

The Shipwreck of *Haarlem* (1647) in Table Bay

Educational Pamphlet



**African Institute for Marine & Underwater Research,
Exploration & Education (AIMURE)**

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This pamphlet provides background information on a current archaeological project that is undertaken in Cape Town, South Africa. It focuses on the shipwreck of *Haarlem* in Table Bay in 1647. This event resulted in the development of the City of Cape Town. It also stood at the cradle of modern-day multicultural and multiracial South African society.

The text describes the wrecking of this Dutch merchant ship in an historical context. It indicates some aspects of the trading organisation of which it formed part: the United Dutch East India Company (VOC). These include its ships, men, and merchandise. The wrecking of *Haarlem* is described, and the impact it had on the local population in the immediate and long term. This is followed by a brief overview of archaeological work that has been undertaken to date to try to find the shipwreck.

The pamphlet is intended to provide more information on this exciting project for anyone who is interested. Its focus is on learners and educators. We hope that you may enjoy reading and learning more from it!

Produced under the auspices of the African Institute for Marine & Underwater Research,
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Haarlem is the name of a ship of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) that sank in Table Bay, South Africa, in 1647. Shortly after 5:00 p.m. on Monday, March 25, the ship ran aground and became stuck. Attempts to refloat the hull were unsuccessful, and all hope that the ship would ever sail again was soon abandoned. In the days that followed, part of the 120 crew members remained on board the wreck and began salvaging the cargo and contents, while others went ashore to secure a shelter. They were soon joined by crew members of two other ships with which the *Haarlem* had sailed in a convoy from Batavia in the Dutch East Indies on the return journey to Europe.



On 1 April 1647, it was decided that 62 men of *Haarlem* were to be left behind to save as much of the cargo as possible. They spent the year following in a survivor camp, before being rescued by another VOC fleet that entered Table Bay in March 1648. During their stay, the men of *Haarlem* encountered indigenous people. Contrary to some earlier experiences between Europeans and indigenes, these contacts developed into friendly relationships. This, together with observations on the natural environment, such as the fruitful soil and the presence of fresh drinking water, was reported upon in a report that was presented to VOC management. The Company finally decided to establish a refreshment station for passing ships on the shores of Table Bay. This settlement developed over time into the City of Cape Town. The wrecking of *Haarlem* can thus be regarded as one of the roots of present-day multiracial and multicultural South African society.

No shipwreck worldwide ever had such an impact on the history of an entire nation.

During the 17th century, many nations in Europe were in upheaval. Several conflicts occurred, one of which became known as the Dutch Revolt or the Eighty Years War (1568-1648). The war started when the Dutch revolted against King Philip II of Spain, who at the time was also ruler of the Netherlands through inheritance. Philip's stance against Protestantism, his unwillingness to grant greater political independence, repressive measures, and increasing taxes prompted several relatively independent territories to join forces against him.

