

Merchants, Mennonites & Marriages.

Commercial, religious and kinship networks in the Dutch port town of Harlingen in the 17th and 18th centuries.¹

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Abstract: In this paper we investigate the importance of kinship for the Mennonite business elite of Harlingen in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Applying both structural and biographical approaches, we conclude that the endogamous structure of this elite was of a practical rather than of a moral nature. We also stress the importance of weak ties for the cultural evolution of this elite from austere entrepreneurs to enlightened intellectuals.

Keywords: kinship networks, intellectual networks, endogamy, Mennonites, religious minorities, strength of weak ties (SWT), business elites, Netherlands, early modern period.

1. CONTEXT

In this paper we want to examine the endogamous kinship structure of the Mennonite business elite of Harlingen in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Harlingen is located in the province of Friesland, a district in the northern part of the Netherlands. Until the construction of the Enclosure Dike in the 1930's it was situated at the northeastern bank of the Zuider Zee, the former inland sea that connected Amsterdam with the North Sea. Due to its location it was favorably situated to profit from the latter city's rise as the capital of world trade during the Dutch Golden Age. The population of Harlingen rose from about 2.000 inhabitants in 1550 to about 9.000 in 1650. Afterwards the population remained relatively stable until the beginning of the nineteenth century. (Faber 1972; Marseille 1984) The small port town owed its relative prosperity to inland and foreign trade and some trade related industries. Harlingen had excellent connections by means of regular shipping services with both the Friesian hinterland and the port towns on the other side of the Zuider Zee in the province of Holland. With Amsterdam a daily shipping service was maintained, so the merchants of Harlingen could easily obtain information on the movements of goods and prices on the international market. (De Vries 1981; Lesger 1992; Nijboer 1995) The relative proximity of Amsterdam provided opportunities in Harlingen for overseas trade that was subsidiary to Amsterdam's. For the years 1654 and 1655 we have a register at our disposal, that gives quite detailed information on the foreign imports and exports through the port of Harlingen. (Faber 1967; Lesger 1988) It shows that the overseas trade of Harlingen was dominated by voluminous goods. Imports consisted mostly of cereals and timber from the Baltic and Norway. Exports measured in monetary value were quite diverse, but when recalculated in physical volumes one product definitely stood out: coarse ceramics like bricks and roof tiles. Other sources confirm that Harlingen was by far the most important Dutch export port for these products. (Arntz 1947; Nijboer 2003) The numerous brick yards in the vicinity of Harlingen provided the town with a unique advantage by location over other port towns in the Zuider Zee region. Bricks and roof tiles might seem modest goods but they were highly demanded in Dutch foreign trade. Because the Dutch Republic had a negative trade balance with most of its trading partners, many ships sailed out loaded with 'ballast bricks'.

Alongside of the production of ceramic building materials other industries developed in Harlingen. Some of them were akin industries like the production of lime from seashells, the fabrication of fine potteries and salt refineries. All of these fuel intensive industries could profit from the abundant supply of relatively cheap peat, produced in the Friesian hinterland. And all of these industries were more or less connected with port activities. The same is true for the Harlingen textile industry that developed from the mid-seventeenth century onward and flourished for about a century. It was at least partly an export industry, because Harlingen cottons were exported in large quantities to the West Indies. (Postma 1954; Faber 1972) The presence of strong industries was probably one of the factors that prevented Harlingen from a severe decline in the eighteenth century, similar to the fate of the towns of Hoorn and Enkhuizen on the other bank of the Zuider Zee. Unlike these port towns the population Harlingen remained relatively stable during the eighteenth century. Nevertheless foreign trades in Harlingen were falling back as well. This can be deduced from the revenues of the so called *convooi- en licentgelden*, a kind of import and export duties. (Figure 1.) Although there is a general consensus among historians that these figures give only a very rough indication, the trend is undeniable. Another port

¹ Paper to be presented at the Sixth European Social Science History Conference, Amsterdam 22 - 25 March 2006. (Network: Family and Demography; Session: FAM26, Marriages and social networks in urban context, chair: Gérard Béaur.)

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activity, the shipping for merchants from other towns (especially Amsterdam) showed a similar decline, but started earlier on, probably from about 1650 onwards. (Faber 1972 & 1988.) Only by the end of the eighteenth century the tide began to turn. The growing British economy offered opportunities for the export of Friesian dairy products to England. Nonetheless, it was only after the *intermezzo* of the Batavian and subsequent French era (1795-1813), a period that was disastrous for Dutch overseas trade, before these exports became substantial. It is, however, a good possibility that already during the eighteenth century the Harlingen economy became more oriented towards its hinterland. (Cf. Nijboer 1995) And its functioning as a relatively strong regional center might have been another factor that prevented Harlingen for a dramatic decline. But there was more. Besides the advantage of its geographically bound industries and hinterland, Harlingen had another advantage, the presence of a deeply rooted business elite.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries business in Harlingen was dominated by a small group of interrelated families. The same surnames are reoccurring over and over again, like Fonteijn, Braam, Stinstra, Hingst, Hannema, Huidekoper, Dreyer, Stijl, Van der Plaats and Oosterbaan. Marriages among members of these families were so common, that it would be apt to describe the whole Harlingen business elite as one kinship network. Besides being highly endogamous this business elite had another distinctive feature: it was predominantly Mennonite. At the end of the seventeenth century about two thirds of the wealthiest inhabitants of Harlingen belonged to this congregation. By the mid eighteenth century the proportion of Mennonites had declined a little, but accounted still for half of the wealthiest people of Harlingen.⁴ Mennonites were certainly over-represented among the well to do. The share of the Mennonites in the total population of the town is estimated at 20% at the end of the seventeenth century. By the end of the eighteenth century their share had declined to only 8%. (Faber 1972; Mennonite Encyclopedia 1955)

