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Sunken history: shipwreck Scheurrak SO1 in the late sixteenth-century Dutch maritime cultural landscape

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Conclusion

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The current research did not lead to a breakthrough in the identification of Scheurrak SO1. While identification can certainly add value, this study has shown that an unknown ship can be an invaluable source. In the introduction of this study, the material turn in history, i.e. the increasing importance of objects as sources for the historian, has been discussed. The current study offers an example of precisely how objects can attain more agency in historical research. By taking material culture as a starting point in examining the maritime culture of the Low Countries on the eve of the seventeenth century, new perspectives open up and new stories can be told. In the case of Scheurrak SO1, it has allowed us to come closer than ever before to the everyday maritime practice of the European grain trade in the final decade of the sixteenth century.

The main question this study focusses on is what Scheurrak SO1 can tell us about the maritime cultural landscape of the Low Countries in the crucial period 1585-1602. This landscape consists of many actors, locations, structures, and events, but is thematized in five main components: the trading networks, the merchants, the shore-based facilitators, the seafarers, and finally life aboard. Chapter 1 opens with a mid-sized and well-armed ship, a grain cargo and a late sixteenth-century Genoese trumpet. These finds from Scheurrak SO1 inextricably link the ship with the most lucrative branch of shipping in the early 1590s, the *Straatvaart*. The wreck site can only be understood by understanding the trading network that the ship was operating in. In the second half of the sixteenth century, climatological conditions and war caused Netherlandish merchants to intensify grain imports from the Baltic. The grains were partly used for domestic consumption, but increasingly also re-exported to the Atlantic ports of France, Portugal, and Spain. Larger ships were built to meet the need to transport larger cargoes. Markets in Norway were opened to get access to more and better quality timber for the shipbuilding sector. Many Baltic ports were visited by Netherlandish grain carriers, but Danzig stood out as the number one supplier. The fertile banks of the Vistula river, the presence of a stable labour force, and efficient fluvial transport ensured a sizeable and reliable flow of grain to Danzig's port. Danzig's trading landscape was marked by good infrastructure, facilities for merchants and skippers, and an up-to-date information network, all contributing to an attractive climate for both foreign merchants and transporters. The shipping to the Baltic was well integrated into the Netherlandish trading network and running at a high level when an unprecedented famine broke out in large parts of the northern Mediterranean in the early 1590s. Low transport costs and high price differences earned merchants shipping grain to the Mediterranean great profits. For a decade, the *Straatvaart* was the most important branch in Dutch shipping. The large influx of Baltic grain imported by the Dutch turned a city like Genoa's economic system upside down, changing

its international communication network, the urban food distribution system, the administrative and financial sector, and even the health care system. The purchase market and sales market of the grain trade, connected by the *Straatvaart*, shaped the archaeological site of Scheurrak SO1, and, in turn, the finds on the seabed testify to the story of the *Straatvaart* in an unique way. The twentieth-century studies of the *Straatvaart* by Heeringa, Kernkamp, Braudel, Brulez, and Hart for the most part concern the theory of this branch of shipping and focus on economic aspects. Scheurrak SO1 in combination with the more quantitative data from the Van Adrichem accounts – by Van Gelder dismissed as the irrelevant information of the invoices – show the everyday practice and cultural aspects of the *Straatvaart*.

