

# **The Muskaatboom and its perilous last voyage of 1664-1665**

Maritime Treasures: diving into maritime history and archaeology

Dr A.M.C. van Dissel

Dr M.R. Manders

M.L.A. van Helsdingen

1368036

Rapenburg 117A

2311 GL Leiden

Mauritsvanhelsdingen@hotmail.com

+31630213589

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## Introduction

It is on the eve of the Second Anglo-Dutch war breaking out, in the early days of 1665, when the richest-ever returning fleet of the VOC gets caught in a violent storm on the Indian Ocean; somewhere between Madagascar and the Cape of Good Hope. Unfortunately, not all ships of the fleet led by Admiral Pieter de Bitter survive this storm, one of the ships: the *Muskaatboom* perishes together with its complete crew and precious cargo.

The story of this ship and what lead up to its final demise is what is being looked into in this research. This is a result of a combined effort between the South African Heritage Resource Agency (SAHRA) and the departments of Maritime History and Maritime Archaeology at Leiden University. Which is mainly fuelled by the renewed interest in cultural heritage by governments and their intergovernmental relationships. The creation of this shared cultural heritage between the Netherlands and South Africa started after the Dutch settlement of the Cape of Good Hope in 1652. From this moment the Cape functioned as a halfway point for the journey between Europe and the East. Eventually all ships of the VOC had to stop at the Cape to stock up on victuals.<sup>1</sup> So it could be said that the Dutch East India Company was essential for what grew to be Cape Town. On the other hand it must be remembered that without Dutch colonisation the Cape could have turned out quite differently from the one we know now.<sup>2</sup> This connection is what ties South Africa and the Netherlands so close together; both countries would not have been the same without the other.

The remnants of this shared heritage consist, in the maritime world, mostly of the ships that wrecked along the South African coasts. This is mainly because even though a by origin Dutch ship sank in for example South African waters, not only the South African government holds jurisdiction over it, but the Dutch government as well.<sup>3</sup> This is

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<sup>1</sup> Bruno E.J.S. Werz, 'Southern African Shipwreck Archaeology' in: Ben Ford, Donny L. Hamilton and Alexis Catsambis eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Maritime Archaeology* (Oxford 2012), 10.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Ross, 'The Cape of Good Hope and the world economy, 1652-1835' in; Elphick, Richard and Hermann Giliomee, *The shaping of the South African Society, 1652-1840* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Cape Town 1989), 269.

<sup>3</sup> Martijn Manders, 2015. My Heritage, Your Heritage, Our Heritage? The Growing Awareness of Local Communities and Consequent Bottom up approaches in Maritime Cultural Heritage Management, in: Maurizio de Stefano (ed), *Heritage and landscape as human values*. Conference Proceedings, 452.

especially important in the case of known shipwrecks, as these have to be protected against possible illegal salvaging and other dangers.

The South African wrecks of the Dutch East India Company tie into this connection as some of the physical remnants of the connection that has existed between the Netherlands, South Africa and the East over the ages. They can show us what the load consisted of, tell about the produce of the Cape itself and the cultural exchange between these places. Each individual wreck can not only tell its own story but also add to the general perspective on the historical ties between the two countries.

The wreck that will be the subject of this research is the *Muskaatboom*, - also known as the *Notenboom*, but later more on this topic - which most certainly wrecked in a storm near the Cape in February or March 1665. What is interesting about this particular ship is that it was part of the *Retourvloot* (homeward-bound fleet), Commanded by Admiral Pieter de Bitter. He was assigned with this important task, as the fleet needed an experienced Admiral. Especially as this *Retourvloot* would be one of the richest fleets ever to be despatched from the Dutch East-Indies! King Charles II of England was keen on trying to capture this rich fleet, as rumours went that it was stocked with spices, porcelain, diamonds and other gems. Events later encountered by this fleet will show that it was a wise decision to have the fleet commanded by De Bitter, especially as the English navy did not succeed in capturing it as a whole.

In the case of the *Muskaatboom* not much was known about its past and demise, therefore there was a specific request by SAHRA to research this ship. The name *Muskaatboom* was referred to in a report on the salvaging of another ship. In this report it was stated that the *Muskaatboom* might have been found and even salvaged!<sup>4</sup> Additional research and information was needed in order to get a better understanding of the role, history and possible location of the ship and its wreck. The relevance of this specific ship is found in its rich and varied cargo, and it being part of the fleet of De Bitter. The ship itself had an approximate cargo value of 293,688 guilders when it sailed from Batavia.<sup>5</sup> Research regarding the state of the ship upon its departure and where it perished is interesting for the SAHRA in regard to the possible finding and salvaging of the ship. Though not only the state of the *Muskaatboom* is relevant, information about the age,

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<sup>4</sup> Lisa LaGrange, Information by SAHRA, d.d. 11-10-2018.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Breet, *Strijd om de VOC-miljoenen*, Slag in de haven van het Noorse Bergen, 12 augustus 1665 ( Zutphen 2007), 24-25.

condition and function of other ships in the fleet may clarify certain decision-making in that age.

The reason the VOC commanded such a rich returning fleet was probably to be able to fund the imminent war with England, which started in March 1665.<sup>6</sup> The fleet departed from Batavia on Christmas Eve 1664 with a total purchasing worth of 3.648.490 guilders<sup>7</sup> and would encounter many troubles on its voyage to the Republic, of which the first large setback was the sinking of the *Muskaatboom*.

Studying primary sources such as the VOC archives, eyewitness accounts, reports, and secondary literature will be the basis of this research. Sources will consist of the OBP from the Cape of Good Hope, the Resoluties of the Governor-General, the Raden in Batavia and the *Daghregister* of the Batavia Castle which were digitised through effort of the Corts Foundation. But also of the eyewitness account written by Wouter Schouten. He was surgeon on the ship the *Rijzende Zon*, which was part of the same returning fleet. This work, called the: *Oost-Indische Voyagie* (East Indian Voyage) first printed in 1676, describes the travels of Schouten in the East Indies and also the return to the Dutch Republic in a very detailed manner.<sup>8</sup> Another important source is the oral report by Admiral De Bitter on the situation in the Indies and the journey home. The report was written down by his contemporary; Lieuwe van Aitzema in the work *Saken van staet en oorlogh* (The affairs of the State and War). In this work the travels of the fleet and the perils they went through are written down.<sup>9</sup> With these primary sources some things must be taken into account. The registration of the VOC will be pragmatic and true to the known reality. In the case of Schouten it should be noted that his *Oost-Indische Voyagie* was published more than ten years after the accounts he is reporting on. His descriptions are accurate, but probably also written with a slight personal commercial interest. The case with the oral report of De Bitter on the other hand is that his oral accounts might have been specific; it is unknown how accurate Van Aitzema was in writing down these reports. Combining and comparing the different sources will hopefully form an accurate account of the events.

