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Chapter 3. Leiden Identification Procedure³⁵

A substantial part of the population of the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic was unable to write, so it is not surprising that not all of the letters in the seventeenth-century *Letters as Loot* corpus were written by their actual sender. While the sender of the letter is usually known, it is often unclear who the writer of the letter was: was it the sender himself/herself, was it a family member, a friend or a professional writer? This is problematic for an analysis of the relationship between social characteristics of writers and their language use. It is important to know which letters are autographs (letters that have been written by the sender himself/herself) and which ones are not, so that it is clear whether the social characteristics of the sender of a letter can be safely identified as the social characteristics of its writer. In order to determine this, the Leiden Identification Procedure (LIP) was developed. This procedure combines different form and content indications of a letter with information about its sender.

In this chapter, I will describe the development of the LIP and how it was used for the *Letter as Loot* corpus. By way of introduction, I will briefly describe the seventeenth-century situation regarding literacy in §3.1. In §3.2 the different pieces of evidence that can provide information on the status of a letter will be presented and I will show how these have been combined into a procedure. How the LIP was put into practice will be discussed in §3.3, together with descriptions of the archival sources that were consulted in the search for valuable information about letter senders.

3.1. Literacy

3.1.1. The situation in the seventeenth century

Although the rate of literacy in the seventeenth-century Netherlands was high compared to other European countries at the time, there was still a considerable part of the population of the Dutch Republic that could neither read nor write (Frijhoff & Spies 1999: 237). Some of the seventeenth-century Dutch people who were able to read did not have any writing skills, since reading and writing were usually taught in succession, not simultaneously. Many children quit school before they had reached the writing stage because they had to start to earn their own living. On top of that, the costs of writing instruction were higher than those of reading

³⁵ Part of this chapter was also presented in Nobels & van der Wal 2009 and Nobels & van der Wal 2012.

instruction, since ink, quills and paper were expensive (Blaak 2004: 13; Kuijpers 1997: 501; Van der Wal 2002b: 9-13). Not all parents could afford this writing education.

Some of the seventeenth-century people who had learnt to write had little writing experience because they had not received a very long training or because they did not need to write in order to earn their living. When Van Doorninck and Kuijpers (1993: 14) calculate that in 1670 in Amsterdam 70% of the men and 44% of the women could write their own names, we must realise that some of these signers were probably not capable of producing anything more than their signature (Kuijpers 1997: 501; Frijhoff & Spies 1999: 237). Illiterates or unskilled writers could ask other people to write letters for them: professional writers (such as ship's writers or public writers) or acquaintances with writing skills (what we call 'social writers').

3.1.2. The consequences for the corpus

At the start of chapter 2, I briefly described that the corpus is split up into three subcorpora which will be used for different purposes. In this section I will explain why this make-up of the corpus was used. To do this properly I will first elucidate my use of the terms *sender*, *writer*, and *encoder*. The *sender* of the letter is the person in whose name the letter is written, the person whose thoughts are conveyed in the letter. The *writer* of the letter is the person who performed the mechanical act of writing the letter. In some cases, the writer of a letter is not its sender, e.g. when the sender of the letter was illiterate and had appealed to a professional writer or a social writer to produce the letter. In these cases, we also call the writer of the letter an *encoder*. An *encoder* is a person who wrote a letter for someone else.³⁶

With autographs there is a direct relationship between the sender and the language used in the letter. Therefore, autographs offer data that are suitable for sociolinguistic research: it is legitimate to examine how the sender's social variables sex, social status and age are linked to the language in the letter. Research on regional variation is also possible if I succeed in pinpointing a sender's regional background.

For non-autograph letters this possibility of a link between the sender's social variables and language does not exist for the obvious reason that the sender did not write the letter; someone else did. In most of the cases it is not clear who the encoder of a non-autograph letter was, which makes it impossible to find information about this writer's social background. Even when it is known who did the actual writing, it might be too simplistic to

³⁶ It is important to note that this use of the term *encoder* differs from the use in Dossena 2008 and in the introduction to Dossena & Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2008, where *encoder* is used as a more neutral term for each person who writes a letter.

straightforwardly link this writer to the language used in the letter. Note that it is often hard to tell how exactly these letters were produced. Did the sender just mention a few topics that had to be included in the letter or did he or she dictate the letter word for word? In the case of the first scenario, the language data could be linked to the writer's social and regional characteristics. But if the second scenario applies, some aspects of the language use might be linked to the sender's characteristics (e.g. word order), but other aspects (e.g. spelling) to the writer's characteristics. And if the letter came about through both dictation by the sender and independent work by the writer, the situation becomes even more complicated. Therefore non-autograph letters are not suitable for research into the relationship between the social characteristics of the writer and the language in the letter. Non-autograph letters thus need to be separated from autograph ones.

The same goes for the letters of uncertain authorship. Since there is no certainty about the identity of the writer of the letter, these letters cannot be used for every type of research. They too need to be distinguished from autographs. However, this does not mean that non-autograph letters and letters of uncertain authorship cannot play any role at all in my analyses. One element about which I can be relatively certain regarding these two groups of letters is the region in which they were written (see the previous chapter for a detailed explanation). Therefore non-autographs and letters of uncertain authorship can be used for research into regional variation.

To conclude, it is important for the analyses that autographs on the one hand and non-autographs and letters of uncertain authorship on the other are treated separately. An analysis of the letters needs to establish whether or not sender and writer were identical in order to avoid the risk of linking specific language use to the social rank, age or gender of someone who did not write the letter at all. Without such an analysis I would be unable to guarantee the reliability of my results. The LIP was developed to meet these needs.

3.2. The Leiden Identification Procedure

3.2.1. The evidence

The LIP combines different pieces of information in order to determine the status of a letter. These pieces of evidence can be found in the content of a letter, the handwriting in which it is rendered and in information about the life of the letter's sender. The combination of these different indications can provide straightforward evidence for the status of a letter or can allow the researcher to make educated guesses. In what follows, I will first discuss

each indication separately and then show how they can be combined in §3.2.2.

Content

An explicit reference to the writing process in a letter is a first and an obvious content indication; one which does not, however, occur very often. A good example can be found in the letter written by T. Saman to her mother Magdalena Simons De Luck in 1665.³⁷ She writes:

Jck hadde v l wel voor deese geschreeuen maer jck hebbe gewacht om ul meteen de eeuarentheijt mijner penne te laete zijen

‘I would have written to you earlier, but I have waited so that I can immediately show you how experienced I have become in writing.’

While this letter irrefutably shows that it is an autograph, other letters prove that they are definitely not autographs. An example of such a letter is one written on behalf of Elisabeth Bernaers.³⁸ The letter to her husband is written in the first person singular and signed with the name of Elisabeth Bernaers, but next to and below this signature one finds the lines that identify the true writer: *door mij gescreven maeij ken pieters ul dochter* (‘written by me, Maaïke Pieters, your daughter’). This evidence is conclusive enough to assign this letter to the corpus of non-autograph letters.