Fragments of a filled coin scale box, a leather purse, and a writing set, draw our attention to the white collar initiators who organized ventures with Scheurrak SO1-like ships. The majority of Amsterdam-based merchants were active in the *Straatvaart*, using the knowledge and connections of the newcomers from the Southern Low Countries. The merchant community relied on family ties. Intermarriage was often the base of a new partnership and many businesses were run by a handful of family members. Increasingly, agents embarked on the ships as supercargoes or were stationed abroad to represent the company there, which ensured that merchants rarely travelled to the sales markets themselves. The upscaling of trade and shipping made joint ownership of vessels the rule rather than the exception, and the participants formed a heterogeneous group in terms of social, economic, and professional backgrounds. A ship usually had multiple owners, and a venture multiple freighters. Large ships with distant destinations like Scheurrak SO1 could only be commissioned because of this. The maritime trade shaped the use of urban space in Amsterdam and other towns to a great extent: a large share of Scheurrak SO1's finds is connected to these places in the maritime cultural landscape. The expansion of trade caused maritime law to be further developed and institutionalized from the 1550s onwards. Local regulations based on medieval customary law did persist, but also attempts for a uniform system of rights and laws were made by the Habsburg authorities. However, in the light of the Revolt, compliance with the rules was anything but a foregone conclusion. At the same time, regulations that were in the interest of skippers and merchants were followed, such as the ones on shipboard artillery and damage at sea. The strategies of risk management made that the traders dared to put more on the line. Not only in terms of capital (larger cargoes and ships), but also in choosing more risky destinations and types of products. The recording of agreements became increasingly important. Notaries were the embodiment of this development, and some were able to specialize in maritime matters, offering a great variety of services for skippers and merchants.

The growth of shipping and trade could not have been achieved without the intricate network of craftsmen, labourers, and suppliers, represented in the wreck with

the filled toolboxes, numerous pieces of equipment and armament, and the remains of the victuals. The development of the Amsterdam Lastage area shows that at the end of the sixteenth century the shipbuilding sector grew rapidly due to the increasing need for more and larger ships. This, too, required a system of regulations and rules, a task that was reserved for the guild. At the shipyards, the ships' hulls were built according to the wishes of the customers. As also the adjustments on Scheurrak SO1's hull underline, there was always room for adaptation of the construction, reasons could be to improve the sailing properties or to increase the capacity. According the historical sources such as the builder's estimates, also the interior division of space was fluid. This complicates the interpretation of the use of space in Scheurrak SO1, but through a combination of the find distribution, the diving reports, and snippets from archival sources, roughly a picture of the ship's layout emerges. Although the equipment of Scheurrak SO1 has been well preserved, the intricate network of suppliers became visible only through a thorough study of the accounts of expenses bequeathed by the Van Adrichem company. These suppliers were a varied group of craftsmen specialized in a type of product, the majority working under the supervision of a guild. The accounts also reveal information about parts of the equipment that has not survived in the wreck, or has not been excavated, such as the cannons. Conversely, the accounts are succinct on the cannoneer's tools, ammunition, and portable firearms, but thanks to Scheurrak SO1, at which they are well presented, we know also what these objects looked like. Besides some fish and ox bones and an enormous batch of barrel staves, little is left of the provisions of Scheurrak SO1, but the Van Adrichem accounts offer a solution here and tell of a shipboard diet rich of fibres, proteins, and carbohydrates, but with little vitamins. Even more than was the case with the equipment, the ship's provisions were purchased from a variety of locations in different urban centres. Apparently, a good deal, region-specific products, quality, or the convenience of a specialist shop outweighed the transport costs.

Scheurrak SO1's human remains, clothing, and personalized tools bring us closer to the sixteenth-century seafarers and their cultural world. The crews that sailed the ships like Scheurrak SO1 were relatively small, and were adapted according the ship's size and armament. Whereas for the lower ranks no specific training was required, for the navigators nautical knowledge was essential. The expansion of trade in the late sixteenth century generated a need for more theoretical education. The crews were recruited by the skippers through family and acquaintance networks, and both parties were protected by regulations based on old customary laws. Payment was a fluid concept in the 1590s and strongly depended on the paying skipper, rank, and the type of journey. Still, thanks to the business administration of the Van Adrichem company, a glimpse of the salaries of the crews in European merchant shipping could be obtained. Ranks surely played a role on board, but in contrast to later times, this did not lead to a strict spatial shipboard segregation due to the small size of ships like Scheurrak