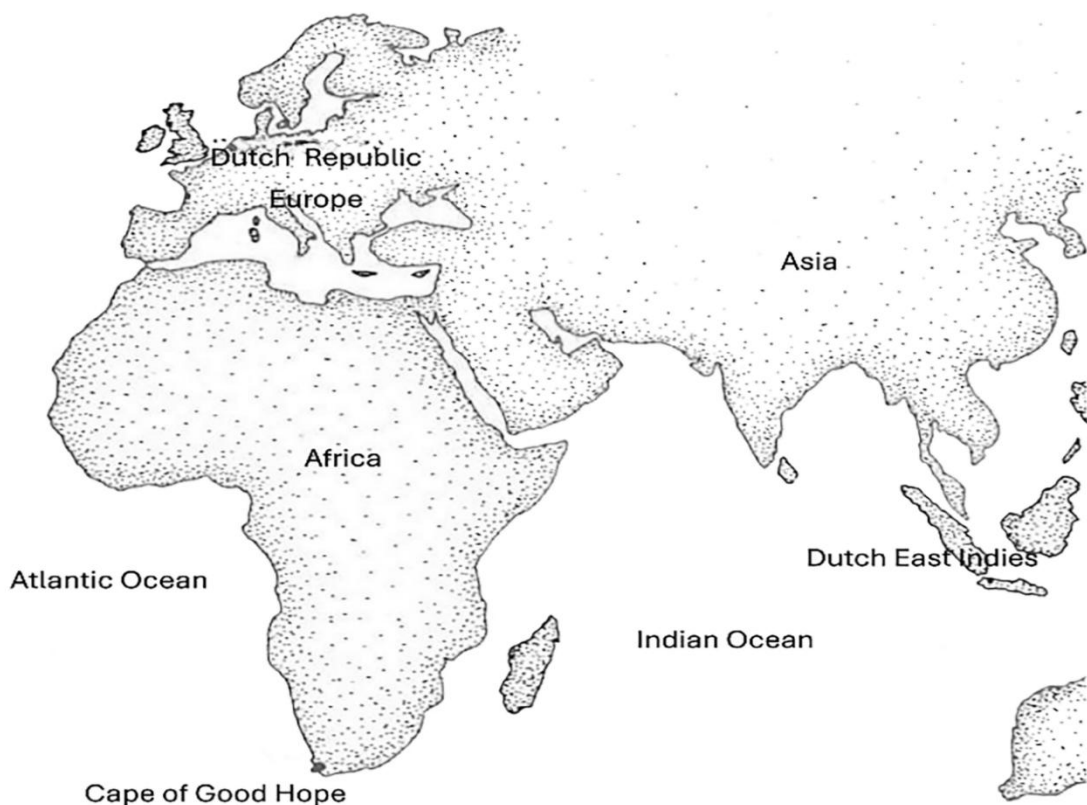
In 1579, the Union of Utrecht formalized this cooperation, and the Dutch Republic was created. Although the new state was nearly continually at war with Spain and its ally Portugal, it prospered and a 'Golden Age' of inventions and a rich cultural life followed. It was the time of painters, such as Rembrandt van Rijn and Frans Hals, philosophers such as Hugo de Groot who also laid the foundations for international law, the inventor of the microscope and 'father' of microbiology Antonie van Leeuwenhoek, and engineers such as Jan van der Heyden, who invented the fire engine, and Jan Adriaansz Leeghwater, who stood at the base of hydraulic engineering. At the same time, the new state also became very strong economically. The Dutch capital, Amsterdam, became the financial hub of the world and it was here that the first international stock exchange was created. These developments were in part a result of the dominant position the Dutch already held and that was largely based on international commerce and trade. Being a maritime nation, they exchanged a multitude of products between different regions, ranging from Russia and the Baltic, to the British Isles, the Mediterranean, the Middle East, the Americas, the African west coast, the Indian Ocean and Asia. It is within this context that the United Dutch East India Company or *Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (VOC) was established in 1602.



During the late 16th and early 17th centuries, different independent companies that traded with Asia existed in the Dutch Republic. Competition and rivalry between them sometimes affected the state's economy. To reduce this negative influence, they were amalgamated in 1602 into one united company, the VOC. This company also became an important tool to combat Iberian interests in the East. For that reason, the national government allowed it certain rights. These included the right to conclude treaties with foreign powers, to maintain its own army and its own fleet of armed ships, to issue its own coins, the right to mete out justice, and even to execute capital punishment on its own personnel.

The Company had six regional offices in the Dutch Republic. Of these, Amsterdam was the most powerful, as it held 50% of the shares. The Zeeland office was the second most important and held 25% of shares, with the remainder divided between the towns of Rotterdam, Delft, Hoorn, and Enkhuizen. The capital was provided by shareholders who came from different backgrounds. Central management was in the hands of a board of 17 directors that were also known as Gentlemen XVII. These decided on general policy. The organization was the first joint-stock company in the world and is sometimes considered to have been the first multinational corporation.

