

# WAPEN VAN AMSTERDAM

A History.

On 19 September 1667 the Dutch merchant vessel *Wapen van Amsterdam* was blown off course by a severe North Atlantic storm to find her demise on the rocky shore of Iceland.

The vessel had a crew of 140, with a cargo of textile, spices, metals, precious stones and other goods. Over fifty of the crew survived the ordeal; some of the cargo was salvaged.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the late 16th century, merchants in the Dutch decided to import pepper and spices from Asia themselves. The Portuguese, who until then controlled this lucrative trade, were no longer able to supply Europe with sufficient pepper and spices. The consequence of the declining supply was an increase in prices. Backed by the necessary capital and knowledge Dutch merchants ordered their ships to Asia. At first the trade was short term; companies were created, ships were hired or bought and crew recruited. After the voyage wages were paid and the ship was sold. A new expedition could be launched from profits made. In the years 1595 to 1602 eight companies from Holland and Zeeland – the economic heart of the Dutch Republic – fitted 65 ships for the Asia trade. However, the prosperous growth of the sector was jeopardized by the fierce competition between the companies from Zeeland and Amsterdam. This in fighting benefited Portugal.

## VOC

The government of the Republic was concerned about this development and took action by compelling the merchants to cooperate. This resulted on 20 March 1602 in the establishment of the *Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (VOC) the United East India Company, better known as the Dutch East India Company. The States General granted the VOC a Charter that stipulated that no one except the VOC could send ships from the Dutch Republic or trade with the area east of the Cape of Good Hope and west of the Strait of Magellan. The VOC was also entitled to conclude agreements with monarchs, build fortresses, wage war and install local authorities on behalf of the States General. The company had obtained rights that were normally reserved for a sovereign state. The VOC had offices, called Chambers, in six major cities in Holland and Zeeland, of which Amsterdam was most prominent. Besides offices in most cases there were warehouses, a cannon foundry, stores for ship's supplies, a sawmill, a shipyard and associated industries.

In Asia the company made use of its charter to the full extent. On 30 May 1619 the armed forces of the VOC conquered the Javanese port town of Jaccatra. The Dutch renamed it Batavia and used it as a base to conquer Java and the outer islands, and a hub for trade. Until the company ceased to be, in 1800, the VOC had a permanent harbour and a repair dock for its ships and central warehouse facilities for trade, and a governmental and administrative centre housed in Batavia Castle. Transport of goods from Asia to Europe was expensive. To finance these costs the VOC set up an intra-Asian trade network with maritime trading posts between Basra in present day Iraq, and Japan. To connect these ports the VOC used all sorts of ships. For the long voyage between Europe and Asia the company built its own ships, to its own design, on its own shipyards.

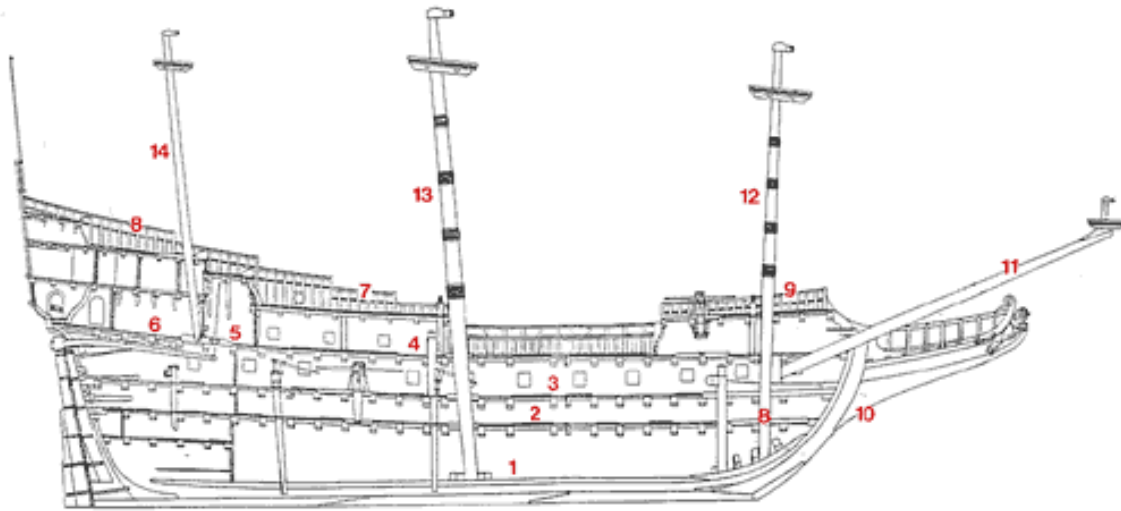


Image of the vessel Batavia; quite similar to the *Wapen van Amsterdam*.