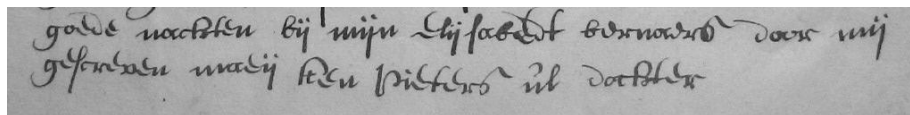


Figure 3.1: The explicit reference to the writing process in the letter of Elisabeth Bernaers.

Same writer, different sender

The second indication applies if two or more letters are found that have been written in the same hand, but that were sent by different people. In this case at least one of the letters is a non-autograph. Illustrative examples are two letters written on 10 December 1664 in Saint-Kitts, in the roadstead of Basseterre.³⁹ Although the first letter (figure 3.2) was sent by Claeijs Pietersen and the second (figure 3.3) by Jan Lievensens, the handwriting and lay-out of the letters are so similar that both of them must have been written

³⁷ Letter 3-1-2008 057-058 in the corpus (HCA 30-647).

³⁸ Letter 3-1-2008 129-130 in the corpus (HCA 30-223).

³⁹ Letters 3b-1-2008 187-188 and 3b-1-2008 203-204 in the corpus (HCA 30-644).

by one and the same person. Since the content of the letters does not indicate that one of the senders is better educated or of higher rank than the other, and since the letters have been written aboard a ship, in a very neat and professional handwriting that does not seem to match the low social class to which both senders belong, it is assumed that a third person (maybe the ship’s writer, the clergyman or one of the petty officers) wrote the letters for both Claeijs and Jan. In any case, it is clear enough that these letters should not be marked as autographs.

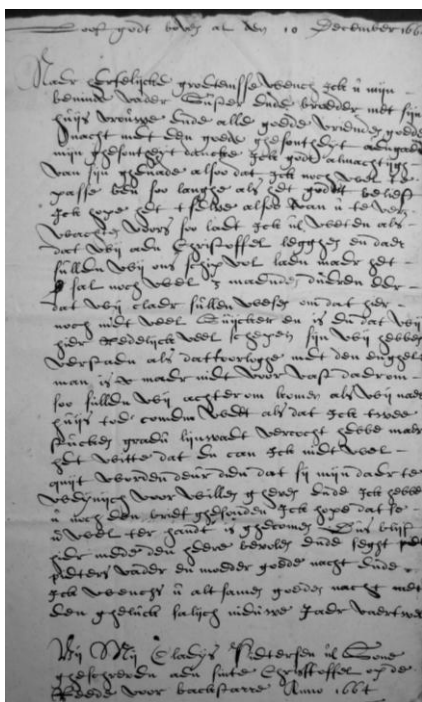


Figure 3.2: The letter sent by Claeijs Pietersen

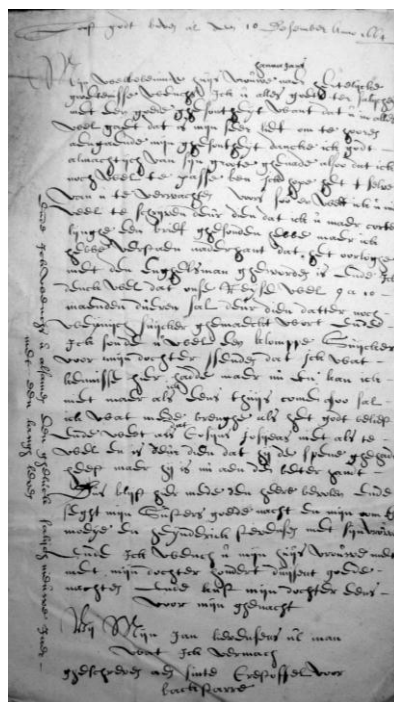


Figure 3.3: The letter sent by Jan Lievensens

One has to bear in mind that this ‘same hand evidence’ can only be applied if there are other letters available for comparison that were written around the same time in the same area. Furthermore, it is important to realise that this indication cannot give a decisive answer about the status of those letters which are written in a unique handwriting: letters that do not have a ‘twin’ are not necessarily free from suspicion. I have to allow for the possibility that letters from a different sender and written by the same writer have not survived or have not been discovered yet, or that writers sometimes wrote only one letter for someone else.

The Groningen Intelligent Writer Identification System (GIWIS)

Since comparing the handwriting of different letters takes up a considerable amount of time, I was fortunate to benefit from the expertise of a team of artificial intelligence specialists at the University of Groningen. This team, under the direction of Lambert Schomaker, has developed a computer program that is able to compare a sample of handwriting to a large set of samples and identify matching ones. This program, called the Groningen Automatic Writer Identification System (GRAWIS), was originally meant for forensic purposes, but with a few modifications it can also be applied to historical texts (Bulacu 2007; Bulacu & Schomaker 2007a; Bulacu & Schomaker 2007b; Brink 2011: 117-124). A modified version of this program, called GIWIS (Groningen Intelligent Writer Identification System), was developed for the use of *Letters as Loot* by Axel Brink of the University of Groningen (Brink 2011: 117-124).

GIWIS allows one to compare the handwriting of one specific letter to an entire set of letters. After the necessary preparatory work (which involves uploading pictures into the program and selecting sections of the pictures that are suitable for processing), GIWIS lists the ten samples that most closely resemble the handwriting under investigation. The program can compare different hands using several features, such as the slant of the script and the thickness of the quill strokes. At this stage, the powers of perception of the researcher come in, for the program *always* lists samples that are supposed to show a similar handwriting, even if the overlap between samples is very small to almost non-existent. It is thus the researchers' responsibility to check whether one of the listed 'matches' is a real match. Although human beings are still undoubtedly better at recognizing matching handwritings, computers are quicker at scanning large sets of examples. Using the GIWIS program has saved a lot of time without negatively affecting the reliability of the conclusions about the status of letters.

Handwriting and signature

Not only the handwriting *across* letters can be compared in order to establish whether the letter is an autograph or not, but also the handwriting *within* one and the same letter can be scrutinised. If the sender's name or signature at the bottom of the letter differs noticeably from the hand used in the body of the letter, the sender may not have written the letter him/herself. This is certainly the case if the handwriting in the letter itself is neat and steady while the signature shows an inexperienced hand. It is very likely – because of the educational circumstances – that there were people whose writing experience was just sufficient to sign their name, but who were not able to produce an entire letter (Frijhoff & Spies 1999: 237). And apparently, some of these senders wanted to sign the letters that had been written for them,

maybe from a point of honour, as a proof of authenticity, or as a more personal sign of life. To researchers, these signatures are a sign that a letter is not an autograph.

