

## A Tuscan travel party amongst the Frisian natives The day trip of prince Cosimo to Stavoren and Molkwerum, 26 June 1669

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### A princely visit to Stavoren and Molkwerum

In the early morning of Wednesday 26 June 1669 a travel party of about forty people headed by the twenty five year old Tuscan prince Cosimo (1642-1723) boarded a yacht in Enkhuizen, a town in northern Holland.<sup>1</sup> Propelled by a gentle breeze already a few hours later the vessel reached the eastern shores of the Zuiderzee at Stavoren in Friesland.<sup>2</sup> In this little town the prince and his company had lunch. In the afternoon they visited the village of Molkwerum, a few miles to the east. The next day the party sailed back to Enkhuizen and continued its journey through the county of Holland. Prince Cosimo and his fellow travellers only spent a day and a night in Friesland. However brief the stay of the Italian party in Friesland was, their excursion was an exceptional event. In the seventeenth century, visitors hardly ever visited Friesland on purpose. At best, they stopped over in some of the Frisian towns on their journey from Amsterdam to Northern Germany or the other way round.<sup>3</sup> This is hardly surprising given the fact that Lodovico Guicciardini in his famous *Description of the Low Countries* had only paid scant attention to Friesland. More in particular Guicciardini's description of the antique ruins to be seen at Stavoren

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\* I wish to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their stimulating comments. I extend that gratitude to the editors of this volume, Emma Grootveld and Nina Lamal and to my dear colleagues at the Fryske Akademy, in particular Pieter Duijff, Eric Hoekstra, Peter van der Meer, Hans Mol and Oebele Vries who all commented upon an earlier version of this article. Obviously all remaining errors are mine.

<sup>1</sup> For accounts of Cosimo's visit to Frisia see G.J. Hoogewerff (ed.), *De twee reizen van Cosimo de' Medici prins van Toscane door de Nederlanden. Journalen en documenten*, Amsterdam, Johannes Müller, 1919, pp. 226 and 267-272 (original Italian texts) and L. Wagenaar & B. Eringa (eds.), *Een Toscaanse prins bezoekt Nederland. De twee reizen van Cosimo de' Medici, 1667-1669*, Amsterdam, Uitgeverij Bas Lubberhuizen, 2014, p. 159 and pp. 209-213 (Dutch translations). In the late 1980s and early 1990s a group of Italian historians restored the up to then rather paltry reputation of Cosimo. The results of their work have been presented in the volume F. Angiolini, V. Becagli & M. Verga (eds.), *La Toscana nell'età di Cosimo III*, Firenze, Edifir, 1993. More on Cosimo's visits to the Republic in H.Th. van Veen, 'Cosimo de' Medici's reis naar de Republiek in een nieuw perspectief', in: *The Low Countries History Review*, 102 (1987), pp. 44-52.

<sup>2</sup> The court physician Gianbattista Gornia claimed in his diary that the party crossed the Zuiderzee in two and a half hours. That seems an exaggeration. Even in case of favourable winds, local shipmasters needed four hours to sail from Enkhuizen to Stavoren. Cf. Hoogewerff (ed.), *De twee reizen van Cosimo de' Medici*, cit., p. 314 and C.D. van Strien, 'Buitenlandse toeristen over Friesland, 1600-1850' in: Ph.H. Breuker & A. Janse (eds.), *Negen eeuwen Friesland-Holland. Geschiedenis van een haat-liefde verhouding* Zutphen, Walburg Pers, 1997, p. 173.

<sup>3</sup> Van Strien, 'Buitenlandse toeristen', cit., pp. 173-183 and B. Wander, 'Frysk en frjemd. Buitenlanders in kontakt met de Friese taal', in: *It Beaken*, 40 (1978), pp. 241-255.

remained very vague.<sup>4</sup> Although the first edition of Guicciardini's account had been published already a century earlier, the book remained until the end of the seventeenth century one of the most influential travel guides for foreign visitors to the Low Countries and especially for Italians.<sup>5</sup> Most likely Cosimo and his courtiers had read Guicciardini before they left for the Low Countries. Their brief visit to Friesland did not alter the standard image of Friesland. In 1683, Pietro Guerini, one of his agents who visited the Low Countries in his wake, travelled from Amsterdam to Hamburg via Friesland. According to him nothing particular was to be seen or learned there.<sup>6</sup>

In this article I shall argue that although the Tuscans were fascinated by what they read, heard and saw in Friesland, their visit turned out to be somewhat disappointing. This excursion had been highly recommended to them by Grand Pensionary Johan de Witt (1625-1672).<sup>7</sup> According to this mighty Dutch politician, in Molkwerum Cosimo could observe 'the language and the habits of the old Frisians'.<sup>8</sup> Subsequently he advised Cosimo to travel to Amsterdam via the Beemster, a then recently drained lake.<sup>9</sup> The Tuscan prince conformed to the suggestions of his Dutch host. In effect, the straight canals, fertile right-angled meadows and impressive farm houses made a far bigger impression upon him than Friesland had done. In the official journal of the journey, the ride through the Beemster was recorded as 'the most beautiful and delightful' part of their trip in the United Provinces.<sup>10</sup> In De Witt's opinion and by consequence also Cosimo's, the primitive nature of Molkwerum stood in contrast to the well-organized character of the Beemster. Molkwerum thus functioned for the Tuscan visitors as a prism that mirrored the marvels of the Dutch Republic.<sup>11</sup>

In what follows I shall first describe how Cosimo's excursion to Friesland fitted into his travel pattern. Subsequently, I shall analyse the descriptions courtiers made of his visit to Molkwerum and Stavoren. Their observations reflected to some extent stereotypes that were cultivated by the political and cultural elites in the Dutch Republic. This opens up questions on the origins of such received ideas and on their impact on the fashioning of regional identities. In fact the political and cultural

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<sup>4</sup> D. Aristodemo (ed.), Ludovico Guicciardini, *Descrittione di tutti i Paesi Bassi altrimenti detti Germania inferiore*, University of Amsterdam (doctoral thesis), 22 April 1994, p. 360.

