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# With Rembrandt and Furnerius to Amersfoort

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One of Wouter's more delightful characteristics as an art historian is his weakness for topography – that poor relation among sub-genres. We share the feeling that a drawn or painted landscape becomes considerably more accessible if you know the actual situation that persuaded the artist to record it or use it as a 'leitmotiv'.

A year ago Wouter accordingly treated me to a stroll along Amsterdam's city wall through the drawings of Roelant Roghman – a walk that may have been inspired by the artist's older friend Rembrandt van Rijn. This time, I am inviting him to leave Amsterdam and join Rembrandt and one of his pupils – let's call him Furnerius – on a visit to a place where you might not expect to see him: Amersfoort (fig. 1).<sup>1</sup>

Rembrandt's walks around Amsterdam are familiar enough.<sup>2</sup> We also now know that he must have visited Het Gooi, the hilly protuberance of the Province of Holland to the southeast of the city, on several occasions.<sup>3</sup> But Amersfoort?

Rembrandt was not a traveller. His ambition to become a great history painter notwithstanding, he saw no need to go to Italy.<sup>4</sup> Even within the Netherlands he travelled as little as he could. Very occasionally family duties obliged him to leave the immediate vicinity of Amsterdam. Once, and probably only once, he went to see his

*Detail of fig 6.*

bride and parents-in-law in Friesland. And he may well have undertaken a second trip, accompanying Hendrickje Stoffels to her birthplace of Bredevoort in the east of the Netherlands.<sup>5</sup> And then there was the visit to Bloemendaal, near Haarlem, where he drew the panoramic view from the dunes and the country house of a good friend of his.<sup>6</sup> But Amersfoort?

As the crow flies, this town was no further from Amsterdam than Leiden, but in terms of the landscape, governance and economy the distance was much greater. In fact Amersfoort was almost wholly focused on the city and province of Utrecht.<sup>7</sup> It had traditionally been the north-eastern bastion of that province, behind which the inhospitable sand flats of the Veluwe formed a broad buffer against potential invaders from the east. The institutional and economic connections were reflected in the transport links. True, there was a ferry service between Amsterdam and Amersfoort by way of the Zuiderzee and the Eem, but this was rarely used for carrying passengers. The same held for the overland link to Arnhem via Amersfoort. There were coaches, but they were hazardous and expensive.<sup>8</sup> If you had to travel to Zutphen or Arnhem, you took the route along the Rhine via Utrecht and Rhenen.