Although a signature can sometimes offer convincing proof of the non-autograph nature of a letter, it is to be handled with caution, for experienced writers sometimes used a larger or different handwriting for their name or signature as part of their stylistic habit.⁴⁰ A different handwriting in the sender's signature therefore does not always point to a different identity for sender and writer. An example of this is shown in figure 3.4. One can only be certain that one is dealing with a non-autograph only if the signature seems to have been written by a less experienced writer than the person who wrote the body of the letter. Figure 3.5 below shows a signature that suggests a less experienced writer than the hand in the body of the letter does. This letter sent by Anna van Staden is indeed a non-autograph letter. The comparison of the handwriting in the body of the letter with that of other letters shows that the letter was written on behalf of Anna by Benedictus Marius.

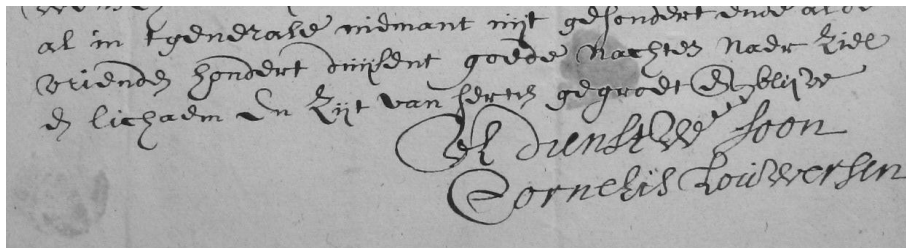


Figure 3.4: Part of a letter sent by Cornelis Louwersen (letter 3-1-2008 059-060 in the corpus, HCA 30-647). The signature is rendered in a larger hand, but does not suggest an unskilled writer.

⁴⁰ Cf. the letter model written by the seventeenth-century writing-master Hendrik Meurs (Croiset van Uchelen 2005:37).

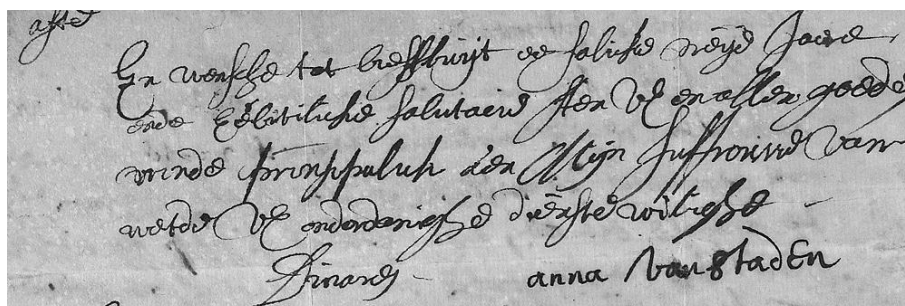


Figure 3.5: Part of a letter sent by Anna van Staden (letter KB 227-2 040-041 in the corpus, HCA 30-227-2). The signature is rendered in a hand that suggests less experience at writing than the hand used in the body of the letter.

Handwriting and occupation

This section will deal with the fourth and the fifth piece of evidence, since they are closely linked. The fourth indication is related to the occupation and social status of the writer. If a letter's contents reveal enough about the life of the sender for me to determine his/her occupation, I can estimate how likely it is that the sender of the letter was an experienced writer. Captains, helmsmen, salesmen, doctors, lawyers, book keepers, clergymen and ship's writers for instance had to master writing in order to study or carry out their respective professions (Van Doorninck & Kuijpers 1993: 46-50, 58-61).⁴¹ Therefore, when I encountered senders with one of these occupations, I assumed that they had written their own letter, unless there was any evidence suggesting otherwise.

The occupation of male senders is often easy to discover. Men often mention their occupation in the address of the letters they send to their wives or they describe their daily activities in the letters themselves.⁴² The occupation of men is sometimes recorded in notarial deeds, in registers of marriage, or in registers of baptism. There is a lot of information about

⁴¹ Captains and helmsmen are assumed to be able to write because they needed to be able to read and sign bills of lading, to keep the ship's log, to plan their route and read maps, and they had to correspond with their principals and clients. Furthermore, Bruijn (2008:135) reports that from the seventeenth century onwards some chambers of the Dutch East-India Company demanded candidates for a helmsman's or captain's position to pass a written exam.

⁴² The occupation of the sender sometimes occurs in the address because the women to whom the letters were to be delivered were often described in relation to their husbands. An example of such an address is: *Aen neeltien sicpkcs huis vrou van schipp' broer Jochemsz in de corte doele steegh tot Enchuisen* 'To neeltien sicpkcs, wife of skipper broer Jochemsz on corte doele lane at Enchuisen' (from letter 3b-1-2008 159-160 in the corpus, HCA 30-642-1).

men's occupations, but what their wives, mothers or daughters did to earn money is rarely mentioned. Occupation seemed to have been a less important aspect of the identity of women (Schmidt 2005: 11, 17). This makes it difficult to discover what women did to earn a living. We may assume, however, that most of the women were engaged in domestic work, manual labour or the retail trade (Van Deursen 1988: 8-13; Schmidt 2005: 8; De Wit 2008: 147-149). Most of the women probably did not need any writing skills in order to make a living in this manner. This does not mean that these women could not write, but it implies that one can almost never say for certain that a woman could write based on her occupation. This renders it difficult to determine the status of letters sent by women based on what is known about their occupation.

If someone's occupation is unknown or if it does not come with the necessity of him/her being literate, not all is lost for this indication. For example, letters from female senders who were married to a captain or a skipper are readily marked as autographs unless counter-evidence prevented me from doing so. The reason for this is the fact that in many cases the wives of captains and skippers looked after their husbands' businesses when they were at sea (De Wit 2008: 161-163; Bruijn & Van Eijck van Heslinga 1985: 117; Bruijn 1998: 67).⁴³ It was a great benefit to these women if they were able to read and write in order to take care of all the financial and organizational aspects of this duty. Furthermore, people of a high social rank were also likely to be experienced writers, because it is plausible that their parents were wealthy enough to offer them an education that included the costly writing instruction (Frijhoff & Spies 1999: 238). So if senders are believed to be members of the upper classes – through (family) relations with other people from the upper classes, for instance – it is assumed that they could write. How I made decisions on people's social ranks was described in the previous chapter.

The fifth indication is very closely related to the previous one; it is in fact an elaboration upon the fourth one. If one can find out a sender's social status, one can compare the level of experience of the handwriting to the expected level of education.⁴⁴ Neatly written letters of low ranking

⁴³ Evidence for this is also to be found in some letters in the corpus. Cf. the letters of Katelijne Haexwant to her husband Leendert Ariensen Haexwant, rear admiral, in which she informs him about financial matters (Van Vliet 2007: 314-333). Or cf. the letters Elisabeth Flipsen Amelingh sent to her husband Lucas Pruijs. In one of the letters she includes a list of things she bought for her husband's journey (letter 06-01-2009 243-245 in the corpus, HCA 32 1845-2) and she repeatedly mentions other financial affairs of which she is taking care.

