

COINS, GAMING COUNTERS AND A BALE SEAL FROM OUDEPOST, CAPE*

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ABSTRACT

This is a description of a small collection of coins, gaming counters and a bale seal from the early Dutch East India Company outpost at Oudepost 1, Cape. The finds are contextualized as elements in the colonial network that involved payment to employees, gambling and trade. Comparisons with other sites should be possible as the pace of South African historical archaeology quickens.

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Introduction

The pace of historical archaeological work in South Africa has intensified over the past five years, especially following the development of cultural resource management programmes and the maritime archaeological research at various universities (see, for example, Hall *et al.* 1990; Werz 1990). Among the material remains recovered from these excavations are collections of coins, gaming pieces and baling seals. We present here a description of a small collection of these objects from the VOC outpost at Oudepost, Cape, which provides some insight into the age of the sites under discussion as well as the behaviour of people who left the debris behind.

Oudepost I was a small outpost of the Dutch East India Company, occupied by a garrison of 6-10 men for about 50 years from 1669 until 1732. The post stood on the western shore of Langebaan lagoon and details of its location, architecture and associated artefacts are described elsewhere (Schrire 1988, 1990; Schrire *et al.* 1990; Cruz-Uribe & Schrire 1991; Schrire & Karklins 1991; Schrire & Marwick 1991). Analysis of clay tobacco pipes, ceramics, glass, gunflints, trade beads, buttons and buckles all support the documentary evidence for the date and duration of occupation, and the associated indigenous artefacts have been interpreted as confirming historical accounts of interactions at the post (see Schrire & Deacon 1989; Wilson *et al.* 1990; Schrire & Deacon 1990).

The following coins, counters and seal listed below were recovered from the deposits at Oudepost I.

Doits

- i. LE-H/1. Doit, copper. United Netherlands, Province of Holland, minted in Dordrecht for the Dutch East India Company (VOC) for use in eastern colonial possessions, 1726-1793. Obverse: crowned shield with Lion of Holland. Reverse: VOC mono-

gram with rosette mark of Dordrecht mint above (Scholten 1953:45 no. 79-122). Fig. 1.

- ii. DP/1. Doit, copper. United Netherlands, Province of West Friesland, 1658. Obverse: shield with province's coat of arms partly visible. Reverse: legend W[EST] FRI[SIAE] in two lines, with date below (Verkade 1848:125 no. 412, plate 75:7).
- iii. NA/2. Doit, copper. United Netherlands, probably Province of Friesland. Possibly counterfeit, rather crudely produced and mis-spelt? Early seventeenth century. Obverse: crowned shield with lion within. Reverse: legend in two lines S..RE...IA. Dotted border (Verkade 1848:155 no. 723-6, plate 132:1-4?).
- iv. GO29/5. Doit, copper. United Netherlands, Province of Holland, mint of Dordrecht, 1717. Obverse: Lion of Holland with Liberty cap on spear, all within a fenced garden, the fence symbolizing the Northern Provinces' independence from Spain. No legend. Reverse: inscribed HOLLANDIA in three lines. Above rosette mint mark of Dordrecht. Date below 1717 (Van Gelder 1966:247-8; Verkade 1848:115 no. 315, plate 57:6).
- v. NA/1. Doit, copper. United Netherlands, Province of Holland. 17[2]0 (Van Gelder 1966:247-8; Verkade 1848:115 no. 315, plate 57:6). Fig. 2.
- vi. LD/1. Doit, copper. United Netherlands, Province of Holland. Eighteenth century (Van Gelder 1966:247-8; Verkade 1848:115).
- vii. FR/1. Double doit or oortdje (fragment), copper. United Netherlands, Province of Friesland. Early seventeenth century. Obverse: top of hat of man just visible, to right O. Reverse: decorative flourish around shield just visible. Legend ...NOVA A... (Verkade 1848:155 no. 715-8, plate 226:4, plate 131:1-3, plate 216:2; for reverse legend see especially plate 131:1).



Fig. 1. Copper doit. Netherlands, Province of Holland, minted by the Dutch East India Company for use in the East and the Cape. Obverse and reverse. LE-H/1. Same size.



