The Great Travel
1668–1670

The great travel of Stensen through Europe from November 1668 to July 1670 is enveloped in enigmatic obscurity.\(^1\) Judged from the Foreword of the *Prodromus*, Stensen looks forward to travelling back to Denmark soon after finishing the manuscript (the first censorship stems from August 30, 1668).\(^2\) He remained in Florence until November, and thereafter he travelled south. Not until in January 1669 did he begin slowly to move north. He took his time in Northern Italy and Central Europe to arrive in Holland at the end of the year. From there, this journey took him back to Florence in only about one month. He saw his home again not until 1672. The traveller seems to have carried out, at the service and at the expenses of the Grand Duke, a geological journey in an active attempt to expand and deepen the findings of the *Prodromus*. The scarce documents from those years fail to explain that long journey and deny that Stensen, actually or erroneously, received a call from his fatherland and that, thereafter, he wanted to hurry home after a short visit in southern Italy. In the south contradictory information met him, but nevertheless he decided on a greater geological journey to Northern Italy and Austria serving his research, always awaiting a renewed call and keeping open his way towards home. The letter to Viviani of April 20, 1669 throws some light on his situation: “I do not know whether I told you that somebody wrote to me in the last letter from home that I should receive new letters from His Majesty. In another, that the one who promised me a letter from the king does not understand the style of the court, etc. I do not know what God has in view with all that…”\(^3\) The Catholic faith of Stensen was indeed the great hindrance and free religious practice in Denmark was a necessary condition for his return.\(^4\)

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\(^{1}\) *Reisen*, 71 ff.


\(^{3}\) EP I, 207.

\(^{4}\) Compare Viviani’s letter, December 13, 1667 (EP I, 27), and Justel’s dated June 13, 1668 (Oldenburg VI, 441). Blondel correspondingly knows that “il l’assura cependant que si on lui accordoit
The scientific interests of the Danish King Fredrik III had led him to the foundation of the great Royal Library. In Peder Schumacher, the later chancellor Griffenfeld, the king had a free-minded advisor, who was certainly friendly inclined to a return of his famous subject. However, with the new absolutist constitution, an intolerant wind blew. When Stensen’s protector, Hans Svane, died in 1668, Professor Hans Wandal was appointed bishop of Zealand. Wandal had expressively pointed out in a book that it was the duty of a king to protect in his kingdom the purely orthodox Lutheran religion, to forbid all sects, to banish their adepts and to refuse free practice of religion.\(^5\)

In that autumn of 1668 we have no trace of Stensen before Viviani, on October 27, writes to the astronomer Gian Domenico Cassini in Bologna: “To satisfy the thirst of knowledge of His Serene Highness my Lord, observations of Jupiter were carried out on the 23rd of this month in the night by the highly honoured Sir Cavalieri Molara, by Mr Auzout and Mr Stensen and by myself with the 10 and 20 yard long telescope of Campani and the said Mr Auzout to check the ephemerides of Your Highness.”\(^6\) On this occasion we also see the Frenchman Adrien Auzout, whom Stensen knew from Paris, in Florence again. Auzout had left France in 1668 to settle in Italy.\(^7\)

### 7.1 Through Italy

In the middle of November we meet Stensen in Rome, which was then still under the sign of the short pontificate of Clement IX. This highly educated Pope proved to be as favourable to artists and the erudite as he was an amicable sovereign for the Roman hospitals. On November 22 he received the Swedish Queen Christina back in Rome after 2 years.\(^8\)

Stensen did not see that. On November 17, Michel Angelo Ricci writes to Cardinal Leopold: “Yesterday I enjoyed seeing Mr Niels Stensen whom I had not greeted since he had become Catholic. After his return from Naples I hope to be able to keep him in Rome many days. His modesty pleases me, and his honesty and his mind which is clear and rich in natural science and other nice knowledge.”\(^9\) Ricci then writes of the bad roads to Naples and of the dangerous influence of the air over the swamps. On the whole, this journey seems to have been full of risks. When Ole

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\(^5\) Helweg I, 458.
\(^6\) Scherz, *Viviani*, 204 f.
\(^7\) EP I, 216. In September he passed Bologna (Adelmann I, 346). By the end of October he was in Florence and later at the recommendation of Cardinal Leopold he was to travel to Rome where Ricci mentions him in a letter in February 1669. Maybe he was in Rome at the same time as Stensen.
\(^8\) Pastor 14\(^1\), 536 ff.
\(^9\) Fabroni, *Lettere* 2, 163.