The VOC operated all over Asia and its sphere of influence extended from the Cape of Good Hope eastwards. The most important overseas post was Batavia in the then Dutch East Indies, known today as Jakarta in Indonesia. This was also the place where the governor-general and the council of India resided. From Batavia, the other outposts were managed, stretching as far as Persia, Ceylon, India, Japan, Taiwan, and China. From 1652 onwards, this also included the Cape of Good Hope.



To transport people and goods, the Company made use of different ships. Most of these were constructed on its own dockyards at the various regional offices. In time, a specific design developed that suited the inter-continental trade. It was characterized by a large cargo hold and a flat stern, and was supplied with cannons for offensive and defensive purposes. For that reason, the VOC sometimes made ships and men available to support the Dutch Navy in times of war. These so-called return ships were constructed according to different classes. *Haarlem* was a return ship of the biggest class at the time and measured approximately 45 meters in length, 10 meters wide, and had a displacement of about 500 tons.

During the nearly two centuries of its existence, from 1602 to 1799, the VOC used approximately 1,772 ships of which about 1,581 were purpose-built. Together, these vessels undertook at least 4,789 outward-bound and 3,401 homeward voyages. It is estimated that almost a million Europeans were transferred to work in the Asiatic trade and that more than 2.5 million tons of Asian trade goods were transported during this period. These goods consisted mainly of spices, such as pepper, cloves, nutmeg, mace, and cinnamon. Other products included Asiatic textiles, dyes, and porcelain. These were carried with the annual return fleets that mostly departed from Batavia.



An average voyage could take anything from six to nine months and sometimes even longer. This often included a stop-over at the Cape of Good Hope to take in fresh drinking water and provisions. Aboard return ships were often hundreds of people, divided between seafarers and military personnel, with occasionally a few passengers. As the Dutch population was too small to meet the demand for personnel, many VOC servants came from abroad. Although most seafarers were Dutch, the majority of military personnel consisted of foreigners.

Since being sighted by Portuguese mariners towards the end of the 15th century, Table Bay had become a welcome stopover for European ships. During the long inter-oceanic voyages, the bay served many of them as a stopover to take in fresh provisions, drinking water, and a place for the sick aboard to convalesce. The area was occupied by indigenous people called Khoikoi or Khoekhoen, who were nomadic pastoralists. One of the most objective descriptions of these people was written by Abraham Bogaert (*1663 - †1727) and published in 1711 in Amsterdam.

“... of moderate stature, rather slim than fat, and brown in color, although some are also found who tend to yellowish. Their hair is short and curly [...] eyes are black, piercing, and clear [...] The women are smaller in stature but with fine and slender legs [...] They all wear a sheepskin [...] which hangs with the hair inwards over their shoulders like a cloak [...] A piece of rhinoceros hide serves them for shoes [...] on their necks chains of red and yellow copper, made by themselves, and set off their hands with rings of copper, a metal much prized by them [...] The women roll around their legs the guts of wild beasts, or strips of small skins plaited together, which serve them as an ornament and protect them from the pricks of the sharp thorns, and serve also to increase their pleasure in dancing by their noise and rattling; and at times serve as a useful remedy for hunger, when they are attacked by famine. All their riches and all their trade goods consist of tame cattle, namely oxen and sheep which they barter to our folk [...] they keep the law of Nations so unimpaired, that they can rival the most civilized peoples of Europe ... “.