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<sup>6</sup> J.I. Israel, *The Dutch Republic, Its Rise, Greatness and Fall*, (New York 1995), 766.

<sup>7</sup> Breet, *Strijd om de VOC-miljoenen*, 25.

<sup>8</sup> Wouter Schouten, *Reistogt naar en door Oostindiën, waar in de voornaamste landen, steden, eilanden, bergen, rivieren, ...nauwkeurig worden beschreven. Doormengd Met veele ongewoone voorvallen, zonderlinge geschiedverhaalen, getrouwen berigten van bloedige zee- en veldslagen met de Portugeesen, Makassers en anderen, Volume 2*, (Amsterdam 1780).

<sup>9</sup> Lieuwe van Aitzema. *Saken van Staet en Oorlogh*, ('s-Gravenhage 1670), V, 488.

What makes this research a little bit more complicated, are the different names that are and have been in use for this ship. It often occurred that ship's names changed spelling and names throughout their existence. But this was mostly the result of a lack of strict spelling rules and the subsequent variations in spelling between different scribes. It also happened that a ship's name was changed after it was for example sold or captured by an enemy. In the case of the *Muskaatboom* this was, as far as is known, not the cause for the difference in names.

In the records of the VOC the ship is most often referred to as the *Nooteboom* or *Noteboom*. This goes for the resolutions from Batavia as for those from the Cape of Good Hope.<sup>10</sup> Schouten introduced the name *Musschaetboom* of which the modern spelling is *Muskaatboom* in his biography.<sup>11</sup> Though it could have been that the ship was referred to as *Muskaatboom* before that. In the oral report of De Bitter, which was written down by Van Aitzema, the ship is referred to as the *Nagelboom*. This is the only case where this name is used; therefore this might be due to a misinterpretation by Van Aitzema.<sup>12</sup> Then finally, to make things more complicated, the name *Notemuskaatboom* is introduced by Warnsinck in his work on the homeward-bound fleet of De Bitter.<sup>13</sup> This contraction of the two known names is not seen in any contemporary work and it can be assumed that Warnsinck fabricated it in an attempt to get some clarity on the matter. In later works, such as that by Breet on the Battle of the Bay at Bergen<sup>14</sup> the ship is referred to as *Muskaatboom*. In online sources and common use, the ship is named "Muskaatboom (or Noteboom)" to show that the ship went by two names. For this research it is deemed superfluous and unnecessarily confusing to use both of the ship's names throughout the text. Based on the fact that *Muskaatboom* is the name which is most often used in modern literature the choice has been made to use it throughout the text. This is however not a statement about which name would be "wrong" or "right".

At first the situation leading up to the putting together of the fleet will be assessed, in order to get a clear image of the importance of the fleet in its time and place. The main focus will be on the years of service the *Muskaatboom* had for the VOC. From its acquisition in 1659, its periods of service in the East and its ultimate sinking in

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<sup>10</sup> Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC), nummer toegang 1.04.02, inventarisnummer 679, 3999.

<sup>11</sup> Schouten, *Reistogt naar en door Oostindiën*.

<sup>12</sup> Van Aitzema, *Saken van Staet en Oorlogh*, V, 488-492.

<sup>13</sup> Warnsinck, J.C.M., *De Retourvloot van Pieter de Bitter, kerstmis 1664 – najaar 1665* ('s-Gravenhage 1929).

<sup>14</sup> Breet, *Strijd om de VOC-miljoenen*.

1665.<sup>15</sup> Might it have been that its years of service in tropical waters affected the ship's seaworthiness? What was the cause and impact of the sinking of the ship *Muskaatboom*? What load was on board and who was the captain? But most intriguing of all, where did it sink and could it have been found? Lastly the impact of the wrecking of the *Muskaatboom* will be looked into.

The research fits into the resurgent interest in transnational relationships in the maritime historiographical landscape.<sup>16</sup> It also exposes a less glorious side of the heroic fleet of Admiral De Bitter. Taking all these factors into consideration makes for the *Muskaatboom* to be an interesting topic for this research; hopefully it will make true its expectations.

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<sup>15</sup> J.R. Bruijn, F.S. Gaastra and I. Schöffer, *Dutch-Asiatic shipping in the 17th and 18th centuries. Volume II, Outward-bound voyages from the Netherlands to Asia and the Cape (1595-1794)*, 132.

<sup>16</sup> Maria Fusaro, "Maritime History as Global History? The Methodological Challenges and a Future Research Agenda", in: Maria Fusaro and Amélia Polónia, *Maritime History as Global History* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press 2010), 267-269.

## Chapter 1

### The *Retourvloot* of Admiral De Bitter

In the early days of the Dutch trade on the East Indies almost all ships that were sent out were intended to return to the Republic. The ships would sail through the Indonesian archipelago in search of trade and cargo. This was a rather cumbersome process that took a lot of time. Besides the consumption of time it also brought increased risk as ships could easily be attacked by pirates or be struck by other ill fate. Already in 1610 the *Heeren XVII* realised this flaw and tasked the Governor-General to set up a local network in Asia. Though this was a first step, it took more time before the system of homeward bound fleets was perfected and fully integrated. In the second half of the seventeenth century the structure consisting of a local fleet to trade in the tropical waters and a fleet of specifically assigned homeward-bounders was pretty solid.<sup>17</sup> Every year a *Retourvloot* was shipped out to transport the valuable spices and other local merchandise to the Republic. This fleet departed around New Year in order for the fleet to arrive in Europe during summer. Sending back a fleet in opposition to sending ships on themselves brought many advantages: ships could help each other with repairing or replacing certain parts when a ship lost parts of its rigging or started leaking. Sailing together provided more safety as a large fleet was less likely to be attacked and to make sure that all captains stuck to the sailing scheme and arrived in Europe at the same time.<sup>18</sup>

Since peace was made between England and Spain in 1660, the tension between the Dutch Republic and England was rising. Especially the rivalry on a commercial level in both of their colonial empires caused friction. Although the Second Anglo-Dutch War officially commenced in March 1665, its beginning is often placed in early 1664 mainly due to the increase in English aggression towards Dutch ships and colonies.<sup>19</sup>

With the Republic on the brink of war, the States General coincided in strengthening and expanding the Dutch naval strength in order to keep up with the ever-growing English navy. It is under these circumstances of growing expenditure that the homeward-bound fleet of Admiral De Bitter is being equipped in the last months of

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<sup>17</sup> Robert Parthesius, *Dutch Ships in Tropical Waters the Development of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) Shipping Network in Asia 1595-1660*. Amsterdamse Gouden Eeuw Reeks. Amsterdam: (Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 66-68.

