

Between Frugality and Civility: Dutch Mennonites and Their Taste for the ‘World of Art’ in the Eighteenth Century

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In 1646 Claes Jurjens Fontein, a wealthy merchant from the Dutch port town of Harlingen, married Antje Reiners Jeddema, a young Mennonite from Leeuwarden. She was thirteen years younger than her husband. Her parents were Mennonites, but his were not. Partly because of his marriage Claes became a Mennonite. Two years after their wedding their portraits were painted by Matthijs Harings. Both are portrayed in plain black clothing without any jewelry. The paintings were clearly meant to express the Mennonite identity of the couple: plain, pious and austere. The portraits even idealized these religious attitudes. But the paintings masked a social reality. Claes and Antje were not simple people; Claes, for example, acted as banker of the Frisian nobility and he died as the richest man of Harlingen. Moreover, the making of portraits was still very rare among Mennonites in Harlingen during the seventeenth century. These portraits from the 1600s contrast sharply with those of the Mennonite physician Dr. Simon

Stinstra and his wife Anna Braam, painted by Tibout Regters in 1763. This couple also lived in Harlingen, and Anna Braam was a great-great-granddaughter of Claes and Antje. The portraits of Simon and Anna express anything but austerity. Simon is wearing a fashionable Indian red jacket and a white powdered wig. Anna is dressed in a blue dress and fine laces. Around her neck she is wearing a string of red corals with a silver lock and her head is draped with a so-called Dutch cap of Valenciennes lace. Within four generations the way that key figures in the Harlingen Mennonite community presented themselves had changed drastically.



Artifact 1 - Portrait of dr. Simon Stinstra (1735-1782), deacon of the United Mennonite Congregation of Harlingen and a nephew of the famous Mennonite preacher Johannes Stinstra. Oil on canvas, dated 1763; signed by Tibout Regters. (Amsterdams Historisch Museum, Amsterdam).



Artifact 2 - Portrait of Anna Braam (1738-1777), deaconess of the United Mennonite Congregation of Harlingen. She was the richest heir in Harlingen, when she married Simon in 1759. Oil on canvas, dated 1763; signed by Tibout Regters (Amsterdams Historisch Museum, Amsterdam).

In the eighteenth century wealthy and educated Dutch Mennonites became increasingly interested in worldly passions like portrait painting, fashionable clothing and art collections. Leaving behind their proverbial austerity and becoming men of good taste, they began to act as spokesmen and supporters of the values of a rising civil society. In the course of time virtue, taste and a civilized education became important pillars of their self image.

In this article we explore the causes of this shift in self-presentation and place it in the context of the involvement of Mennonites with the rise of cultural nationalism in the Dutch Republic during the last quarter of the eighteenth century. To be more precise we analyse the changing world of well-to-do Mennonites of the Frisian port town Harlingen as a case study of cultural change among Mennonites in an urban, maritime context. We will also argue that a key factor in this process of cultural change was the deep involvement of Dutch Mennonites with financial and commercial networks and practices. Motives for collecting paintings and books could be diverse and individual, but money and market functioned here as the general and structural conditions for buying of art: no auctions, no Mennonite art collectors. Already in the seventeenth century art dealers played a critical intermediary role between artists and wealthy collectors.¹ An important premise of our approach is James Urry's fine observation that understanding Mennonite economic success involves not so much a search for religious causes, but rather an examination of the historical contexts in which Mennonites prospered economically.² Nevertheless, we still recognize a kernel of truth in the much-debated thesis of Max Weber on the selective affinity of early modern Protestantism and capitalism. While we cannot agree with the simplistic causality between religious attitude and capitalistic mentality, we are inspired by Weber's idea of the "unintended collective consequences of intended individual (and religiously motivated) action". Or in more concrete terms, the idea that people who lived an ascetic and sober life in the hope of salvation, could, at the end of their lives and under certain circumstances, transfer great wealth to their offspring and smaller portions of it to the poor in their congregation. The attractiveness of this life goal revealed itself in Harlingen in the course of time. Mennonite merchants and ship-owners not only became wealthy, rich businessmen and their families in Harlingen also became Mennonite (Sprunger 2008).³

Harlingen: Mennonites and Money

Harlingen is located in the northwest of the province of Friesland. Witmarsum, the place where Menno Simons was born, is only twelve kilometers from Harlingen. The town of Harlingen was also an important meeting place in the early history of the Mennonites in the Netherlands.⁴ When Menno died in 1561, Harlingen had a population of only about 2000 inhabitants, but later it grew spectacularly, reaching nearly 10,000 in 1680. During the seventeenth century, the Dutch Golden Age, the town profited greatly from the rise of Amsterdam

as a centre for world trade. Commercial ties with this nearby trade metropolis especially benefited ship-owners and traders in Harlingen. Then, during most of the eighteenth century, the port cities of the Dutch Republic, including Harlingen, suffered from a stagnating economy.⁵ By 1700, the town's population had declined to about 7.000 inhabitants. In spite of this stagnation, Harlingen entrepreneurs and traders not only continued their search for new markets and innovation but also increased their investments in farmland and other properties, thus spreading their financial risk.⁶ After 1750 Frisian agriculture and trade began to prosper again and the economy and population of Harlingen followed this upward trend.