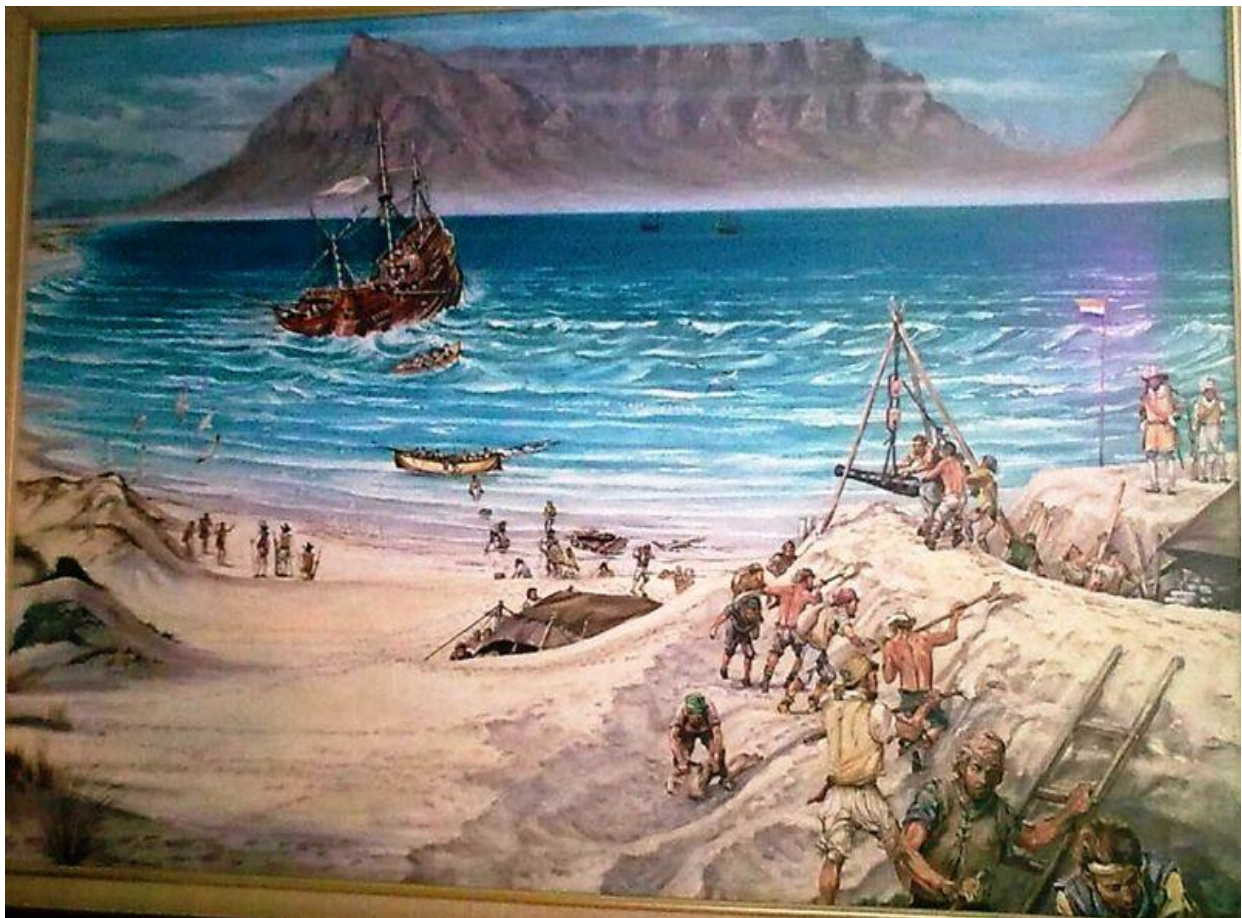
Haarlem was built in the Amsterdam dockyard of the VOC during the period 1635-1636. According to the resolutions of Gentlemen XVII of Thursday 22 May 1636, the ship was officially to be called *Nieu Haarlem* or *New Haarlem*, after the city of Haarlem, but most historical sources only refer to *Haarlem*. Before being wrecked in Table Bay, the return ship completed three successful voyages to the East and back. The fourth and last outward-bound journey commenced on 15 May 1646, when it left the roads near the island of Texel. After a stopover at the Cape Verde islands, it reached Batavia on 2 November of that same year. Already two-and-a-half months later, on 16 January 1647, it departed from Batavia in the company of *Witte Olifant* and *Schiedam*. The ship carried 120 people and cargo for the VOC office of Amsterdam valued at 183,018 Dutch guilders.