⁴⁴ The level of experience of a writer is a subjective criterion to some extent. However, it seems to be possible to distinguish different levels of experience based

senders are of particular interest: they may well be non-autographs. However, this evidence may present us with problems if we do not take into account two important facts. Firstly, it is sometimes difficult to tell the difference between an experienced, but sloppy hand and an inexperienced one. Secondly, a person's occupation and social status may change. It might be possible, for instance, that the son of a captain (belonging to a middle-high social rank by birth) starts out his career as a sailor of low rank. The neat handwriting in his sailor's letter would then not be oddly out of place.

An example of a letter that is categorised as a non-autograph on the basis of a discrepancy between the quality of the hand and the expected quality of the handwriting based on the sender's social class is a letter sent by Cornelisje Jacobs. Cornelisje writes to her brother, Alert Jacobsz, who is a petty-officer's assistant. On the basis of Alert's occupation, both brother and sister are placed in the lowest social category. But Cornelisje's letter is not rendered in a hand that is normally associated with this group. Her letter is written in a neater, more refined and more experienced hand than one would normally expect to find. Figure 3.6 below shows the handwriting in Cornelisje's letter. Figure 3.7 shows a handwriting that is typically associated with handwriting of members of the lower social classes: the graphemes seem to have been formed one by one in a rather awkward manner, the lines are sloping and capital letters are rare. Considering these differences, Cornelisje's letter was assigned to the non-autograph letters.

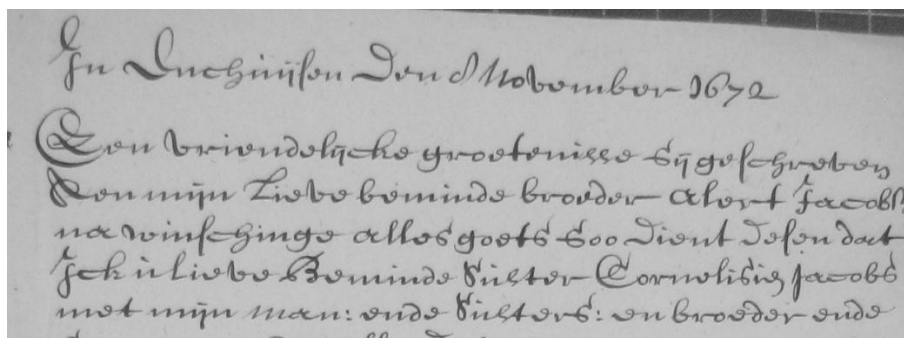


Figure 3.6: The handwriting in Cornelisje's letter (letter 17-06-2009 289-290 in the corpus, HCA 30-223).

on various features, such as whether the letters have been drawn graph by graph or not, the regularity of the handwriting in form and size, and the slope of the lines. For more information about different styles of handwriting and different levels of writing experience, see for instance Fairman (2000, 2003, 2007a, 2007b, 2008) and Dury (2008).

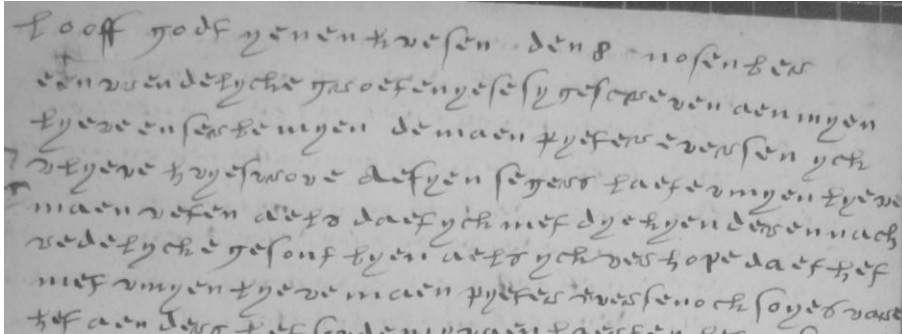


Figure 3.7: The handwriting of a typical lower- or lower-middle-class writer (letter 17-06-2009 244-246 in the corpus, HCA 30-223).

Signatures in archives

The last – and often the only – way to determine with certainty whether a letter writer and sender are identical is to compare the handwriting and/or signature used in the letter to other samples of the sender's handwriting that are known to be authentic. It is not always easy to find these samples, but it is certainly possible. For particular cities that have accessible and searchable archives, one can retrieve a surprising number of such samples with the help and advice of archivists.

Authentic samples of handwriting can be found in registers of marriage, notarial deeds or in petitions. When these documents show a mark or a sign instead of the signature of a letter's sender (as in figure 3.8), it is highly likely that the sender of the letter could not write and had someone else write his/her letter. If these documents show a signature for the letter's sender (as in figure 3.9), this signature needs to be compared to the signature and the handwriting in the letter itself.

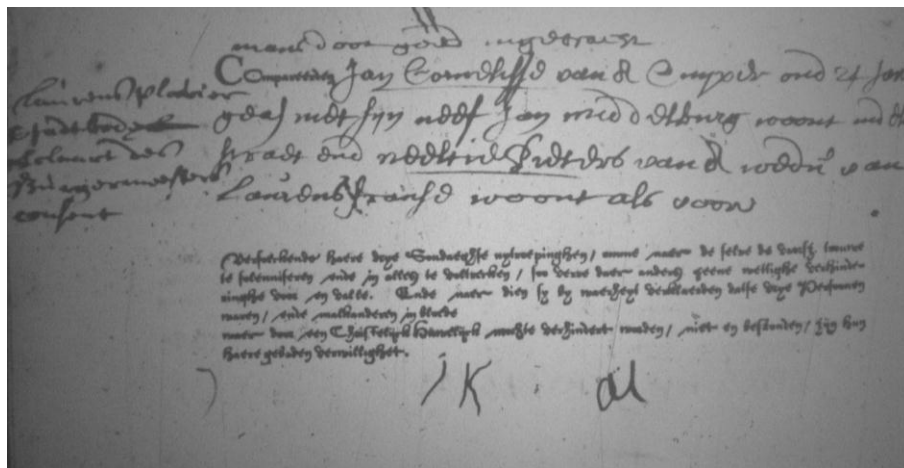


Figure 3.8: The certificate of marriage of Jan Cornelissen and Neeltje Pieters (Municipal archive Amsterdam, DBT Amsterdam) showing two signs at the bottom of the certificate – a squiggly abbreviation for Jan Cornelissen (Kornelissen) at the left and an indefinable sign for Neeltie Pieters at the right – indicating that neither husband nor wife could write.