The Mennonites form a branch of Anabaptism based on the teachings of Menno Simons (1496-1561), a Friesian priest who had left the Roman Catholic church and started to preach and rebaptize in the late 1530's. Notwithstanding the great variety among Mennonites in religious doctrine or practice and separation from 'the evil world', most of them shared in the course of their early history the following core values: believers baptism, the refusal of swearing oaths, non-violence, austerity and the refusal of public offices. By the end of the sixteenth century strong emphasis on the true Christian way of life led to many rivaling factions in the Dutch Mennonite movement. And with the rise and, eventually, the victory of Calvinism during the Dutch Revolt against the Spanish king, the prominence of the Mennonites in the Protestant movement declined. In the new Dutch Republic the Calvinist Reformed Church established itself. Calvinist congregations were recognized as the only true church. In the young Republic the government created universities (between 1574 and 1614: at Leiden, Franeker, Utrecht and Groningen) to train Calvinist ministers. Only members of the privileged Reformed Church were appointed as professors. Lutherans, Mennonites and Roman Catholics became dissenters: inhabitants but not citizens with full legal rights. But after 1648, the end of both the Dutch Revolt and the Thirty Years War, confessional tensions in Europe decreased and in the Dutch Republic Mennonites were more or less tolerated as a religious minority. (Dyck 1993; De Jong 1994)

During the seventeenth century Calvinists and Mennonites were called 'hostile brothers' – a striking observation, because despite all their differences in doctrine they had much in common, such as their struggle for a purified church with strict discipline. In the beginning of the Dutch Golden Age most Mennonites still had a ascetic attitude towards life and marriages to non-Mennonites were more or less forbidden. Many congregations were a sort of closed communities and took on the form of family churches. Internal conflicts were solved by mediators within the congregations rather than by courts of law. (Voolstra 1994) But in the course of the seventeenth century the Dutch Mennonites, especially in the towns of Holland and Friesland, were also influenced by their economic experiences.⁵ Since they were not allowed to enter such professions as teaching, nor to participate in government or military service, quite a lot of them were active as traders and entrepreneurs. Maintaining high ethical norms enforced by the possibility of excommunication, made them trustworthy business partners in unsecured markets.⁶ This was particularly true for the Baltic trade where much of the wealth of Harlingen depended upon. By the beginning of the seventeenth century this trade was still characterized by many elements of a 'good faith economy'. In 1617 the Amsterdam mayor Cornelis Pietersz Hooft wrote for instance that Dutch merchants often could get goods in the Baltic without any written guarantees. (Van Stipriaan

⁴ Shares have been estimated using tax censuses for 1672, 1697 and 1749 and scattered information from marriage registers etcetera. Sources are available at Tresoar: 1697 census: Coll. Fr. Gen. IVa 15,2; 1749 census: digital database; 1672 census: Gemeentearchief Franekeradeel 10, 612-622.

⁵ The affinity between religious affiliation and economic performance has been the subject of much debate ever since Max Weber (1922) presented his famous thesis on the protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism. Although his original thesis has been falsified on many topics, his approach is still inspiring new generations of historians and sociologists. For recent contributions in the Weberian tradition see Runciman (2001 & 2005).

⁶ Mennonite congregations were quite active in maintaining the commercial reliability of their members. Fraud and bankruptcy could result in excommunication. (Cf. Sprunger 1991)

1997) And in Amsterdam the Baltic trade was dominated by Mennonite merchants as well. Of course, in the long run their intensive participation in business transactions was an obstacle for maintaining their traditional Mennonite ideal of world-shunning. And when business transactions became more and more secured by contractual agreements, the relative advantage of being (traditionally) Mennonite diminished.

Already at the time of Menno Simons there was a Mennonite congregation in Harlingen, probably the largest in Friesland. By the close of the sixteenth century this port town numbered six separate congregations, but around 1700 Mennonite Harlingen had one large moderate United Congregation and a couple of very small, more orthodox groups. The United Congregation possessed an orphanage and a house for the poor. It was also one of the initiators of the Frisian Mennonite Conference in 1695. During the eighteenth century nearly all treasurers of this Mennonite Conference were members of the Harlingen United Congregation, with family names as Vermeersch (treasurer from 1696 till 1721), Stinstra (1722-1739) and Fontein (1771-1787). The aims of this Conference were to maintain peace and cooperation among the Frisian congregations, to take care of poor congregations and to subsidize those which were unable to pay the salaries of their ministers. In course of time more than fifty congregations joined the Conference. In 1742 the Frisian Mennonite Conference held a special meeting after Johannes Stinstra (1708-1790), its president and minister of the United Congregation of Harlingen, was suspended by the government, the States of Friesland. Stinstra had been accused of heresy by Calvinist theologians and his suspension would last till 1757. Since the 1670's the Mennonites in Friesland had certain political rights, such as electing the representatives in the Frisian government. They got this right after the deacon of the United Congregation of Harlingen (Claes Huyberts Braam) presented to this government half a million guilders, raised by a compulsory collection taken in all the Mennonite congregations of the province. The government used the money for the building of warships and the Frisian Mennonites were also released from the oath and military service. However, only after the Batavian Revolution in 1795 they were given equal rights with the Calvinists of the Reformed Church.