<sup>5</sup> Wander, 'Frysk en frjemd', cit., p. 248.

<sup>6</sup> F. Martelli, 'Sulle orme del principe. Viaggi di tecnici toscani in Europa negli ultimi decenni del Seicento', in: *Idem* (ed.), *Il viaggio in Europa di Pietro Guerini (1682-1686). Edizione della corrispondenza e dei disegni di un inviato di Cosimo III dei Medici*, Firenze, Leo S. Olschki Editore, I, 2005, pp. 159-160.

<sup>7</sup> The best biography in English on Johan de Witt remains H.H. Rowen, *John de Witt. Statesman of the True Freedom*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003 (first edition 1986). A more recent overview in Dutch can be found in L. Panhuysen, *De Ware Vrijheid. De levens van Johan en Cornelis de Witt*, Amsterdam, Atlas, 2005.

<sup>8</sup> Egli (= de Witt) consigliò l'A.S. (= Cosimo) a andare a Malquerum per la curiosità di veder preservati e l'antica lingua e i costumi degli antichi Frisoni. Cf. Hoogewerff (ed.), *De twee reizen*, cit., p. 248.

<sup>9</sup> *Ed a Bemster per vedere quel gran lago industriosamente dagli abitanti seccato e reso oggi fertilissimo*. Cf. *Ivi*, p. 248. The Beemster was the first of a series of lakes in the North of Holland that were drained in the first half of the seventeenth century. Up to these days the original, planned lay-out of the landscape has been preserved. For that reason in 1999 the Beemster has been listed on the UNESCO world heritage register. Cf. J. de Vries, *The Dutch Rural Economy in the Golden Age, 1500-1700*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1974, pp. 160 and 194.

<sup>10</sup> 'Il cammino del giorno 27 fu senza dubbio il più vago e il più delizioso di tutta l'Olanda'. Cf. Hoogewerff (ed.), *De twee reizen*, cit., p. 272.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. K. Davids & J. Lucassen, *A Miracle Mirrored. The Dutch Republic in European Perspective*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995.

antagonism between Holland and Friesland dated back to the Middle Ages, when at several instances the counts of Holland had tried to conquer Friesland. Although from about the 1590s the Frisian economy had become ever more dependent upon the growth of Amsterdam, such tensions were revived in the seventeenth century.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, within the framework of the United Provinces Friesland was considered to be the second-richest province after Holland. Therefore, it was perceived, not least by Johan de Witt, as the most important of the 'lesser provinces'.<sup>13</sup> Even though Cosimo was interested in administrative matters and he studied the institutional framework of the United Provinces, he might not have fully grasped these subtleties.<sup>14</sup> However, the myth that in the towns such as Stavoren, Molkwerum and Hindeloopen, aspects of the primitive Frisian culture would have been preserved flourished well into the nineteenth century.<sup>15</sup> Therefore that myth shall be briefly discussed in the last section of this article.

### Cosimo's travel pattern

Cosimo's whistle-stop visit to Friesland was part of a greater tour that the prince and his entourage made through Western Europe. In September 1668 they had sailed the Mediterranean from Livorno to Barcelona. The following months, the prince and his courtiers visited the Iberian Peninsula, the British Isles, the Dutch Republic and the health resorts of Aix-la-Chapelle and Spa. Subsequently, after a spell of nearly two months in Paris, the party travelled south to Lyon. From there the travellers navigated down the Rhône River. In Marseille, they were awaited by grand ducal galleys, which brought the party back home. In October 1669, more than a year after Cosimo and his courtiers had left, they arrived once again in Florence.<sup>16</sup>

Cosimo loved to travel. In his early twenties he had made several trips to northern Italy and already in 1667-68 he had embarked for a first visit to the Dutch Republic, the Southern Low Countries and Northern Germany.<sup>17</sup> Apparently, Cosimo

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<sup>12</sup> Breuker & Janse, 'Beelden', cit., pp. 29-37.

<sup>13</sup> H. Spanninga, *Gulden Vrijheid? Politieke cultuur en staatsvorming in Friesland, 1600-1640*, Hilversum, Verloren, 31-51; J. de Vries, 'De economische ontwikkeling van Friesland na het einde van de Friese Vrijheid', in: J. Frieswijk e.a. (eds.), *Fryslân, staat en macht. 1450-1650*, Hilversum, Verloren, 1999, pp. 140-157 and A.Th. van Deursen, 'De plaats van het gewest Friesland in de Republiek', in: *Ivi*, pp. 219-220.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. See for instance van Veen, 'Cosimo de' Medici's reis', cit., p. 52 and Hoogewerff (ed.), *De twee reizen*, cit., p. 273.