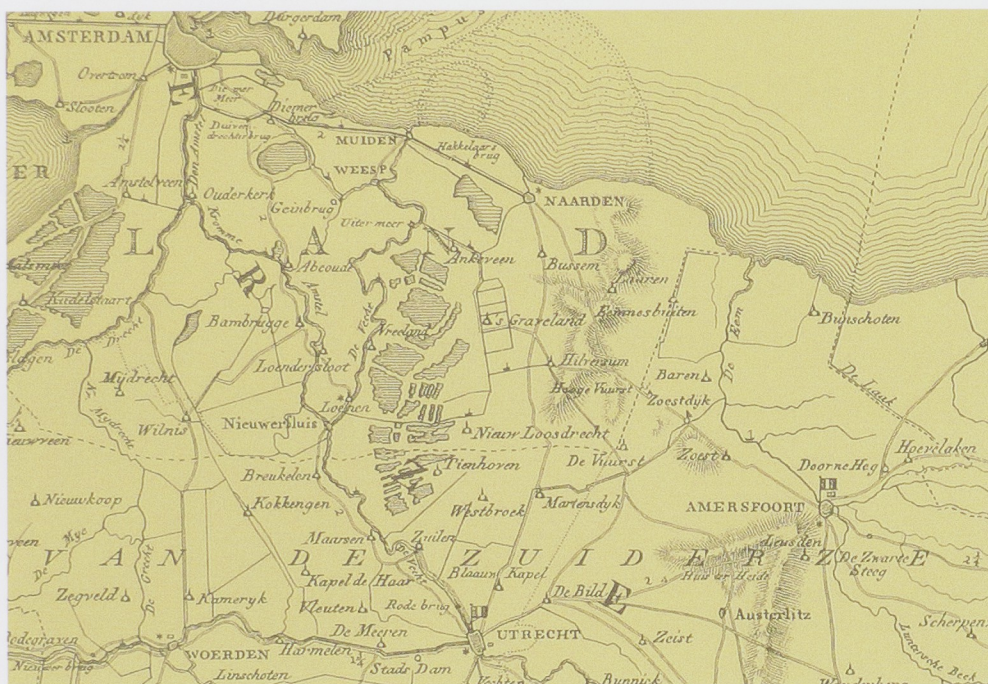


Fig. 1  
C.R.T. CRAYENHOFF,  
*Itinéraire en  
algemeene post  
kaart van het  
Koninkrijk Holland  
MDCCC: Vereenigd  
met het Fransche  
Rijk*, (detail),  
published by Mortier,  
Covens and Son,  
Amsterdam, 1810.  
Engraving,  
760 x 910 mm.  
University of  
Amsterdam Library.

Het Gooi played the same role for Amsterdam as the Veluwe for the western Netherlands. In the Middle Ages the Counts of Holland had seized this hilly, sparsely-populated area as a strategic south-eastern buffer, with the fortified town of Naarden on the Zuiderzee coast. This defensive model was still working as late as the seventeenth century. When Stadholder William II tried to bring the recalcitrant Amsterdam military to its knees in 1650, his attack failed because the troops approaching from the east lost their way in the heathland around Hilversum.<sup>9</sup> Economically, though, Het Gooi was of virtually no importance to the city, and this did not change until wealthy businessmen acquired the concession to dig the land and develop agriculture around 's Graveland, on the western edge of Het Gooi, near Hilversum. They dug a canal from Weesp to 's Graveland, which was completed in 1638.<sup>10</sup> Two years later the existing canal from Amsterdam to Muiden was extended as far as Naarden.<sup>11</sup> These works meant

that by about 1640 the whole of Gooiland was much more accessible than before. And this had implications for the Amsterdam tradition of drawing outdoors.

Since the early years of the seventeenth century Amsterdam artists had looked for picturesque subjects that offered some relief from the flat, treeless peat moors around the city. Claes Jansz Visscher found these subjects in the Kennemer Dunes near Haarlem – and in Het Gooi, witness a sheet showing typical Gooi barns that bears the inscription 'near Bussum'.<sup>12</sup> In Visscher's day the journey to Het Gooi was still not exactly easy. On foot, it was at least five hours' tramp along the muddy sea dikes to Naarden – too long for a day out.<sup>13</sup> After the canals were built, however, it was possible to get there easily and inexpensively by barge, and explore this singular and 'unspoiled' area. Rembrandt was without doubt one of the first Amsterdam artists to seize this opportunity. His earliest known 'landscape drawings' are of huts on

the Gooi heath.<sup>14</sup> They actually date from around 1636, a few years before the canals were dug and at precisely the time that he started to focus on the landscape. He must have been back to Het Gooi on many occasions after that, as we see from the landscapes and farmhouses in his later drawings.<sup>15</sup>

Rembrandt passed on his love of the Gooi landscape to several of his friends and pupils, among them Lambert Doomer, Johannes Leupenius, Abraham Furnerius and Anthonie van Borsom. Sometimes they noted the place in question on their drawings, such as 'Goylandt', 'Hilversum' or 'by Naarden'.<sup>16</sup> These boys probably – at least at first – went out with their teacher, as they did in and around Amsterdam. The Rijksprentenkabinet holds various examples of the fruits of these expeditions.<sup>17</sup> To them we can now add a sheet attributed to Furnerius that almost certainly shows the hamlet of Houtewaal, which stood a stone's throw from Amsterdam on the dike to Muiden and Naarden (fig. 2).<sup>18</sup>