2. FAMILIES AND KINSHIP NETWORKS

Although family history is definitely the most popular branch of history, academic interest in this subject is still limited. Family history is primarily the field of amateur genealogists, who supply the world (and especially the World Wide Web) with an abundance of family trees and pedigrees. These idiosyncratic family histories are normally treated with a certain disdain by academic historians. This attitude is justifiable when we consider the scientific value of individual studies, but it has as a handicap that historians underestimate the value of the mass of these studies as a potential data source for various fields of research. In the case of the Harlingen business elite, for instance, much genealogical material was already available when we started our research.⁷ And the complex endogamous structure of this elite has not been unnoticed in other studies. (Schutte 1985; Ter Avest et al. 1994; Kuiken 2003) These studies, however, are clearly missing a proper analytical framework. Like in most other historical studies, genealogies are treated in a merely descriptive, illustrative or biographical manner. With a few exceptions (e.g. Lombardini 1996) the methodological contributions by anthropologists and social network theorists have received little attention among social historians of the family.

Within cultural anthropology the study of kinship structures has greatly advanced on a methodological level by the work of Douglas R. White and fellows. (White 1997; White, Batagelj & Mrvar 1999; White & Jorion 1992 & 1996; White & Schweizer 1998; White & Harary 2001) White *cum suis* have proposed a social network approach to kinship structures, called p-systems. Central element in this approach is the representation of kinship relations by means of P-graphs. These P-graphs have several advantages over the traditional genealogical diagrams, that were first used in anthropology by Rivers (1910). In traditional genealogical diagrams lines are used for both marriage and descent, so these relationships can not be represented by a single matrix. In P-graphs potential reproductive units (both married couples and singles) are represented by nodes (vertices) while the descending persons shape the connecting lines (edges). (Figure 2) The P-graph method reduces the number of graphical elements needed to visually represent kinship structures and can therefore be used to draw much larger and much more complex structures than is possible with traditional diagrams. Furthermore, when seen as a data structure, P-graphs make it much easier to discover the circuits that represent instances of cohesive relinking. Furthermore, when seen as a data structure, P-graphs make it much easier to discover the circuits that represent instances of 'cohesive relinking'. Last, but not least, P-graphs are not bound to the traditional categories of genealogy, which are primarily defined in terms of lineage. And although matrilineal relations are not left out of consideration by principle, in practice most genealogies suffer from a severe patrilineal bias. P-graphs can be used to represent broader networks of affiliation that are build up of matrilineal relations as well.

Although P-graphs allow for refined graph-theoretical analysis of large kinship networks, implementation of this method is not without drawbacks. Most of these issues are of a quite technical nature and

⁷ Genealogical data are collected at our website: <http://www.harlingerrijkdom.nl>.

it would require another paper to discuss them in a proper context. In general, however, the main drawback of applying the P-graph method to large kinship networks of multiple generations is that this method tends to reify a dynamic structure into a static one. Kinship structures, after all, are histories and like all other histories their structures and values evolve over time and are dependent upon the position of the actors involved. A too holistic and a too synchronistic approach would easily ignore that the relevance of kinship networks in the end is depending on what it means for people to be linked and relinked to close and distant relatives.

3. CASE STUDIES

To avoid the pitfalls of holism, mentioned before, we have decided to single out three interesting couples for further analysis. These three couples were chosen because they were evidently wealthy and Mennonite and because there are artifacts known that represent these couples, like portraits or wedding gifts. Of course these are niceties, but they pointed us at three cases we believe are both interesting by themselves as well as illustrative for how family and family networks mattered at an actor level. The tree couples we have selected were not only embedded in a tightly knit family structure around them, but were also related to each other. A P-graph of the relevant (relinking) family relations around and between them is drawn in Figure 3. Combining this structural representation with the more biographical accounts below allows for an in depth analysis of continuity and change within the Harlingen business elite for more than a century.

Claes Jurjens Fonteijn and Antje Reiners Jeddema, married in 1646

On the 30th of March 1646, when Claes Jurjens Fonteijn traveled to Leeuwarden to fetch his bride for the wedding ceremony, he performed a spectacular wedding stunt. The canal between the two towns had recently been equipped with a tow path, in order to facilitate regular shipping services by means of tow barges. Thanks to his close connections with the Harlingen town counsel, Claes Jurjens Fonteijn was granted the honor to be the first to travel by tow barge between the two towns. According to the silver wedding box that commemorates this event, thousands of people went out to see how Claes Jurjens Fonteijn and Antje Reiners Jeddema traveled to Harlingen by tow barge.

The merchant and landowner Claes Jurjens Fonteijn did not descend from a Mennonite family. His father, the merchant Jurjen Scheltes Fonteijn, even served as mayor of Harlingen, an office Mennonites were excluded from. Claes Jurjens Fonteijn, however, changed to the faith of his wife Antje Reiners Jeddema. Their portraits clearly illustrate the Mennonite ethic of austerity. (Ill. 1) Despite their wealth, the couple is dressed in plain black clothing and jewelry is completely absent. The couple was definitely sincere about playing a central role in the Mennonite community of Harlingen and in the merchant elite that was affiliated with this congregation. All of their children married to members of established and upcoming Mennonite merchant families. Their sons Reiner and Jurjen were listed as the fourth (rank: 4-6) wealthiest households in the 1697 census. Claes Jurjens was not the only Fonteijn changing to the Mennonite faith. His brother Gijsbert Jurjens did the same when he married in 1654 to Janke Reiners Jeddema, a sister of Antje Reiners.