## WAPEN VAN AMSTERDAM

The ship the *Wapen van Amsterdam*, was built in 1653 on the VOC's shipyard in Amsterdam, a type *East Indiaman*; designed for long-distance trade. The ship had a length of 147 ft; a beam of 35 ft and the cargo hold was 12 ft deep. In comparison to other ships the *Wapen van Amsterdam* was a rather large vessel. The deadweight tonnage was 460 *last* (920 tonnes). An inventory list of 1660 showed 30 guns varying in pound rating from 4, 6, 8, and 12 to 18. In times of war it was common to put more cannons on a ship like the *Wapen van Amsterdam*. With an armament of 35-40 cannons this East Indiaman differed little from a war ship.

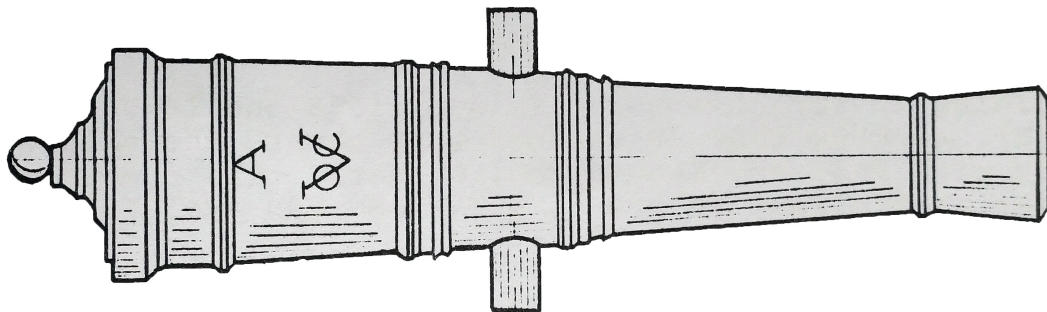
The abbreviation VOC was the company's brand. The logo consisted of a capital letter V and an O on left leg and a C on the right leg. Each Chamber of VOC had its own logo, with the first letter of their town atop VOC. The logo was used for items like flags, cannons, coins, or to indicate property of objects or cargo.



The logo of the  
VOC Chamber  
of Amsterdam

Photograph of the  
VOC Chamber of  
Amsterdam on a  
cannon.

The *Wapen van  
Amsterdam* is very  
likely to have been  
fitted with guns  
with such a logo.



Drawing of a cannon. It shows the logo of the VOC Chamber of Amsterdam.

## VOYAGES

The *Wapen van Amsterdam* made four successful voyages to and fro Batavia, the VOC's hub in Asia. Her maiden voyage began on 20 October 1654 when she sailed under the command of Master Pieter Jansz Mundt from Vlie straits in the north of the Republic to the VOC's settlement at the Cape of Good Hope on the southern tip the African continent. A call at the Cape was compulsory for the company's ships. In 1652 the VOC had established the first European settlement in southern Africa. The settlement supplied ships with fresh water, vegetables and meat. There was exchange of messages and information on ships, trade, troubles and weather. At the Cape ships arrived to strengthen the VOC's labour force with farmers, clerks, military and enslaved persons. Wounded or ill crew were sent to a special company hospital for recovery. Occasionally, passengers and additional crew were taken on board. For the VOC the stopover was also an opportunity to change its sailing instructions in case of war, bad weather, redirect the flow of goods and to organize search parties to find ships gone missing. The journey of the *Wapen van Amsterdam* continued from the Cape and the vessel sailed on to arrive on 21 June 1655 at Batavia. The voyage had taken 244 days. On 16 July 1657 the ship was back at Vlie in the Dutch Republic, with a cargo valued at 274.061 Guilders destined for the VOC Chamber of Amsterdam.

For the next voyage to Batavia the ship set sail on 13 October 1657. Master Andries Wolf died on the way. Jan Jansz. Vlodrop succeeded him. It must have been crowded on board with 317 people. At the Cape sixteen enslaved persons embarked. They were registered as 'passengers'; four of them did not survive the voyage to Batavia. In all 33 people passed away. On 14 December 1658 the return voyage began from Batavia to the Cape, to arrive on 23 February 1659. On the last leg the *Wapen van Amsterdam* spent a fortnight at the island of St. Helena. Arrival at Vlie was on 30 June 1659 with a cargo valued at 233,025 Guilders destined for the VOC Chamber of Amsterdam.