<sup>18</sup> Idem, 38.

<sup>19</sup> Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 766.



1664. It was well known that such fleets could supply national exchequers for a year and make or break wars. - As the capture of the Spanish treasure fleet by Admiral Piet Hein in 1628 had proved. - The cargo was supposed to strengthen the financial position of the Republic in the war to come. This assumption is further strengthened by the fact that the total purchasing value of the fleet amounted up to 3.7 million guilders, which was a higher total worth than had ever set sail before.<sup>20</sup> The resell value of the cargo these fleets brought home would on average be around three to four times higher than its purchasing value. The fleet would be filled with cargo, which would have been accumulated in Batavia. These wares would be the fruit of trading and cultivation in the Indonesian archipelago and the rest of East Asia. This in order to save time and protect ships from the hard-wearing tropical circumstances.

The Christmas fleet of 1664 was supposed to consist of thirteen ships.<sup>21</sup> Even though the normal procedures were to send out a complete fleet at once, it sometimes happened that not enough cargo was available for the complete fleet. This could result in the fleet's departure being stalled. Though having the complete fleet wait could result in the weather turning less favourable for its departure. In general the increased risk of having the whole fleet wait did not weigh up financially to waiting for the last merchandise to arrive. Therefore the decision was often made, even though in the face of company policies, to let a couple of ships wait on cargo and depart for Europe a few months later.<sup>22</sup> The same is seen with the homeward-bound-fleet of De Bitter. The ships *Kogge* and *Nieuwenhoven* set sail to the Cape in January as *naschepen*,<sup>23</sup> where the fleet would be waiting for them. Causing the fleet to set sail with eleven of the planned thirteen vessels.<sup>24</sup>

The decision to have Pieter de Bitter as admiral of the fleet was, not one made with full conviction. In the daily register from Batavia it is written down that the decision was made to appoint De Bitter as admiral of the fleet after a long search for a suitable commander. In the end no other senior officer had applied for the position, it

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<sup>20</sup> Breet, *Strijd om de VOC-miljoenen*, 24-25.

<sup>21</sup> Idem.

<sup>22</sup> Parthesius, *Dutch Ships in Tropical Waters*, 39.

<sup>23</sup> J.R. Bruijn, F.S. Gaastra and I. Schöffer, *Dutch-Asiatic shipping in the 17th and 18th centuries. Volume I*, Introductory volume, 78.

<sup>24</sup> Dagregister Batavia, donderdag 18 december 1664, Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC), nummer toegang 1.04.02, inventarisnummer 679.

was even said that the choice was made for lack of better options!<sup>25</sup> Though time would tell that the decision for De Bitter was a wise one.

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<sup>25</sup> Breet, *Strijd om de VOC-miljoenen*, 24.

## Chapter 2

### The *Muskaatboom*

Not much is known about the ship *Muskaatboom*. Therefore in this chapter an effort is made to find out more about this ship. The enchiridion on outward-bound voyages by Bruijn, Gaastra and Schöffers tells that the Chamber of Amsterdam acquired the ship in 1659. No further information was written down, therefore little is known about the age and condition of the ship at the moment of acquisition, besides it having a capacity of 600 tons or 300 *last*.<sup>26</sup> This places the *Muskaatboom*, according to the rating of ships by Parthesius, in "Rate 8". This category is referred to as that of "ships". Which would generally be ships of 200 *last* or more without further specifically assigned tasks. Usually, most VOC ships were assigned specific tasks such as homeward-bounder or men-of-war. Though some ships did not get a specification. These were in general large cargo carriers, which had been used in Europe for a number of years. Such ships were generally to be used for a one-way trip to the east in order to supply goods or people. But as stated by Parthesius, some of these ships were then used for shipping in Asia and even a return voyage to the Netherlands.<sup>27</sup>

Thus it can be assumed that when the *Muskaatboom* left *Vlie* on 8 March 1660 the ship had already made quite some voyages within Europe. The fact that the ship had 80 soldiers on board further strengthens the image sketched by Parthesius of the *Muskaatboom* being intended as one time use people carrier. The voyage was relatively normal, arriving at the Cape on 14 July 1660 and arriving in Batavia on 13 December 1660. Of the in total 299 people on board of the ship, 39 died during that nine-month voyage to the east. After that not much is heard from the *Muskaatboom* in the following years. She was most likely put to use as a cargo-carrier within Asia. These cargo-carriers sailed throughout Asia in order to get the merchandise to Batavia. Originally the ships sent out by the VOC sailed throughout Asia themselves to gather merchandise. This would later be deemed too time-consuming and risky. This was caused by the fact that the tropical waters and weather took a heavy toll on the construction and state of the ships. Thus the homeward-bounder came into being; these ships would sail only between the Netherlands and Batavia where they would pick up cargo that was gathered

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<sup>26</sup> J.R. Bruijn, F.S. Gaastra and I. Schöffers, *Dutch-Asiatic shipping in the 17th and 18th centuries. Volume II, Outward-bound voyages from the Netherlands to Asia and the Cape (1595-1794)*, 0920.1.

<sup>27</sup> Parthesius, *Dutch Ships in Tropical Waters*, 71, 209.

on the intra-Asiatic routes by other ships that were assigned to this task. This to ensure minimal time was spent in tropical waters.<sup>28</sup> The same goes for the *Muskaatboom*, originally only intended to bring troops to the East, she stayed there and sailed the local tropical waters. Ships like the *Muskaatboom* would generally be used for local trading, the carrying of cheap bulk cargo or to transport soldiers on calmer waters. The cargo such ships carried would be downgraded over time to lower the risk of losing precious cargo if such a ship would sink.<sup>29</sup> This shows in the case of the *Muskaatboom*, as the last regional voyage she made was to haul wood from the north coast of Java.<sup>30</sup>

The question arises why the decision was made to use a ship with such a history of heavy use for a homeward-bound voyage with a value as this one. It goes against the observation made by Parthesius; that old worn ships could be used for one last voyage from Europe to Asia as the cargo was of less value, but that in Asia the decision was often made to decommission a ship instead of letting it sail with precious merchandise. On its return voyage the *Muskaatboom* had aboard approximately 150 men.<sup>31</sup> This was half of the amount of people that sailed with the *Muskaatboom* on its outward-bound voyage in 1660. This is in line with the common practice of over-crewing ships on the voyage to the East. Often large numbers of the crew passed away on the voyage as a result of malnutrition, which could cause diseases such as scurvy. In order to have enough crew to reach the Indies and actually sail back a large margin had to be taken. The smaller number of crew on the returning voyage enabled the ships to take in more cargo and therefore increase profitability.<sup>32</sup> The same situation applied to the *Muskaatboom*. The question of why the *Muskaatboom* was assigned to this fleet will be further elaborated on in the final chapter.

