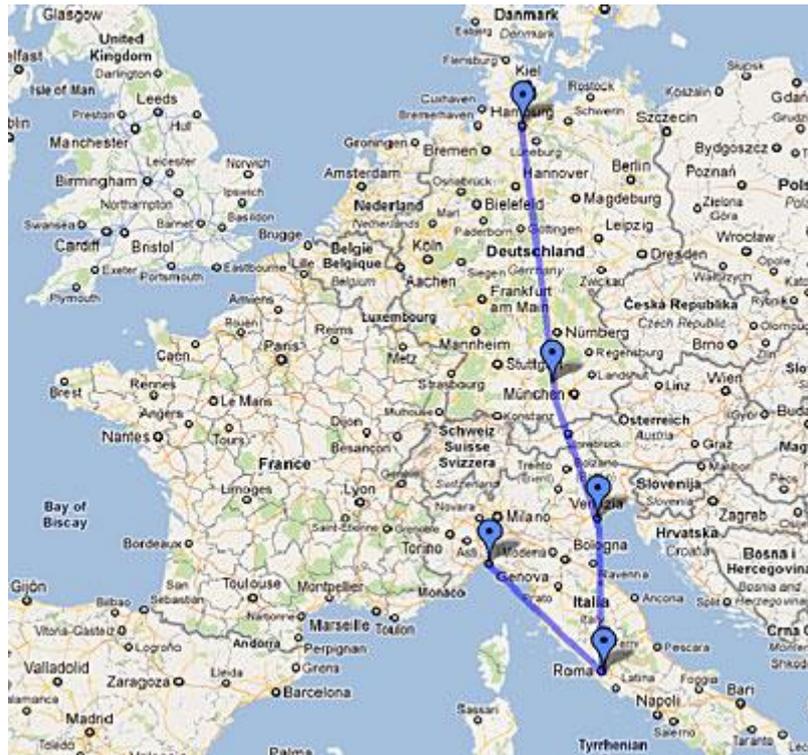


Monthly Letter Augustus/September 2011

Michiel Heusch Jr. on a business trip in Italy

In the spring of 1664 a young man leaves his home in Hamburg on a business trip to Italy that would last at least a year and a half. Actually, it was more like an internship abroad to learn the merchant's trade. Named after his father, he is called Michiel Heusch, and he is around 26 years old. The young Michiel keeps up a frequent correspondence with the folks back home during his trip. In the *Sailing Letters* we discovered 52 letters addressed to him of which 47 are written by his father. The other five are by his sister Elisabeth, his mother, an uncle, a cousin and a business friend, who all live in Hamburg. The Heusch-letters give us a unique opportunity to peek into the life of a merchant family in 1664-65.



Michiel Heusch Jr.'s route through Europe. He travels from Hamburg to Augsburg in the south of Germany. Later he continues his journey and goes to Venice, Rome and Genoa.

Mail while abroad

Every time Michiel receives a letter from his father he notes on the letter when and where he answered it. The illustration shows how that letter has been addressed to Michiel Heusch “il giovane” (Italian for ‘the younger’) in Naples, and that it is sent “franco” (paid for) via Venice. At the top, an annotation informs us of its arrival on the 27th of November 1664 SN (new style calendar), and of the reply on the 29th in Rome. The letter was written on 26 passato: the 26th of the previous month. Through these remarks we can conveniently reconstruct Michiel's whereabouts during the trip. In June 1664 he has just left Augsburg in “decent company” for Venice. His parents are worried and eagerly waiting for a sign of life, “*I hope you haven't become slow in writing already, since a letter is easily written*”. They are much relieved when Michiel reaches Venice safely and answers three letters at once on July 1. According to plan he is to spend the summer there and then in the fall to go on to Rome. His father is a wealthy merchant who expects his son to be in Genoa in the spring of 1665 to take care of his business affairs there.



A letter from Heusch sr. to Heusch jr.

The Heusch family is originally from Antwerp and, as so many merchant families, left the city at the end of the 16th century to go elsewhere. They settled in Hamburg and became part of a close-knit community of Flemish-Dutch traders that dominated the Hamburg trade in the 17th century. They married amongst each other and kept the Dutch language alive for a long time. As is becoming clear now, they still wrote in Dutch to each other, even after 70 years!