Fig. 2. Copper doit. Netherlands, Province of Holland, 17[2]0. Obverse and reverse. NA/1. Same size.

Stuivers

- i. LK/1. Probably a base silver two stuivers (dubbele stuiver). United Netherlands, Kampen City in Overijssel province, 1677 (De Vries & Van der Wiel 1965:49 no. 63; Verkade 1848:178 no. 903, plate 166:4). Fig. 3.
- ii. CO27/2. Possibly a base silver one stuiver or two stuivers (dubbele stuiver). United Netherlands, Province of Overijssel, 161[8] (De Vries & Van der Wiel 1963:97-98 nos 68-70; Verkade 1848: plate 143:1-3). Fig. 4.
- iii. EA/2. One stuiver or two stuivers (dubbele stuiver), base silver. United Netherlands, Province of Gelderland, 1614 (Verkade 1848: plate 17:1 or 2).
- iv. EO26-clearance. A fragment, probably of a two stuivers (dubbele stuiver) or one stuiver, base silver. United Netherlands.



Fig. 3. Base silver 2 stuivers. Netherlands, Kampen City in Overijssel Province, 1677. Obverse and reverse. LK/1. Same size.



Fig. 4. Base silver stuiver or 2 stuivers. Netherlands, Province of Overijssel, 161[8]. Reverse only. CO27/2. Same size.

Schellingen (Shillings)

- i. GO29/7. Probably a poor silver arendschelling or eagle shilling (fragment). United Netherlands, probably Kampen or Zwolle City in Overijssel province. Probably 1595-1676. Obverse: Spanish coat-of-arms including Castile and Leon. Reverse: imperial double eagle (hence name arendschelling) (Van Gelder 1966:239; Verkade 1848: plate 165:2, plate 176:3).
- ii. BL/2 and iii. LC/2. Unidentifiable; probably schellingen fragments of poor silver. United Netherlands.

Gaming Counter, Gaming Pieces and Bale Seal

- i. CO28/1. Gaming counter, bronze. England, William and Mary (1688-1694) by L. G. Lauffer of Nürnberg. End of seventeenth century (Hawkins 1969 I:691-2 no. 84). Fig. 5.
- ii. HO35/3. Gaming piece, lead. Circular, two diagonally crossed wheat sheaves incised on one surface. Fig. 6.

nally crossed wheat sheaves incised on one surface. Fig. 6.

- iii. EA/1-1. Gaming piece, lead. Square to circular with rounded corners, cross incised on one surface. Fig. 7.
- iv. RB. Gaming piece, lead (broken in two). Round, cross incised on one surface.
- v. EA/1-2. Gaming piece, lead. Square, cross incised on one surface. Fig. 8.
- vi. CED-1. Gaming piece, lead. Rectangular, incised line down short axis on one surface.
- vii. CED-2. Gaming piece, lead. Oval, raised design of cross (Baart *et al.* 1976:460 nos 867-8).
- viii. GO 31/2. Half bale seal, lead. Possibly from England, Ireland or Spain (J. Baart, pers. comm. 1988). Given as indication of approval by cloth guild. ?Seventeenth century (Baart *et al.* 1976:116 no. 65a).



Fig. 5. Bronze gaming counter with portraits of William and Mary of England (1688-1694), made in Nürnberg. Obverse and reverse. CO28/1. 1.2 magnification.



Fig. 6. Lead gaming piece. Uniface. HO35/3. 0.9 magnification.



Fig. 7. Lead gaming piece. Uniface. EA/1-1. 0.9 magnification.



Fig. 8. Lead gaming piece. Uniface. EA/1-2. 0.9 magnification.