<sup>15</sup> A. de Jong, *De dirigenten van de herinnering. Musealisering en nationalisering van de volkscultuur in Nederland. 1815-1940*, Nijmegen, SUN, 2006<sup>2</sup>, pp. 41-62 (translated into German as *Die Dirigenten der Erinnerung. Musealisierung und Nationalisierung der Volkskultur in den Niederlanden 1815-1940*, Münster, Waxmann, 2007).

<sup>16</sup> On the different stages of Cosimo's European tour see, apart from the text editions by Hoogewerff and Wagenaar quoted above, A. Body, 'Le duc Côme III de Médicis à Spa (1669)', in: *Bulletin de l'Institut archéologique liégeois*, 16 (1881), pp. 47-65; A.M. Crinò, *Un principe di Toscana in Inghilterra e in Irlanda nel 1669. Relazione ufficiale del viaggio di Cosimo de' Medici tratta dal 'giornale' di L. Magalotti*, Roma, Abate, 1968; H. Graillot, 'Un prince de Toscane à la cour de Louis XIV en 1669', in: *Mélanges de philologie, d'histoire et de littérature offerts à Henri Huvette*, Paris, Les presses françaises, pp. 213-223; *Idem*, 'Un prince de Toscane dans le Midi de la France en 1669', in: *Mélanges de philologie et d'histoire offerts à Joseph Vianey*, Paris, Les presses françaises, 1934, pp. 321-328; J. Boutier, 'Les visiteurs italiens du Roi-Soleil: Alliances princières, apprentissages aristocratiques et fidélités nobiliaires', in: C. Zum Kolk e.a. (eds.), *Voyageurs étrangers à la cour de France. 1589-1789: regards croisés*, Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2014, pp. 91-116; C.M. Radulet, 'Cosimo III Medici and the Portuguese Restoration: A Voyage to Portugal in 1668-1669', in: *E-Journal of Portuguese History*, 1.2 (2003), pp. 1-8 and A. Sanchez Rivero & A. Mariutti de Sanchez Rivero (eds.), *Viaje de Cosme de Médicis por España y Portugal (1668-1669)*, Madrid, Sucesores de Rivadeneyra, 1933, 2 vols.

<sup>17</sup> Radulet, 'Cosimo III', cit., p. 2 and Martelli, 'Sulle orme del principe', cit., pp. xxviii-xxxiii.

was so fascinated by what he had seen in the United Provinces on his first voyage that already within a few months after his return to Tuscany, he left for his Grand Tour through Europe. In contrast to what historians have argued until a few decades ago, these travels cannot be considered any longer as attempts by Cosimo to escape his unhappy marriage with Marguerite Louise d'Orléans (1645-1721), a cousin of Louis XIV. Rather, the prince travelled to learn how to become a ruler.<sup>18</sup> In doing so Cosimo conformed to a recent Medici tradition. Four decades earlier, at the outset of his personal rule, Cosimo's father Ferdinand II (1610-1670) had visited amongst other places the imperial court at Vienna and Prague. Three decades later, in 1698, Cosimo's son Gian Gastone (1671-1737) on his turn went from Reichstadt in Bohemia, where he resided with his recently wed spouse, Anna Maria from Saxe-Lauenburg (1672-1741) to Paris, Brussels and Amsterdam.<sup>19</sup>

Nevertheless Cosimo's travels differed in one important aspect from those of his father or his son. Whereas the latter basically limited themselves to shorter or longer stays at the courts of friendly dynasties, where they learned how to behave in such courtly environments, Cosimo also wandered around.<sup>20</sup> This prince thus did not only strengthen the ties with the monarchs of Spain, Portugal, England and France, he also got to know their realms.

A similar pattern occurred in the Dutch Republic. Taking his two trips to the country together, Cosimo spent thirty six days in the economic and cultural metropolis Amsterdam (42 % of his total time in the Republic) and fifteen days (or 17 %) in the political capital The Hague. In the latter town the prince met several members of the Orange-Nassau family and he talked to various foreign ambassadors. On 7 February 1668, the young William of Orange (1650-1702), the future king-stadholder, even impressed his peer Cosimo of his talents as a dancing and thus virile prince during a ballet performance staged to celebrate the Peace of Breda.<sup>21</sup> But Cosimo did not only spend time in government and diplomatic circles as he also extensively toured the United Provinces. From Alkmaar in the North, to Dordrecht in the South, he stopped in nearly all the important towns in Holland. From the traditional six towns which had dominated the county in the Middle Ages, decaying Gouda was the only one that did not receive a princely visit. In contrast, Cosimo went twice to booming Rotterdam, where he spent four days in total.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, during his first Dutch journey the princely party hopped as well for a short visit to Zeeland. In contrast, land towns in the provinces of Guelders and Utrecht only served as stopovers on Cosimo's travels back and forth to the maritime Western part of the country. Cosimo mainly concentrated on Holland, the powerhouse of the country.

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<sup>18</sup> See for the traditional explanation of Cosimo's journeys for instance E. Cochrane, *Florence in the Forgotten Centuries. 1527-1800. A History of Florence and the Florentines in the Age of the Grand Dukes*, Chicago-London, The University of Chicago Press, 1973, pp. 259-262. H.Th. van Veen has detected in his 'Cosimo de' Medici's reis', pp. 44-52 training and education as more convincing motives.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. J. Boutier, 'L'institution politique du gentilhomme. Le 'Grand Tour' des jeunes nobles florentins en Europe, XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles', in: *Istituzioni e società in Toscana nell'età moderna. Atti delle giornate di studio dedicate a Giuseppe Pansini*, Roma, Pubblicazioni degli Archivi di Stato, 1994, I, pp. 269 and Martelli, 'Sulle orme del principe', cit., p. xxix.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. A. Spagnoletti, *Le dinastie italiane nella prima età moderna*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2003, pp. 310-314.