The Fonteijn family played a central role in the Mennonite community of Harlingen for more than two centuries. In the 1660's Claes Jurjens, for example, was deacon in one of the Harlingen Mennonite congregations and later on his son Reiner became preacher in the United Congregation of Harlingen. Another Fonteijn, Claes Dirks, was deacon of the same Congregation and treasurer of the Frisian Conference during the 1770's and 1780's. The latter branches of this family were however not patrilineally descendents from the two brothers Claes and Gijsbert. When Claes Jurjens' granddaughter Auckje Reiners Fonteijn married to Dirk Pieters in 1707, the latter adapted the surname of his wife. This practice of matrilineally transferring surnames was not uncommon among the families of the Mennonite business elite in Harlingen. Although most Fonteijns remained within this elite, not all descendents of Claes and Gijsbert Fonteijn stayed within the Mennonite business community of Harlingen. Occasionally some branches took another direction. That is already the case with Gijsbert's son Reinder Gijsberts Fonteijn who married to the Dutch Reformed IJbeltje Harmens Nauta. It is interesting to notice that he was the progenitor of a branch of the Fonteijn family that was not only Dutch Reformed, but was not affiliated with the Harlingen business elite either.

Dirk Sikkes and Pietje Jacobs Braam, married in 1691

Pietje Jacobs Braam was the granddaughter of the Mennonite merchant Claes Freerks Braam, who was the wealthiest inhabitant of Harlingen in 1672. Her father Jacob Clasen Braam had been a wealthy merchant as well, but had been so unfortunate to die at a very young age. After his death in 1678 her mother Grietje Hessels (Hingst), also descending from a family of merchants and skippers, continued the business. So Pietje Jacobs Braam must have learned at a young age that women played an important role in business. About the trading businesses of her father we know quite a lot thanks to the probate inventory that was drawn up after his death.

Jacob Clasen Braam was active in the Baltic trade and the goods he traded in consisted mostly of rye and timber. Besides that he owned a share in the brick yard Greetinga in the vicinity of Harlingen. Jacob Clasen Braam was therefore as close to the archetypical Harlingen merchant as one could get. His business was closely connected to those of his father and his brothers. The brick yard Greetinga was for instance co-owned by several family members. And his trades were very similar to those of his father's. Claes Freerks Braam survived his son by two years and after his death a probate inventory was drawn up as well. Again we see a strong orientation towards the Baltic trades, mainly consisting of cereals and timber, but Claes Freerks was also active in shipping, finance and storehouse rental. The probate inventories of father and son show little evidence of business relations among family members. Apart from the afore mentioned brick yard, there is only a curious remark in the inventory of Jacob Clasen Braam, mentioning that his brother had bought some goods on his account in the Baltic. This transaction was clearly 'off the record'. It is all but unlikely that these kind of transactions were more common than can be deduced from archival records. Informal relationships and heritage tied the family economically together. In 1697, seventeen years after Claes Freerks Braam had passed away, his close relatives were omnipresent in the top of the Harlingen wealth distribution. (Table 1)

Her ancestry shows that Pietje Jacobs Braam was stemming from a well established merchants family. And it would have been difficult for her to find a spouse of equal standing without becoming incestuous. Fortunately for her she managed to find a partner in the best next category. She became engaged with Dirck Sickes, a son of Sikke Hettes and Geertje Everts [Oosterbaan]. Sikke Hettes started his career as a baker in Makkum, a small industrial (port) town twelve kilometers southwest of Harlingen. He probably moved to Harlingen to become active in trade when he married to Geertje Everts, whose relatives later became known by the surname Oosterbaan. The 'Oosterbaan' family, at that time driving a rope yard, was one of the rising families in the second half of the seventeenth century. The close relatives of Geertje Everts managed to get married to members of established merchant families like Fontein, Roorda and Hingst. The offspring of Geertje Everts and Sikke Hettes was also successful in finding socially attractive spouses. Not only did their son Dirk marry to a member of the wealthy Braam family, their daughter Jeltje Sikkes did almost equally well, marrying to Anske Jacobs van Deersum a second cousin of Pietje Jacobs Braam. Sikke Hettes and his offspring turned out to be important nodes in the linking and relinking of several families of the Mennonite business elite. In terms of relinking Sikke Hettes made another noteworthy contribution. After the death of Geertje Everts he remarried to Foekje Gosses, the widow of his brother in law Claas Everts. His third wife was also affiliated to the Harlingen business elite. Being a newcomer in Harlingen, Sikke Hettes managed to get closely related to several family strands of the Harlingen elite. Whether this was the result of a deliberate strategy or not, is something we don't know, but it certainly was not maleficial to him nor his children. Starting as a modest baker he climbed up to become a relatively wealthy merchant. In 1697 his wealth was estimated at 15,000 guilders (rank 53-55). And even more successful were his offspring.