SO1. Cornelis Claesz from Blokdijk was just one of the hundreds of West Frisians who embarked on a *Straatvaarder*. Their long experience on the Baltic fleet served Amsterdam and other merchant cities that were crying out for manpower in the light of the rapidly growing trade. Just as in Amsterdam, in the West Frisian urban centres the growing shipping sector generated large scale employment, both directly and indirectly through the connected crafts and retail trade. The urban layout evolved along, with a reorganization that created more space for shipbuilding and related industries. Even within the maritime communities, the seafarers were easy to distinguish. The remains of the garments of the people on board Scheurrak SO1 show what the historical sources only can suggest. Function went over looks and typical shipboard clothing like the *bolkvanger* testifies to an environment where practical workwear was the norm, but the presence of some luxury textiles and the decorated shoes show that fashion was nevertheless present on board. Tools, sewing equipment, and altered garments attest to frequent recycling and repairing. Seafarers were faithful people. The religious life ashore, like attending Sunday services and participating in rites of passage played a role. In churches, the maritime world was transferred to other groups in society through metaphors in preaching and physical objects and symbols. Scheurrak SO1's engraved toolboxes, however, show that on shipboard and maybe ashore too, seafarers expressed their faith rather in a spiritual than in a confessional way. With exposure to danger that a sea voyage entailed, the protective connotation of faith was especially important. Where written sources allow us to study the maritime communities on land, like Boon, Van Royen and De Wit did in their work, the material culture of Scheurrak SO1 that represents the seafarers allows us to study their cultural world on shipboard.

The seascape deals with the maritime cultural landscape of shipboard life. Although Scheurrak SO1 never made it to the sea passage on its last journey, the ship's inventory, either in forms of navigational instruments, household items, or medicine jars, embodies life at sea. In the estuary, life at sea started and ended – in the case of Scheurrak SO1 quite literally. The wreck is one of hundreds in the former Zuiderzee, with the highest concentration on the location where once Texel's roadstead was. The roadstead was the transit point of the coastal transport zone of the North Sea. In the zone, the interaction between humans and sea is visible in a system of buoyage, landmarks, and pilotage, ensuring safe waterways in the ever changing (marine) geology of the area. The communities in the settlements surrounding the roadsteads of the Vlie and the Marsdiep were often transport enclaves or provided for the fleet in another way. In the estuary, traditional knowledge of small navigation enabled steersmen and pilots to beat the shallows, currents, and tides. Once on open sea, this knowledge did no longer suffice and navigational instruments were needed. Scheurrak SO1's well-represented category of navigational instruments symbolizes the importance of nautical work aboard carried out by the steersman. The majority of the

crew was busy with the rigging, maintenance, and handling the artillery if necessary. The elements of the seascape determined the rhythm and pace of work aboard as well as the floating household. The recovery of many household items from Scheurrak SO1 in combination with the many records on the ship's inventories in the Van Adrichem accounts make the scene of food preparation and consumption come to life. The scarcity of finds related to personal hygiene and health care is significant: there was little room for this on board. The many objects used in the work on board, running the household, spending spare time and personal care, in combination with information on these topics deriving from archival sources, shows that shipboard life was in many aspects different on the sixteenth-century *Straatvaarders* than it was on the VOC ships as studied by Ketting and others. The distinctiveness of the seascape emerges most when it comes to misfortune. Danger was always lurking at sea and in the estuary, but the extreme weather of the Grindelwald Fluctuation (1560-1630) caused an accumulation of risks and hazards. The 1590s commenced with a series of shipwrecks in the estuary and with the Tesselschade disaster as the climax. Although Scheurrak SO1's presence at this event cannot be confirmed, the storm provided the perfect case study of maritime disaster due to the vast amount of documents it generated. Stories on the cause of the disaster, but also on rescuing and salvaging offer a glimpse of what might have happened to Scheurrak SO1 before it was covered with sand.