<sup>21</sup> I. Bésanger, 'Ballet de la paix: staging a seventeenth century theatre performance', in: J. Bloemendal, P.G.F. Eversmann & E. Strietman, *Drama, Performance and Debate. Theatre and Public Opinion in the Early Modern Period*, Leiden and Boston, Brill, 2013, pp. 333-346.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. A. van der Schoor, *Stad in aanwas. Geschiedenis van Rotterdam tot 1813*, Zwolle, Waanders, 1999, pp. 271-303 and N.C. Sluijter-Seijffert e.a., 'Bladgoud bladdert af', in: P.H.A.M. Abels e.a. (eds.), *Duizend jaar Gouda. Een stadsgeschiedenis*, Hilversum, Verloren, 2002, p. 456.

Short excursions to Zeeland and Friesland completed his impressions on an essentially maritime Republic.<sup>23</sup> This travel pattern is visualized in the table underneath.

**Table I.** Travel pattern of prince Cosimo and his train in the Dutch Republic. December 1667-February 1668 and June-July 1669.<sup>24</sup>

Region	Days	Percentage
State Brabant (Generality Land)	2	2,3
Guelders	4	4,7
Holland	69	80,2
Friesland	1	1,2
Overijssel	3	3,5
Utrecht	5	5,8
Zeeland	2	2,3
<b>Total</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>100</b>

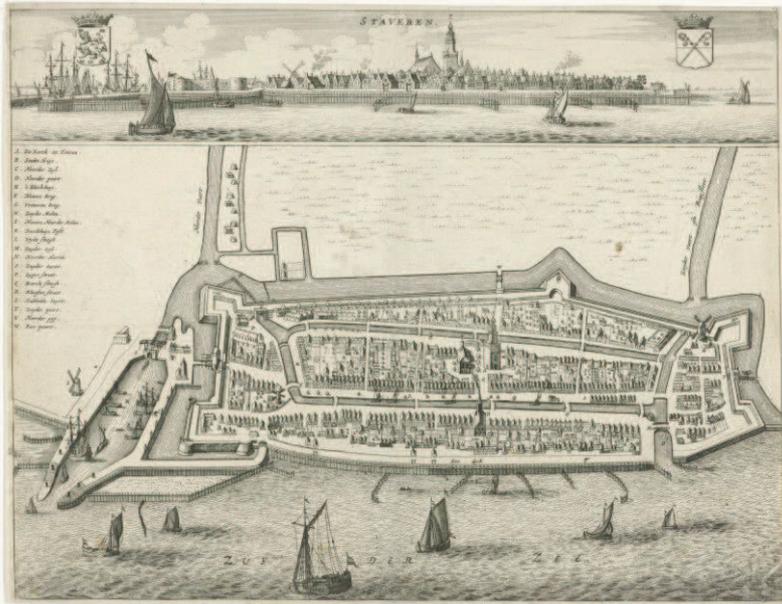
Cosimo insisted on travelling as a private person. Nevertheless everywhere he met various dignitaries. This formula implied that Cosimo's princely status was recognized by his hosts, while enabling him to choose his own travel destinations. It conferred a personal touch to his journeys, which should not be considered as diplomatic missions, but rather as private princely experiences. His excursion to Friesland is a good example of that practice. The directors of the admiralty of Northern Holland provided their yacht to ferry the Tuscan party to the east bank of the Zuiderzee.<sup>25</sup> It is hard to imagine that they would have conferred a similar honour to visitors of lesser rank. But once he had arrived in Friesland, the prince toured Stavoren and Molkwerum as a simple tourist. In this sense, Cosimo was a trendsetter. Later onwards in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, a long incognito journey became a fashionable element of princely education projects. The best known example is that of Czar Peter the Great's (1672-1725) first trip to the Dutch Republic in 1697-1698.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Cosimo's itineraries in the Low Countries are reconstructed in Wagenaar & Eringa (eds.), *Een Toscaanse prins*, cit., pp. 32-33 and pp. 160-161. Already in February 1668 when Cosimo toured the Republic for the first time, he had wished to visit Friesland on his way from Holland to Hamburg. However, winter storms and floods forced the prince to travel over land via Westphalia. Cf. Hoogewerff (ed.), *De twee reizen van Cosimo de' Medici*, cit., pp. 140-142.

<sup>24</sup> This table is based on the itineraria provided by Wagenaar & Eringa (eds.), *Een Toscaanse prins*, cit., p. 32 and 162. Calculations are made on the basis of the number of nights the party spent in a certain place.