During the early afternoon of 25 March, *Haarlem* entered Table Bay under calm conditions. A few hours later, a south-easterly wind picked up. Sailing close to the wind, Master Pietersz tried to change course upon reaching a water depth of 8 fathoms (14.5m), but the rudder did not respond. By then, *Haarlem* was already close to shore and battled against rough seas. Suddenly, some of the foresails caught wind and forced the ship even closer to the beach. Shortly after 17.00hrs the vessel touched ground and was pounded by the surf. An anchor was lowered immediately to prevent it from being beached further, but the waves broke the cable and the hull was stuck. The next day it was found that *Haarlem* was firmly lodged in sand, approximately a musket shot or 60 meters away from the shore. Attempts to free the ship ensued but according to Leendert Jansz, the junior merchant on board, this: "... was as likely as counting the stars".

Fortunately, Junior Merchant Leendert Jansz kept a daily log of events at the time, and parts of this have survived. His writings describe in detail what happened during the period when part of the crew of *Haarlem* was marooned on the shore of Table Bay. He reports that immediately after it became clear that it was impossible to save the ship, the crew started to transfer goods to shore. For example, on 27 March 1647, some ammunition and clothing were sent to a small group of people who had managed to reach the beach. They were soon followed by others, including two carpenters and their tools to build a tent. Their boat, however, was swamped and the men had to jump off to save their lives. One of the carpenters, who could not swim, drowned. During the morning of the following day, two English ships anchored in the roads. They soon got involved in salvage operations and took 40 of the *Haarlem* crew with them when they continued their voyage a few days later.

On 1 April, *Schiedam* arrived and a meeting of the officers of the three VOC ships was held. They decided that Leendert Jansz and First Mate Claes Winckels, together with 60 others, would stay behind to salvage as much of the *Haarlem* cargo as possible. During the days following, a fortification was constructed in the dunes, and a well was dug to provide fresh drinking water. During the first half of April 1647, building on the fortification and the transfer of goods and people continued. On 12 April, *Witte Olifant* and *Schiedam* left for the Dutch Republic taking with some of the salvaged goods from *Haarlem*. Upon their return, on 9 and 10 August 1647 respectively, VOC management was informed in detail of the fate of *Haarlem* and its crew.



On 8 March 1648, the first ship of the return fleet from Batavia for that year entered Table Bay on its way to the Dutch Republic. From 8 to 19 March, a total of twelve richly laden return ships with about 1,566 seafarers, soldiers, and passengers dropped anchor in the roadstead under the command of Wollebrant Geleijnsz de Jongh. This energetic official soon ordered the transport of salvaged equipment, goods, and cargo from *Haarlem* on board the fleet. This included 272,762 pounds of pepper, 144 bales and six bags containing cinnamon, 100 chests with sugar, 109 bales of Guinea textiles, seven chests with indigo, and 140 tubs with porcelain of which much was damaged. Some cannons were also recovered, but four heavy anchors and 19 iron cannons were left behind in the wreck as it was too difficult to salvage them.



On 3 April 1648, the fleet continued its voyage with the 62 men from *Haarlem* on board. As insufficient provisions had been obtained at the Cape, it was decided to sail to the island of St Helena. From there, the voyage continued on 5 May. The last leg of the journey took just over three months, and many fell ill or died due to a lack of fresh provisions. On 7 and 8 August all vessels returned safely in the Dutch Republic.

Upon their return, some of the men from *Haarlem* were questioned by a committee of officials from the Amsterdam VOC office. Probably around that same time, Leendert Jansz and another VOC official named Matthijs Proot started to compile a proposal to establish a refreshment station for passing ships at the Cape. This *Remonstrantie* was presented to the VOC on Monday 26 July 1649 and brought to the attention of Gentlemen XVII the following year. On 20 August 1650 the directors decided in favour of the proposal.

The *Remonstrantie* provides detailed information on the Cape of Good Hope during the mid-17th century and contributed directly to the decision to establish a refreshment station here. It contains observations on the natural conditions and proposes the creation of a garden to cultivate fruits and vegetables to supply passing ships.

“... as the soil [...] is very good and fertile, and as during the dry season the water may be guided [...] into the garden to irrigate everything, all things will grow as well as in any other place in the world”.