Throughout the eighteenth century, the top of Harlingen's financial elite remained Mennonite or even converted to the United Mennonite Congregation of Harlingen. The proportion of Mennonites in the total population of Harlingen declined during the first half of the eighteenth century from 15% to 10%, but among the wealthiest thirty to forty families the Mennonites were still in the majority. It was a close-knit elite. Especially among the most well-to-do Mennonite, endogamy was common. Many preachers of the relatively large local Mennonite congregation were close to, or even members of these opulent families. In fact, the most influential Harlingen Mennonites also associated with the town's economic elite even at a time when laws in Dutch provinces and towns barred these rich Mennonites from all government offices. Only after the Revolution of 1795, did non-Calvinists become eligible for political office.⁷

The United Mennonite Congregation of Harlingen was founded around 1672 after several attempts to unite the former congregations of the so-called Young Flemish, Young Frisians, High German and Waterlander Mennonites.⁸ It soon became evident that the leaders of the United Mennonite Congregation were especially talented in managing both money problems and theological debates. In 1695 they initiated the foundation of the Mennonite Frisian Conference, with nearly all the treasury of this Conference coming from well-to-do members within Harlingen's United Congregation. As the richest congregation of Friesland they soon opened their own orphanage and almshouse.⁹ The aims of this Conference not only were to maintain peace and cooperation among the Frisian congregations, but also to take care of poor congregations and to subsidize those that were unable to pay the salaries of their ministers. In the course of time, more than fifty congregations joined the Conference. Already in the years around 1670 one of the leaders of Harlingen's United Congregation, the rich merchant and deacon Claes Huyberts Braam, negotiated three loans totaling a million guilders between the Frisian government and the Frisian Mennonite congregations. The province of Friesland needed

much money for building warships and found it in part by compulsory fund-raising among Mennonites. In exchange for Mennonite cooperation, Friesland guaranteed the Mennonites freedom of religion and exemption from military obligation.

Dr. Simon Stinstra: Representative of the Enlightened Mennonite Elite

Physician Simon Stinstra was born in 1735 into a family of wealthy, well-known Harlingen Mennonites. He obtained his medical doctorate from Leiden, as had his father who practiced medicine in Harlingen. Around 1760, Simon succeeded him. His uncle was Johannes Stinstra, a rather notorious Mennonite minister. In 1742, the Government of Friesland had suspended his right to preach as he was suspected of Socinian heresies. This suspension not only caused a local stir: it launched Johannes Stinstra to nationwide fame. In his 'enlightened' plea for religious freedom Stinstra based his arguments on the natural right to freedom of religious thought and practice and not on biblical authority.¹⁰ During this period of forced *otium*, Stinstra translated Samuel Richardson's novel *Clarissa, or the History of a Young Lady* into Dutch. In a lengthy introduction, he emphasised the moral significance of the work.¹¹ A cousin of Simon, Heere Oosterbaan, had also studied at Leiden. Oosterbaan was a professor at the Mennonite Seminary of Amsterdam, the place where Mennonite preachers had been trained since the early eighteenth century. The Seminary maintained close ties with the Mennonites at Harlingen. Much later, Oosterbaan served the same congregation as a preacher. Simon's younger brother studied theology at the University of Franeker in Friesland and then trained at the Amsterdam Seminary to become a preacher at Franeker. Simon's other brother married a rich Mennonite merchant's daughter from Amsterdam and became a partner in a banking firm. The Stinstra brothers had two sisters who married wealthy Mennonite merchants and never left their native Harlingen.

Simon Stinstra and Anna Braam were a perfect match according to seventeenth century Dutch values; the marriage fused their economic, social and religious capital. Simon's family was well-to-do and had a learned reputation, while Anna's family was the wealthiest in town, and had been so for some generations. During the second half of the seventeenth century, the Braam family made their fortune in trading in timber, plying international trade routes with a fleet of three-masted, unarmed, heavy cargo 'flute' ships with striking names – King David, Paradise and Love. To enhance their reputation, both Simon and Anna

held offices in the United Mennonite Congregation, Simon as elder and deacon, Anna as deaconess.

