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A Jetton Found Far From Home

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In 1987 Dr Michael McCarthy of the Western Australian Maritime Museum led an archaeological expedition, which included a number of on-land excavations, in search of clues to the wrecking of the Dutch ship *Zuytdorp* that had taken place more than 250 years previously. As part of that program contract archaeologist Fiona Weaver¹ made a detailed report on fieldwork conducted by the group. In an entry in the day diary dated 6 May 1987 Weaver described excavations carried out at a site on top of the cliffs overlooking the wreck of the *Zuytdorp* in which the group came across a pin, a button and what was described at the time as a small copper coin. The 'coin' (which has not been tested for content) is presumably bronze, weighs 1.061 gm and has a diameter of 19 mm. Its description is as follows:

Obverse: Diademed bust of the Sun King Louis XIV (1643-1715) facing right with long flowing curly hair, surrounded by the

legend, LVD : XIII. DG. FR. ET. N. REX. (the ET is more of a ligature of the two letters).

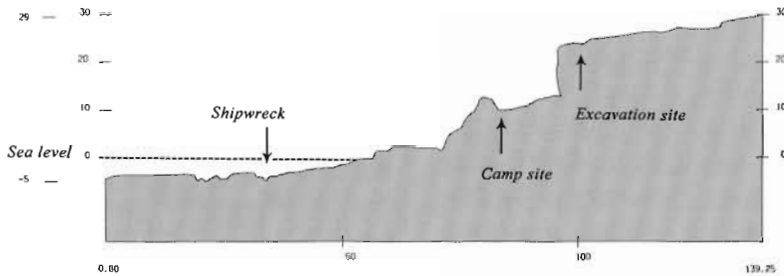
Reverse: A crowned shield with three fleur de lis, surrounded by the legend, HANS. WEIDINGERS. RECH. PFEN

The legends expand on the obverse to LVD(OVICVS) XIII D(EI) G(RATIA) F(RANCIA) ET N(AVARRA) REX, and on the reverse, HANS. WEIDINGERS. RECH(EN) PFEN(NIG).

For a long time this piece was thought to be a coin or token of Alsace-Lorraine, and this is how it is registered at the Museum, but it is in fact a jetton (French *jeton*, German *rechenpfennig*), a counter used in calculating for accounting purposes. What is remarkable about this piece is the lovely green patina and its unimpaired state of preservation, certainly not what one would expect of a coin that had been immersed for a time in seawater. It is reasonable to assume that the jetton escaped corrosion by the sea



Obverse and reverse of the Jetton of Hans Weidinger



Top. View of the Zuytdorp cliffs

Above. Cliff profile showing the wreck, camp site and excavation site

because it had been brought ashore in the pocket of one of the ship's company.

The story starts with the third and final voyage of the *Zuytdorp*, a vessel owned by the Chamber of Zeeland. The ship sailed from Vlissingen on 27 July 1711 on its trip to Batavia, now known as Djakarta. The last record of the *Zuytdorp* was when it left the Cape of Good Hope on 22 April 1712 after which it just vanished without trace. Over 200 years later, in April 1927, a group led by stockman Tom Pepper from Murchison House Station reported the discovery of wreckage of a ship at the foot of (the now named Zuytdorp) cliffs some 65 km north of the mouth of the Murchison River.

The wreckage was not identified with certainty until 1958 following Phillip Playford's research, the key to this being the presence of a large number of coins of Zeeland dated 1711. It became evident that

the *Zuytdorp* had been carrying the bulk of the minting of *schellingen* (six *stuivers*) and double *stuivers* from the Middelburg Mint, and it was these coins that were covering the seabed near the wreck. The *Zuytdorp* must have run aground in early June, two months after leaving the Cape. It is clear that those crew who survived the ship's grounding brought many of its items ashore and then made their campsite in a sheltered section at the base of the cliffs. Later they must have climbed the cliffs to set up a signal fire for passing ships, but none ever came to the rescue.

The artefacts discovered by the Western Australian Maritime Museum expedition had only survived the destructive sea by having been taken off the ship by the crew to the cliff top, and the remoteness of the area would have contributed to their remaining undiscovered for such a long period of time. A very readable account of the early

archaeological discoveries of these artefacts can be found in Playford², and for details of the actual coins found (as at 1985) see Wilson³.

Jettons most likely originated in France, and were used by merchants and bankers for reckoning the complicated money systems in use then, both internally and for foreign exchange. Because the relative rates of gold, silver and copper varied according to market dictates, location and government decree, sums were figured on 'counting' boards whereby piles of jettons were stacked on various spots on the board and moved to other spots as the calculations demanded.

Jettons were used throughout Europe and even found their way to Great Britain. They were produced in the same way as coins and medals, with intricate and at times quite artistic engraving. From the late fourteenth century onwards the centre for this industry was the German city of Nuremberg where the mintmasters in charge of their production formed dynastic families, including the Lauffers and the Krauwinkels. The piece found in Western Australia was produced by Hans (Iohann) Weidinger. As detailed in Mitchiner⁴, Hans Weidinger was apprenticed to Georg Lauffer in 1660 and became a master in 1670. Hans Weidinger was married to Anna Maria Mayerin in 1672 and died in 1727 aged 83. His wife survived him by six years. Their son Iohann Friedrich Weidinger was also active as a mintmaster from 1710 until 1765. This was well after the closure of the Lauffer workshop, which had operated over six generations from 1554 to 1716.

This particular piece does not seem to be listed in the main references on jettons, but it is a variety of Mitchiner⁴, no.1845 (with the shield replacing the crowned arcuate

cross fleuretty). See also Feuardent⁵, No.13020 and Barnard⁶, No. 324.

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