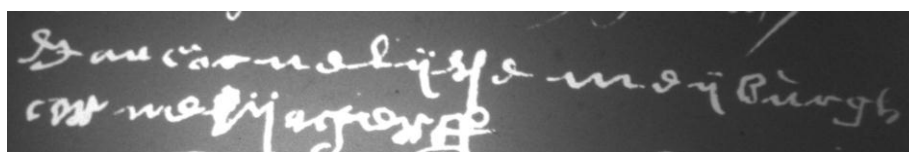


Figure 3.9: Signatures at the bottom of the will of Jan Cornelisz Meijburgh and Cornelia Gerrits (Municipal Archive of Rotterdam, ONA Rotterdam).

These official documents often present researchers with very compelling evidence as to the authenticity of a letter, but there are three elements that complicate this working method. The first problem is that not every archive is easy to search through, which may cost a researcher a considerable amount of time and thus limits the number of people that can be tracked down.

Another problem has to do with names in the seventeenth century. Seventeenth-century surnames were often patronymic and some first names – like Jan, Cornelis, Claes, Pieter and Jacob for men, and Trijn, Mary, Neel, Guurt, Griet and Anna for women – were very frequent (Van Deursen 2006: 31-33). The use of patronymics coupled with little variety in first names produced a huge number of namesakes. This makes it difficult to successfully track down people with popular names like ‘Jan Pietersen’ or ‘Trijntje Jans’ if one does not have more detailed information at one’s disposal.

The third obstacle is that the letters and the signatures in official documents may be years apart from each other. If these signatures differ, this does not necessarily mean that they were not written by the same person. A person's handwriting can change over time due to practice, lack of practice, or ailments. Take for example Rutger Pranger: the signature on his marriage certificate from 1643 is not identical to the signature on Rutger's letter, but this does not have to mean that he did not write his own letter. Since there are 30 years between these two signatures, it is possible – even likely – that Rutger's handwriting changed over time.

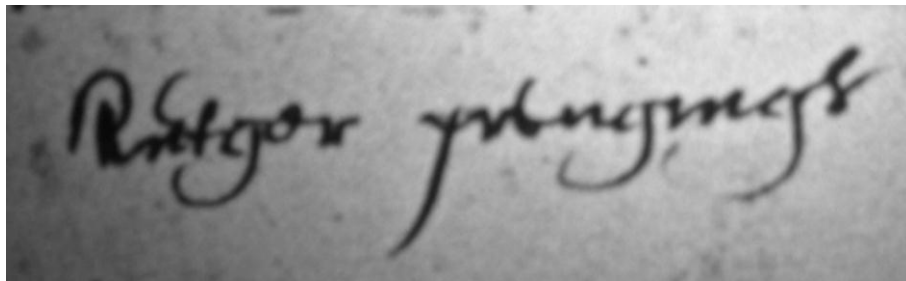


Figure 3.10: Rutger Pranger's signature on his marriage certificate dating back to 1643 (Municipal Archive Amsterdam, DTB Amsterdam)

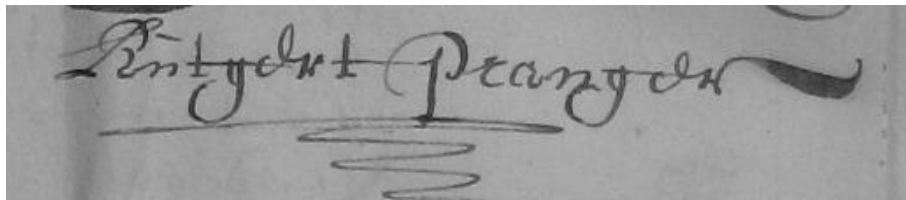


Figure 3.11: Rutger Pranger's signature on a letter sent by him in 1673 (letter 3b-1-2008 240-242 in the corpus, HCA 30-645).

3.2.2. A flow-chart

Most of the indications presented here do not offer 100% certainty about the status of a letter and should be handled with care. But when used carefully and combined whenever possible, these pieces of evidence may furnish clear proof for the authenticity of the corpus data or may enable researchers to make at least educated guesses about the status of seventeenth-century letters.

Some of the above-mentioned indications are very telling, while others only become important if a number of other indications cannot provide conclusive results. In order to visualise this, I transformed the list of indications into a flow chart (figure 3.12) which takes into consideration different priorities and allows us to examine every letter thoroughly, as well as efficiently.

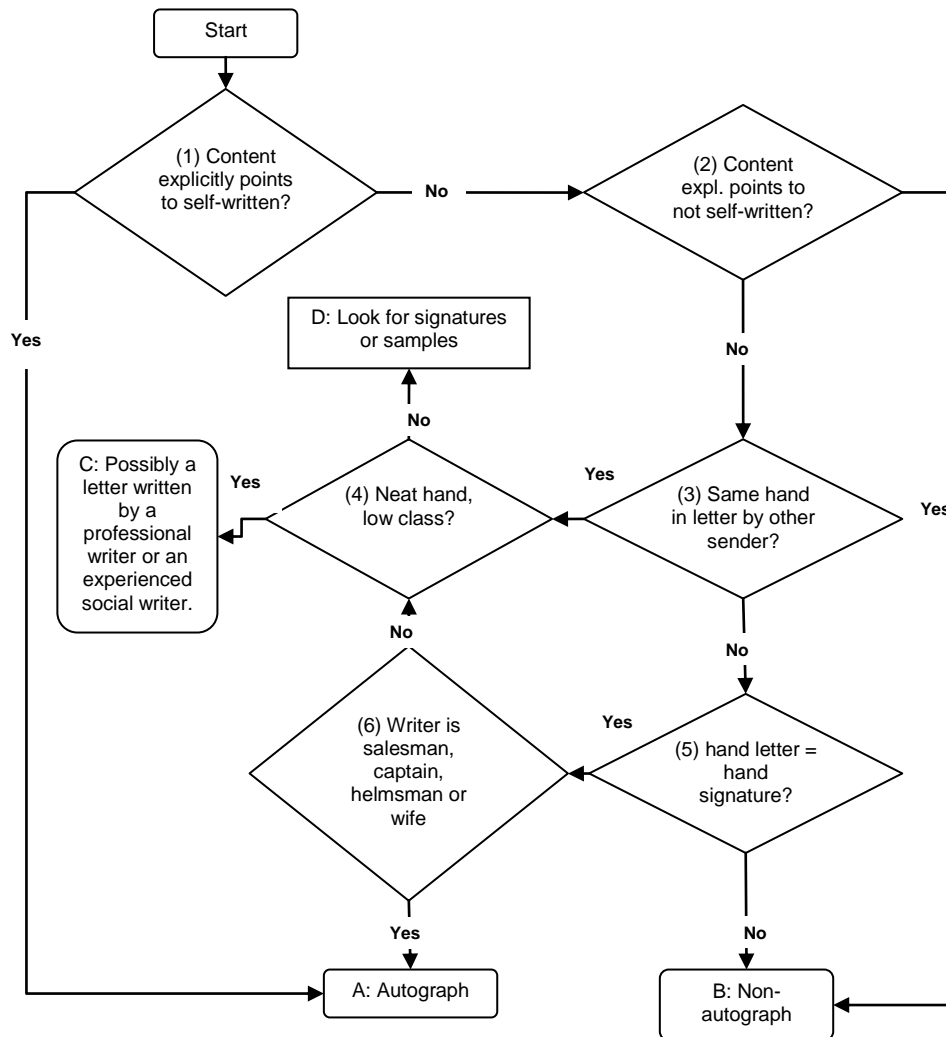


Figure 3.12: The flowchart

The flow chart starts with the content of the letter. If a letter mentions explicitly that it is an autograph or a non-autograph (box 1 and 2), one need not look for further evidence and can go straight to the relevant conclusion (A or B). If the content does not offer any information about the writing of the letter, the corpus must be checked for letters written in the same hand, but sent by someone else (box 3). If there are such letters, it must be checked whether they were all sent by people of low status, but written in an experienced hand (box 4). If this is the case, chances are high that we are dealing with letters written by a professional writer or possibly with letters