The Stinstras were also known as passionate book and art collectors. Simon's grandfather Simon Stinstra, after whom he had been named, owned a formidable library. His two sons, one a physician, the other a preacher, had followed his example, with impressive book collections. Simon Stinstra Jr. was himself particularly fond of seventeenth-century Dutch painting. There is little doubt that he owned the largest cabinet of paintings in eighteenth-century Friesland. His entire collection of over 220 paintings was auctioned one year after his death in 1782, requiring four days to be sold. The very site of the auction, stipulated by Simon's last will as Amsterdam, not Harlingen, illustrates the value of the collection. Simon's only son Gooitjen Stinstra issued purchase orders to several art brokers for pieces in the family collection and when he died forty years later, his own collection was also auctioned. Still, several paintings remained in the family as Gooitjen's sister Isabella, who then lived at Amsterdam, purchased several of the paintings. Like many other Mennonites in Harlingen, the Stinstras also loved to collect silver and china, *naturalia*, and scientific instruments. Many silver spoons, boxes, bowls, and goblets, traditionally commissioned to commemorate births, betrothals and weddings, are found in their inventories and in those of other wealthy and cultured Harlingen Mennonites.¹²

This omnivorous practice of collecting among the Stinstras follows a general practice among prominent citizens of Holland proper, the western region of the Dutch Republic in general, and Amsterdam in particular. It even appears to follow a trend in taste. The initial popularity of historical, biblical, allegorical or mythological subjects gradually gave way to pastoral and *genre* paintings.¹³ At first glance it appears to be a sign of secularisation as scriptural scenes gave way to more natural scenes, with increasing attention to landscape. The landscapes now featured both indigenous scenes of typical Dutch flatland with pastures, waterways, and cosmopolitan scenes, including exotic mountainscapes.

Yet such a reading ignores the persistence of theological interest among eighteenth-century Harlingen Mennonites, an interest expressed in erudite and lively debate. It suggests that Dr. Simon Stinstra's cabinet of paintings reflected only the fashion among the rich and educated, and was aimed mainly at fellow-collectors. It suggests that the entire pattern of collection, funded by fortunes made in shipping and trade, could be understood as investments in valuable objects or status (or both), that is, in strictly commercial and social terms. Such a reading misses the complex historical and cultural context in which Mennonites such as Stinstra began collecting art. In

the course of time their collections achieved fame and reputation, but they did not build up their collections to gain status but rather to show their civilized taste.

The concept of taste is crucial to the matter. It illuminates the collector's *habitus*, his perceived ideal self and the dominant cultural practices in his social circles and networks.¹⁴ Within the circle of Harlingen Mennonites, Simon Stinstra represents the types of the educated art lover (Dutch: "liefhebber"; Italian: "dilettante") and the *connoisseur*, a man of taste, who also collected drawings and engravings and books about art theory and biographies of painters. In the eighteenth century these two types fused more and more with their predecessor the *mercator sapiens*, who already was not a merchant investing and dealing in art, but a collector of paintings who delights in sharing good taste and in opening his cabinet of paintings to other art lovers and men of reputation. This type of collector was already well-known in Amsterdam in the seventeenth century.¹⁵ Because of his Amsterdam network, Stinstra had many contacts in the art dealing and art collecting circles of the city. The walls of his cabinet, the main room on the first floor of his house in Harlingen, were indeed entirely covered with paintings, mostly bought at auctions in Amsterdam (or sometimes from the art dealer Heinrich Baur, a German painter who had moved to Harlingen in the late 1760s).¹⁶

Dr. Simon's Cabinet

The eighteenth-century poet and sentimentalist Rhijnvis Feith (1753-1824) once wrote that the typical hard-working Dutch merchant did not care for "lofty thought" and that he would recognise reality as the sole element of beauty. Another scholar, the physician, art dealer and author of the book series *Natural History of Holland* Le Francq van Berkhey (1729-1812), noticed the "shallow dilettantism" of the merchant-collector whose central aim was leisure. Such authors obviously depicted such art lovers in derogatory terms, as mere amateurs dabbling in the arts, using their cabinets merely for recreational purposes.¹⁷