The two voyages that followed were rather uneventful. Master Michiel Engelken commanded the *Wapen van Amsterdam* on her third voyage to Batavia and back to the Vlie from 17 December 1659 to 30 June 1661. The cargo was valued at 353,729 Guilders. On the fourth voyage Master Jan Idese de Vink was in command during the voyage to Batavia and back to the Vlie from 30 January 1661 to 18 July 1663. The ship had a cargo valued at 486,708 Guilders. For the fifth outbound voyage the *Wapen van Amsterdam* departed the Vlie on 21 May 1664 and arrived at the Cape on 11 October 1664. Ten days later sails were set for Batavia. Arrival was on 24 January 1665. According to the archives the ship had 239 people on board: 155 seafarers, 77 soldiers and 7 passengers.



## REINIER BRINKMANS

The last master to command the *Wapen van Amsterdam* was Reinier Brinkmans. On his earlier outbound voyage to the East he commanded the yacht *Landsmeer*. It had taken four months - from 26 April 1663 to 27 August 1663 - to sail from Holland to the Dutch settlement at the southern tip of the African continent. There, at the Cape, he was assigned to the task of finding the missing crew of the *Arnhem*, which had ran aground at the Cargados Carajos, a group of atolls and reefs, 430 kilometres northeast of Mauritius, on 12 February 1662 and was lost at sea. About 80 survivors reached Mauritius and were picked up later. The *Landsmeer* sailed from the Cape via Mauritius and Madagascar to arrive on 12 February 1664 at Batavia.

The whereabouts of Reinier Brinkmans between February 1664 and January 1667 are not known.

## LAST VOYAGE

On 26 January 1667 master Brinkmans sailed with the *Wapen van Amsterdam* from Batavia for the Dutch Republic in a fleet of nine. This fleet consisted of the vessels: *Amersfoort*, *Eendracht*, *Hazenburg*, *Kasteel van Medemblik*, *Zuidpolsbroek*, *Esperance*, *Middelburg*, *Wapen van Amsterdam* and *Walcheren*. Most of the ships were of the type East Indiaman; two flutes completed the fleet.<sup>1</sup> Commander of the fleet was Johan van Dam on board the *Zuidpolsbroek*. The total value of the VOC-cargo of the fleet amounted to 3,1 million guilders. Calculated to present date that would be a value of 36,5 million Euros or 40 million USD.

The voyage from Batavia to the Cape took well over 100 days. On the 8th of May the *Esperance* was the first to arrive. A few days later, on the 13th of May, the entire fleet had arrived. At the Cape a triplet of flutes - *Cecilia*, *Opperdoes* and *Sparendam* - that had departed on the 26th of March 1667 from Bengal, joined the return fleet. On 8 June 1667 the fleet of twelve ships departed the Cape, homeward bound.

## CARGO

From a compiled cargo list and later reports on salvaged cargo from the wreck one gets a reasonable idea of the cargo carried by the *Wapen van Amsterdam*. On board were textiles (silks, batik, cotton), spices, metals (tin and copper), precious stones (diamonds, gems, pearls), various other goods in smaller amounts like gold, silver, drugs, dyes, paint, food, oil and special wood). As on every return voyage there must have been on board a private cargo from officers and crew. The total value of the VOC-cargo on board the *Wapen van Amsterdam* amounted to 367.680 guilders. Calculated to present date that would be a value of 4,3 million Euro or 4,7 million USD.

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<sup>1</sup> A flute was a distinctive ship design developed by the Dutch for an inexpensive and efficient cargo ship to carry bulky cargo with relatively few seamen and few, if any, guns. Also called a "fluit" or "flyboat". King, D, *A Sea of Words*, 167.

## WAR

The Dutch Republic and England were at war. This Second Anglo-Dutch War started on 4 March 1665 and the fight for maritime dominance and trade went on till 31 July 1667. By the time fleet commander Van Dam had his convoy ploughing the Atlantic swell, both countries were still in a state of war. Instead of sailing through the English Channel the fleet set her course around Scotland, thus avoiding the expected contact with the English navy. In times of tension or war, Dutch navy ships usually escorted inbound merchant vessels to a safe port in the Republic. Likewise, in the autumn of 1667, the return fleet was expected for an escort in the Northern Atlantic, but no contact was made.

## STORM

On 17 September 1667 a storm developed on the North Atlantic. It was to shape violent winds and waves, along with torrential rains, resulting in death and destruction on land and at sea. It created havoc in northern America, as well as in Europe. On 18 September the ships in the convoy had lost sight of each other and sailed to the Faroer Islands. The *Walcheren* was wrecked on Mykines, one of the Faroer islands. Most of her crew perished. Islanders salvaged goods from the ship. On 19 September on the shore of Iceland the *Wapen van Amsterdam* met a similar fate. The remainder of the fleet arrived on 1 October 1667 at Torshavn on the main Faroer island of Stremoy. From thereon the ships set course to the Dutch Republic and Germany to arrive at their destinations between 9 and 25 October 1667.