<sup>25</sup> In the United Provinces five regional admiralties paid for and commanded each a navy escadre of the Dutch fleet. The one of Northern Holland was based in the ports of Hoorn and Enkhuizen. Cf. O. van Nimwegen & R. Prud'homme van Reine, 'De organisatie en financiering van leger en vloot van de Republiek', in: P. Groen e.a. (eds.), *De Tachtigjarige Oorlog. Van opstand naar geregelde oorlog. 1568-1648* (Militaire geschiedenis van Nederland. 1), Amsterdam, Boom, pp. 377-378. Cosimo had a great interest in naval matters. For instance, in February 1668 he had visited the central navy basis at Hellevoetsluis, where also the *Royal Charles*, the main prize that the Dutch fleet had won at the Battle of the Medway in June 1667, was anchored. Also in Amsterdam he visited the admiralty headquarters twice. Cf. Hoogewerff (ed.), *De twee reizen van Cosimo de' Medici*, cit., pp. 141-142 and 189.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. van Veen, 'Cosimo's reis', cit., p. 48; L. Bély, *La société des princes. XVI<sup>e</sup>-XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris, Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1999, p. 469 and D. Roche, *Les circulations dans l'Europe moderne. XVII<sup>e</sup>-XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris, Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2003, pp. 675-676. See on Peter the Great's first journey to the Dutch Republic R. van Vliet, 'Tsaar Peter de Grote: identiteit en imago', in: *Literatuur*, 13



**Fig. 1** map and view of Stavoren in the mid seventeenth century. Etching by Jacob van Meurs (1619/'20-1680). © Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

In order to keep memories alive of what the prince had seen on his journeys, some of his courtiers wrote a diary. Subsequently their texts were edited by Cosimo's chamberlain marquis Filippo Corsini (1647-1706). The final copy was bound in beautiful parchment covers and stored in the Medici library. One of the sources of that official account was a text that has been labelled by Godfried Hoogewerff<sup>27</sup> (1884-1963) as Corsini's private journal.<sup>28</sup> However, most likely the main author of the official account was the learned Lorenzo Magalotti (1637-1712) who had already visited the United Provinces on an earlier occasion.<sup>29</sup> During that first visit Magalotti had made several friends who were connected to the Republic of Letters, such as the scholars Nicolaas Heinsius (1620-1681),<sup>30</sup> Isaac Vossius (1618-1689)<sup>31</sup> and Jacobus Gronovius (1645-1716).<sup>32</sup> Probably these three men supplied him with the historical, institutional and topographical details that abound in the text. Pier Maria Baldi (c. 1630-1686) provided eighteen large pen and ink drawings on additional sheets of the most noticeable Dutch sites as a visual addendum to the text. Sights of both Stavoren

(1996), 344-349 and L. Toorians, 'An eager apprentice. Peter the Great and the Dutch Republic', in: *The Low Countries*, 4 (1996), pp. 275-276.

<sup>27</sup> For a biographical entry on Hoogewerff see H. Cools & H. de Valk, *Institutum Neerlandicum. MCMIV-MMIV. Honderd jaar Nederlands Instituut te Rome*, Hilversum, Verloren, 2004, pp. 29-32.

<sup>28</sup> Hoogewerff (ed.), *De twee reizen van Cosimo de' Medici*, cit., pp. LVII-LVIII and 224-225.

<sup>29</sup> Radulet, 'Cosimo III', cit., p. 3 and E. Cochrane, *Florence in the Forgotten Centuries*, pp. 256-259 and 535-537. See as well the biographical entry by C. Preti & L. Matt, 'Magalotti, Lorenzo', in: *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani (DBI)*, Roma, Treccani, LXVII, 2006. The assertion of these authors that Lorenzo Magalotti travelled directly from London to Paris and did not take part in the Dutch stage of Cosimo's journey is wrong. In fact, in June and July 1669 Magalotti reported in several letters from The Hague and Amsterdam about the journey to the Tuscan court. Cf. Hoogewerff, *De twee reizen*, cit., pp. 292-298.

<sup>30</sup> For a biographical entry, see Kan, 'Heinsius, Nicolaus', in: *Nieuw Nederlands Biografisch Woordenboek (NNBW)*, Leiden, A.W. Sijthoffs Uitgeversmaatschappij, II, 1911, pp. 557-560.

<sup>31</sup> The most recent biographical entry is H. Nellen & D. Imhoff, 'Isaac Vossius', in: J. Bloemendal & C. Heesakkers (eds.), *Bio-bibliografie van Nederlandse Humanisten. Digitale uitgave*, Den Haag, DWC/Huygens Instituut KNAW, 2009. To be consulted on <http://www.dwc.knaw.nl/vossius-isaac-1618-1689/>; last retrieved on 18 November 2015.

<sup>32</sup> For a biographical entry see Bierma, 'Gronovius, Jacob', in: *NNBW*, Leiden, A.W. Sijthoffs Uitgeversmaatschappij, I, 1909, pp. 986-989.

and Molkwerum figure amongst them.<sup>33</sup> A more informal diary of Cosimo's second Dutch trip that has survived, is the one kept by his court physician Giovanbattista Gornia (1633-1684).<sup>34</sup> Often this trained scientist and rather practical man rendered his impressions in a few keywords and with an emphasis on physical details. The difference between these various authors becomes clear when we compare their descriptions of Cosimo's visits to Stavoren (Fig. 1) and Molkwerum (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2 map of Molkwerum in 1718. The caption emphasizes that this 'notorious village' was known as 'the Frisian maze'. Engraving by Johannes Hilarides.

### 'L'antica lingua e i costumi degli antichi Frisoni'

Giovanbattista Gornia seems to have been disappointed by what he had seen in Stavoren. In his eyes only the skulls and claws of bears that decorated the town gates and the remarkably small size of the port were deemed noteworthy.<sup>35</sup> Such vivid

<sup>33</sup> Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, ms. Med. Pal. 123. Cf. R. Chiarelli, 'Baldi, Pier Maria', in: *DBI*, Roma, Treccani, V, 1963.