But do such negative labels also apply to the collections of father and son Simon and Gooitjen Stinstra? A closer look at Dr. Simon Stinstra's holdings is revealing.¹⁸ Nearly one third of his entire collection of 220 paintings consisted of landscapes and another one third of still life paintings. No more than one eighth of the entire collection consisted of historical paintings. This appears to reflect the changing tastes outlined above. Yet this particular collection also discloses a preference that appears to be telling of the taste and self-image of

this individual collector. Dr. Stinstra's cabinet included no less than twenty-four seascapes and harbour views, and one dozen cityscapes, half of them of Amsterdam (one showing the city's largest Mennonite church building); not a single one portrayed Harlingen. The seascapes and harbour views include representations of the Mediterranean and Levantine sea trade, with only a single work by Frisian seascape painter, Wigerus Vitringa.¹⁹

These were the paintings which Simon Stinstra's son Gooitjen and his daughter Isabella bought back many years later. During their childhood they had of course been familiar with these works, recognizing that their father's collection of seascapes included paintings by leading artists who had worked at Amsterdam around 1700: Ludolf Backhuysen, Arnout Smit, Abraham Storck, and Hendrick Dubbels.²⁰ Such a high degree of specialisation suggests a combination of expertise and passion in the collector. Still, at the auction of Simon Stinstra's cabinet in 1783 in Amsterdam, the painting fetching the best price was a *vanitas*, an exotic and highly symbolic work by Hendrick Andriessen ('lame Hein') of Antwerp. It represented an African prince in what was described as *zeer kostbare kleeding* ('very expensive clothing'), surrounded by books, musical instruments, flashy jewellery and soap-bubbles. The message of the painting was the meaningless of earthly life, as expressed in the biblical verse "vanity of all vanities, all is vanity". This was not a painting for which Fouquet, the well-known Amsterdam art broker, had been given a purchase order by Simon's son Gooitjen.²¹ On Gooitjen's behalf, Fouquet instead bought a view of the port of Enkhuizen by Backhuysen and two works of Abraham Storck, an 'Italian Seaport' and a 'Levantine Trading Place' depicting Dutch merchants sailing in a convoy of heavily-armed military vessels. Significantly, this depiction of ships runs counter to the common assumption that the pacifism of Mennonite traders would have prevented them from sailing in armed convoys.

Although Simon Stinstra was quite busy as a medical practitioner, he had also invested part of his capital in ships. One of the larger ships carried the name of his daughter, 'The Miss Isabella.' Another one was called 'The Maria Magdalena'. Like other shareholders, the naval war of the early 1780's between Britain and the Dutch Republic must have worried him. When the sea war between England and the Dutch Republic began in 1780, Mennonite and Calvinist ship-owners of Harlingen reacted promptly with fundraising for new warships.²² This, of course, was patriotism at its high point; traditional Dutch Mennonite pacifism seems to have become but a distant value. Stinstra's passion for marine paintings may even have been inspired by nostalgic sentiment about the Republic's glorious nautical past, a sentiment already prominent in his circles before the war of 1780 broke out. Significantly

it was his friend and bachelor Dr. Simon Stijl, also a medical doctor in Harlingen of Mennonite descent, who wrote a treatise on the rise and prosperity of the Dutch Republic in the seventeenth century.²³ When Stijl died, in 1804, he also left a rich collection of paintings, drawings and engravings. It included about thirty marines.²⁴



Artifact 3 - Whaling ships of the Mennonite shipowner Wildschut from Harlingen, at the background Spitsbergen. Oil on canvas; around 1760; painted by Dirk Danser (Museum Hannemahuis, Harlingen).



Artifact 4 - Ships owned by Mennonite timber-merchants from Harlingen approaching the harbor of Arendal in Norway. Oil on canvas; dated 1755; signed by Dirk Danser (Fries Scheepvaart Museum/ Frisian Maritime Museum, Sneek).

Patriotism increasingly involved the Stinstra family. During the 1780s, Simon's son Gooitjen became a vocal member of the Patriot Movement that wanted to restore the economy of the Dutch Republic to the glory of the Golden Age. These patriots aimed for political and economic change by mobilizing the opposition against the ruling establishment with its supervisor, the Prince of Orange, William V. In many provincial towns Mennonites acted as the entrepreneurs of the Patriot Movement by starting new militias of voluntary armed citizens.

