In 1636 the Amsterdam publisher Johannes Janssonius (Note 6) brought out a short treatise on drawing entitled De Teecken-Const. It must have been a small, unillustrated book of about thirty pages and it was intended, according to the subtitle, for young beginners and amateurs. No printed example is now known, but the Kunstmuseum at Basle possesses a careful transcription by C. Müller-Hofstede, which is published here as an appendix (Fig. 1, Note 2). The transcription is accompanied by a short, unpublished article by Müller-Hofstede (Note 3) and was made from a printed copy of the treatise that is now lost (Note 4).

The name of the author, concealed in two mottos, proves to be Cornelis Pietersz. Biens, who was neither a painter nor a draughtsman, but a poet. Born around 1590–5, he lived and worked in Enkhuizen, where he died in 1645 (Note 8). In 1623 he married Soutjen Jacobsdr. Brouwer (b. 1589), by whom he had two sons, Pieter (b. 1626) who died young, and Dirck (b. 1627), who studied theology at Leiden and, having adopted his mother's surname, appears in the list of Enkhuizen preachers as Theodorus Brouwer (Note 11). Nothing is known of Biens' family background, but he is known to have become a deacon of the Reformed Church at Enkhuizen in 1624 and an elder in 1639 and 1643, while he held various official posts in the town from 1629 onwards, finally sitting on the council from 1640 up to his death. There is no indication of his having followed any other calling, but the loss of a large part of the Enkhuizen archives makes further research impossible.

If Biens' life affords no clue as to how he acquired the knowledge to write the treatise, neither do his poetic works. These consist of a retelling in Dutch verse of the story of Pyramus and Thisbe, four collections of mainly religious poetry of a strictly Calvinist tenor and a pamphlet on the Reformation in Enkhuizen (Note 17). Only one poem contains a few passages relating to the fine arts, Lof der Ambachten, which, along with Lof der Studie (Note 18), comprises an exhortation to the young to study or learn a trade, the trades mentioned including silversmithing, engraving, tapestry weaving, printing, architecture, drawing and painting. Although Biens characterizes painting here as an art that can arouse emotions, as silent poetry, he nonetheless classifies it as a craft rather than among the sciences or liberal arts and this tenor is also detectable in the treatise in which, on the one hand, he adduces arguments in support of the loftiness of drawing, while on the other he provides practical, technical information. In Lof der Ambachten he mentions a 'friend' who is a silversmith and engraver and also draws and paints, but this seems merely to be a stylistic device.

A further notable point about Biens is that the fine map of Enkhuizen in Johannes Blaeu's Toneel der steden van de vreemde Nederlanden of 1649 is said to be Delineata à Cornelio Biens - Senatorc Enchusano (Figs. 2, 3). This map is not copied from any of Blaeu's predecessors and it shows the extension of the harbours on the south side of the town, which does not appear on any earlier map, so that it must have been specially made for Blaeu (Note 22). No other maps by Biens are known, however, so it may be that Blaeu asked him, as a member of the town council, to act as intermediary, as he is known to have done in other instances (Note 23). The inscription certainly emphasizes Biens' position as town councillor.
Thus there is nothing to indicate that Biens was active in the visual arts in any way. Nevertheless, his book shows him to have had a good knowledge of their theoretical and practical aspects. Planned as a concise, but systematic teaching method for young painters, it was not meant to replace the practical training given by a painter or draughtsman, but to supplement it. Much of the material is borrowed from other theoretical works, but there is also some interesting information in it that had not been published before.

The book opens with a preface that begins with the phenomenon of 'representation', the copying of reality whereby the artist imitates the Creator and strives to depict the invisible as something tangible, ideas which seem to be borrowed from the Neo-Platonist art theory of the second half of the 16th century (Note 26), but which are given a Calvinist slant here inasmuch as Biens uses the 'invisible' to mean not the 'Idea' (Note 27), but God Himself. Biens' warning against misusing art in a spirit of pride to try to equal the Creator almost constitutes an argument against drawing, but he hastens to stress its permissible, useful and pleasant aspects. The useful aspect is illustrated with a Biblical reference (Note 29) and the indication of the practical use of drawing for doctors, sea captains and craftsmen. This emphasis on the technical side is in line with a long tradition, which also includes Biens' principal theoretical source, Carel van Mander's Schilderbock (Note 24), where the examples adduced are rulers and commanders (Note 30). Biens' exposition of the pleasant aspects of drawing is actually applicable to art in general and of the variety found in numerous early and contemporary treatises. At the end of his preface he urges the young to learn drawing in terms comparable to those used by Van Mander. He stresses the modesty of his own knowledge, but adds that he will publish something that has never appeared in print before. Here and elsewhere in his treatise he makes scarcely any distinction between drawing and painting and it is clear that what he means by drawing is the basis for painting, a view he again shares with Van Mander (Note 38).

The first two chapters serve as an introduction to the book. In Chapter I Biens defines the terms drawing and painting in a sober manner far removed from Van Mander's lyricism. Nor does he share the latter's love of imagery and mythological comparisons. Later in this chapter he states that 'Architectura, Perspectiva and Ortagraphie ('decorum')' are indispensable for the artist and proceeds to define the first two. Although these concepts are certainly found in other Dutch works (Notes 43, 44), none of these has precisely this combination, which seems to be unique to Biens. Nor do they occur in Van Mander in this form. Biens, does, however, follow Van Mander at the end of this chapter, where he stresses the importance of light and shade in the representation of objects on a flat plane (Note 46), but he goes beyond him in emphasizing the necessity of rendering nature as precisely as possible. It is tempting to see this as a reflection of the increasing interest in 'realism' in the 17th century, but there is nothing else to support this view, as Biens does not discuss any actual works of art or reveal any personal predilections.

Chapter II is devoted mainly to the pupil, who must have an inborn talent, which he must exercise through training and practice, (natura, ars, exercitatio) ideas that were generally well-known in the Netherlands in the 17th century and are even depicted on Van Mander's title-page (Note 47). As regards training, Biens lays stress on the copying of works by good artists, adding that there is an abundance of these to be found in the Netherlands. This comment seems to suggest, in contrast to what Van Mander advocates, that there is no need at all for the prospective artist to go to Italy. Biens goes on to say that the help and advice of a good teacher are indispensable and that the young artist must also practise drawing 'from life'. His advice on the making of a composition is taken from Van Mander and this chapter ends with almost word for word quotations of Van Mander's technical instructions regarding highlights and shadows in figures and reflections.

The theoretical core of the book is formed by Chapters III–VII, which deal with a number of aspects of art theory that are of fundamental importance for every artist. Chapter III is devoted to perspective and as Van Mander does not handle this subject,