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**Leven, werken en geloven in zeevarende gemeenschappen : Schiedam,
Maassluis en Ter Heijde in de zeventiende eeuw**

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Summary

This thesis examines the way in which daily life in three Dutch seventeenth-century communities was influenced by the economic dependency on seafaring. Most of the population in seventeenth-century Schiedam, Maassluis and Ter Heijde was involved directly or indirectly in some form of seafaring. These communities can therefore be dubbed seafaring communities. They were situated around the mouth of the River Maas which, at that time, formed an important source of seafarers for the labour market. In contrast with North Holland, where maritime workers were recruited mainly from country dwellers, the people in Schiedam, Maassluis and Ter Heijde lived in harbour towns and specialized fishing communities. From the start of the seventeenth century they no longer combined agricultural work with seafaring, as was customary elsewhere in Holland. In Maassluis and Ter Heijde the men combined work in the cod fishery with work in the herring and coastal fishery. In Schiedam they alternated between herring fishing or whaling and merchant voyages to the Mediterranean. Seafarers in specialized occupations, such as barrel-makers and ship's carpenters, plied their trade at sea in summer and on shore in winter. Some made money on the side by doing all sorts of small jobs, both at sea and on shore. When stripped of its agricultural basis, Lucassen's theory of the 'labour cycle', which describes the successive seasonal activities of seafarers in the rural areas of North Holland, could be easily extended to the seafarers from these three communities.

There were clear differences in the size and structure of the three communities. Schiedam was a harbour town with a mixed seafaring population. Within this population there was a clear distinction between citizens on the one hand and groups of itinerant outsiders on the other. The citizens, as described by Davids, belonged to the internal segment of the maritime labour market. They contracted themselves out to certain employers and were hired on the basis of personal contact. These men found work on the whaling or fishing fleet, in merchant shipping, or in the higher ranks on board of warships and East Indiamen. The men who lodged temporarily in the taverns of Schiedam belonged to a group of casual labourers who found work mainly in the so called external segment of the maritime labour market. They usually filled the lowest ranks in the Dutch East India Company and the navy. The internal segment was more important than the external segment. However, the dividing line between the two was not always clear because the foreign workers in the Schiedam taverns were not ready to grab any

work that came their way. Many of them had experience of working at sea and regarded themselves as mariners.

Most of the supply and demand on the maritime labour market in Schiedam was controlled by local employers and employees. Schiedam could, in effect, be described as a 'home port'. The economic importance of seafaring started to wane at the second half of the seventeenth century. There was a decline in the number of jobs in the herring fishery and in the merchant fleet operating in the Baltic Sea. A gradual transition took place to an economy dominated by brandy distilleries. Some of the casualties of the decline in the herring fishery managed to get jobs in the merchant fleet where the brandy industry had pushed up the demand for workers.

At the close of the sixteenth century, Maassluis was little more than a settlement consisting of a handful of fishermen who worked in the cod fishery. The growth of the cod fishery generated enough money for them to invest in herring fishing. After this, Maassluis burgeoned into a prosperous community. In 1614 the administrative ties with neighbouring agricultural Maasland were severed and Maassluis acquired its own village council. This gave the economic growth a further boost as all fishery business could now be settled in Maassluis' own harbour. It can safely be assumed that the seafaring population of Maassluis found employment almost exclusively in the internal segment of the maritime labour market.

The coastal village of Ter Heijde was populated mainly by fishermen and their families. In winter the men worked on their little vessels, just off the coast. In summer, most of them manned the herring boats that sailed from the harbours in the mouth of the River Maas. During the seventeenth century Ter Heijde was hit by floods and sand drifts which caused a deterioration in the living conditions and a drop in the population. As in Maassluis, the seafarers of Ter Heijde belonged mainly to the internal segment of the maritime labour market.

Seafaring had a profound influence on the economic life of Schiedam, Maassluis and Ter Heijde. A large part of the working male population earned a living at sea and people were also engaged in occupations that were dependent on seafaring. At the start of the seventeenth century a large group of inhabitants owned direct shares in vessels under the *partenrederij* co-ownership system. As the century progressed, however, ship ownership became more and more the preserve of the (local) elite. Merchants and ship-owners became the main shareholders in the fisheries and merchant shipping.