Whether Pietje Jacobs Braam and Dirk Sikkes were aware of the significance of their marriage for the family structure of the Harlingen business elite is subject to speculation. Fact is that they commemorated their wedding in 1691 with a 30.5 centimeter high wedding cup made of gilded silver. (Ill. 2) This cup contrasts strongly with the principles of frugality and austerity the Mennonites once used to live by. Furthermore, for a business man it seems illogical to store so much wealth in a piece of what can be considered 'dead capital'. We must not forget, however, that Dirk Sikkes was the son of a newcomer in the Harlingen elite. And it is well known sociological phenomenon that freshly arrived members of elites tend to go 'over the top' in their acquisition of precious luxury goods. On the other hand even if this cup had been half as conspicuous, it shows clearly that members of the Mennonite elite became less reluctant in using their wealth for purposes that were all but frugal and austere. Mennonite beliefs and manners were definitely changing. Yet, Pietje Jacobs Braam and Dirk Sikkes were not less sincere about being Mennonite. Dirk Sikkes even served as lay preacher for the Harlingen Mennonite community. It seems they were pretty much esteemed by their brethren of the Mennonite faith. Economically our couple was doing fine as well. In the 1697 census they were listed as the third wealthiest household in Harlingen. (Table 1) They had two children: a son called Jacob Dirks who probably died at a very young age, and a daughter, Geertje Dirks who married to her third cousin Claes Jacobs Braam, closing the circle once again.

Simon Stinstra and Anna Braam, married in 1759⁸

The physician Dr. Simon Stinstra was the grandson of Simon Johannes Stinstra and Trijntje Gooitjens Braam. So, although he was not a Braam by name, he certainly was one by descent. His marriage to Anna Reinders Braam can thus be considered as an obvious case of cohesive relinking. Besides that this marriage was also instrumental in the reunion of wealth. Anna was the only child of Dr. Regnerus (Reinder) Braam († 1747) and Ybeltje Dreyer († 1742). Her father had been active in trade, but also made a career in law. He was active as a

⁸ This case was earlier described by Kuiper (1997). For references see there, unless other references are given.

lawyer and later in life he took office as the secretary of a rural municipality nearby Harlingen. Two years after his death his wealth was estimated at 183,000 guilders. It made his daughter and heiress Anna one of the richest Frisian women of her time. Her husband Simon Stinstra was not that wealthy then. His father, the physician Dr. Gooitjen Stinstra, had chosen an academic career instead of becoming active in industry or trade. In the 1749 census his wealth was estimated at only 9,000 guilders. But that figure might be deceiving. In the same census Anna Gooitjens Braam⁹ is still listed for 45,000 guilders, while Gooitjen Stinstra's father in law, the merchant Willem Mouter was listed for 40,000 guilders. There was still a lot of money to come. Anna died in 1777 and Simon in 1782. They were both quite young, respectively nearly forty and forty-seven. At their funerals the children of the Mennonite orphanage of Harlingen were present; this institution got legacies from Simon and Anna. The couple itself had two children, a son and a daughter, who inherited 300.000 guilders in the first instance; a smaller portion of their inheritance remained undivided provisionally. About two third of this estate was made up of land and farms, and the remainder consisted of parts in eight ships, private loans, national and foreign debentures, and real property in and around Harlingen: three houses, two summerhouses and a store house on the prominent canal, the *Noorderhaven*.

Dr. Simon Stinstra, eldest son, had two sisters and two brothers who reached adulthood. The sisters married two rich, Mennonite sea-merchants (Fontein and Wiltschut) of Harlingen. One brother found his bride in a well to do, Mennonite family, living in Amsterdam on one of the prestigious canals (the *Keizersgracht*); he became a banker. His father in law (De Clercq) was a large merchant, director of The Eastern Trade and Shipowning and owner of a magnificent country-seat, built by the famous architect Philip Vingboons. Simon's youngest brother studied theology at the University of Franeker and at the Amsterdam Mennonite Seminary (founded in 1735). He served as minister of the Mennonite church of Franeker and married twice, in both cases with a girl born in the Harlingen Mennonite elite.

Simon and Anna lived in a big canal house on the *Voorstraat*, the most popular residential street among the rich and distinguished Mennonites of Harlingen. In the dining room their guests could see the family's porcelain and silver. Only two big paintings hung here on the wall: the portraits of the present-day owners of the house, painted by the Amsterdam society-painter Tibout Regters, also a specialist of the so-called conversation piece, in which a family group is portrayed in an informal, domestic sphere, for example in a garden or music-room. (Ekkart 2006) The Stinstra-Braam couple was fond of music and in their music-room stood a harpsichord and a virginal. In the biggest room of the house, on the first floor, was the pride of the family: an impressive collection of paintings of Dutch and Flemish artists (including famous 'old masters' like Jacob Ruisdael, Albert Cuyp, Pieter de Hoogh, Jan van Goyen en Willem van de Velde). The whole collection consisted of more than 200 paintings and was definitely the most beautiful art gallery in town and, probably, in the whole province of Friesland. We don't know exactly when and why Simon Stinstra started to collect his paintings. But it is quite sure that his Amsterdam-networks played an important role here. Through his younger brother's marriage Simon was invited into the world of art lovers and buyers in Amsterdam – gentlemen with good taste who had their own art cabinets and bought their trophies at auctions. Besides his art collection dr. Stinstra owned his father's library; he had bought it for 8,000 guilders. And his paternal grandfather, Simon Johannes Stinstra (overseas trader and wood merchant, who died in 1743), had also been an enthusiastic collector of books, just as his uncle Johannes Stinstra, who we already met as the famous suspended minister of the United Congregation. In Harlingen the Stinstra family had a central position in the network of well to do, Enlightened-bourgeois Mennonites. Their horizon was broader than the Dutch Republic. So in 1773 the Stinstra-Braam couple made 'a tour' to the Southern Netherlands with Simon's sister Baudina Stinstra, her husband Jelle Wiltschut and some other, more distant relatives, among whom the niece of the first appointed professor at the Mennonite Seminary in Amsterdam, dr. Tjerk Nieuwenhuis, born in Harlingen in 1708.