<sup>34</sup> Archivio di Stato a Firenze, Miscellanea Medicea, filza 836. L. Spruit, 'Gornia, Giovanbattista', in: *DBI*, Roma, Treccani, LVIII, 2002. Both the official journal and Gornia's diary have been edited by Hoogewerff, *De twee reizen*, cit., pp. 221-291 and translated into Dutch by Wagenaar & Eringa, *Een Toscaanse prins*, cit., pp. 159-241.

<sup>35</sup> 'Si sbarcò a Steveren, porto piccolissimo e fatto con palificate ... Et alle porte di Staveren vi sono i teschi e artigli d'orsi incisi per trofeo'. Hoogewerff, *De twee reizen*, cit., pp. 314-315.

details lack in Lorenzo Magalotti's official travel account. Nevertheless, this author also emphasized that the heydays of Stavoren were over. Although the ramparts and bulwarks were in good condition, the town had lost its previous splendour and had become quite small. However, once Stavoren had been the capital of the Frisians, where their kings resided and ships coming from all northern seas anchored. But floods had destroyed the palaces and churches, whereas the new port had been silted.<sup>36</sup> Magalotti, who just as Cosimo had a keen interest in religion,<sup>37</sup> concluded his description with some brief historical notes on the struggles between the Frankish and the Frisian kings and on the chapters of canons and cloisters that had existed in the town and in its neighbourhood until they had been swept away by the Reformation.

Although no physical remnants of its heydays had been preserved, the Tuscan visitors valued Stavoren for its antiquity. However, various opinions circulated about its precise age. According to Corsini's private diary, the first king of the Frisians had established himself there about 300 BC. In the official account of the journey Lorenzo Magalotti was more cautious. He thought that Stavoren had been founded one year after the birth of Christ.<sup>38</sup>

These different opinions reflected the uncertainty that reigned amongst humanists about the origins of the Frisians. According to the early sixteenth-century chronicler Worp of Thabor (-1538), the Frisians originally came from Asia, but he proposed three different possible arrival dates. A generation later Suffridus Petrus (1527-1597) acknowledged that five different opinions circulated on this matter. Personally Suffridus preferred to date the Frisian history back as far as possible, in order to enhance the status of Friesland within the young Republic. In any case according to him Frisians could boast an older history than the Hollanders.<sup>39</sup> However, Nijmegen, where the Tuscan party passed on its way from Amsterdam to Spa, had even stronger claims on a respectable antiquity. Lorenzo Magalotti reported that locals supposed their town had been founded by the troops of Julius Caesar, and Filippo Corsini thought the legacy of the Romans was still present in that town.<sup>40</sup>

At Molkwerum, the Tuscans encountered similar difficulties to interpret what they saw. In the middle of the seventeenth century this large village must have counted about 1,500 inhabitants. Most of them did not belong to the privileged Reformed Church. The largest religious community in the village was those of the relatively isolated Anabaptists.<sup>41</sup> Houses in Molkwerum were built on a series of small

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<sup>36</sup> 'La città di Staveren è la più antica di tutte le città della Frisia, giacchè fu fabricata, secondo alcuni autori, un'anno dopo la nascita di Cristo [...] ma avendo le inondazioni del mare sommersa la maggior parte di questa medesima città fu rifabricata in altro luogo più sicuro. [...] Era anticamente Staveren una città potentissima, ricca, molto popolata, ed il porto di mare più famoso di tutte le coste settentrionali, ma le frequenti inondazioni l'hanno talmente sminuita, che in paragone di quello che era viene stimata poco, benchè ne resti delle sue rovine ancora a bastanza per formarne una buona città. Vi sono grosse muraglie e gran bastioni circondati da paludi. Vi si vedono molte belle strade, e vi è ancora un gran molo avanzato nel mare, sostenuto da puntelli per impedire che le arene non turbino l'entrata di questo porto. Gli antichi re di Frisia abitavano in questa città'. G.J. Hoogewerff, *De twee reizen*, cit., p. 268.

<sup>37</sup> Cochrane, *Florence in the Forgotten Centuries*, cit., p. 261 and Radulet, 'Cosimo III', cit., p. 6.

<sup>38</sup> Hoogewerff, *De twee reizen*, cit., p. 268. Cf. Johan Picardt, *Korte beschryvinge van eenige vergetene en verborgen antiquiteten ...*, Amsterdam, Tymon Houthaak, 1660, pp. 93-94 who in his description of Stavoren avoided to speculate about the year of foundation of the town.

<sup>39</sup> Breuker & Janse, 'Beelden', cit., pp. 23-26.

<sup>40</sup> Magalotti speaks of 'Un' antica fortezza volgarmente chiamata 'Valch-Hof', che si crede fabricata dal tempo di Giulio Cesare', whereas Corsini reported that: 'Vi sono diverse memorie del tempo de' Romani'. See Hoogewerff, *De twee reizen*, cit., p. 288.