Economies of scale in the shipping companies brought changes to the role of masters and their crew. In the early years of the seventeenth century masters in the herring fishery and on merchant vessels were usually the main owners. They were also responsible for the financial affairs of the business, but from the 1630s, they lost their position to a new profession of bookkeepers. In general, masters still held a share in the ship under their command. Things were different for the

other crew members who, at the start of the century, thanks to the need for nets and lines, could also have a share in the business. As the century moved on, the status of these men changed from co-owner to employee. Only in the coastal fishing from Ter Heijde did the fishing folk retain a share in the ship they worked on. Despite the economies of scale the shipping company continued as a local business. Merchants sought their co-financiers mainly within their own family circle. The recruitment of crew also took place largely in the immediate circle. Ship's masters played a dual role in this process. They were employed by ship owners but, at the same time, acted as employers for the rest of the crew. In the fisheries masters tended to recruit from their own family, but most of the jobs in merchant shipping and whaling and the higher ranks in the navy and the Dutch East India Company also went to friends and associates.

The men who earned their living at sea usually did so for most of their lives. Children in the three seafaring communities made their first trips at sea when they were still very young. In Ter Heijde men were forced by poor economic circumstances to work in coastal fishing until they were well up in years. Fairly old people also worked on the physically much more demanding herring boats. The master was usually about forty and the sailors were in their early thirties. A relatively large proportion of elderly seamen also worked in other branches of the seafaring industry. In Schiedam, Maassluis and Ter Heijde the majority of the seafaring population was married. There was barely any difference between the average age of seafarers and non-seafarers upon marriage. In Ter Heijde the average age of bridegrooms was slightly higher, possibly because of the poor economic conditions in the village.

Work at sea followed set patterns. The herring fishers left in June, stayed away for two or three months, brought the catch ashore and then left again for another two or three months. They made about three trips between the months of June and January. Some of them then switched to cod fishing, where the pattern again was a few months' absence broken by a brief period at home. The men who worked in coastal fishing during the winter returned home every evening. Those who served on the merchant fleet did not know when they would be returning home as this was partly determined by the cargo that was to be loaded for the return trip. Whale fishers left in early spring and returned at the end of summer. Men who joined the navy were usually at sea from early spring till autumn. Those who served with the East India Company were away from home for several years at a time.

The earnings of all seafarers were made up of several components: the basic wage, a wage which depended partly on the success of the trip, and secondary benefits such as free board and lodging and medical care. Each segment had its own system of payment. For example, the herring fishers always received part of their wage at the end of the trip, whereas men working for the East India Company had cash in hand two months in advance. However, East India seamen were permit-

ted to transfer a maximum of three months of their annual pay to their family while the herring fishers went home with full pay. The earnings from cod fishing and coastal fishing from Ter Heijde depended entirely on the yield from the catch. Hence, the income of fishers in this segment was subject to fluctuation. In all segments there was a sort of insurance to cover the many risks to which the seafarers were exposed.

It would be safe to say that, in general, seafarers had difficulty supporting their family on their income because of irregular earnings, the difficulties surrounding the payment of wages and, more generally, the uncertainties which are an integral part of seafaring life. Seafarers' wives were therefore more or less forced to contribute to the household income. They did paid work that could be carried out both at home and in the labour market. They also used a whole array of survival strategies, such as living on credit. Both the paid labour and the casual jobs that these women did were heavily dependent on the seafaring activities. They found work mainly in trades and crafts related to the shipping industry.

However, women could not find work in all sectors because, in early modern societies, men and women did not have equal access to labour. Women were excluded from certain occupations and their opportunities for earning money were largely dictated by their civil status, not to mention family circumstances. For example, women with young children had to combine work with caring for a family. Seafarers' wives were effectively head of the household in daily life. In contrast with other married women, they were usually empowered by their husband to deal with all sorts of financial business. But the unconventional position of seafarers' wives did not mean that they automatically had more chances on the labour market. They were, however, at an advantage in that they could use their husband's social network to find work in businesses and occupations associated with shipping.

These opportunities were, however, to some extent dictated by the segment in which their husband worked. The labour market for a seafarer's wife, like the labour market for seafarers themselves, consisted of different segments. Fishermen's wives did different work from the wives of the men on East India vessels or ships in the war fleet. Also, there were clear social differences between the wives of masters and the wives of sailors. In the course of the seventeenth century various developments took place which had an adverse effect on opportunities for earning money by undermining the household as a unit of production and making it difficult for women to combine different jobs with caring for a family. These developments occurred at more or less the same time as the changes which prevented crew members from owning the lines and nets and which turned them into employees rather than co-owners of the business.

A maritime household was a very flexible household. All the members contributed to the household budget by combining different types of activity. The

contribution of the wife was essential, but most wives were unable to make ends meet without the income of their husband; husband and wife were financially dependent on each other.

