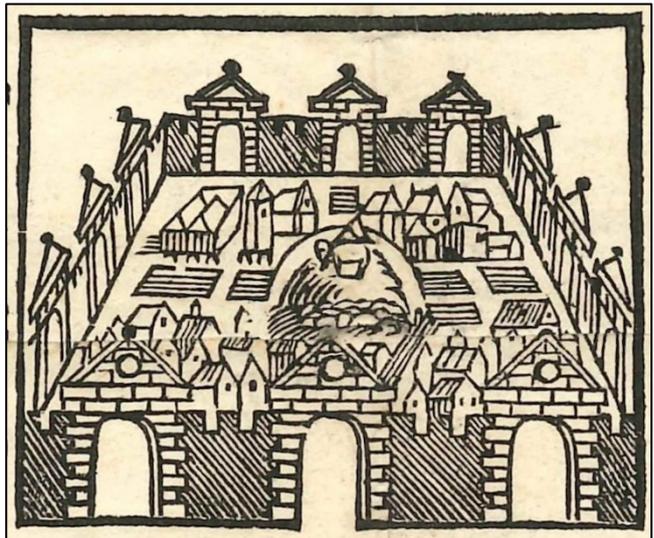
The broadsheet is entitled “Dool-Hoff” and beneath quotes two lines in Dutch from the Bible:

Proverbs 14.12 – There is a way which seemeth right unto a man,  
but the end thereof are the ways of death.

Ephesians 5.15 – See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise,

The Dool-Hoff labyrinth (actually a simple maze in the strict sense, but with only four dead-ends and occasional pathway choices) is 32 x 40 centimetres and packed within its walls are some 400 lines of Dutch verse, each consisting of four to eight words (typically eight syllables) of text, providing lessons and guidance on the virtues and pitfalls of pursuing different goals and careers in life. The text is arranged in such a way that when various life choices are presented the text deviates along different paths at those points in the maze. Some options, such as the text that describes the pursuit of wealth, are long and winding and ultimately reach a dead end within the design. Others, such as the path of the man who wishes to excel in appearance are much shorter, and the section describing the study of the seven liberal art contains a number of appropriately intersecting and converging pathways. The choices that manage to avoid the dead ends will eventually reach the final pathway, inscribed *the New Jerusalem*, and at the goal is a representation of the Holy City, with walls standing four-square, three gateways on each side, various buildings within the city and the Lamb of God standing at the very centre. Although the text might seem rather monotonous (and overly moralistic to modern eyes), the alignment of the text with the twists and turns, and especially the deviations of the pathways, is truly a masterpiece of the art of letterpress printing.

***New Jerusalem at the centre of the Dool-Hoff.  
Noord-Hollands Archief, shelfmark 2 A 13.  
Photo: courtesy Marja Smolenaars.***



At the base of the broadsheet is a panel that records the place of publication as Haarlem in the Netherlands, the printer as Claes Braau and the author of the text as “H.A. Hoewilt,” but *Hoe je wilt* means ‘However you want,’ so is likely not a real name. Instead, the Dutch scholar C.P. Burger suggested that Hendrik Aelbertsz (1605-1667) might have written the text [Burger 1906]. Claas Braau (1636-1707) was a printer living and working in Haarlem and much of his work was of a Catholic nature. Aelbertsz was a Baptist poet from De Rijp, a small village in the province of Noord-Holland with no printworks of its own, so it is no surprise that Braau’s services would have been called upon to print the sheet. In his extensive description of the broadsheet and transcription of some of the long and complex text, Burger proposes that this undated work might have been Braau’s examination piece for his admittance to the Haarlem Boekdrukkersgild (book printers guild) in 1667. However, a more recent study [Dorren & Verhoeven 1994] objects to Burger’s conclusion, arguing that such an exam piece would have consisted of a binding project, not merely a printed item. Either way, 1667 was also the year that Aelbertsz, the supposed author of the text, died, so it might seem fair to assume, as did Burger, that this labyrinthine broadsheet first published in the year poet died, was also the first real test of the technical skill of the newly qualified printer.