<sup>41</sup> C. Trompetter, *Eén grote familie. Doopsgezinde elites in de Friese Zuidwesthoek, 1600-1850*, Hilversum, Verloren, 2007, pp. 193-194.

islands. Narrow, stinking canals connected the different parts of the settlement with each other. Therefore the village resembled a maze (Fig. 1). The tall and bearded male inhabitants somehow looked like Germans. The women dressed strangely; according to Gianbattista Gornia, they wore strange bonnets with large (metal?) ties on top on their heads. Moreover, they wore two pairs of stockings: large ones that reached their ankles, and above those small socks that just covered their feet. Both sexes behaved rudely and their language was not understood by outsiders.<sup>42</sup>

Reading these descriptions it seemed as if Cosimo and his courtiers had ventured in some exotic destination, where barbarians lived. The minds of these cultivated Italians had been influenced by their reading of Tacitus' *De origine et situ Germanorum*, a classic of each serious humanist training since its rediscovery in the mid fifteenth century by Enea Silvio Piccolomini (1405-1464).<sup>43</sup>

More in particular, the idea as if Molkwerum, together with the nearby town of Hindeloopen, was a place where somehow the customs and the language of the old Frisians would have been preserved, may date back to the late sixteenth or the early seventeenth century.<sup>44</sup> However, in the mid-1640s this myth became fashionable in learned circles. In those years, both Janus Vlitius (1620-1666) and Franciscus Junius (c. 1590-1677) wandered around in Friesland, noticing the folklore costumes and studying the local language.<sup>45</sup> They were attracted by the fame of the poet Gysbert Japix (1603-1666),<sup>46</sup> who had conferred once again literary status on Frisian, after the virtual disappearance of the written variant of the language since the 1580s. Independently of each other Vlitius and Junius tried to establish the affinity between the various Germanic languages. Vlitius and Junius belonged to the same intellectual circle as Gronovius, Heinsius and Vossius. One may suppose that Johan de Witt picked up his suggestion for Cosimo to visit that part of Friesland from these men.<sup>47</sup> Obviously prince Cosimo and his company did not understand Frisian. However, in line with the fashionable ideas of his learned friends, Lorenzo Magalotti must have

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<sup>42</sup> According to Lorenzo Magalotti: 'Malqueren (è) villaggio di circa 300 case [...] in modo che formano fra di loro una certa specie di laberinto [...] La gente che l'abita è rozza, incivile e salvatica, et ha una certa lingua particolare, che da alcuno, ne meno de' più vicini luoghi è intesa [...] e nelle donne si vede qualche stravaganza nel vestirsi'. Whereas Gornia was struck by the: 'Canali piccolissimi e quasi asciutti e fetenti passandosi fra casa e casa strettissimamente. Gente villana e rozza e che porta in capo, cioè le donne, una cuffia nera coll'apertura in dietro per tirarla al viso in caso di pioggia, e detta è cinta sopra un cingolo largo e le calze arrivano fino alle noci, e lontano un dito i calcetti compagni tutto chiusi con ancineletti piccoli e in oltre le pianellette [...] Ha gente grande, barbe a spazzola, e che comincia a rappresentare il tedesco'. Hoogewerff, *De twee reizen*, cit., pp. 269 and 314-315.

<sup>43</sup> D.R. Kelley, 'Tacitus noster. The Germania in the Renaissance', in: T.J. Luce & A.J. Woodmann (eds.), *Tacitus and the Tacitean Tradition*, Harvard, Princeton University Press, 2014, pp. 152-167.

<sup>44</sup> K. Dekker, 'Sibbrandus Siccama on the Lex Frisionum (1617): Frisian identity as a philological construct', in: R.H. Bremmer jr. e.a. (eds.), *Advances in Old Frisian Philology*, Amsterdam-New York, Rodopi, 2007, p. 85.

<sup>45</sup> See on Vlitius and his interest in the Frisian language: Ph.H. Breuker, 'On the Course of Franciscus Junius's Germanic Studies, with Special Reference to Frisian', in: R.H. Bremmer jr., *Franciscus Junius F.F. and His Circle*, Amsterdam-Atlanta, Rodopi, 1998, pp. 139-143; K. Dekker, *The Origins of Old Germanic Studies in the Low Countries*, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 1998, pp. 58-159 and 240-337 and M.A. Weststeijn, *Art and Antiquity in the Netherlands and Britain. The Vernacular Arcadia of Franciscus Junius (1591-1677)*, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2015, pp. 12, 22, 65, 154 and 160. For a description of Molkwerum by Vlitius (in Italian) see J.H. Brouwer & A. Campbell, 'The Early Frisian Studies of Jan van Vliet', in: *The Modern Language Review*, 34 (1939), p. 156.

<sup>46</sup> More on Gisbert Japix in Ph.H. Breuker, *It wurk fan Gisbert Japix*, Ljouwert, Fryske Akademy, 1989, 2 vols.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. W. Frijhoff, 'Volkskundigen voor de volkskunde?', in: *Volkskundig Bulletin*, 20 (1994), p. 247 and *Idem*, 'Het zelfbeeld van de Nederlander in de achttiende eeuw: een inleiding', in: *Documentatieblad Werkgroep Achttiende Eeuw*, 24 (1992), p. 12.

been one of the first foreign visitors to assert that in Molkwerum a particular variant of that language was spoken.<sup>48</sup> Nearly simultaneously another acquaintance of Johan de Witt, the English ambassador sir William Temple (1628-1699), remarked in his *Observations upon the United Provinces* that:

the Friezons old Language (has) still so great affinity with our Old English, as to appear easily to have been the same; most of their words still retaining the same signification and sound; very different from the Language of the Hollanders. This is most remarkable in a little Town called Malcuera, upon the Zudder Sea.<sup>49</sup>

Subsequently nearly all early modern English travellers who visited Friesland described Molkwerum as a labyrinth. Nevertheless, they recognized its inhabitants as 'distant cousins'.<sup>50</sup> For prince Cosimo and his courtiers in contrast, Friesland remained a strange and somewhat primitive region.