But did the collecting of art that represented the old glory of the Republic only function as a cultural compensation for the ongoing exclusion of Mennonites from the governments of the provinces and towns? In our view it was more than that. Our argument is that the seascapes and city views in Dr. Simon Stinstra's art-filled cabinet room reveal not only a personal appreciation, but also a collective taste, closely interwoven with the rise of national pride and the construction of a national canon of history during the last three decades of the eighteenth century. On the one hand the Dutch tricolor on the trade ships and men-of-war refer to a national, maritime glory, but on the other hand sea trade symbolized his family tradition. However, Stinstra's seascapes do not exclude the possibility that these paintings had symbolic (including religious) meanings, such as the ship of love, the ship of life and the ship of state. Topographic views on cities also held Stinstra's special interest. Two city views painted by Gerrit Berkheyde – Dam Square in Amsterdam, with its famous town hall built around 1650 and the Great Market in Haarlem, with its Saint Bavo church – are illustrative.²⁵ Already in Stinstra's time these places were attractions for well-to-do visitors and tourists, connected with both specific urban and general national sentiments. So once again, we meet the enlightened, Mennonite physician, memorializing the past, and identifying himself with the history of his nation and its cities.

Although Gooitjen's art collection was only half as large as his late father's, contemporary *connoisseurs* were aware of its exceptional value. Gooitjen's cabinet included paintings by such famous Dutch artists as Rembrandt, Pieter de Hoogh, and Jacob Ruisdael.²⁶ With his father, the son shared a taste for seascapes. Backhuysen, Van Everdingen, and Van de Velde, but also his own neighbour Nicolaas Baur were well represented in his cabinet. To the consternation of Gooitjen's heirs, the auction of his collection at Amsterdam in 1822 fetched much less than expected. That included Rembrandt's portrait of a woman, now in the Museum Boymans Van Beuningen at Rotterdam.²⁷ The best price at the auction was paid not for a seascape but for a city view, probably the most famous or, according to the French writer Marcel Proust, the most beautiful painting in the world. Although the auction catalogue mentions the name Stinstra, it had really been owned

by the Mennonite Kops family of Haarlem.²⁸ For unclear reasons, a broker had covered up its provenance. The anonymous buyer at the auction turned out to be King William I of the Netherlands. He donated this painting to the Royal Art Collection, now the Museum Mauritshuis at The Hague. It was the famous 'View of Delft' by Johannes Vermeer.

Mennonites and Trust: Social, Cultural and Symbolic Capital

The case of Simon Stinstra shows vividly how in the eighteenth century wealthy Mennonites moved in the vanguard of the nascent civil society. In doing so, they gradually developed an appetite for civil, yet worldly, pleasures like art collecting and participating in musical and theatrical performances. It would be incorrect, however, to state that the Mennonite ideals of frugality and austerity had become corrupted by the growing wealth of Mennonites, although more orthodox Mennonites – and especially those outside the Dutch Republic – would clearly have condemned the lifestyle of their liberal 'fellows' as immoral and worldly. Wealth, however, was not something that was new to Mennonites in the eighteenth century. Besides, why should we treat these developments as a kind of moral corruption? The enlightened Dutch Mennonites of the eighteenth century did not become immoral. On the contrary, morality was something they were rather conscious about. Furthermore, many of their newly formed attitudes were somehow related to one of the core issues of moral and social behavior: trust.

Whether deliberately or not, being Mennonite has always been the expression of a special kind of trustworthiness. Many of the attitudes and practices that defined the Mennonites as a religious group, also defined the trustworthiness of individual Mennonites: their refusal to bear arms, their repudiation of swearing oaths, their austerity and sobriety and their ethic of hard work. All these characteristics communicated a message of trustworthiness, both within and outside the Mennonite world, and hence provided important symbolic resources to the Mennonites. The more rigid Mennonite congregations even added guarantees to this *symbolic capital* by applying the penalty of excommunication and shunning to those who were unable or unwilling to meet the congregational standards. In the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic, Mennonite congregations were quite active in maintaining the commercial reliability of their members and fraud and bankruptcy often resulted in excommunication.²⁹

The concept of symbolic capital, coined by Bourdieu (1985; 1986), denotes the advantages people derive from their socio-cultural identity.³⁰ Priests, for instance, were said to be trusted by many Roman

Catholics for the simple reason that they were priests. It is a kind of trust that does not rely on the individual merit of those who are trusted, but on the mere idea they represent. This kind of trust is deduced from a general world view and is not easily shaken by exceptions to the rule. Similar principles were at work in Mennonite and other Protestant congregations that adhered to the idea of 'the priesthood of all believers'.³¹ The Mennonite aspiration to be 'a church without spot or wrinkle'³² contributed much to the symbolic capital of its members.