Although membership of the United Congregation of Harlingen decreased in the eighteenth century, at the end of it was still a flourishing and rich congregation. Due to its leading bourgeois elite it cherished a rather liberal and tolerant atmosphere and it was served by some prominent preachers, among whom members of the families that formed this leading elite. These ministers, with a Harlingen background or from outside, also participated in the new emerging intellectual networks of the (rationalistic) theology, philosophy and literature of the Enlightenment. Johannes Stinstra, for example, translated moralistic novels by the English novelist Samuel Richardson, with whom he kept up a correspondence. His friend, the historian and physician, dr. Simon Stijl wrote a well-known book about the rise and prosperity of the Dutch Republic (1774) and played characters in his own stage-plays. Already Reiner Claesen Fontein (1655-1727), a well to do merchant and owner of a salt work, who served the congregation as preacher from 1694 until his death, had liberal opinions. Members of several many Mennonite families in eighteenth-century Harlingen showed affinity with the arts as *collectionneurs et connaisseurs* of books, china and paintings. (Kuiper, 1996; 1997) Many Mennonites participated also in the literary and scientific societies, which were founded in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Very popular among them was the Society for Public Welfare that was initiated by a Mennonite preacher in Edam (near

⁹ Curiously she is listed under the name of Berber Jans. (Probably her maid.)

Amsterdam) in 1784. The goal of this society was to give concrete form to the ideals of the Enlightenment. For example, saving banks and insurance companies were established to stimulate material self-help and popular reading material was produced and brought to the attention of ordinary people through lending libraries. In the same period (Harlingen) Mennonites practiced political emancipation with their participation in the political reform movement of the so-called Patriots. As active members of voluntary militias they abandoned their traditional values of not wearing arms and not aspiring to public office.

4. SOME INTERPRETATIONS

Despite its endogamous kinship structure and despite the proverbial Mennonite austerity, the Harlingen business elite adapted remarkably easily to a modernizing life world, not to say eagerly. Such a development seems uncommon for closely knit groups, unless they are affected by what Granovetter (1973; 1983) has called the 'strength of weak ties' (SWT). Unlike cohesive or strong ties, weak ties link people in chainlike rather than grid structures and on a group level they link cohesive groups with the outside world. These weak ties can become strong when they play a role in the dissemination of new ideas and techniques. They provide people with access to information and resources beyond those available in their own social circle. Because of their structure cohesive groups are more effective in reproducing cultural phenomena, but for innovation they have to rely on outward links. Although Granovetter tends to deal with SWT scenarios as incidental phenomena, it is not hard to see that they can have durable properties as well. The Harlingen business elite, for instance, being active in trade (and increasingly in finance, banking, bookprinting or collecting of art) was structurally linked to the outside world by weak ties. Even their marriage alliances, although strongly interwoven, were not a closed circuit. Newcomers were continually entering the Harlingen family networks, while others moved to other towns and regions. It seems to us that in this commercial and professional environment kinship was in the course of time more an expression of practical and emotional motives than of religious and moral values. According to Granovetter's model of SWT a crucial characteristic of a real upper class is its lack of cognitive flexibility. Moreover an upper class lifestyle presupposes a stress on the importance of strong ties to other members of the upper class. Certainly the Mennonite business elite had become part of the upper class of Harlingen, but in Friesland and in Amsterdam the real upper classes were the ruling elites of, respectively, the nobility and the patrician notables (or regency class). They were more or less privileged groups that had most power and, in the estimation of the surrounding society, superior status. The endogamy of these elites was, probably, also much stronger than among our Harlingen Mennonites. (Kuiper 1986; Price 1995) Another striking fact is that even around 1660 the United Congregation in Harlingen already had many mixed marriages of a Mennonite husband with a non-Mennonite wife (or, and three times more, a Mennonite wife with a non-Mennonite husband, because many more women than men were member of the congregation). The ratio between mixed and non-mixed marriages varied from 1:2 to 1:4. (Marseille 1984; Zijlstra 2000)

Some families of the early-modern Harlingen Mennonite business elite (such as Stinstra and Braam) died out, but we still find descendants - in the male line - of other families from this local elite (Fontein, Hannema, Hingst and Oosterbaan) in the genealogical series *Nederland's Patriciaat* ('Dutch Patriciate', published since 1910 by the *Centraal Bureau voor Genealogie* as a pseudo-official collection of non-noble, high bourgeoisie families). As in other genealogical registers we find here a more or less biased view on the kinship structure of this elite. The stress on patrilineal descent can suggest that our Harlingen Mennonites as members of the property owning class had strong patrilineal sentiments and acted accordingly. But as we have seen in our three case studies the practical economic significance of descent through females was in this group at least as significant as descent through males. (Kuiper 1995) Nevertheless the introduction in this elite of inherited surnames generated to a certain extent an ideological differentiation, among these well to do Mennonites, between the value they attached to patri-filiation in comparison to matri-filiation. In such circumstances, as the anthropologist Edmund Leach strikingly remarked, surname groups can come to be credited with many of the characteristics of patrilineal descent groups even though these attributes are largely fictional. (Leach 1973)