Other provisions, such as meat, could be obtained by bartering. The authors reported positively on the indigenes and argued that they were not lawless, brutal persons but ordinary human beings. In several passages, their friendly demeanour and hospitality is emphasized. Even though it was stated that some Europeans had been killed by them around the time that *Haarlem* was wrecked, this was explained as follows.

“It is therefore beyond doubt that the killing of our people is caused more by revenge due to the stealing of their cattle, than because they want to eat them. So one should not blame the indigenous people, but our own for their rude ingratitude”.



The authors also imply that stronger bonds between the locals and those from overseas could be developed as: “... they speak a few words [in Dutch], so it is beyond doubt that they can learn our language”. It was also deemed necessary that the settlement: “... should have a good commander who treats the indigenous people politely and who pays for everything that is bartered from them ...”. This is reflected in a VOC instruction dated 12 December 1651: “... it will be necessary to have good contact with the inhabitants [...] and you have to prevent harming their people or their cattle...”.

On 6 April 1652, the VOC ship *Dromedaris* dropped anchor in Table Bay. It had departed from the Dutch Republic on Sunday 24 December 1651, together with *Reiger* and *Goede Hoop*. The three vessels had been despatched to transport equipment and less than 100 people to establish a Company outpost at the Cape. The person in charge of the venture was Johan or Jan Anthonisz van Riebeeck (*1619 - †1677). In the decade that followed, Commander Van Riebeeck and his people laid the foundations for the refreshment station that later developed into the City of Cape Town.



Van Riebeeck entered the service of the VOC and sailed to Batavia in April 1639. In 1645 he took charge of the Company trading station at Tongking in Vietnam. From there, he went to Decima in Japan where he was relieved of his duties and ordered back to the Dutch Republic, having defied a ban on private trading. He returned on board the *Koning van Polen*, one of the twelve ships of the return fleet of 1648 that repatriated the men from *Haarlem*. During the stopover in Table Bay, and possibly during the last leg of the journey, he gathered information through direct observation and conversations with some of the *Haarlem* crew. Upon his return, he was tried and discharged. Grovelling back into VOC service, he was reinstated about two years later and tasked to establish the new outpost. It is doubtful that he was the right person for this job, as during his tenure he contravened more than once with the instructions as given to him. He also disagreed with Leendert Jansz' positive opinion regarding the indigenes, being of the opinion that they: "... are completely untrustworthy, but are a brutal gang that live without any conscience [...] they have to be approached cautiously and one should not become too close".

In October 1988, a plan was conceived to research the history of *Haarlem* in more detail. This seemed all the more relevant due to the important role this shipwreck has played unwittingly in the formation of the multiracial and multicultural society that exists in South Africa today. Initial work focused on tracing available data. From this, it became clear that there was actually very little information available at the time, and that some of this which was published during the 19th and 20th centuries was unreliable. Further research in archives and libraries in South Africa and the Dutch National Archive in the Netherlands indicated that several relevant historical documents still exist but that only part of these had been studied. Of these, the daily log kept by Junior Merchant Leendert Jansz van Tongeren is of utmost importance. Although only part has survived — covering the period 25 March to 14 September 1647 —, this daily account of events, supplemented with information from related correspondence and the *Remonstrantie*, has allowed for a detailed re-enactment of the wrecking.

Since 2012, the *Haarlem* Project is undertaken under the auspices of the African Institute for Marine & Underwater Research, Exploration & Education (AIMURE). AIMURE is a non-profit and non-governmental organization based in Cape Town. The main objectives of the *Haarlem* Project are to locate the shipwreck and the survivor camp, that was dubbed *Fort Zandenburch*. To that purpose, various surveys were undertaken over the years. These included regular field-walks to look for traces of the camp site. This was followed by geophysical surveys using a magnetometer. This instrument detects disturbances in the earth's magnetic field that can point to both the shipwreck and the associated survivor camp. The geophysical surveys were followed by test excavations. One of these, undertaken on Sunday 9 September 2018, revealed material that matches that from other VOC shipwrecks.