## **Skipper**

The skipper of the *Muskaatboom* on its outward voyage was Jan Hermanszoon. For the return voyage it is unknown who the captain of the *Muskaatboom* was. Other captains of the fleet are known as a result of a shortage of suitable captains who were finishing

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<sup>28</sup> Idem, 39.

<sup>29</sup> Idem, 68-69.

<sup>30</sup> Ministerie Van Koloniën, Bataviaasch Genootschap Van Kunsten En Wetenschappen, and Nederlandsch-Indische Regeering. *Dagh-register Gehouden Int Casteel Batavia Vant Passerende Daer Ter Plaetse Als over Geheel Nederlands-India Anno 1664*, (1887), 2 June 1664.

<sup>31</sup> Schouten, *Reistogt naar en door Oostindiën*, 170.

<sup>32</sup> Parthesius, *Dutch Ships in Tropical Waters*, 98-99.

their contracted time of service.<sup>33</sup> They were by exception allowed to stay on the ships that they were captain of, some had been captain on these ships for a few years already.<sup>34</sup> Though even of the *Rijzende Zon* the captain is unknown despite the report of Wouter Schouten. In the short research results of SAHRA it is assumed that Jan Hermansz. was captain of the *Muskaatboom* when it set sail for the Republic in 1664.<sup>35</sup> The fact that a Jan Hermansz. was captain of the ship *Maarsseveen*, which set sail to the Netherlands on December 21<sup>st</sup> 1663, makes it highly unlikely that he could have been the captain on the *Muskaatboom* as well. Though it must be taken into account that more persons with the same name could have existed, the records of the VOC make no mention of another Jan Hermansz. sailing to the Indies in the same period. Therefore with sufficient certainty the assumption can be made that he was not the captain on the returning voyage of the *Muskaatboom*.<sup>36</sup> Who was the captain will therefore remain a mystery even though other captains in the fleet are known.

## Cargo

The *Muskaatboom* was, as stated before, part of the richest homeward-bound fleet that ever set sail up to that point. The total purchasing value of the fleet was 3,648,490 guilders and consisted of the following:

- 4,000,000 *kati*<sup>37</sup> pepper
- 500,000 pounds of Ceylon cinnamon
- 8690 *kati* Chinese silks
- 18,000 pounds ebony
- 1,500,000 pounds of saltpetre
- 440,000 pounds of cloves
- 22,000 pounds of indigo
- 314,000 pounds of nutmeg
- 121,600 pounds of mace
- 200,000 carpets and doilies
- 16,580 pieces of porcelain

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<sup>33</sup> NA, Den Haag, 1.04.02, inv. 679, Folio 344-345, 27-28 November 1664.

<sup>34</sup> NA, Den Haag, 1.04.02, inv. 679, Folio 344, 345, 28 November 1664.

<sup>35</sup> LaGrange, Information, d.d. 11-10-2018.

<sup>36</sup>[http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/das/voyages?clear=1&field\\_voymaster=Hermansz.,%20Jan](http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/das/voyages?clear=1&field_voymaster=Hermansz.,%20Jan)

<sup>37</sup> Kati is a weight measure of 618 grams.

- 3084 uncut diamonds
- 2933 rubies
- 18,151 ounces of crushed pearls

These goods amounted to an estimated total sales value of eleven million guilders a value that equalled 300 tons of gold!<sup>38</sup> Such revenues would be enough to finance a whole year of waging war. Though as detailed the total cargo list was, so little is known about what was on board each specific ship. The load was certainly divided pretty equal between the different ships. This is shown by the fact that they all carried about 1/11 part of the total value. The *Muskaatboom* carried a value of 293,688 guilders, which matches that of the other ships. Only the flagship *Walcheren* (346,964 guilders) and the ship of the rear admiral: *Slot Honingen* (386,122 guilders) carried noticeably more value. Though this could well be caused by the fact that these ships were much larger than the other ships in the fleet.<sup>39</sup> The *Kogge* and *Nieuwenhoven* both carried considerably less value when they departed on February 1<sup>st</sup>; the *Kogge* 67.972 guilders and *Nieuwenhoven* 77.251 guilders. It can be assumed that the *Muskaatboom* carried equal parts of the inventory stated above when it set sail on the day before Christmas 1664.

Having formed a cohesive image of the *Muskaatboom*, the question remains how and where it sank. This will be researched in the following chapter.

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<sup>38</sup> Breet, *Strijd om de VOC-miljoenen*, 25.

<sup>39</sup> *Idem*, 24.

## Chapter 3

### The wrecking

Perhaps one of the more important aspects of this research is the question of where and how the *Muskaatboom* met its final demise. That is what will be researched in this chapter. To answer these questions the report of Wouter Schouten is of great importance. He describes the storms the fleet is facing during its voyage quite accurately, makes note of the condition of the *Muskaatboom* itself and lastly describes the effect the storm has had on the *Rijzende Zon*, the ship he himself was sailing on. The information of De Bitter and his ship *Walcheren* will be taken into account as well.