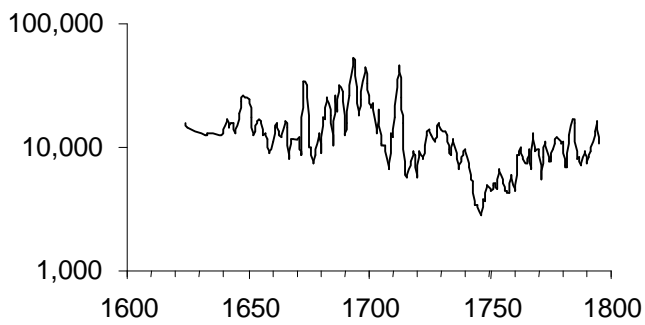
The economic success of (business elites among) the Dutch Mennonites in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries still remains a riddle for many historians. (Trompeter 1997; Zijlstra 2000) Explanations by means of marginality and deprivation leave the researcher with the problem that they do not explain the non-success of other marginal groups of dissenters. But what about an explanation with a stress on more typical Mennonite characteristics? Does an enumeration of core values as honesty, financial reliability and austerity – the so-called traditional Mennonite identity or mentality – really give us a more insight into the phenomenon? As we have mentioned above this mentality might have been beneficial in a 'good faith economy', but it became somewhat obsolete in an economic environment that depended increasingly upon contracts for loans and transactions. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries economic endurance relied more and more on expanding capital markets. And savings and investments were increasingly done by means of private debenture bonds. (De Vries 1968; Van Zanden 1987, Van Zanden 1992; Nijboer 2005) Furthermore, our three case studies suggest that the Harlingen Mennonites were – during the period 1650-1800 - involved in a complex process in

which elite-formation and a changing collective identity stimulated one another in a certain direction. Perhaps we may summarize and typify this development in three slogans: more individual autonomy, more intellectual challenges and more political participation.

5. CONCLUSION

Modernization is often associated with the dissolving of family and kin as basic social structures. The case of the early modern Harlingen business elite shows, however, that a bounded network of family relations was no barrier to modernization per se. It might even be said that, on the contrary, this tight network of family relations offered the safe environment that was needed for the evolution of attitudes and lifestyles apt to survive in an environment that was increasingly dependent on contractual agreements and secular civility. Borrowing the elegant formula of Granovetter, it is a good example of social embeddedness of economic behavior. It was also a seedbed of individual autonomy. Members of small town merchant elites were depending on both in-group and outward relations for maintaining their position as trustworthy business partners. In such an environment both kinship and religious identity had to be solid but flexible entities.

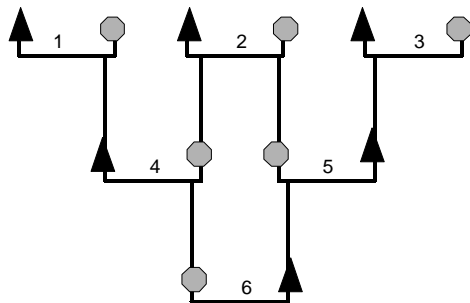
Figure 1. The revenues of the 'Convooi- en Licentgelden' levied at Harlingen, 1624-1795.



Sources: Becht (1908) and De Vries (1968).

Figure 2. Representations of kinship networks.

Genealogical diagram, type Rivers.



P-graph.