## ICELAND

On the 19th of September, after two days in the Atlantic tempest the *Wapen van Amsterdam*, not expecting to have land in sight, ran aground in darkness on the reefs near Skeidararsandur on Iceland. After two hours on the rocks the tormented vessel broke up in heavy seas. Few of the crew swam to safety; others came ashore with the longboat. Others used a line from the ship that was held by some who already come ashore with the boat. Many people drowned upon reaching the shore. Master Reinier Brinkmans died on Icelandic soil. About ninety of the crew of 140, perished at sea, drowned or died of exhaustion due to the cold weather. It is also possible that the combination of low temperatures and the reported excessive drinking of hard liquor by some survivors contributed to the loss of life. In all, fifty-two or three of the crew survived, they received help from local inhabitants. Fourteen of the survivors sailed on board the freighter of master Jan Jansz. Crop to Glückstadt (Germany) and returned from thereon to the Netherlands.



Map of Iceland (Tabula Islandiae), by Joris Carolus in the year 1664.  
Source: Scheepvaartmuseum Amsterdam (S.1034\_(01) kaart 014)

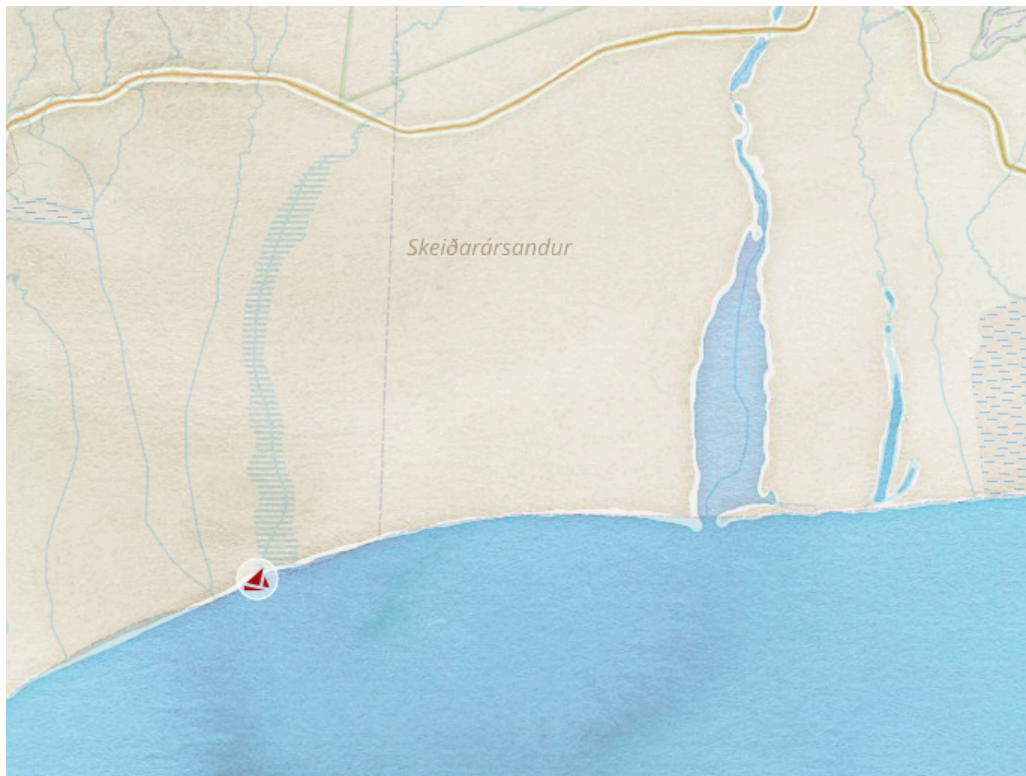


## SALVAGE

The cargo from the *Wapen van Amsterdam* was partly lost at the time the ship was wrecked. *As it took some time before it became clear that the vessel was lost, there must have been enough time for the crew to take care of their own valuables and for the officers to take care of the most valuable cargo, like diamonds.*

From the records it is clear that most of the cargo was salvaged immediately after the incident, by the crew and by local inhabitants. Later it was noted that the wreck was easily accessible during the low of the spring tide.

The VOC, as owner of vessel and cargo, made some effort to recover cargo and communicated with the governor of Iceland, and asked the Dutch ambassador to Denmark to assist. In June 1669 a small amount was recovered from the wreck. The VOC's financial reports show the salvage of 60 kg of sealing wax, 900 kg copper, 3170 kg tin and 440 kg silk. It appears that also the diamonds were saved from the shipwreck.



Position of the wreck of the *Wapen van Amsterdam* near Skeiðararsandur .

Source: <https://mass.cultureelerfgoed.nl>

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