In this study, every paragraph opened with one of the many finds of Scheurrak SO1. Perhaps, besides the three thousand objects excavated, just as many were not preserved or excavated. The written sources fill the gaps to a great extent, with the biggest role played by the Van Adrichem accounts. They not only show what 'misses' in the wreck, but they also elaborate on matters that directly relate to Scheurrak SO1, such as joint ownership, the supply network, the composition and payment of the crews, the sailing routes, and responsibilities of the skipper during the voyage. Other archival documents, such as those in Van der Meulen archive and the notarial archives shine light on several other aspects of the ventures made by Scheurrak SO1 and similar vessels, such as the role of agents abroad, forms of risk management, and legal settlement of disaster at sea. The chosen methodology for this study is applying the concept of the maritime cultural landscape. In doing so, a historical approach was chosen, abandoning the aspect of spatial delimitation. This provided the opportunity to examine Scheurrak SO1 within the far-reaching and multilayered network it operated. In fact, this study takes Broeze's broad definition of maritime history writing – focussing on networks of people, commodities, and locations – to the next level, by adding material sources to historical ones. The maritime cultural landscape that became visible applies to Scheurrak SO1 as well as to the larger trading network of the late sixteenth-century Low Countries.

This landscape covered large parts of Europe. Close to the wreck, it includes Texel's roadstead, the transport enclaves on the surrounding islands, the West Frisian towns and countryside, and Amsterdam as the hub of trade and knowledge. Even Antwerp, the previous European centre of maritime trade, is part of it: its migrating residents took their commercial network and knowledge to the north, through which the *Straatvaart* could further develop. When drawing wider circles around Scheurrak SO1, we encounter the Sound as the gateway to the Baltic, and Sweden and England, where seafarers carried out the same spiritual rituals as the crewmembers of Scheurrak SO1. In southern England, the cannons for the Dutch merchantmen were produced. The Norwegian coastal forests supplied heavy ship parts, those on the banks of the Polish Vistula deck planks. Danzig and the hinterland were the purchasing markets for cereals. An even wider circle includes the Atlantic harbours of France and Portugal, the ports where Baltic grain was mostly exported to prior to 1590, and in the 1590s often were still included in the itinerary of *Straatvaarders* on the return journey to load a cargo of Portuguese salt or French wine. In the outer circle, at the edges of the trading network of the 1590s, are the Strait of Gibraltar as the gateway to the Mediterranean, the Italian port cities as the sales markets, and the Nova Zembla site that heralded the new era of intercontinental shipping and trade.

These locations or regions are just one type of component building up the maritime cultural landscape, besides there are countless actors that played a key role. These are groups of people, such as merchants, shipowners, labourers, craftsmen, suppliers, and seafarers, but there are also individuals that marked the landscape in an unique way. These are the maritime specialists of the 1590s: bookseller Cornelis Claesz, notary Jan Fransz Bruijningh, grocer Cornelis Jansz Geelvinck, and painter Hendrik Cornelisz Vroom. Besides locations and people, institutions like the Dutch guilds and admiralties, the Spanish authorities, and the Italian magistrates of the *Abbondanza* and *Sanità* are important components. So is architecture, such as the Artus Court in Danzig, the Amsterdam Weigh House, the Oosterkerk in Hoorn, and the *Lanterna* in Genoa's harbour. Historical events, such as the outbreak of the Dutch Revolt, the Fall of Antwerp in 1585, the lifting of the embargoes in 1589, the arrival of the first Dutch shipment in Genoa in 1591, and the *Eerste Schipvaart* to Asia in 1595 all had an impact on the maritime cultural landscape, because they were decisive for how trade and shipping was organized. Perhaps the elements were the most decisive factors: water enabled the seaborne trade, the waterways, currents, and winds determined the sailing routes, and the seasons and climate dictated the rhythm of trade. For sixteenth-century people, the elements were secondary to the supernatural and therefore also religion and spirituality are significant factors in how the maritime cultural landscape was structured in the late sixteenth century.