The influence of seafaring on domestic life and marriage was clearly visible in the three communities. Marriage and the birth of children followed the rhythm of the trips. People married before the ships set sail. The number of children in seafarers' families, despite the frequent absence of the men, was not noticeably lower than in other families. It is true, however, that a seafarer's sweetheart had a slightly greater chance of going through life as an unmarried mother, after being let down by a fiancé who had to depart suddenly. Fishermen in particular tended to choose their future wife from their own occupational group. The social distinction between masters and the common people also had an influence. Seamen in the East India Company and the navy did not deliberately look for a wife from a seafaring environment.

The long periods of separation that a seaman's marriage imposed on both partners was a heavy emotional strain. Men tried to make up for the loss of female companionship by writing letters to their wife or sweetheart or by singing about their loved ones. Very occasionally, they sought refuge in homosexual contacts. Adultery occurred among both the women and the men. One cannot simply conclude that it was more common among sailors' wives than among other wives in the seafaring community. However, both the local government and the church were fairly accommodating towards adulterous wives of seafarers. In seafarer's marriages a wife would act as an intermediary between her husband and the on-shore society. She would pass on information to him and ardently protect his interests during his absence.

The influence of seafaring on the social relationships in Schiedam, Maassluis and Ter Heijde was shown by a research project on the social status and occupational identity of seafarers. There were clear differences in social status within the motley group of seamen who populated the three communities. In Schiedam the citizens had more prestige than the roving seafarers from the inns and taverns. Ship's masters were more affluent, they lived in more salubrious homes and wore more expensive clothes than the seafaring folk. But seafarers had their own unmistakable identity. The outside world recognized them by their clothing and use of language, and their occupation played a role in the establishment of social relationships, such as marriage and guardianship. Seafarers did not live in separate neighbourhoods in Maassluis, Schiedam and Ter Heijde. In Schiedam and Ter Heijde there were special hostels that provided shelter for old seafarers. There are no indications that seafarers regarded their occupational identity as more important than citizenship of their town or village. They felt strong ties with the community in which they lived. They made bequests to the local parish and, if their status allowed, they played an active role in local politics.

In Schiedam public office was reserved for rich merchants. Only a few masters or captains managed to find their way into local government. In Maassluis the changes in the ownership structure of the fisheries, which gave ship owners and merchants more control as the century wore on, led to gentrification of the local government and the church board. As a result, seafarers who had held public office at the beginning of the seventeenth century disappeared from local government. The situation was different in Ter Heijde where seafarers ran the show in both the village and the church.

The seafarers in all three communities appear to have been raised in the Christian tradition. They learned the rudiments of the Christian faith through (reformed) schools, Bible reading and the hymn-singing culture. Special mention should be made of the flourishing hymn-singing culture in Maassluis, which firmly linked the Christian faith with the fishing industry. There were also special seafarer's *vademecums*, which not only served as a guide for the ship's masters who were responsible for the religious education of the crew, but were also read by individual seafarers and their family members.

Seamen and fishermen played a role in the local church. They were church members and could become elders or deacons, at least in Ter Heijde. But it was not only the seafarers who were church members that had a bond with the local church. The church played a major role in all the milestones in human life, such as baptisms, marriage and burials. Burial in their own churchyard was particularly important to seafarers; the prospect of a watery grave filled them with horror. Seafarers also maintained ties with the church through care for the poor. Their families received financial support, but many seafarers also bequeathed money to the parish, regardless of their religious background. For seafarers' wives the church and the Christian faith were an important mainstay in their lonely existence, with some chapters in seafarer's *vademecums* and songbooks specifically intended for them. Preachers chose the situation of seafarers' wives as the theme for their Sunday sermons. These women could also count on social and financial support in times of trouble.

In Maassluis, Ter Heijde and Schiedam the official church doctrines were offset by various forms of superstition, stemming largely from fear of the sea. The vulnerability of seafarers and the confrontation with the wonders of nature made people turn to superstition as a promise of a safe return. Though the Protestant church campaigned against 'negotiating' a safe trip or a good catch, it made allowances for the 'life-saving' concept. Special seafarers prayers bargained with God, offering a life of devotion in exchange for clement weather or a good catch. On shore the church and the preacher also acted as intermediaries in pleading for a safe return for the seafarers.

Summarizing, it may be said that seafaring had an influence on more or less all aspects of daily life in Schiedam, Maassluis and Ter Heijde. In the harbour town

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of Schiedam this influence declined at the end of the seventeenth century due to the growing importance of the brandy industry. Things were different in the 'occupational communities' of Maassluis and Ter Heijde, where fishing continued to govern the lives of the inhabitants. The fishing trade had permeated everything, especially in Maassluis. It determined not only the social and economic relationships but was also closely interwoven with the culture and religious faith.