But back to Het Gooi. As a rule these outings would not have lasted longer than a day and would have ended with the return trip to Amsterdam. Beyond Het Gooi, after all, was the beginning of the rather dull and marshy polder landscape of the valley of the River Eem, which had little to offer that differed from what artists were used to in Amstelland. But not always. On this same Eem, another four hours' travel past Naarden, was Amersfoort. Salomon van Ruysdael, who was born in Naarden, had discovered the magnificence of the panorama of the town seen from the hill known as the Amersfoortse Berg, which marked the northern extremity of the Utrechtse Heuvelrug or Utrecht Ridge. Jan van Goyen and Aelbert Cuyp both painted this view at least once and various artists drew it.<sup>19</sup> The sweeping view of Amersfoort with its unusually tall church towers was thus more or less part of the canon of famous national town portraits.<sup>20</sup> This is understandable since, along with Haarlem and Alkmaar, it was one of the only towns

Fig. 2  
ABRAHAM  
FURNERIUS (?),  
*The Hamlet of  
Houtewaal near  
Amsterdam*,  
c. 1640–50.  
Pen and brush in  
brown, 113 x 186  
mm. Rijksmuseum,  
Amsterdam (inv. no.  
RP-T-1889-A-2042).



in the west of the Netherlands that could be seen from a relatively elevated vantage point. These works of art or the accounts of their makers probably piqued the curiosity of Rembrandt, who had himself etched a panoramic view of Amsterdam in 1640, so that one day he walked eastward beyond Het Gooi and on to this reportedly picturesque place. We shall meet him in Amersfoort shortly.

But Rembrandt was not the only one. One of his pupils – probably Furnerius again – did the same. Furnerius left several documents referring to Het Gooi and its environs. One bears the inscription ‘Laren 1651 8/17’.<sup>21</sup> Assuming for a moment that he decided on this occasion to walk on to Amers-

foort, he would probably have gone across country by way of Soest. Past Soest he would then have approached Amersfoort from the low-lying Eem valley on the northwest side. There was no ‘Amsterdam gate’. To enter the town one had to walk further in a southerly direction to the Utrecht gate – the only entrance on this side of the town (fig. 3). However, Furnerius – if we may call him that – did not go into the town straight away. First he walked for a while along the Utrecht road, up the gentle slope of the Amersfoortse Berg. Here he took out his sketchbook and – sitting at the side of the road behind a wooden fence, which is just visible – he drew the view of the town (fig. 4).<sup>22</sup> The drawing presents a