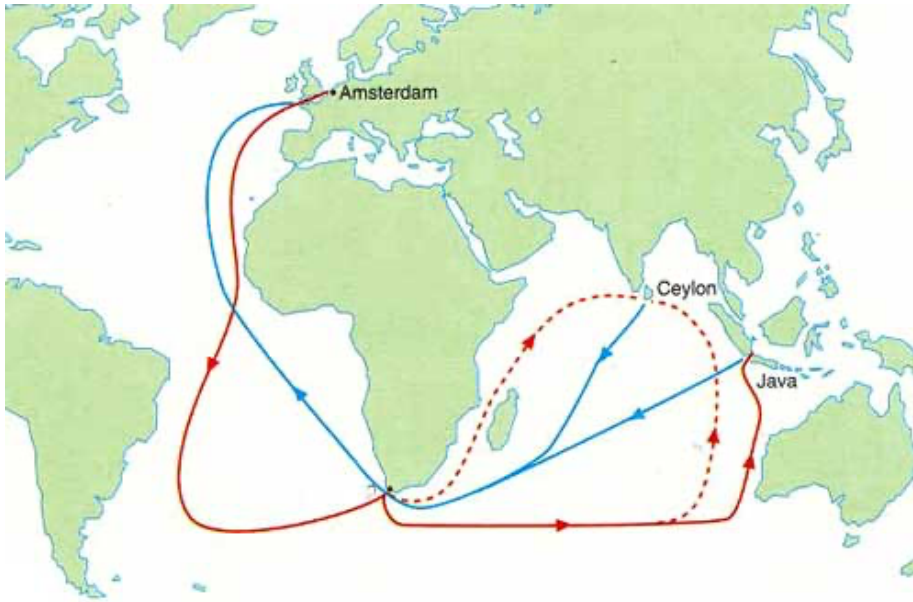
#### Where

Part of understanding how the *Muskaatboom* sank is knowing where it happened. A variety of different locations are possible, especially since SAHRA reported on possibly having found the wreck.<sup>40</sup> This report and the report by Wouter Schouten are the only ones that come up with feasible locations. To better understand the possible location of the wreck of the *Muskaatboom* it is important to look into the routes sailed by the VOC in the seventeenth century. An extensive amount of research has been conducted on the development of the outward-bound shipping routes and intra-Asiatic routes; noticeably little has been researched about the homeward-bound route over the Indian Ocean.<sup>41</sup> This is caused by the fact that the route from Batavia to the Cape of Good Hope was pretty straightforward. It is the outward-bound route that knew a lot of development, especially in its early years when the most efficient route was not yet known. The normal course of a homeward-bound fleet was to sail from Batavia through the Indonesian archipelago past Mauritius and Madagascar, towards the Cape of Good Hope. As can be seen on the map depicted below. Detailed instructions for this leg of the journey only came into being in the eighteenth century. The fleets would normally sail on the southeast trade winds, which brought them straight to the Cape from the Indonesian Archipelago.

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<sup>40</sup> LaGrange, Information, d.d. 11-10-2018.

<sup>41</sup> Bruijn, *Dutch-Asiatic Volume I*, 77.



**Map depicting the major outward- and homeward-bound shipping routes of the VOC<sup>42</sup>**

At the Cape the fleet would regroup if necessary and stock up on fresh water, foodstuffs and other supplies. After this minor break the fleet would set sail for the Republic. In optimal conditions the trip could be made in four to five months. Though in reality this was often not the case.<sup>43</sup>

The fleet of De Bitter set out on the same route when they departed on the 24<sup>th</sup> of December 1664. After passing through the Strait of Sunda, the fleet stopped at the *Prinseneiland* on the fifth of January in order to fill up the water supply. Hereafter the fleet set sail for the Cape of Good Hope. Though this first leg of the journey would augur little good.<sup>44</sup> Based on the report of Wouter Schouten the fleet was caught by a storm on February 11<sup>th</sup> 1665. On that day the *Rijzende Zon* found itself on south latitude of 26 degrees and 20 minutes. The longitude was estimated to be somewhere between Mauritius and Madagascar.<sup>45</sup> Schouten describes this storm in extensive detail, what is interesting is what happened to the *Rijzende Zon* during this storm. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of February (after four days of storm!) an enormous wave crashed on the stern of the *Rijzende Zon*, as a result of sailing down wind and down the waves. This wave caused a very large hole in the stern of the ship that had almost meant its demise. Only by covering the damage with sails the ship could be saved. What increased the fear of the

<sup>42</sup> [https://maritimeasia.ws/maritimelanka/galle/voc\\_shipping.html](https://maritimeasia.ws/maritimelanka/galle/voc_shipping.html)

<sup>43</sup> Parthesius, *Dutch Ships in Tropical Waters*, 98.

<sup>44</sup> Warnsinck, *De Retourvloot van Pieter de Bitter*, 14-15.

<sup>45</sup> Schouten, *Reistogt naar en door Oostindiën*, 172.



crew of the *Rijzende Zon* was the realisation that three years prior four ships sank on approximately the same location. According to Breet the overloading of ships in Batavia and the dangerous habit of sailing down wind during storms often caused these incidents. Down-wind sailing brought with it that waves could come crashing in from behind.<sup>46</sup> The *Rijzende Zon* encountered four other ships of the fleet on the 18<sup>th</sup> of February. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February these ships reached the south latitude of 31 degrees and 24 minutes, which was quite a distance from their position prior to the storm. This part of the fleet encountered another heavy storm on March 1<sup>st</sup> but in the end they managed to reach the Cape of Good Hope by the 11<sup>th</sup> of March. What is interesting is that the location De Bitter reported for his ship *Walcheren*, was 29 degrees south and 73 degrees east longitude.<sup>47</sup> The latitude of both ships was fairly equal; the difference in longitude is what is interesting. The longitude of the *Rijzende Zon* was definitely an estimate. It is uncertain if the same can be said of the position of the *Walcheren*. It was notoriously difficult to measure longitude on the open ocean, especially during a storm, as accurate knowledge of time relative to location was required. Ships would be on open water for extended periods of time and clocks were not accurate enough this caused longitude measurements to be estimates more often than not. Therefore the locations of the *Rijzende Zon* en *Walcheren* will be used.

After the fleet regrouped at the Cape it became apparent that none of the ships had seen the *Muskaatboom* after the storm began on the 11<sup>th</sup> of February. After waiting and hoping to see the *Muskaatboom* appear on the horizon the fleet finally gave up hope of seeing the *Muskaatboom* ever again. Schouten deduced that the ship surely must have sunk. This assumption was fuelled by the observations of the crewmen of the other ships. They had all feared for the faith of the *Muskaatboom* even before the start of the storm, as the ship was already known for its “rankheid en gebreklijkheid”.<sup>48</sup> Based on these sources it is most likely that the *Muskaatboom* did indeed sink during that first storm between 11 and 18 February 1665. This would mean that, based on the estimated location of the *Rijzende Zon* at the beginning of the storm, the *Muskaatboom* perished somewhere over the Madagascar Basin. Though it must not be ruled out that the ship perhaps survived the first storm and was taken by the subsequent storm on the 1<sup>st</sup> of March, or that the ship lost its way and came to its final end on a completely different

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<sup>46</sup> Breet, *Strijd om de VOC-miljoenen*, 28.

<sup>47</sup> Van Aitzema, *Saken van Staet en Oorlogh*, V, 491.