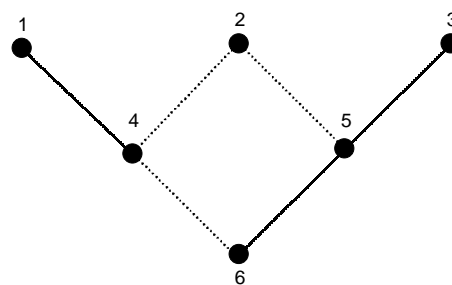
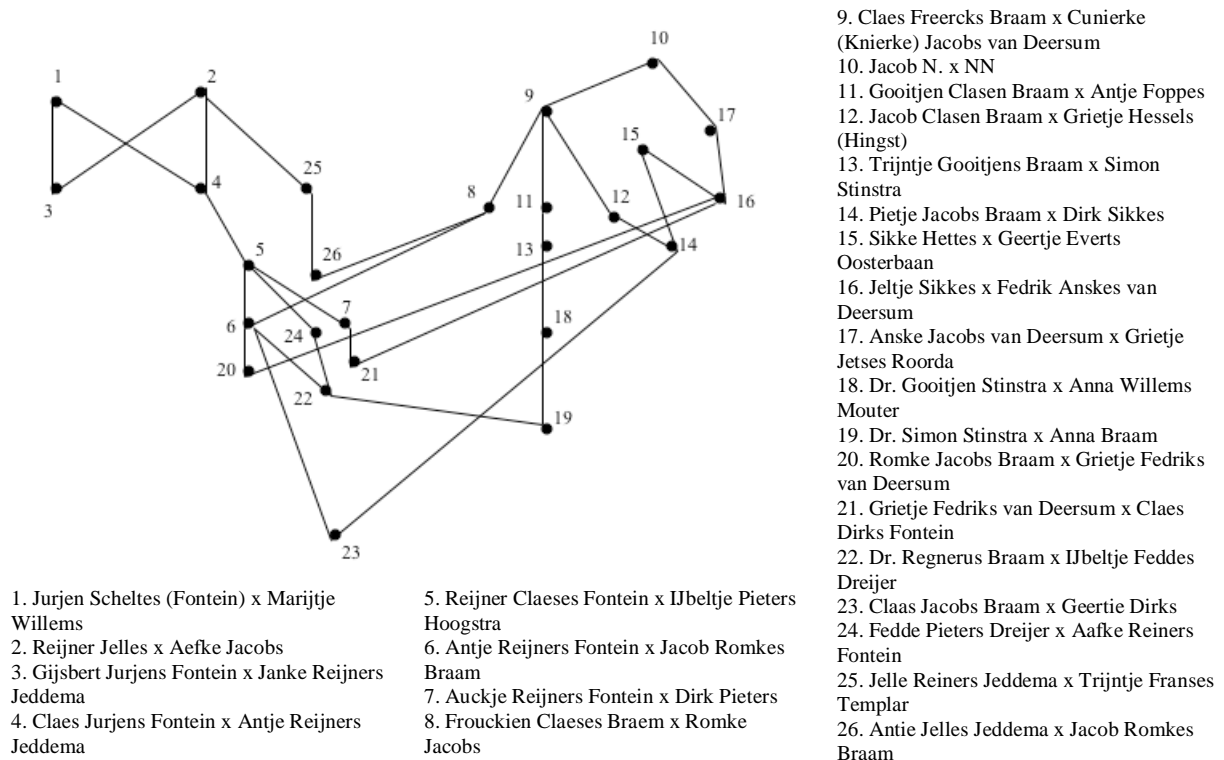


Figure 3. Cohesive relinking in the kinship relations around the selected couples.



Note: Only relinking relations have been drawn, but even in depicting these relations the graph is not comprehensive.

Table 1. The wealthiest households in Harlingen (1697), religious affiliation and family relations.

Wealthiest households in Harlingen 1697	Estimated wealth in guilders	Religious affiliation	Family relation to Claas Freeks Braam, the wealthiest man in 1672
The former tax collector Nauta	100,000	Dutch Reformed	
Jacob Romkes Braam	90,000	Mennonite	Grandson
Dirk Sickes	83,000	Mennonite	Grandson in law
Dieuwke Pijlters Hooghstra	80,000	Mennonite	Daughter in law
Reijner Clasen Fonteijn	80,000	Mennonite	Brother in law of daughter in law and father in law of grandson
Jurrien Fontein	80,000	Mennonite	Brother of previous.
Reiner Gijsberts Fonteijn	70,000	Mennonite	
Reijner Arriens Mahu	60,000	Mennonite	Son in law
The widow of Rear-Admiral Bruinsvelt	50,000	Dutch Reformed	
Saco van Idsinga	50,000	Dutch Reformed	
Goijtien Braam	50,000	Mennonite	Son
The heirs of burgomaster Oldaans	42,000	Dutch Reformed	
Doede Hendrix widow	40,000	Mennonite	
Ericus Haarsma	40,000	Dutch Reformed	
Gilles Vermeersch	38,000	Mennonite	
Trijntie Pijlters [Laquart]	36,000	Mennonite	Grandmother of granddaughter in law
Huijbert Clasen Braam	35,000	Mennonite	Son of cousin
The heirs of Feddrik Tierx widow	35,000	Mennonite	
Ysbrant Joosten Heins	35,000	Mennonite	
Evert Clasen (Oosterbaan)	35,000	Mennonite	Cousin of grandson in law, marries widow of grandson
Minse Cornelis curator for his grandchild	31,000	Mennonite	Father in law of grandson
Aijse Arriens Mahu	30,000	Mennonite	Brother of son in law
Johannes Vosma	30,000	Mennonite	
Tiaard Sioerds	30,000	Mennonite	

Illustration 1. Claes Jurjens Fontein & Antje Reiners Jeddema

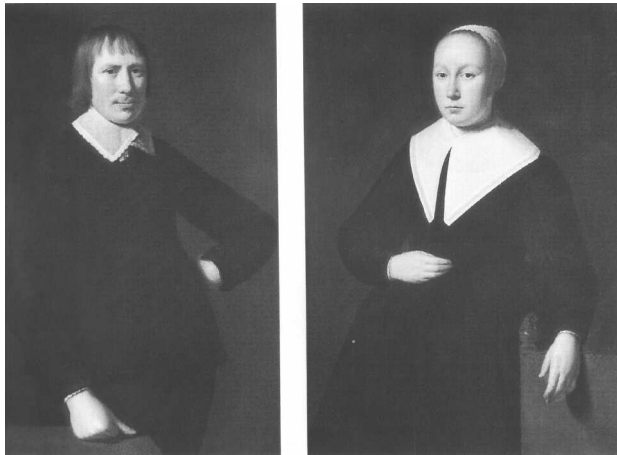


Illustration 2. Silver wedding cup of Dirk Sikkes and Pietje Jacobs Braam.



Illustration 3. Dr. Simon Stinstra & Anna Braam



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