This 'Mennonite ethic', revealed itself not in theological teaching but in 'faith in practice', as commitment to hard work and frugality.³³ And it evolved in an age when symbolic capital was still a necessary resource for many economic transactions. This was particularly true for trade between the Baltic and the Dutch Republic, one dominated by Mennonite merchants and skippers. By the beginning of the seventeenth century this trade was still characterized by many elements of a 'good faith economy'. Revealing the nature of such an economy, Amsterdam mayor Cornelis Pietersz Hooft wrote in 1617 that many Dutch merchants could obtain goods in the Baltic without any written, legal guarantee.³⁴ Early Mennonite congregations even backed up these personal guarantees by penalizing those who violated them; such violators were considered to be a disgrace to the ideal of 'priesthood of all believers' and were excommunicated and subsequently shunned. Such measures were instrumental in establishing confidence rather than trust.

As Adam B. Seligman argues, scholarly analysis requires a clear distinction between confidence and trust.³⁵ Confidence is backed up by guarantees, such as the excommunication of a traditional Mennonite who fails to repay his debts. Trust, on the other hand, does not rely on guarantees of sanction, but on the very lifestyle of the subjects involved, in the case of Mennonites, on their austere lifestyle or personal piety. But in each of these cases no real guarantees are provided. This distinction between trust and confidence is more than a semantic game as it points to the basic question in which social spheres of trust and confidence do arise, the public or private?

In being trusted, Mennonites in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries still relied heavily on their collective identity. For individual Mennonites this meant they had to live up to the ideal of being Mennonite in order to take full advantage of the symbolic capital provided to them. In this way they could provide the 'personal guarantees' needed in business transactions and other exchanges in socioeconomic life. In order to take advantage of a trust bestowed by a public identity one constantly has to demonstrate one's desire not to lose that identity. This struggle is not specific to Mennonites. It is a general characteristic of symbolic capital that it relies on trust in the public sphere and

confidence in the private. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries many other public and collective identities bestowed individuals with symbolic capital. The Calvinists had their own ways of establishing trust. And partly outside the realm of religion, concepts of honor performed similar functions in all strata of society.

From the sixteenth century onwards the importance of personal guarantees in socio-economic life gradually declined. Several factors contributed to this process. The formation and institutional growth of national states promoted the state's monopoly over both criminal and civil justice. But this was not only because rulers sought means to control their subjects; the growing role of private law responded to popular needs as well. Increasingly, civil courts settled disputes over debts and other economic affairs. Moreover, from the sixteenth century onwards, people in northwestern Europe made increasing use of contractual agreements like bills of exchange, notarial deeds and private debenture bonds to obtain guarantees for loans and business transactions. In other words, people sought more and more refuge in public instruments to secure their socioeconomic relations.³⁶ And Mennonites were no exception to this rule.

A look at the asset portfolios of wealthy Mennonite merchants in Harlingen at the end of the seventeenth century reveals that already at that time a considerable part of their wealth was made up of bills of credit, private debenture bonds and other public instruments. There were even considerable investments in the public debt. Whether these loans to the government were completely voluntarily or not does not matter much in this context, because wealthy Mennonites had little choice but to engage in the use of these instruments of credit to manage their wealth and their businesses. Because of their occupational activities, they were entangled in various financial and commercial networks that stretched far beyond their immediate control. In the competitive economy of the Dutch Republic it was not easy to scorn the obvious advantages of public instruments in asset management and business transactions. Besides, bills of exchange and private debenture bonds became so widely used in settling payment and the transferring of trade debts that it became virtually impossible to do business without these instruments. And if Mennonites embraced austerity as a key value to their identity, they never embraced poverty.³⁷

Due to the increased use of contractual agreements, the way in which trust and confidence were situated in the public and the private sphere gradually became reversed. When confidence becomes a public matter, trust becomes increasingly privatized. And one of the main characteristics of private trust is that it is primarily based on empathy. Trust in the private sphere only arises when people are able to feel sympathy for each other. This requires specific attitudes not only

regarding the regulation of feelings and emotions but also regarding the expression of tastes. For example, sharing and discussing tastes in the recently founded drawing academies in the Dutch Republic of the late eighteenth century were important means for establishing empathic relationships. Collectors kept their drawings in albums, bound in leather with gold imprint. These large art books were often stored in specially designed cabinets.³⁸ Or, to put it in Bourdieuesque terms, social capital (i.e. privatized trust) is produced with cultural capital (i.e. the right taste). This shift in the regime of trust and confidence had a considerable impact on consumer preferences. From the seventeenth century onwards we can observe that the preferences of northwest European consumers shifted more and more towards goods requiring active appreciation instead of goods that had *prima facie* value.³⁹