written by a social writer belonging to the upper-middle or upper class (C). If they are not all neatly written letters sent by people of low status, one can only learn more about the potential writer by looking for signatures or handwriting samples of the senders concerned (D).

If the letter is the only letter in the corpus which shows a certain hand, the signature must be scrutinised (box 5). If it is not written in the same hand as the body of the letter and if it seems to be written in a less experienced hand, we are probably dealing with a non-autograph letter (B). If the hand in the signature does not seem to be different from that in the rest of the letter, it is time to take into account the occupation and social status of the sender (box 6). As I have explained above, if the writer is a salesman, a captain, a helmsman, a lawyer, a doctor, a clergyman, a ship's writer, or someone of high social status, it is quite likely that the letter is an autograph (A). If the sender of the letter falls into neither category, the only option left is to compare the sender's handwriting with what one would expect of someone with the sender's status (box 4). If the handwriting is very neat, while the sender is of low status, it might be possible that a professional writer or a friend who was an experienced writer interfered (C).⁴⁵ If the handwriting does not seem to be very deviant from what could be expected, the letter might be self-written. But because the writer could have been a non-professional writer as well, the only way to find out for certain is to look at authentic samples of handwriting or signatures, (D). The letters that fall into category A are identified as autographs, those of categories B and C as non-autographs. The letters in category D might prove to be either autograph letters, non-autograph letters, or letters of uncertain authorship, depending on the authentic handwriting samples or signatures that can be traced.

Two further remarks have to be made about the procedure. Firstly, if particular striking indications for a specific letter are clear at first sight, there is no harm in skipping steps in the flowchart. The chart's chief purpose is to help analyse letters that do not immediately signal whether they are autographs or not. Secondly, it is not always possible to be one hundred percent certain about the status of a letter without the evidence of authentic handwriting or signature samples.

3.3. Using LIP in practice

However neatly arranged the Leiden Identification Procedure may be, putting it into practice with a corpus of nearly 600 letters required some

⁴⁵ Other indications that suggest an experienced or even a professional writer are: names in the text or in the signature written in a slightly larger hand, embellishments and flourishes in the margins, and a cursive hand.

extra organisation. In this section I will briefly describe how the process was brought to a favourable conclusion.

3.3.1. Classification based on place of writing and first analyses

The first step of the entire process consisted in grouping all the letters based on the place where they were written. I benefited from this classification in that it greatly diminished the number of letters that each letter needed to be compared to in order to determine whether the handwriting in this letter occurred in other writings as well, since it is most likely that letters written by the same writer have been sent from one single place or region. This decrease in the number of comparisons needed increased the chances of GIWIS listing an identical handwriting in its top ten of similar handwritings.⁴⁶

Each sub-group of letters was handled separately. First, every letter pertaining to one sub-group was studied using all the indications from the LIP except for the 'same writer different sender' evidence and research in archives. Then the digital photographs belonging to the letters were fed into the GIWIS program and adapted. If the sub-group contained fewer than fifteen to twenty letters, the GIWIS program was not used and the handwritings were compared manually. The results of the comparisons were added to the findings of the first check.

3.3.2. Archival research

Determining the letters' status and the completion of the database were not finalised just yet, however. In order to dot the i's, the number of letters of uncertain authorship needed to be restricted and this could be done by comparing different hands to authentic signatures or handwriting samples in archives. For this purpose, the letters were re-grouped according to the city or village in the Netherlands to which the sender of the letter could be linked. For instance, to the group of letters written in the city of Middelburg I added letters that were written abroad but that were sent by people originating from Middelburg.

Based on the preliminary results of the LIP, a decision was made on which senders were to be handled with priority in the archives: these were senders of letters of uncertain authorship or senders of letters that had been appointed to the corpora of autographs or non-autographs on the basis of an

⁴⁶ This was confirmed by Axel Brink, one of GIWIS' designers, in private correspondence [10/02/2011]. If the program needs to compare a sample of handwriting to 600 letters instead of to 60 letters, the chances that the true identical handwriting will be listed in GIWIS' top ten of similar handwritings are smaller. Therefore keeping the number of letters that need to be compared as low as possible increases the reliability of the program.

educated guess. The archives that offered a fair chance of finding signatures and to which a substantial number of senders could be linked were given priority: the Municipal Archive in Amsterdam, the Municipal Archive in Rotterdam, the West-Frisian Archive in Hoorn, the Archive of Zeeland in Middelburg, the North Holland Archive in Haarlem, the Regional Archive in Leiden and the Regional Archive in Alkmaar. In what follows, I will briefly explain which sources were used in each archive.

Amsterdam

The register of marriage in the Municipal Archive of Amsterdam (*Stadsarchief Amsterdam*) contains a wealth of signatures, since newly weds in the seventeenth-century Dutch capital were requested to sign this register. A signature, mark or sign is thus bound to be discovered when one manages to trace a sender's certificate of marriage. On top of that, the certificate of marriage almost always contains information about the bride and groom's age, occupation and place of origin. These registers are easily accessible and therefore offer a good chance of finding new information. The figure below shows the certificate of marriage for Lambert Ariansen and Marritje Bastiaans.