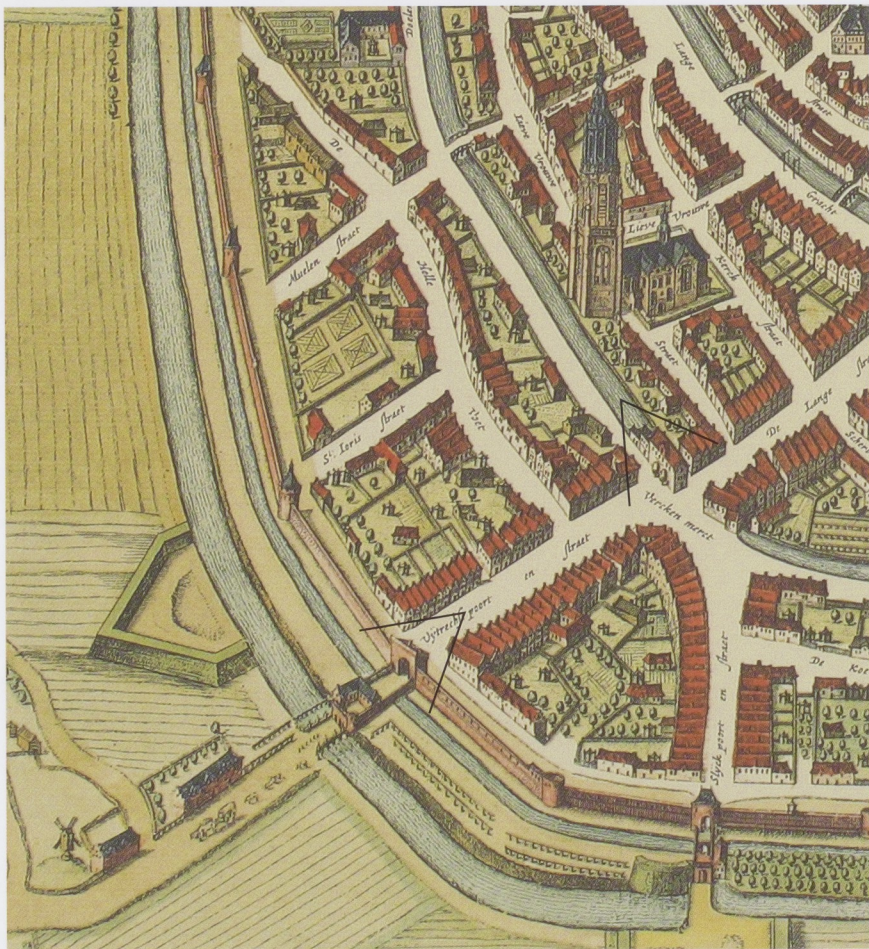


Fig. 3  
JOAN BLAEU,  
*Amisfurtum* (detail),  
from *Het Toonneel  
der Steeden*,  
Amsterdam 1649.  
Etching and engraving,  
hand coloured,  
413 x 518 mm.  
University of  
Amsterdam Library.



remarkably faithful picture of the town as he must have seen it spread out before him.<sup>23</sup> In the foreground we see some low hills with three windmills that stood on the slope outside the gate; behind them the view of the town unfolds, dominated by the towering spire of the Church of Our Lady. The Utrecht gate, lower lying, must be concealed behind the mills. Further to the left there is a slightly higher section of the brick wall with a small tower. To the left, behind the church spire, we can just make out the high nave of St George's Church, whose substantial tower is hidden by that of the Church of Our Lady. In the distance, obliquely behind the mill on the left, can be seen a fourth windmill, which stood on the ramparts on the other side of the town.

This drawing, whereabouts unknown, has been unknown in art historical circles until now.<sup>24</sup> It must have been done shortly after the fire in the tower on 7 February 1651 that destroyed the church spire. The damage can clearly be seen in the drawing.<sup>25</sup> The spire was not rebuilt until 1655, but I suggest provisionally dating the sheet to the summer of 1651, when Furnerius drew the view of Laren. If we now walk on with Furnerius to the Utrecht gate and enter the town there, Rembrandt will

come to keep us virtual company. The Rijksprentenkabinet has a modest drawing that is regarded as a copy – evidently done by a pupil – of a lost drawing by Rembrandt himself (fig. 5). There is also a second version in an equally unpractised hand. In Peter Schatborn's 1985 catalogue the location of this little gate had not yet been identified.<sup>26</sup> The author could hardly have known then that, not long before, a keen-eyed resident of Amersfoort had recognized this gate as the Utrecht gate, which had been demolished in 1835.<sup>27</sup> And so another of Rembrandt's sometimes puzzling drawings of town gates has been located.<sup>28</sup>



Fig. 4

ABRAHAM  
FURNERIUS (?),  
*View of Amersfoort*,  
c. 1651.  
Present whereabouts  
unknown. Photograph:  
Gemeente Amersfoort.

Fig. 5

COPY AFTER  
REMBRANDT, *The  
Utrecht Gate in  
Amersfoort*, c. 1650.  
Pen in brown, brush  
in brown and grey,  
138 x 196 mm.  
Rijksmuseum,  
Amsterdam (inv. no.  
RP-T-1890-A-2411).



Fig. 6  
REMBRANDT  
VAN RIJN,  
*The Westsingel in  
Amersfoort, c. 1650.*  
Pen and brush in  
brown, 152 x 277 mm.  
Musée du Louvre,  
Paris. © RMN/Thierry  
Le Mage.