<sup>48</sup> Schouten, *Reistogt naar en door Oostindiën*, 170.

location. The *Rijzende Zon* for example found itself on the latitude of approximately 31 degrees on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February. This means that they at least sailed 563 kilometres in that period, based on latitude only.<sup>49</sup> Based on the positions of the *Rijzende Zon* and *Walcheren* a possible location of the wreck of the *Muskaatboom* was marked on a map (Appendix 2). This shows clearly how far the fleet was from the South African coast on the moment the storm caught them. It is an approximate 3400km to Cape Town from the location written down by Schouten on February 11<sup>th</sup>. SAHRA on the other hand, had information that stated that the wreck of the *Muskaatboom* was actually found near the South African coast and even salvaged at some stage. Though this was only based on information given to them by a third party.<sup>50</sup> The discrepancy between the two possible locations is quite large and even the two possible locations encompass very large areas. Though it certainly is not impossible that the *Muskaatboom* reached the South African coast, it having sunk near Cape Town is impossible, as no ships of the fleet have seen her after the storm or near the Cape as stated by De Bitter in his report. In his report De Bitter stated his hope that the ships would find its way and bring the crew home safely. In the end this proved to be wishful thinking.<sup>51</sup> It is most probable that the *Muskaatboom* sank in the storm of February 11<sup>th</sup> – February 18<sup>th</sup> or; if having survived that storm, sank during the storm of March 1<sup>st</sup> 1665. This would mean that the wreck of the *Muskaatboom* is somewhere on the bottom of the Madagascar Basin.

## How

Since an approximate location has been determined of where the *Muskaatboom* could have perished, the question remains of how the ship came to its end. There are two parts to this question, the first half considers the physical state of the ship on its departure from the Indies and the second half involves the conditions the ship had to endure on route from Batavia to the Cape of Good Hope. The state of the *Muskaatboom* has been mentioned a couple of times before in this research, as it is assumed that this played quite an important role in its final demise. Schouten makes mention of it in his report and Breet and Warnsinck both take it into consideration that this was the cause of the sinking of the vessel.

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<sup>49</sup> <http://www.marine waypoints.com/learn/greatcircle.shtml>

<sup>50</sup> LaGrange, Information, d.d. 11-10-2018.

<sup>51</sup> Van Aitzema, *Saken van Staet en Oorlogh*, V, 491.

At first glance it might seem like a silly idea to send a ship with a history such as that of the *Muskaatboom* on a voyage of this kind with such valuable cargo. But how does this actually compare to the state and history of other ships in the fleet. If the *Muskaatboom* was indeed of lesser quality or in a lesser state, what was the reason for this choice? A comparative list (Appendix 1) has been created in order to compare the *Muskaatboom* with the other ships in the fleet. In this comparison different aspects have been assessed: the age of the ship or the year it was acquired, the amount of voyages is made between the Republic and the Indies or vice-versa, how the life of the ship ended and if it sailed locally in the tropical Asiatic waters. It is based on the work by Bruijn et al. which was later digitised by the Huygens Instituut.<sup>52</sup> At first the assumption was made that when a ship stayed in the Indies for over a year it would have sailed locally. Ships that spend less than a year in Batavia between its arrival and homeward-bound voyage would not have sailed locally. The results this provided proved faulty after more extensive research. After going through the daily registry of the Castle of Batavia for the year 1665 it became clear that some ships were sent out for local trade missions shortly after they arrived in Batavia from the Republic. The *Slot Honingen*, *Wapen van Hoorn* and *Jonge Prins* were some of these ships. What is interesting is that these ships were used for local trade missions close to the departure date of the fleet. The *Ooievaar* arrived in Batavia from Persia via Coromandel and Malacca on the 15<sup>th</sup> of October.<sup>53</sup> The *Slot Honingen*, *Wapen van Hoorn* and the *Jonge Prins* were sent out on the 26<sup>th</sup> of August 1664.<sup>54</sup> *Wapen van Hoorn* to Japara to haul wood,<sup>55</sup> *Slot Honingen* to Malacca and *Jonge Prins* to Jambi (Sumatra). This in opposition to the *Muskaatboom*, which arrived in Batavia on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of June 1664 after having hauled a load of wood from Japara.<sup>56</sup> The *Muskaatboom* is not being sent out afterwards and lay waiting on the Batavia Roadstead until its departure on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of December. This is further strengthened by it being mentioned in the registry on October 7 as still lying waiting outside Batavia.<sup>57</sup> It is unclear why the *Muskaatboom* was kept waiting in Batavia, instead of being sent out such as the other ships. Clearly there was enough time between its arrival on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of

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<sup>52</sup> J. Bruijn, J.R., F.S. Gaastra and I. Schöffer, *Dutch-Asiatic shipping in the 17th and 18th centuries. Volume III, Homeward-bound voyages from Asia and the Cape to the Netherlands (1597-1795)*.

<sup>53</sup> Ministerie Van Koloniën, *Dagh-register Gehouden Int Casteel Batavia*, 15 October 1664.

<sup>54</sup> Idem, 26 August 1664.

<sup>55</sup> Japara was a city on the northeast coast of Java, it was a prime source for wood for the VOC.

<sup>56</sup> Ministerie Van Koloniën, *Dagh-register Gehouden Int Casteel Batavia*, 2 June 1664.

<sup>57</sup> Idem, 7 October 1664.

June and its final departure in December to perform a local trade mission. No mention is made of any possible repair work being done in that period or other possible explanations.

As stated by Parthesius, local shipping by homeward-bounders could occur when there was a mismatch between the date of arrival in Batavia and the intended date for departure. The research done to form Appendix 1 proves this statement.

It is interesting to note that most ships made an odd number of voyages. This could strengthen the point made by Parthesius that ships were more easily used for a last outward-bound voyage as the risk was lower, because there was less valuable cargo on board.<sup>58</sup> The prime example that does not comply with this theory is the *Muskaatboom*. Based on this index the same could be said of the *Amstelland*, though this would be an incorrect assumption as this ship survived the whole journey and finally wrecked east of Terschelling. Which would indicate that its condition was sound enough to be able to survive the long voyage and even the Battle in the Bay of Bergen.<sup>59</sup>

Schouten gives the most important information when he writes about his fear of the *Muskaatboom* perishing. He describes the “rankheid en gebreklijkheid” of the *Muskaatboom*, which had been observed by other crewmembers. *Rankheid* is the Dutch nautical term for crankness in a ship. When a ship is suffering of crankness it means that it has issues with its stability. It is a condition in which a ship heels abnormally and it has issues returning to an upright position. This is especially dangerous in the situation of overloading a ship or when it gets caught in a storm. Loading a ship correctly could reduce the issue of heeling. From the end of the sixteenth century onwards it became imminent that the way the cargo was distributed in a ship was of great importance to its stability and overall handling. Several times it was reported that faulty weight distribution caused ships to stop and rearrange their cargo mid-journey. One of the main issues was that the goods being brought to the Republic were often of relatively light weight and great volume. In order to counterbalance this issue, large amounts of ballast had to be taken aboard. Company policy stated that the ballast should at least be resalable for its purchasing value; unfortunately this was not always possible. Some of the most favourable form of ballast was ebony from Mauritius, it could be harvested without cost from the woods on the island, it yielded a good price in the

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<sup>58</sup> Parthesius, *Dutch Ships in Tropical Waters*, 68-69.