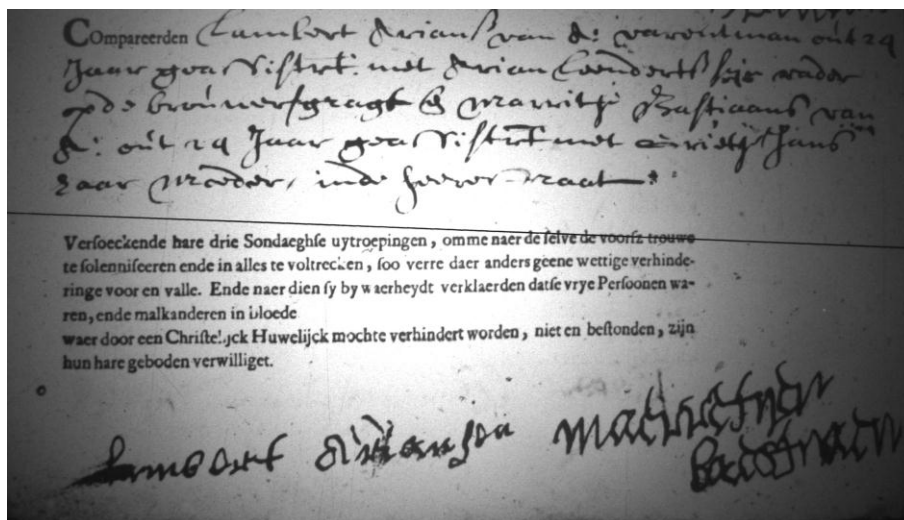


Figure 3.13: The certificate of marriage of Lambert Ariensz and Marritje Bastiaans (Municipal Archive of Amsterdam, DTB Amsterdam)

Their signatures can be seen at the bottom of the picture. The written part of the certificate reads:

[Compareerden] Lambert Ariansz van A: varentman out 29 jaar geassistrt met Arian Leendertsz, sijn vader op de brouwersgragt ende marritje Bastiaans van A: out 29 Jaar geassistrt met Grietje Jans haar moeder, inde heerestraat

‘[appeared as a party:] Lambert Ariansz from A(msterdam) sailor 29 years of age assisted by his father Arian Leendertsz, (living) on the Brouwersgracht and Marritje Bastiaans from A(msterdam) 29 years of age assisted by her mother Grietje Jans (living) on the Heerestraat’

The notarial archive in Amsterdam is not easily accessible, since it has not been indexed for person. The notarial archive is actually a collection of archives of individual notaries public. The extent of the corpus combined with poor accessibility renders this notarial archive unsuitable for a search for handwriting samples and signatures.

Rotterdam

In Rotterdam, unlike in Amsterdam, signatures cannot be found in the register of marriage since newly-weds were not requested to sign it. A good source for signatures, signs or marks does, however, exist in the form of the extensive Old Notarial Archive (ONA) in the Municipal Archive of Rotterdam (*Gemeentearchief Rotterdam*). This archive has been indexed for persons and part of the archive is even digitally searchable. Especially when a person can be traced in the digital database (which can be consulted online), it becomes fairly easy to find the appropriate microfiche in the Municipal Archives and look for signatures, signs or marks. For instance, I found one of the senders in my corpus, Francois Pennenburg, in the digital database of the ONA in Rotterdam (see figure 3.14). The matching microfiche showed Francois’ signature (figure 3.15) which matched the signature and the handwriting in his letter and thus showed that Francois wrote his letter himself. Depending on the type of notarial act, some extra information about senders or addressees could be gathered from this archive.

Notariële Akten

Resultaat (uittreksel)

Akiesoort	testament
Datum	21/11/1701
Archief	ONA Rotterdam
Inventarisnummer	1659
Aktnummer/Blz.	111/263
Notaris	D. Vos van Weel

Bij bestellen gewenste vorm

Inhoud

Francoijs Pennenburgh, meesterkleermaker, wonende op de Kleermarkt, benoemt zijn kinderen Josijntje, Catharina en Christiaen Pennenburgh ieder voor 1/3 part tot zijn erfgenamen.

Vorige Volgende Opnieuw zoeken ← Terug naar resultaat scherm ←

Printen  Bestellen kopie akte 

Figure 3.14: A result from the online database of Old Notarial Acts in Rotterdam, showing information about the will of Francois Penneburg, one of the senders in the *Letters as Loot* corpus.



Figure 3.15: Francois Pennenburgh's signature at the bottom of his will (ONA Rotterdam).

Hoorn

The West-Frisian Archive (*Westfries Archief*) in Hoorn was consulted as well. The sought-after signatures of people linked to Hoorn, Enkhuizen and Medemblik are almost literally hidden in its large notarial archive. Like the notarial archive in Amsterdam, the notarial archive of the West-Frisian Archive has not been indexed for persons. It consists of numerous small archives of single notaries public. Some of these notaries provided indexes to their archives, others didn't. To find notarial deeds of letter senders from this region, one can only systematically run through the different archives that stem from a relevant period, starting with the indexed ones. Although it is like searching for a needle in a hay-stack, some deeds containing information about a sender from the corpus were identified and signatures were discovered (see figures 3.16 and 3.17 for the surprisingly identical signatures of Trijntje Lourens).

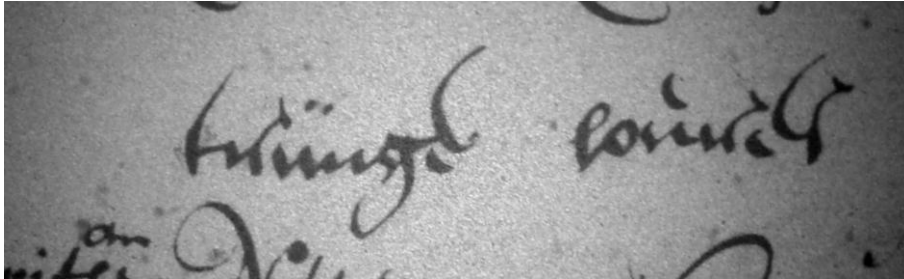


Figure 3.16: Trijntje Lourens' signature in a notarial deed in the West-Frisian Archive in Hoorn.

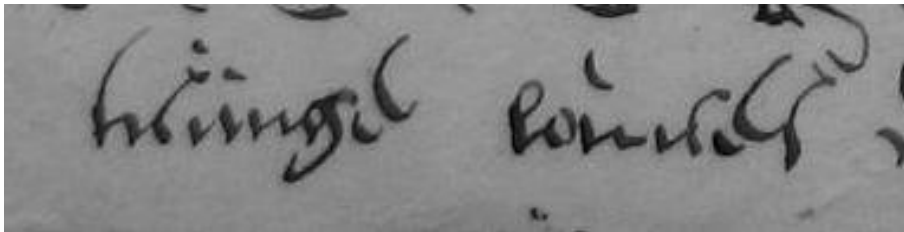


Figure 3.17: Trijntje Lourens' signature in letter 3-1-2008 230-231 of the corpus (HCA 30-228).

Middelburg

The fourth archive I visited in order to complete the corpus was the Archive of Zeeland (*Zeeuws Archief*), which is based in the town of Middelburg. Due to a fire in the nineteenth century and a bombing during the Second World War, large parts of the archive of Zeeland have been lost. The remaining registers of marriage do not contain any signatures and the notarial archives of Vlissingen and Middelburg for the period of interest no longer exist. Two possible sources of signatures and sender information remain, however.