In our mind's eye, we can now walk on with Rembrandt, a few hundred yards further, until we reach the Westsingel. This is part of the first medieval town moat, which was incorporated as a watercourse in the town plan after the major expansion in the fourteenth century. Rembrandt made another drawing here (fig. 6).<sup>29</sup> He probably did this sitting in a boat in the middle of the canal, looking at the narrow culvert, built up on all sides, that links the Westsingel with the Zuidsingel under Langestraat.<sup>30</sup> Rembrandt's view, which Frits Lugt was the first to recognize, has scarcely changed in three and a half centuries. On the left and right we look diagonally along the banks of the canal, which has no quay on either side. In the right foreground, where there was apparently something that spoiled the composition, he has left the sheet blank. Behind this is the small block of houses on the outer corner of Langestraat. The brick jetty on the left belongs to one of the deep back gardens of the *Muurhuizen* or 'wall houses' in the actual *Krankeledenstraat*, built along the first medieval town wall.<sup>31</sup>

What makes these two drawings by and after Rembrandt particularly interesting is that they are the only seventeenth-century drawn views in Amersfoort to have survived.<sup>32</sup> Rembrandt's sketches are all that is left to tell us just how picturesque the Utrecht gate and the Westsingel were at that time, in precisely the way he and most of his Dutch contemporaries so admired. They were concerned with a very different sort of beauty from that which Jacob van Campen, for instance, was striving to attain. This Amersfoort aristocrat designed not just the rigidly classicist *Maurits-huis* in The Hague (1633) and the Amsterdam town hall (1648), he was also responsible for the strictly geometric dead straight road from Amersfoort to Utrecht with country houses on either side (1647).<sup>33</sup> Both Amsterdam draughtsmen apparently disregarded this huge development project, which must have been in progress when they visited the city. This need not surprise us. There could scarcely be a greater difference in taste and aesthetic preferences, in subject

and execution alike – and that in one small country in the selfsame period. To anyone paying attention, the savage rejection of Rembrandt's oeuvre by younger authors that began in the sixteen-sixties must have been heralded as early as the sixteen-forties.

A second peculiarity of Rembrandt and his colleagues is harder to explain. I refer here to the rarity of views drawn by them – and the near absence of painted ones – inside the walls of Dutch towns, particularly if we contrast

this with the overwhelming number of landscapes outside the towns and cities. This leads one to suspect that the traditional Dutch taste for the 'picturesque' did not extend to objects and views inside the then town walls. And yet, there must have been plenty of appealing little corners like this, both here and in other towns. How we are to explain this remains an open question for me – and one that I am delighted to put to Wouter now.