Foreign trade

Sons were raised to take over the family business. To finalize their education they could go on a trip to learn the ins and outs of the foreign trade. This is exactly what Michiel was undertaking; he was going to be introduced to the trade partners and business relations his family had carefully built up all over Europe. A network of people, often family members, was scattered along the trade routes and were in touch with one another by frequent mail. Heusch sends out a number of recommendation letters to pave the way for Michiel. He writes that he is sending “*six recommendation letters: two for Genoa, one for Milan to signor Gilardi, one for Florence to sr. Donati, one for Livorno to signores Moijlives, and one for Napels [.....]; you can take a letter [of introduction] from sr. Druijvestein [in Venice] for Rome since I do not have any acquaintances there at the moment*”.

As soon as Michiel arrives in Venice the learning experience can start: “*I expect you to go to Realte every day*” his father reminds him. This is the Ponte di Rialto across the Grand Canal where all trading took place and prices were determined. Heusch is happy to hear that Michiel is learning Italian; especially his newly acquired writing skills will come in handy once he runs the business. “*I find it agreeable that*

you get acquainted with the language; the writing will be of use to you, so try to practise writing letters, that way you learn best”.



Ponte di Rialto in Venice

The most important subject of the letters, not surprisingly, is trade. This was the main purpose of Michiel's trip. He was supposed to renew the connections, make some purchases, and eventually arrange the arrival of captain Johan Lanckhorst in Genoa. We find out, however, that Michiel does not always follow his father's orders. He fancies the Carnival in Venice and wants to spend extra time (and money) there. Heusch sounds a little irritated when he writes *“I see that you wish to go back to Venice which is unnecessary since you have already been there, and there is not much to gain from the Carnival”*. Later, in Genoa, Michiel stays against his father's wish with an business associate and not at an inn. Which means that other merchants feel left out, like Viganego & Schepel, with whom Heusch is dealing. *“I wished you would have stayed with someone else because I sense a lot of jealousy between signor Schepel and signor Pohlman, something I have suspected for a long time. Well, it has been done now and things will run their course”*. Michiel has to try and keep the peace with everyone.

War with England

Father and son often correspond about goods and about the Anglo-Dutch war which interferes with their business. In early May 1665 captain Lanckhorst is finally ready to depart from Genua for Hamburg. Besides other goods, he has loaded 600 bales of rice, four Parmazan cheeses, some bags of almonds and a quantity of wine stone (cream of tartar) for Heusch. However, in the meantime the war situation with England has become very risky and Heusch wants Lanckhorst to sail all the way along Scotland, avoiding the Channel. Whether he makes it home safely, we don't know. This is where the correspondence stops for us. The last thing we know is that Michiel prepares to leave Genoa, as he writes his father on June 14th, 1665 (or June 4th in the old calendar as they use in Hamburg). He is getting ready to go to France to brush up on his French, for a good merchant knows many languages.

Father and son probably kept writing each other for a few more months until Michiel would come home. Unfortunately, Michiel does not get a chance to put his newly acquired skills to work for long. He dies in 1668, more than a decade before his parents.



Portrait of Michiel Heusch sr. by Bartholomeus van der Helst.
Appropriately, Heusch sr. is portrayed holding a letter in his left hand.

The Heusch-letters are in HCA 30-233. The comment on this monthly letter was written by Hetty Krol. She has made the bulk of the transcriptions of these letters within the Wikiscripta Neerlandica project, but Netty van Megen, Bram Plantinga, Arie Pos, Puck Wijnschenk Dom, José de Bree, Renaat Gaspar, Fred Kluit, Lotty Minnen, Marysia van Arnhem, Dick Braggaard, Judith de Lang and Jan de Vries as well have buckled down to decipher Heusch's handwriting.

Literature

- Hermann Arioivist von Fürth, *Beiträge und Material zur Geschichte der Aachener Patrizier-Familien* (Aachen: Verlag der Cremerschen Buchhandlung, 1890) vol. 1, (zweiter Anhang) *Zur Genealogie einzelner Aachener Familien*, 12-13.
- Maartje van Gelder, *Trading Places, the Netherlandish Merchants in Early modern Venice* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2009).
- Wilhelm Sillem, “Zur Geschichte der Niederländer in Hamburg von ihrer Ankunft bus zum Abschluss des Niederländischen Contracts 1605”, in: *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Hamburgische Geschichte*, vol. 7:482-598.