Discussion

The coins found at Oudepost represent the smallest denominations of Dutch coinage. Their sparsity and low values are consistent with the fact that soldiers stationed on outposts such as this one had less direct access to cash than was available to other Company employees. Mentzel, who was at the Cape from 1733-1740, listed the full pay of men on outposts as 108 guilders per annum (Mentzel 1921:163; Boxer 1977:301) which, at the usual exchange rate, worked out at about 15 stuivers per guilder (Mentzel 1925:39). However, men stationed on outposts did not handle much of this money directly because the Company forced them to save their pay by leaving four months of their annual earnings to their credit in the Company's books. Although this might have proved a hardship on occasion, men posted to places such as Oudepost I had fewer ongoing expenses than other soldiers, and had literally nowhere to spend money anyway. There were no taverns in Saldanha Bay and, since the men had no military duties and wore no uniforms, they probably paid very much less to clothe themselves (Leibbrandt 1901:301) than they might have done in a town. Then, too, their food was provided in part by the Company and obtained, also in part, from living off the land by fishing and hunting (see Cruz-Urbe & Schrire 1991). Outpost men did not therefore need to draw *subsidiengeld* of around 2 guilders per month (Mentzel 1921:163f) and were consequently able to pay off their transport debt to the Company faster than other employees and let their pay accumulate (Mentzel 1921:164).

The gaming pieces come as no surprise. If the numerous proclamations forbidding these activities among slaves is any indication of their popularity (Jeffreys 1944:46, 84, 85, 103, 122, 227, 265, 297, 331), gambling (*dobbelary*) and card games were very popular at the Cape (see Shell 1991 for an inventory of the possessions of a Free Black at the Cape that included several packs of cards). The bronze counter (CO28/1) is clearly exotic, but the lead pieces might have been made on the spot. Lists of materials sent to Oudepost I include consignments of lead to the post (VOC 4004) and numerous fragments of molten lead, sheets, lead shot and pulls from bullet moulds all attest to familiarity with this material there.

The bale seal suggests the shipment of cloth to the Cape and thence to Oudepost. There is little documentary confirmation, however, other than a listing in the supplies sent to the Saldanha Bay post on May 31 1669 of "*bethillis* [cloth] to make flags; 1 red, 1 white, 1 blue" (VOC 4004). Bale seals have been found in large numbers on Dutch sites (Baart 1977), as well as numerous native American sites of the contact period (Baart 1987:6-10). Here they denote trade in textiles such as duffels and linen, which was done in exchange for wampum and beaver pelts. The single example from Oudepost carries no such connotations as yet, but future excavations at other sites might yield more direct evidence of trade in cloth at the Cape.

Turning finally to their chronological implications, the small collection from Oudepost I includes five coins inscribed in turn: 1614, 161[8], 1658, 1717 and 17[2]0. Three of these were minted before the historically attested occupation of Oudepost I from 1669-1732. This is of little consequence in itself because there are so few coins involved here that it is just as likely that they were lost by stray visitors to the area as by occupants of the post. But if we were to argue that all the Oudepost I coins were dropped by the tenants of the outpost, then their dates suggest that coinage continued to circulate in Company hands for at least half a century after it was minted (i.e. 1614 until 1669).

A more specific archaeological connotation may be inferred from the date (ii) DP-1 which carries the date 1658. Unlike the rest of the collection which was excavated in and around the buildings at Oudepost, this coin came from a dense heap of bones and artefacts, jammed into a rock pool just beyond the sea wall of the fort, which we term the 'Dump' or 'DP'. It represents a single deposition when a large number of butchered cow bones were scooped up and heaved into the sea, just beyond the fort wall. We were able to obtain a relative date through the analysis of the stem bore diameters of the associated pipe stems (see Schrire *et al.* 1990). The stems from the dump have a mean hole diameter of 2,55 mm which makes the group significantly larger, and hence older, than any other group on the site. Inasmuch as an actual date may be computed from the mean diameter of the stem holes, the entire site with its reading of 2,20 mm is estimated to date around the turn of the eighteenth century, whereas the dump is older, around 1670 (Friederich 1975:75). The coin DP-1 therefore supports the pipe stem data by providing a *terminus post quem* that lies well on the earlier end of historically attested site occupation.

Conclusion

The collection of coins, counters and a single seal from Oudepost I provides a reference list for the site occupied from the late seventeenth to the early eighteenth century, and affords a material expression of the customs of soldiers of the Dutch East India Company.

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