<sup>59</sup> Bruijn, *Dutch-Asiatic Volume III*, 78-79.

Republic, could be stowed under the cargo holds easily and it did not perish. Another common form of ballast, though slightly less favourable as it was harder to stow and keep, was saltpetre from Coromandel and Bengal.<sup>60</sup> On the cargo-list in chapter two there is made mention of 18.000 pounds of ebony and 1.500.000 pounds of saltpetre. From this it can be deduced that both of these commodities were in use as ballast in the homeward-bound fleet of De Bitter. It must be noted that in comparison to the total weight of the fleet's cargo the proportion of ebony is considerably smaller than that of saltpetre. Therefore it cannot be said with certainty that both were in use as ballast on the *Muskaatboom*. Only of saltpetre the assumption can be made with certainty that it was indeed in use as ballast at the moment of perishing. All in all, the crankness of the *Muskaatboom* was so severe that it was noticed by the crews on other ships, and probably could no be solved completely by storing ballast in a correct manner.

The comment on the “gebreklijkheid” of the *Muskaatboom* probably originated from the worn state of the ship. Directly translated as defectiveness it leaves little to the imagination. The age of the ship and the years it had spent in tropical waters would not have done the ship much good. It is unknown what the age and state of the *Muskaatboom* was when it was acquired by the Chamber of Amsterdam in 1659 or when it set sail to the east in 1660. There is as of yet also no information available concerning the maintenance or repairs to the ship in the East Indies. Often it was very difficult for the VOC to properly maintain their ships in tropical waters; this could be caused by a lack of proper equipment, supplies and craftsmen. The *Muskaatboom* probably would have suffered greatly from the years it spend in tropical waters; dry rot, shipworm and all sorts of other influences gnawing away on the ship. The visible defectiveness could have been caused by a lack of proper replacements or provisional repairs to the rigging.<sup>61</sup>

Assuming that the *Muskaatboom* did indeed sink during the storm of February 1665, there are several possible phenomena that occurred, which would have been the final nail in the coffin. The area of the Indian Ocean the *Muskaatboom* found itself in was notorious for the frequent occurrence of cyclones. One of the main threats homeward-bound fleets faced were the cyclones around Mauritius, these mostly occurred between January and March. Throughout its existence, the VOC authorities preferred its

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<sup>60</sup> Parthesius, *Dutch Ships in Tropical Waters*, 95-96, 108-109.

<sup>61</sup> Parthesius, *Dutch Ships in Tropical Waters*, 101-106.

homebound fleets to depart from Batavia in November at the latest to arrive in the Cape before the storm season commenced. This was in reality not possible due to the fact that the necessary goods had not arrived in Batavia yet. This resulted in the creation of the Christmasfleet, such as the fleet of De Bitter was as well. One of the main measures that a captain could take when his ship got stuck in a storm was to head the ship into the wind. This was even part of the official instructions captains received.<sup>62</sup> As we know from the report of Schouten, it was enticing for a captain to sail down wind during a storm, as this seemed to be the easiest solution. This caused one main problem; the risk of large waves crashing down on the ship from behind and smashing its stern. The waters near the Southeast-African coast are known for the presence of extremely large waves called freak or rogue waves.<sup>63</sup> These are waves that can appear out of nowhere with an extremely high slope and can reach heights up to 20 meters and more. This makes it almost impossible for a ship to take any precautions. It is difficult to say if the wave that hit the *Rijzende Zon* was indeed a wave that could be classified as a freak wave. In result it is impossible to say if the *Muskaatboom* was struck by such a wave or if indeed a wave was the cause of its sinking. Other possibilities are that the *Muskaatboom* capsized and subsequently sank as a result of its crankness, or perhaps the ship became uncontrollable during the cyclone because of its dilapidated state, broke apart and sank to the bottom of the ocean. There is the possibility of the ship having been overloaded, such as frequently happened according to Parthesius.<sup>64</sup> Though this does not seem very likely, as the ships *Kogge* and *Nieuwenhoven* both remained in Batavia to await sufficient cargo.<sup>65</sup>

But why would the command of the VOC in Batavia assign a ship such as the *Muskaatboom* to a task as important as that of the *Retourvloot* of Admiral De Bitter? The archives tell that the *Muskaatboom* was present on the Batavia Roadstead from the 2<sup>nd</sup> of June 1664, and was specifically assigned to become a part of this fleet from the 7<sup>th</sup> of October.<sup>66</sup> This rules out the possibility that the *Muskaatboom* was used as a result of a temporary shortage of loading space or as a last resort after another ship could not

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<sup>62</sup> Bruijn, *Dutch-Asiatic Volume I*, 77-81.

<sup>63</sup> I.V. Lavrenov, The Wave Energy Concentration at the Agulhas Current of South Africa, in: *Natural Hazards* 17, no. 2 (1998), 117-127.

<sup>64</sup> Parthesius, *Dutch Ships in Tropical Waters*, 117.

<sup>65</sup> NA, Den Haag, 1.04.02, inv. 679, Folio 344-345 Donderdag 18 december 1664.

<sup>66</sup> NA, Den Haag, 1.04.02, inv. 679, Folio 313 Dinsdag 7 October 1664.

make it.<sup>67</sup> Which is of course further strengthened by the fact that there were two *naschepen* that set sail in January. The executives in Batavia must have known of the state of the *Muskaatboom*, a last option is that they assumed that the *Muskaatboom* would survive this journey. Though this can never be known for certain. Most other ships in this fleet spend considerable time in tropical waters as well and all survived the first leg of their journey.

### **Impact**

What is remarkable is that so little is known about the *Muskaatboom*. Upon arrival in the Republic virtually no attention was paid to the ship and its sinking. From the oral report of De Bitter, written down by Aitzema, we know that the *Heeren XVII* did not care much about the journey of the fleet.<sup>68</sup> They paid no heed to the heroic actions of De Bitter during the Battle in the Bay of Bergen or other important tactical decisions taken by him during the homeward-bound journey. He did his duty and they were not particularly impressed. The only thing they were interested in was the current state of affairs in the Indies.<sup>69</sup> This lack of interest was the result of an attitude of looking forward instead of crying over spilled milk. The only way the losses of the *Muskaatboom* and the other lost ships could be repaid was by going forward. The cost of a lost ship would have been calculated and could often be paid for by the gains of the cargo of the remaining fleet. Even Schouten who tells the most about the *Muskaatboom* is telling relatively little compared to the extent of his book. Therefore this research will hopefully add to the compelling narrative of the *Muskaatboom*.