Mennonites and Sentimentalism: An Elective Affinity

There are no indications that the majority of Dutch Mennonites formed an exception to this general tendency. Only some small Mennonite sects like the *Janjacobsgezinden* (Jan Jacob's People) or *Ukwallisten* (Uko Walle's People) persistently resisted all changes in their lifestyle, but even the otherwise orthodox *Oude Vlamingen* (Old Flemish) had by the mid-eighteenth century adapted to the fashionable consumption practices.⁴⁰ Again we might ask whether Mennonites really had an option not to adapt. We have to keep in mind that the newly emerging consumption patterns reflected a growing appreciation of the immaterial aspects of goods. Colin Campbell, who was one of the first to draw attention to the empathetic nature of modern consumerism, sees an elective affinity between these new consumption patterns and the British literary movement of Sentimentalism, which advocated quite extreme and afflicted sensibilities.⁴¹ In the Dutch Republic, it was the Mennonite minister Johannes Stinstra (1708-1790) who undertook the Dutch translation of the great Sentimentalist novel *Clarissa* by Samuel Richardson. The elective affinity between the Dutch-Mennonite ethic and sentimentalism, however, goes beyond this single case. As Simon Schama argues, the sentimentalist novels of the two most popular female, Mennonite writers in the Dutch Republic had been published in the late eighteenth century. Within a discourse of nostalgia for the past these novels "appealed to traditional native virtues of simplicity, innocence, frugality and candor".⁴²

Already in the seventeenth century Dutch Mennonites had shown a clear appetite for the language of feeling and they were also much

more influenced by Arminianism than Mennonites in other countries.⁴³ For instance, the works of the Mennonite-Arminian preacher, painter and poet Dirck Raphaelsz Camphuysen (1586-1627) were very popular among the believers in both denominations. The appreciation of the sentimental rather than theological piousness expressed in his works, shows that despite their black dresses the Dutch Mennonites of the seventeenth century were in this respect well equipped to adapt to the newly emerging patterns of consumption. Besides that, already in the seventeenth century they did not refrain from the collection of paintings, porcelain and silver, richly ornamented objects. Mennonites were even among the key players in the flourishing Amsterdam art market of the seventeenth century. The Mennonite art dealer Hendrick Uylenburgh (c. 1587-1661), for example, commissioned the works of Rembrandt and Govert Flinck.⁴⁴

Cultural practices change more smoothly than people's reactions to economic challenges. Especially the ideas that people have about themselves often show great continuity, but gradually even the self image of the Mennonite business elite changed. The changes are subtle, however, from "wealthy but austere" to "wealthy but sensible". The portraits of Dr. Simon Stinstra and his wife Anna can be seen as an expression of this new self image. Regarding himself as man of taste and the rightful heir of the *mercator sapiens*, the civilized merchant, his choice of Tibout Regters to paint his and his wife's portraits, must have been carefully considered. Regters had a particular way of composing his portraits: the figures seem to be engaged in a vivid conversation against the background of a well equipped library or a richly ornamented art cabinet. (Te Rijdt 2006; Ekkart 2006).⁴⁵ This portrayal of subjects in conversation corresponded, without doubt, to the image that Simon Stinstra and Anna Braam had of themselves, that is, as enlightened Mennonites of sense and sensibility, who as tolerant Dutch citizens had overcome pride and prejudice.

Notes

- ¹ John Michael Montias, *Art at Auction in 17th Century Amsterdam* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2002), 113-152; Marten Jan Bok, " 'Schilderijen te koop'. Nieuwe marketingtechnieken op de Nederlandse kunstmarkt in de Gouden Eeuw", in: Martine Gosselink and Jannet de Goede (eds.), *Thuis in de Gouden Eeuw. Kleine meesterwerken uit de SØR Rusche collectie* (Zwolle: Waanders 2008), 9-29, pp. 12-14.
- ² See Urry's paper in this issue.
- ³ Mary Sprunger has shown the same trend among Mennonites and rich families in seventeenth century Amsterdam. See Sprunger's paper in this issue.