This list is far from exhaustive. Riga and Koningsbergen could have been added as purchase markets, and Venice and Livorno as sales markets, yet that would not essentially change the nature of the maritime cultural landscape. Critics of the concept of the maritime cultural landscape often argue that literally everything can be included, making the concept subject to arbitrariness. This does not have to be the case, as long as there is a clear starting point. In this study, what is included, is determined by the wreck and its finds. For this reason, other aspects of the maritime sector, such as the fisheries and the navy, regardless of their importance, are left out. This study is not an overview of, but a perspective on late sixteenth-century maritime culture. For this kind of history writing, the maritime cultural landscape has proven to be fruitful. With the wreck site as the starting point, the archival sources further colour the map, by giving context, filling the blanks, and solving some of the ship's mysteries. In turn, the finds on the seabed visualize matters and objects that the written sources can only allude to. In other words, the unique history uncovered in this way, could only have come about through interdisciplinarity.

Westerdahl, Duncan, and Van Popta advocate the use of an interdisciplinary set of sources when using the concept of the maritime cultural landscape. Yet most archaeologists applying the concept in their work do not include historical sources but stick to archaeological remains. Few archaeologists navigate through the archives and many limit themselves to using existing historical literature. The historical application of the concept as used in the current study shows that the maritime cultural landscape can function as a tool for archaeologists to incorporate historical documents too. At the same time, nearly twenty years after Auslander's plea for object-related historical research, many historians are still reluctant to use material objects as fully-fledged sources. For the historian, the concept of the maritime cultural landscape can function as the framework for the study of the material aspects of a certain time period, event, or historical theme. Although one needs to recognise that both historians and archaeologists cannot just take on each other's skill sets, this study has shown that new conclusions can be drawn by means of cross-fertilisation of the two disciplines. The maritime cultural landscape can fulfil a uniting role: in research projects with this approach, both historical and archaeological sources and methods can be included, creating more possibilities for interdisciplinary research.

When Scheurrak SO1 was found in 1984, it was by accident. Four decades later, the strategy of researching and excavating shipwrecks is still mostly incident driven. When a wreck is reported by sports divers or fishermen to the authorities, it is often already in a precarious state. As soon as it is uncovered from the sand, the supply of oxygen and the exposure to the currents can speed up the degradation process. Quick action is therefore necessary, but the lack of a steady basis in terms of manpower and financial means usually results in a demarcation, excavation, and research of the site

without proper attention for the archaeological context, let alone the historical context.[1521] The current research has shown that ships are always part of a larger history. Material remains have the potential to add new insights to existing historical knowledge, and the written sources can help to interpret the wreck sites. One of the main statements in Martijn Manders' work on the preservation of the Wadden Sea wrecks is that a better mapping through predicting strategies leads to better protection. Besides the archaeological tools and techniques as suggested by Manders, historical research can predict (possible) sites of underwater cultural heritage. In the late 2000s, the RCE started to build the dataset Wrecks in Documents. By collection data on wrecks as recorded in archival documents and literature, the aim is to predict the location of wreck sites. To date, around four hundred ships wrecked around Texel in the period between 1576 and 1795 have been included in the dataset and the list is expected to expand further in the coming years.[1522] Archaeologists are recommended to look beyond the ship's name in the archives, in order to map the larger history that the ship was part of. Only then, the wrecks can realize their full potential as a research entity. Historians, in turn, should aim to integrate material culture in their research. In doing so, not only history can be written from a new perspective, it also contributes to more awareness of the preservation of our tangible heritage. The prehistoric structures appearing on Scheurrak SO1's latest multibeam footage possibly herald the end of many wrecks in the Wadden Sea. For the majority, this means that they may be gone before research can be conducted. This research allowed the sunken history of Scheurrak SO1 to be recorded before the wreck is overtaken by time and disappears into the past.

1521 Manders, *Preserving a layered history*, 37.

1522 Dataset 'Wrecks in Documents', https://maritiemportal.nl/wrecks-in-documents-dataset/, last accessed 23 July 2024.