## NOTES

- 1 W. Kloek, 'Met Roelant Roghman naar de Haarlemmerpoort', in J.E. Abrahamse e.a., *De verbeelde wereld*. Liber amicorum voor Boudewijn Bakker, Bussum 2008, p.65-75. On my virtual visit to seventeenth-century Amersfoort I was aided by Gerard Raven, Agnes Witte, Alice van Diepen and particularly Burchard Elias. On Amersfoort see R. Kemperink and B. Elias (eds.), *Bruit van d'Eem*. *Geschiedenis van Amersfoort*, Utrecht 2009. Helpful as ever, Peter Schatborn assisted me in the labyrinth of Rembrandt's pupils.
- 2 B. Bakker et al., *Het landschap van Rembrandt. Wandelingen in en om Amsterdam | Landscapes of Rembrandt. His favourite walks*, Bussum/Amsterdam 1998
- 3 B. Bakker, 'Rembrandt en de landelijke bouwkunst van zijn tijd', in *De Kroniek van het Rembrandthuis* 2008, pp. 2-27.
- 4 Seymour Slive, *Rembrandt and his Critics 1630-1730*, pp. 16-18.
- 5 According to a document that came to light recently, she went to Bredevoort in the summer of 1649 to sign a notarial deed. See M. Roscam Abbing, *Rembrandt 2006: New Rembrandt Documents*, Leiden 2006, no. 25 (July 1649), p. 40. Rembrandt's drawings of places in Utrecht, Rhenen and Arnhem were presumably done on this occasion.
- 6 Bakker et al., *Landscapes* (note 3), pp. 374-79. He made this trip in 1651.
- 7 This did not apply to tobacco and bombazine, which were exported from Amersfoort to Amsterdam and elsewhere. See R. Rommes, 'Economische en sociale ontwikkelingen', in: Kemperink and Elias op. cit. (note 1), pp. 241-71.
- 8 In 1651 the trip from Amsterdam to Amersfoort cost nine and a half guilders, a very considerable sum. See A.C.J. de Vrankrijker, *Geschiedenis van Gooiland*, vol. II, Amsterdam 1940, pp. 144-47.
- 9 See Luuc Kooijmans, *Liefde in opdracht. Het hofleven van Willem Frederik van Nassau*, Amsterdam 2000, pp. 152 ff.
- 10 This canal or *Zandvaart* was designed to carry sand to Amsterdam. In 1650 it was continued through to Hilversum. For transport from Amsterdam to Het Gooi and on to Amersfoort see De Vrankrijker, *Gooiland* (note 8), pp. 144-56.
- 11 See also Jan de Vries, *Barges and Capitalism. Passenger Transportation in the Dutch Economy*, Utrecht 1981. The Naarden and 's Graveland ferries tied up not far from Rembrandt's house on the Binnen Amstel.
- 12 'tot Bussum', Frits Lugt Collection, Institut Néerlandais, Paris.
- 13 A century later people reckoned it took four hours to walk along the towpaths beside the canals. See the *Nieuwe Geographische Nederlandsche Reise- en Zak-Atlas*, Amsterdam 1773, p. 98.
- 14 See Bakker, 'Landelijke bouwkunst' (note 3), esp. pp. 10-16.
- 15 According to a copy by Lambert Doomer, one of these sheets, signed 'Rembrandt f. 1644', was drawn in Hilversum. See Bakker, 'Landelijke bouwkunst' (note 3), esp. pp. 18-21.
- 16 Sumowsky 1561 (Leupenius): 'T.GOY-LANDT 1666'; Sumowsky 439 (Doomer): 'by Naarden Doomer f.'; Sumowsky 465\* (Doomer): 'te Hilversum'.
- 17 Bakker et al., *Landscapes* (note 2), passim.
- 18 P. Schatborn, *Tekeningen van | Drawings by Rembrandt, zijn onbekende leerlingen en navolgers | his anonymous pupils and followers*, The Hague 1985, no. 115, as