- ⁴ Samme Zijlstra, *Om de ware gemeente en de oude gronden. Geschiedenis van de doperen in de Nederlanden 1531-1675* (Hilversum/Leeuwarden: Verloren/Fryske Akademy, 2000), 284-315.
- ⁵ J.A. Faber, "The economic decline of the Dutch Republic in the second half of the eighteenth century and the international terms of trade," in: G.W. Heeres et al. (eds.), *From Dunkirk to Danzig. Shipping and Trade in the North Sea and the Baltic* (Hilversum: Verloren Publishers, 1988), 107-115.
- ⁶ Yme Kuiper, "Friese kunstkabinetten en Hollandse relaties: schilderijencollecties van Stinstra's uit Harlingen", in: Ph.H. Breuker and A. Janse (eds.) *Negen eeuwen Friesland-Holland. Geschiedenis van een haatliefdeverhouding* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers & Leeuwarden: Fryske Akademy, 1997), 213-226.
- ⁷ Yme Kuiper and Harm Nijboer, "Merchants, Mennonites and Marriages. Commercial, religious and kinship networks in the Dutch port town of Harlingen in the 17th and 18th centuries", paper presented at the *Sixth European Social Science History Conference*, Amsterdam, 22-25 March 2006.
- ⁸ Only a very small group of strict Mennonites, rigid on matters of banning and mixed marriages, the Jan Jacob's People, stayed out of this process of union (N. van der Zijpp, "Harlingen", in: *The Mennonite Encyclopedia* (Scottsdale PA: Herald Press, 1955), 662-663).
- ⁹ Kuiper and Nijboer, "Merchants, Mennonites and Marriages".
- ¹⁰ James Urry, *Mennonites, Politics, and Peoplehood. Europe-Russia-Canada 1525 to 1980*, (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2006), 57.
- ¹¹ Joannes Stinstra, (1752), "Voorreden van den vertaler", in: Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa of de historie van eene jonge juffer* (Harlingen: Folkert van der Plaats, 1752); Yme Kuiper, "Images of marriageable Mennonite women in 18th-century Harlingen", paper presented at the *International Conference on Myth and Reality of Anabaptist/Mennonite Women*, Free University of Amsterdam 2007 (to be published in 2009).
- ¹² Kuiper, "Friese kunstkabinetten", 215.
- ¹³ Th.L.J. Verroen, "'Een verstandig rijk man', de achttiende-eeuwse verzamelaar Adriaan Leonard van Heteren", *Leids Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek 4* (Delft: Delftsche Uitgevers Maatschappij, 1985), 17-61; R. Falkenburg, "Landschapsschilderkunst en doperse spiritualiteit", *Doopsgezinde Bijdragen NR 16* (1990), 129-153; G.M.C. Pastoor, "Bijbelse historiestukken in particulier bezit", in: C. Tümpel (ed.), *Het Oude Testament in de schilderkunst van de Gouden Eeuw* (Zwolle: Waanders, 1991), 122-134; Montias, *Art at Auction*; Marten Jan Bok, "Schilderijen te koop", 20.
- ¹⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, "The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups", *Theory and Society* 14 (1985), 723-744; Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital", in: John G. Richardson (ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 241-258.
- ¹⁵ Piet Visser, "De artes als zinnebeeld: over doopsgezinden en hun relatie tot kunst en wetenschap", *De zeventiende eeuw* 5 (1989), 92-102.
- ¹⁶ His son Nicolas Baur was a successful painter of marines and townscapes; he lived in Harlingen around 1800 (A. van den Berge-Dijkstra, & H.P. Ter Avest, *Woelend water, leven en werk van de zeeschilder Nicolaas Baur*, (Harlingen: Gemeentemuseum Het Hannemahuis, 1993).
- ¹⁷ Verroen, "Een verstandig rijk man", 27.
- ¹⁸ Kuiper, "Friese kunstkabinetten", 219-221.
- ¹⁹ For more details about Vitringa: Piet Bakker, *Gezicht op Leeuwarden. Schilders in Friesland en de markt voor schilderijen in de Gouden Eeuw* (PhD thesis University of Amsterdam, 2008); G. de Beer and G. Elzinga, *Wigerus Vitringa (1657-1725). De zeeschilder van Friesland*, (Leeuwarden: Fries Museum & Friese Pers Boekerij, 2008).

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- ²⁴ *Catalogus van eene uitmuntende verzameling schilderyen, tekeningen, prent-konst, pleisterbeelden, enz. Bijeenverzameld en nagelaaten door den Heer Simon Styl, Med. Doct.* (Harlingen: H.A. Baur en Zoon en V. van der Paats, 1804).
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- ²⁶ Kuiper, "Friese kunstkabinetten", 222-224.
- ²⁷ *Ibid*, 223.
- ²⁸ Ben Broos, Yme Kuiper, et.al., "Het gezicht op Delft van Johannes Vermeer en het Stinstra-mysterie", *Oud-Holland* 110 (1996), 35-46.
- ²⁹ Mary Sprunger, "Faillissementen. Een aspect van geestelijke tucht bij de Waterlands-doopsgezinde gemeente te Amsterdam in de zeventiende eeuw", *Doopsgezinde Bijdragen* NR 17 (1991), 101-130.
- ³⁰ Bourdieu, "Social Space" and idem, "Forms of Capital".
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