***The top and base of the Noord-Hollands Archief Dool-Hoff broadsheet (2 A 13) with the title and publishing details missing on the London copy. Photos: Marja Smolenaars.***



# DOOL-HOFF.

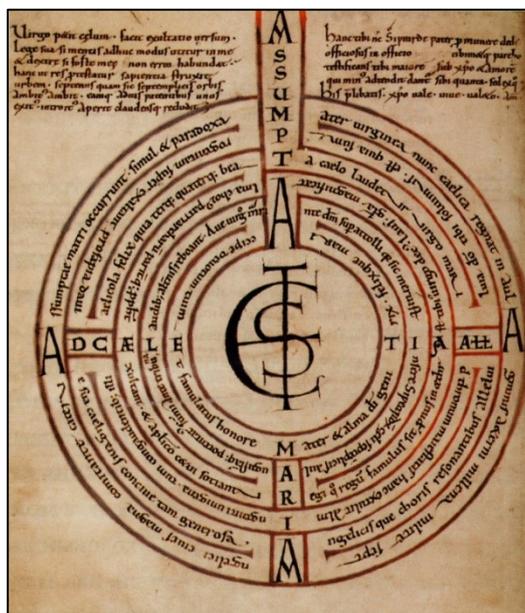
Proverb. 14. 12. Meenighen behaecht enen wegh wel, Maer eyndelijck brenghet hy hem totter doodt.  
Ephes. 5. 15. So ziet nu toe, hoe ghy voorfichelijck wandelt, niet als de onwifjen, maer als de wijfen.

Dool-Hoff broadsheet dated 1705. Photo: Rijksmuseum, collection number RP-P-OB-76.978.

However, another slightly different version of the Dool-Hoff broadsheet is preserved in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam (collection number: RP-P-OB-76.978). While the design of the doolhof and the text are identical, the publication details in the panel along the lower edge contains an additional date: *anno 1705*. This was towards the end of Braau's life, and instead of being one his first works, it would have been one of his last! This poses an interesting question: which of the known copies of this Dool-Hoff broadsheet is the earliest, and is the London copy the same as the 1705 or the undated version, or different again?

Without the all-important publication panel on the London copy, it's impossible to say, but the situation is further complicated by the fact that the forme (printing plate) and remaining copies of this broadsheet are recorded as purchased in 1754 by the Dutch Mennonite teacher, minister and bookseller Jan Nieuwenhuyzen [Smolenaars 2016]. It's possible that he removed the date and later printed undated copies, but that seems unlikely as he would probably have added his name as the publisher. Or was the date removed by whoever owned (and possibly reused) the Dool-Hoff forme between Braau's death in 1707 and its subsequent acquisition by Nieuwenhuyzen in 1754? Ultimately the answer will probably remain, for the time being at least, a chicken or egg problem and much like the design itself, a labyrinthine question, full of twists and turns!

But of course, this combination of text and labyrinths is nothing new. The Roman mosaic labyrinth in the basilica of St. Reparatus in Algeria, with a *Sancta Ecclesia* word square at its centre is probably the earliest, albeit simple example, so far discovered (ca. 324 CE). The first comparable labyrinth with text lining the pathways is to be found in a manuscript from Abingdon, England, (Cambridge University Library, Kk. 3.21) written ca. 1030-1044 CE. This labyrinth, inscribed with a prayer to the Virgin Mary – *Assumpta est Maria ad Caelestia. Alleluia* – is similarly ingenious, the prayer can read in either of two ways: by following the path of the labyrinth or by tracing the concentric circle of text, to give two different, but equally coherent renditions.



**The Abingdon manuscript, CUL Kk. 3.21.  
Courtesy of Cambridge University Library.**

Printed broadsheets of labyrinthine text, similar in form to Braau's work and likewise of religious, instructional or political content, were popular in Europe from the mid-16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, and indeed continued to be produced in parts of Midwest America until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A number of examples are described and discussed by Kern under the heading of *Schrift-Labyrinth und Geistliche Irrgärten* (script labyrinths and spiritual mazes). However, all of the examples he provides are in fact labyrinths in the strict sense, with a single continuous line of text that leads, in the fashion of Ariadne's thread, though a complex series of twists and turns to a central goal or some other conclusion. Braau's Dool-Hoof is a rare example of a spiritual maze that is in fact a true maze, with deviating pathways and dead ends – a unique and fascinating document indeed.

Jeff Saward, Thundersley, England; April 2019

My thanks go to David Irwin and Jan Sellers for bringing this fascinating item to my attention, to Marja Smolenaars at the Nationale Bibliotheek in Den Haag for images and her invaluable assistance with information, and likewise to the Rijksmuseum for placing the image of their Dool-Hoff online and freely available.

#### References:

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