Archival research that was undertaken as part of the *Haarlem* Project focused on written documents, as well as contemporary maps and charts. Studying these two different sets of evidence in conjunction, resulted in an approximation of the location where the shipwreck occurred and where *Fort Zandenburch* was established.

Different historical sources indicate that *Haarlem* foundered in the north-eastern part of Table Bay, in shallow water close to a sandy shore. The maximum distance to shore was recorded as approximately 60 meters. Also, the distance to the place where VOC ships normally anchored and where their crews went ashore was indicated as 1.5 (Dutch) miles or approximately 11,112 meters. This information was transferred onto a modern chart of Table Bay and compared to the different historical maps and charts that had been accumulated.

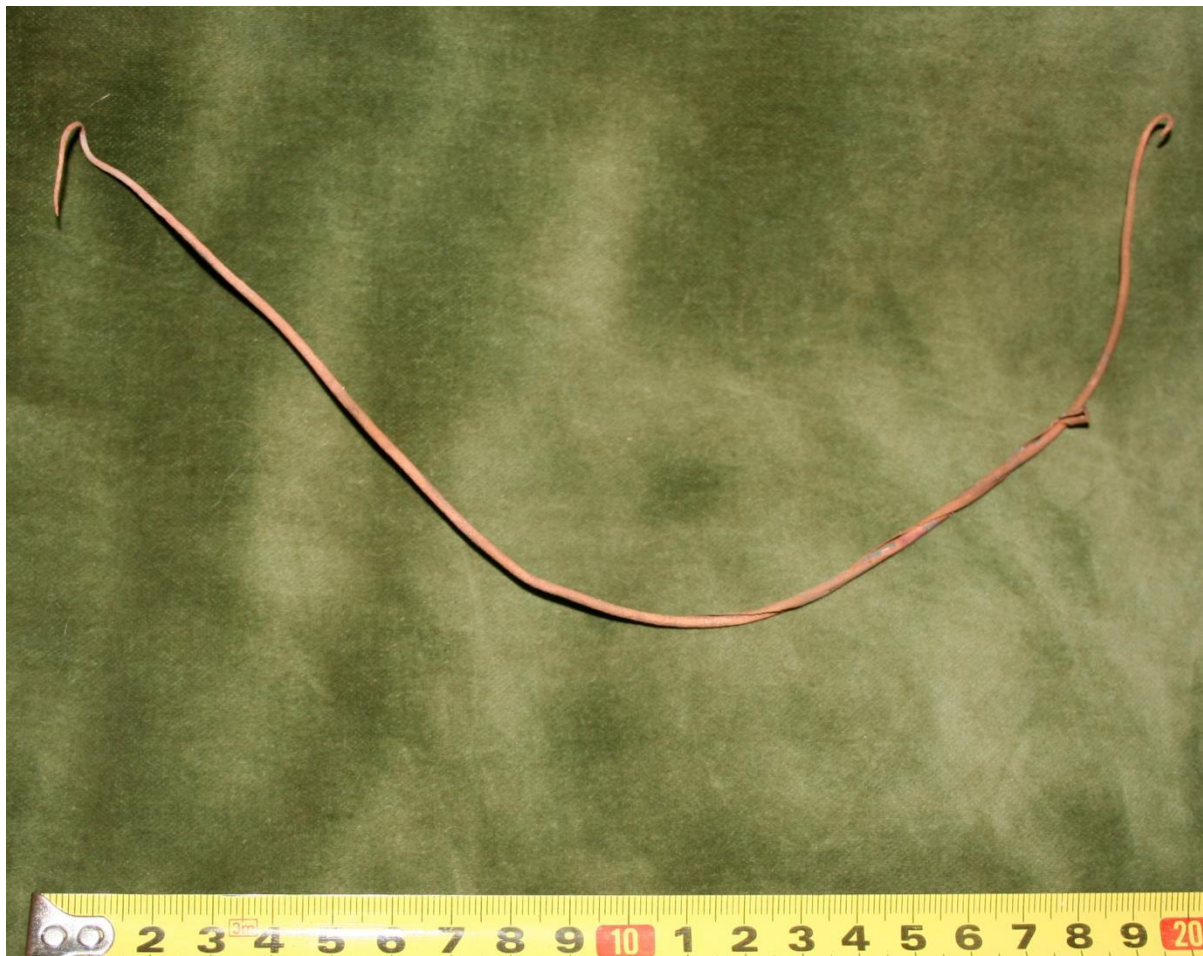
Both the written sources and the cartographic material provided further clues of the 17th century situation, indicating that the wreck of *Haarlem* was very close to an area inland with salt-pans. This is confirmed by Jan van Riebeeck in an entry in his journal made on Monday 20 May 1652. "Paid a visit to the wreck of the ship 'Haerlem' which we saw still buried in the sand. [...] fetching salt, which we found in fair abundance in that vicinity ...". Nearly seven years later, his journal reports on Wednesday 29 January 1659: "... large salt-pans above the wreck ...".