- 'Huizen en bomen aan een dijk / Houses and Trees on a Dike', by an unknown pupil.
- 19 Salomon van Ruysdael, *View of Amersfoort*, Museum Flehite, Amersfoort (loan, private collection). See W. Stechow, Salomon van Ruysdael. *Eine Einführung in seine Kunst: mit kritischem Katalog der Gemälde*, Berlin 1938, cat. no. 236 (1634), fig. 14. H.-U. Beck, *Jan van Goyen, 1596-1656: ein Oeuvre-verzeichnis*, 111; *Ergänzungen zum Katalog der Handzeichnungen und Ergänzungen zum Katalog der Gemälde, mit einem Geleitw. von Wolfgang Stechow*, cat. no. 398 (1646). For Cuyp see Stephen Reiss, Aelbert Cuyp, London 1975, p. 52, no. 24 (Städtisches Museum, Wuppertal). A.K. Wheelock (ed.), *Aelbert Cuyp*, cat. Washington/London/Amsterdam 2001/2002, cat. no. 24, lists the drawings by Cuyp of views of Amersfoort, from different sides. Museum Flehite in Amersfoort has a drawn panorama that is attributed to Anthonie Waterloo. See also the anonymous drawing in the Koninklijk Huisarchief, The Hague, Atlas Utrecht, vol. 111, photograph L 11904 (with thanks to Burchard Elias for this information).
- 20 Amersfoort, moreover, still lay wholly within its medieval walls. The canon of beautifully situated towns and cities included those along the edge of the dunes of Holland (Alkmaar, Haarlem, Leiden, The Hague and Delft), and those on the banks of the major rivers (Dordrecht, Gorinchem, Rhenen, Arnhem, Nijmegen), plus Amsterdam and Utrecht.
- 21 Hamburg, Kunsthalle; Sum. 1018\*\*.
- 22 Photograph in Archief Eemland, Amersfoort (in the name of Rembrandt). On the basis of the photograph, Peter Schatborn confirmed the provisional attribution to Furnerius 1 suggested, in part in the light of his view of Laren referred to in note 21 and illustrated above, and the view of Houtewaal, which some authors likewise attribute to Furnerius (fig. 2). Cf. also the Furnerius group of landscapes, Sumowski 985\*\* (The Buiten-Amstel) and 988\*\* (View of Amsterdam), illustrated in Bakker et al., *Landscapes*, on pp. 252 and 211 respectively.
- 23 The same applies to Van Ruysdael's painting, which depicts the view from a much higher point on the road to Utrecht, but from virtually the same direction as Furnerius's drawing. The 1697 panoramic view of Amersfoort by Caspar Specht after Herman Saftleven (Hollstein 27, pp. 241-42) is much less topographically reliable; for an illustration see the Museum Flehite website, fig. no. 1000-592). Here the artist has manipulated the view to get as many church towers as possible into the picture.
- 24 I owe this discovery to Erik Schmitz. See Cor van den Braber, *Toren in de tijd. Bouwen en restaureren in pelgrimsstad Amersfoort*, Amersfoort 1998, ill. on p. 69.
- 25 For the history of the tower see Van den Braber (note 24).
- 26 Schatborn, *Drawings* (note 18), no. 111.
- 27 B(urchard) G. J. E(lias), book review, in *Flehite. Tijdschrift voor verleden en heden van Oost-Utrecht* 14 (1982), note 1, p. 6. Elias was able to compare the drawing with one by A. J. van Eyndhoven dated 1830.
- 28 In particular, the location of the famous monumental town gate in Teylers Museum (Benesch 826) has still not been identified despite exhaustive investigations.
- 29 Benesch 824, Musée du Louvre, Paris. See C. van Tuyll in P. Schatborn et al., *Rembrandt dessinateur: chefs-d'œuvre des collections en France*, Paris 2006, cat. no. 43. Unfortunately the topographical explanation here is incorrect. The sheet is generally dated to the late sixteen-forties.
- 30 Later this place was also sometimes called Sprengel; see J. Ayolt Brongers, 'Putstoel en sprengel in Amersfoort; opmerkingen naar aanleiding van de stadskaart van Blaeu', in *Flehite. Tijdschrift voor verleden en heden van Oost-Utrecht* 26 (1999), pp. 35-38.
- 31 Information kindly supplied by Burchard Elias.
- 32 Aside from the paintings by Van Ruysdael and Van Goyen mentioned above, the most important works in terms of the topography of Amersfoort are two panoramic views by Matthias Withoos and a few views of town squares by or after Joost Cornelisz Droochsloot. A painting by or attributed to Abraham de Verwer with a view of Amersfoort seen from the River Eem was auctioned in Amsterdam (Sotheby Mak van Waay) on 18 November 1985. See the websites of Museum Flehite, Amersfoort and the Netherlands Institute for Art History (RKD) in The Hague.
- 33 Jaap Evert Abrahamse, 'Wegh der Weegen: Ontwerp en aanleg van de Amersfoortseweg. Een zeventiende-eeuws landinrichtingsproject door Jacob van Campen', *Jaarboek Flehite* 7 (2006), pp. 72-97, 113-21.