The first source is the archive of the Audit Office of Zeeland, part C. The Audit office of Zeeland took care of the financial matters of the Admiralty of Zeeland. Among other things it kept records of the expenses. Salesmen who had delivered goods for the admiralty and family members of men who were at sea for the admiralty could request money (see figure 3.18). If the petition was approved, the creditor could come and collect the money and he or she had to sign for receipt (on the same document that had originally been handed in as a petition). The archive of the Audit Office is enormous and lacks a detailed index, but recently a small part of the archive has been indexed. This limited index was put at my disposal and was used to look for senders linked to Vlissingen or Middelburg.

Jacob van de Velde

Ged. Gemeent. Raad, vande
E. D. H. G. Staten van Zeeland.

Verzoekt verduidel. Jacob van de Velde, dat hi E. D. H. van
aan Dapp. getuigen te d'Ordon. van betalinge van
sommige ingent gien frucht sijstien sijn, en vrie grooter, vrie
over de verantie van vijand en ander, geding te d'Ordon.
van Land op Surinaam a. d. Command. Cruijter, Bal.
en verhoef te ad. verstante van d'Ordon. E. D. H. sijnker a
twae sijn, te souden, 1 sublet d'Ordon. &c.

Ged. Ontfangen d'Ordon. van d'Ordon. sijn ordonant
te hi betale, an Jacob van de Velde, d'Ordon. van ingent gien
soudy sijstien sijn, en vrie grooter, vrie over de verantie
van vijand en ander, geding te d'Ordon. van Land op
Surinaam a. d. Command. Cruijter, Bal. volgens wils
ginder attestatie. In bevestiging sijnker, sal ja
niet word validat. Actien jnt. G. D. van Zeeland
binde, d'Ordon. den 16. Julij 1669.

de Nassau Landt. L. de Nassau

de ordon. van d'Ordon. Raad
van Staten van Zeeland.

J. de Nassau

Reg. int. ord. G. D. H. van Zeeland, sijnker
of d'Ordon. = souden van d'Ordon.

G. D. H. van Zeeland

Ged. Ontfangen den ingent d'Ordon.
den 23. Julij 1669.

Johan van d'Ordon. sijnker

Figure 3.18: A request and receipt signed by Jacob vande Velde, one of the letter writers from the Letters as Loot corpus (at the bottom, right) found in the archive of the Audit Office of Zeeland.

The second source that was used in the Archive of Zeeland is the Poortvliet database. This database is still being developed by Mr. P.F. Poortvliet. It contains all kinds of information about seamen linked to Zeeland. The database refers to different sources - among which the archive of the Audit Office - which only occasionally contain a signature. Although this database has not yielded any signatures so far, it has proved useful in providing information about the occupation and the career of some senders.

Haarlem

Information on people living in the villages of Akersloot, Graft, Schermerhorn, Oude-Niedorp, Egmond-aan-zee and on people living in the town of Haarlem can be found in the North Holland Archive (*Noord-Hollands Archief*). For Haarlem, the registers of marriage, baptism and death as well as the old notarial archive are available. For the other villages, only the old notarial archive is kept in Haarlem; the registers of marriage, baptism and death can be consulted in the Regional Archive of Alkmaar. The Old Notarial Archive of Haarlem has been indexed, which facilitates the searching, and yielded a couple of useful signatures.

Leiden

The Regional Archive of Leiden (*Regionaal Archief Leiden*) offers the facility to search through the seventeenth-century registers of baptism, marriage and death and a part of the Old Notarial Archive online. The registers do not contain any signatures, but the notarial deeds occasionally do. However, at the time of this phase in the research, the digitization of the Old Notarial Archive (which allows one to search for and view a notarial deed online) had not yet been completed and the original documents in the archive were not indexed for person (only for period and notary public).⁴⁷ For that reason, no signatures could be discovered of the few senders linked to the city of Leiden.

Alkmaar

The last archive that was consulted was the Regional Archive of Alkmaar (*Regionaal Archief Alkmaar*). As mentioned above, the registers of marriage, birth and death for the villages of Akersloot, Graft, Schermerhorn, Oude-Niedorp and Egmond-aan-zee are kept here. The archive also contains the registers of marriage, birth and death and the Old Notarial Archive of Alkmaar. In the registers of marriage, birth and death some extra information

⁴⁷ At the present time of writing [October 2012], however, the notarial archive of the city of Leiden is much more accessible. It has been indexed for persons and is now searchable online. Pictures of the original notarial deeds can also be viewed online.

could be found on the families of the Reverend Johannes Bruno from Egmond-aan-zee and Bartholomeus Cornelisz from Alkmaar. The indexes which contain information about the notarial archives dating back before the year 1700 produced information about and signatures of a couple of senders, e.g. the signature of Jacob Zeeman (figures 3.19 and 3.20).


 A close-up photograph of a handwritten signature in dark ink on aged paper. The signature reads 'Jacob Zeeman' in a cursive script, with a large, sweeping flourish under the name. Below the name, the year '1692' is written in a similar cursive hand.

Figure 3.19: The signature of Jacob Zeeman in a document found in the Old Notarial Archive in the Regional Archive of Alkmaar.

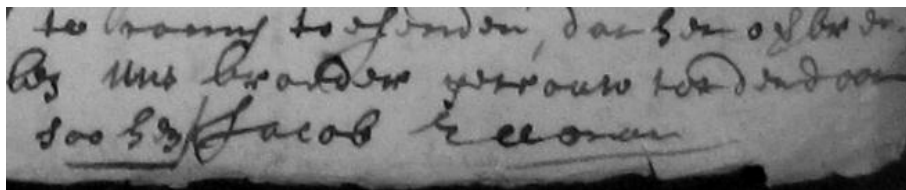

 A photograph of the bottom portion of a handwritten letter. The text is written in cursive and includes the name 'Jacob Zeeman' at the end. The paper shows signs of age and wear.

Figure 3.20: Jacob Zeeman's signature at the bottom of his letter (letter 05-01-2010 225-229 in the corpus, HCA 30-228).

3.3.3. Finalisation

On the basis of new information and signatures discovered in these archives, the status of some letters could be confirmed or – whenever necessary – changed. New information obtained during the ransacking of the archives was saved in the database. With these last two steps the execution of the Leiden Identification Procedure was completed for the letters analysed here and the seventeenth-century *Letters as Loot* corpus could take on its final form.

In this chapter, I have explained why it is important to distinguish autograph letters from non-autograph letters in the light of the sociolinguistic analysis that will be carried out on the seventeenth-century *Letters as Loot* corpus. I have described the indications that are helpful to distinguish between autograph and non-autograph letters and how these pieces of evidence were combined to form the Leiden Identification Procedure (LIP). In §3.3 I have shown how the LIP was applied to the corpus. Because of the progress that is being made in the digitisation of Dutch archives at present, it

is possible that after the publication of this dissertation, new documents and new information will be discovered that shed a different light on the status of certain letters that were categorised in the corpus as letters of uncertain authorship. In its current form, however, the corpus is as complete and as sound as it could possibly be with the information that was available at the time of its compilation.