### Conclusion

Cosimo de' Medici greatly admired the Dutch Republic. Within two years he and his courtiers twice toured the United Provinces. Although, they spent most of the time in Amsterdam and The Hague, the economic and the political capital of the country, the Tuscans made as well a brief excursion to the somewhat more peripheral region of Friesland, where they visited Stavoren and Molkwerum. However, these places did not meet up to their expectations. In the Middle Ages Stavoren had been an important economic, political and religious centre. But from the twelfth century onwards the town had been regularly flooded. Subsequently, due to political turmoil it had been burned down at several occasions in the fifteenth century. By then, the port had been silted up. Although, some prosperity returned in the seventeenth century, the town never returned to its former glory.<sup>51</sup> In contrast, Molkwerum reached its demographic heyday only in the middle of the seventeenth century, more or less at the moment Cosimo and his courtiers visited the village. In subsequent decades, that place was hit by a severe crisis as well. However, the village lacked the political and economic privileges of a chartered town.<sup>52</sup> Geographical isolation, religious peculiarities and remaining antiquities may have turned Molkwerum and Stavoren into attractive travel destinations for learned Dutchmen, but Cosimo and his fellow Tuscans were hardly interested in such frivolities. They had come to the Republic to discover thriving cities, with their wealth of recently constructed palaces

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<sup>48</sup> Wander, 'Frysk en frjemd', cit., pp. 243 and 245. Cf. K. Dekker, *The light under the bushel. Old Germanic Studies in the Low Countries and the Motivation and Methods of Jan van Vliet (1622-1666)*, Leiden University (doctoral thesis), 25 June 1997, p. 252.

<sup>49</sup> As quoted by R.H. Bremmer jr., *Late medieval and early modern opinions on the affinity between English and Frisian: the growth of a commonplace* (Dutch Working Papers in English Language and Linguistics 9), s.l., 1989, p. 12. William Temple published the first edition of his *Observations* in 1672. The book was based on his extensive travels in the Dutch Republic before and during his spell as the English ambassador in the country between 1668 and 1672. Cf. L. Brummel, 'William Temple als schrijver, denker en historicus', in: *Bijdragen en Mededelingen van het Historisch Genootschap*, 70 (1956), pp. 31-58.

<sup>50</sup> C.D. Van Strien & Ph.H. Breuker, 'Friesland in de reisverslagen van Britse reizigers omstreeks 1700', in: *It Beaken*, 52 (1990), pp. 196-197 and 201.

<sup>51</sup> G. Eenling, 'Middeleeuwse handel en de Hanze', in: P. de Haan (ed.), *Stavoren, o Stavoren. Een geschiedenis van Stavoren*, Stavoren, Commissie Het Stavorse Boek, 2002, pp. 37-38. Cf. J.A. Faber, *Drie eeuwen Friesland. Economische en sociale ontwikkelingen van 1500 tot 1800*, Leeuwarden, De Tille, 1973, I, pp. 170-176.

<sup>52</sup> Trompeter, *Eén grote familie*, cit., pp. 193-194.

and warehouses.<sup>53</sup> In Holland, they found these things. In Friesland on the contrary, they were introduced to strange customs, an incomprehensible language and a legendary past, without physical remnants that could make it trustworthy.

### **Keywords**

Cosimo De' Medici, Friesland, early modern travelling, regional identities

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## **RIASSUNTO**

### **Una compagnia di viaggio toscana tra i frisi**

#### **La gita di Cosimo a Stavoren e Molkwerum (26 giugno 1669)**

Quest'articolo esamina la percezione della Frisia attestata in alcuni resoconti dell'escursione a Stavoren e Molkwerum compiuta nel 1669 da Cosimo de' Medici. Il principe toscano visitò la Repubblica delle Provincie Unite negli anni 1667-1768 e 1669 per studiare le strutture politiche ed economiche di un paese che in alcuni decenni era diventato una grande potenza. Benché la comitiva principesca fosse prevalentemente interessata a vedere le grandi città olandesi, il suo ospite Johan de Witt le aveva consigliato di visitare anche la Frisia, regione piuttosto isolata e reputata per aver conservato gli antichi usi e costumi. Il 26 giugno 1669 la comitiva compì un'escursione al sudovest della Frisia. Sebbene la cittadina portuale di Stavoren fosse nota come la capitale degli antichi Frisoni e gli intellettuali olandesi apprezzassero Molkwerum per l'urbanistica labirintica, la religione anabattistica e l'uso della lingua antica, i viaggiatori toscani sembrano essere stati colpiti più dal declino e dalla stranezza della zona che dal suo fascino culturale e storico. Dai resoconti di viaggio non pare che la comitiva, venuta nei Paesi Bassi per scoprire novità, abbia valutato positivamente il contrasto della primitiva Frisia con l'Olanda moderna. Questo studio illustra pertanto come i toscani non adottavano automaticamente l'immagine della Frisia propagata dagli olandesi, ma esprimevano invece una percezione diversa, motivata da obiettivi di viaggio non necessariamente storico-culturali.

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<sup>53</sup> van Veen, 'Cosimo de' Medici's reis', cit., p. 47.