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<sup>67</sup> Parthesius, *Dutch Ships in Tropical Waters*, 101.

<sup>68</sup> Van Aitzema, *Saken van Staet en Oorlogh*, V, 488-492.

<sup>69</sup> Breet, *Strijd om de VOC-miljoenen*, 107.

## Conclusion

The mystery of perished ships will be taking up a portion of the maritime historiographical landscape for a long time. Shipwrecks combine the narrative of its cargo, crew, contemporary events, intercultural exchange and of course the wrecking itself. These factors all apply to the *Muskaatboom* as well. Not much was known about this ship and her story prior to this research, which is the result of cooperation between the SAHRA and Leiden University.

The political position the Dutch Republic found itself in in the autumn of 1664 called for the putting together of the richest ever homeward-bound fleet under the command of Pieter de Bitter. This fleet consisted of thirteen ships and the *Muskaatboom* was one of them. The research has shown that the *Muskaatboom* was already quite an old ship when it was chosen to be part of this fleet. After being bought in 1659 and years of service in tropical waters the ship was badly deteriorated. The state of the ship was so bad that it was even noted and written down by contemporaries. In hindsight it is not surprising that the *Muskaatboom* did not survive the cyclone season of the Indian Ocean, as many better ships sank before her. What the final cause was remains unclear: a freak wave, the ship heeling over and capsizing or breaking apart as a result of the tumultuous storm? It will probably remain a mystery forever. Based on the locations of the ships *Rijzende Zon* and *Walcheren* and the fact that the *Muskaatboom* was not sighted after that storm of February 1665, the location where the ship sank is thought to be somewhere over the Madagascar Basin, south of Mauritius. It seems unlikely that the wreck has been found near the Cape, though this cannot be said with full certainty. Only a wreck that can be identified as the *Muskaatboom* could bring closure to this question.

Considering the fact that the *Muskaatboom* was part of the richest ever homeward-bound fleet to have set sail up to that point, there has been little contemporary attention for the sinking. This lack of contemporary attention for the lost ship is probably the result of the frequency that ships perished in that period and the fact that it all happened during the breaking out of the Second Anglo-Dutch war. There was also very little information available at the time and there was always the hope that a lost ship would come home at some point. The lost proceedings would most likely be compensated by the rich returns of the rest of the fleet, which further reduced the impact of the sinking.



Hopefully future research will reveal more details of the years the *Muskaatboom* spend in Asia. Perhaps the on-going effort of the Corts Foundation to digitise the VOC-archives in Jakarta will result in more information becoming available. Much could be learned from information on the history and state of the ship, the crew, the captain and the final decision to use the *Muskaatboom* for a homeward-bound voyage. This could improve insight in corporate policies of the Dutch East India Company and help lift the shrouds of mysteries that surround the *Muskaatboom* at present.

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## Appendix 1

### Overview of the fleet of De Bitter

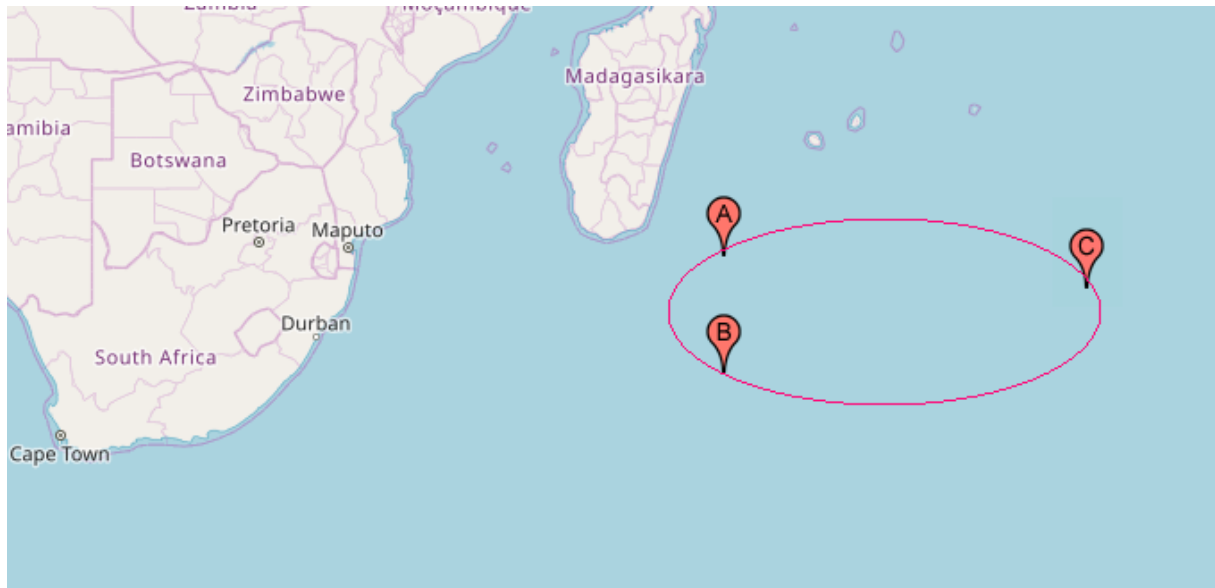
Based on information from <http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/das>

Ship	Year build	Return voyages		Sailed in east
Walcheren	1661	6	Sunk 1667	No
Phoenix	1653	10	Captured 1665	No
Slot Honingen	1654	8	Captured 1665	No
Rijzende zon	Bought 1660	5	Sold in Batavia 1675	Yes
Brederode	1663	5	Sold in Batavia 1678	Yes
Wapen van Hoorn	1662	7	Sunk 1673	No
Amstelland	1660	2	Wrecked 1665	Yes
Diemermeer	1659	3	Sunk 1670	Yes
Ooievaar	1656	5	Sunk 1668	Yes
Jonge Prins	1661	10	Unknown	No
Kogge	Bought 1662	5	Sold 1675	Yes
Nieuwenhoven	1660	3	Sold 1675	Yes
Muskaatboom	Bought 1659	2	Sunk 1665	Yes

## Appendix 2

### Possible location of the Muskaatboom

Map made with <https://www.geoplaner.com/>



A: The approximate location of *Rijzende Zon* on 11-02-1665, 26 degrees 20 minutes south.

B: The approximate location of *Rijzende Zon* on 22-02-1665, 31 degrees and 24 minutes south.

C: The approximate location of the *Walcheren* on 15-02-1665, 29 degrees south, 73 degrees east

Red circle: Possible location of the wreck of the *Muskaatboom*.

Based on the different positions and the information available from the reports it can be assumed that the wreck of the *Muskaatboom* lies somewhere between A, B and C.