SOME EARLY CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE HISTORY OF GEOMAGNETISM—VIII

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We present as the eighth contribution to the early history of geomagnetism extracts from the English version of the "Portuum investigandorum ratio." This work was written by Simon Stevinus (1548-1620), an eminent Dutch mathematician, at the instance of Count Moritz of Nassau, Prince of Orange, Admiral of the Dutch Fleet, who was convinced of the value of a knowledge of the magnetic declination for navigation. It contains the oldest list of values of the magnetic declination (43 stations), emphasizes the great importance of a knowledge of the declination to mariners, and contains an introduction to the determination thereof with the aid of the azimuth-compass.

The booklet appeared simultaneously in Dutch, Latin, English, and French. P. Plancius, a Calvinist preacher and geographer, is mentioned as the authority for the declination-values. It appears that he had collected these data for a geographic chart which he is thought to have prepared in 1592 but of which no copy is known to exist.

In his "Rara Magnetica," G. Hellmann has reproduced the text of portions of the extremely rare Dutch edition (De Havenvinding, Leyden, 1599). The English version (The haven-finding art, London, 1599) was prepared by Edward Wright, although his name does not appear on the title-page. It is from this version that the following extracts are taken, namely, the method of finding the magnetic declination and the list of declination-values. These sections correspond to those reproduced by Hellmann. The text of the original English version has been preserved; only the orthography has been altered as necessary to conform to modern English practice.

Hellmann was unable to learn anything regarding the publisher of the French version (Le trouve-port, Leyde, 1599) but he points out that in Simon Stevin's collected works (Wisconstige Gedachtenissen, Leyden, 1608) and in the French translation (Les oeuvres mathematiques de Simon Stevin de Bruges, par Albert Girard, Leide, 1634) this little work on the art of haven-fining is included.

With regard to the values of the magnetic declination given in the list, it should be mentioned that they apply to various epochs over a considerable period of time and hence are of little value for secular-variation studies.¹

We reproduce herewith from Hellmann's "Rara Magnetica" (Neudrucke von Schriften und Karten über Meteorologie und Erdmagnetismus No. 10), in Plate 1, the title-page of the only known copy of the Dutch edition of "The haven-finding art" which is the property of the Royal Library at The Hague, as well as the two figures in the text from the same source.

¹Terr. Mag., 1, 153 (1896); 2, 72-73 (1897).