Next, a geological study was undertaken. At the base lay information on the stratigraphy of the area where the survivor camp was established. This was documented by the *Haarlem* crew when they dug a well to provide drinking water. The aim of the study was to compare the local stratigraphy with the general area. The results indicated a location in close proximity to the position that had already been established on the basis of the written sources.

The results of the combined historical, cartographic, geological and geophysical studies also correspond with the results of the test excavation that was undertaken on 9 September 2018. During this limited excavation, objects including hand-forged nails, lead sheeting, and a copper sheet with lead lining were found that strongly resemble finds from other VOC shipwrecks. Historical sources indicate that the stem and stern, as well as the rudder of VOC vessels were often sheathed with lead-lined copper plates. The greater part of the hull was, however, covered with iron nails that, once corroded, created a protective ferrous layer against marine borers. Lead sheeting is also ubiquitous on VOC shipwreck sites. Patches of lead were used to cover holes in the hull, to make this watertight, whereas the muzzles and touch holes of cannons were often covered with lead sheeting to keep the gunpowder inside dry.

Another interesting object is most likely a necklace and made from a thin rod of hand-drawn copper. It has been recorded that the men from *Haarlem* bartered copper with indigenous people and the journal of Jan van Riebeeck is full of references to this practise. On 18 December 1652, he writes that: "... they had already received much copper from us which they were busy making into bracelets and chains for ornaments". On 14 January 1653, he reported: "Meanwhile, when we discussed with our interpreter Harry [...] what the Saldanhars did with the copper, he gave us to understand, in broken English, that they made from it the bracelets and chains which we have seen them wearing. These they again bartered with certain other tribes far inland for cattle, and then obtained more copper from the Dutch and English ships every year ...". This seemingly inconspicuous object may thus symbolise interaction between indigenes and those from overseas.





The *Haarlem* Project has entered an exciting phase. Various research avenues have provided strong indications for the wreck location, but material analyses of metals recovered still has to be undertaken. If these reveal a Central or Northern European origin than this provides a further positive clue, as the VOC mostly imported metals from these regions. The next step is to undertake core drilling in the area of interest. If this results in wood samples that can be identified and dated, this will add one further step in the positive identification of the site.

Only excavation will provide 100% certainty that *Haarlem* has been found. This project is going to be complex and costly. Due to its location, it will not be possible to excavate the hull underwater. In stead, a dam has to be constructed around it to enable excavation in a relatively dry environment. Should the ship be excavated and recorded in future, the wreck will have to be re-buried *in situ*. This is the most viable and best option to preserve this object for future generations.

The *Haarlem* Project has been a private initiative to date. Not one cent has been received from local, provincial, or national government, nor from the country from where the ship originated. During the last 37 years, all searches, surveys, and research was undertaken by private individuals, supported mainly by donations in kind from a handful of sponsors. This situation is no longer tenable.

Bearing in mind of what has already been achieved, but even more so by taking into consideration the most important role this project can play in future, government(s) should become involved. Only in this way, the symbolic importance of *Haarlem* as laying at the cradle of the Rainbow Nation of South Africa can be fully acknowledged and appreciated.

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