

Hizen Ware From the *Avondster*

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The ship *Avondster* sank in the bay of Gale in 1659 when its anchor rope broke. The ship was waiting to be loaded with cargo bound for India.

During the night, although the weather was fine, the vessel slipped her anchor and hit the shore northeast of the anchorage. The ship broke in two, and was soon submerged in the soft sand. An eye-witness account tells how a sailor on deck discovered the vessel drifting and tried to wake the skipper. However, the skipper was slow in making his appearance, and by the time he ordered the warp anchor to be thrown out, it was already too late.

Originally, the name of the ship was *Blessing* and it was owned by the British East India Company. Because of the Anglo-Dutch War, it was captured by the VOC and after some refitting in Holland, in 1654-1655, it was renamed as *Avondster* (Evening Star)¹⁾

In 1655 the *Avondster* returned to Batavia. On a voyage to Japan in 1656, she carried two large globes and an expert to explain geographical data to the emperor.²⁾ There are no records at this stage suggesting that the ship was unseaworthy; she was carrying valuable cargo and important people. From then the ship was used in Asian waters to transport cargo and military soldiers.

During the Gale Harbour project (1993-1996), several wrecks were found in and around the bay of Gale. The *Avondster* project was started in 1999 to train local archaeologists to become maritime archaeologists, including learning the conservation of the artefacts. The artefacts included many types of ceramic shards: earthenware, stone ware and some porcelain.

In 2003 we identified and inventarised a few hundred ceramic shards. A typology and database was made and part of this is published in: *Excavation report of the VOC-ship Avondster, Special Publications, no. 1, 2007(2 volumes)*³⁾

A number of European earthenware shards belonging to medicine jars have been found during the course of



Figure 1 Hizen ware from the *Avondster*

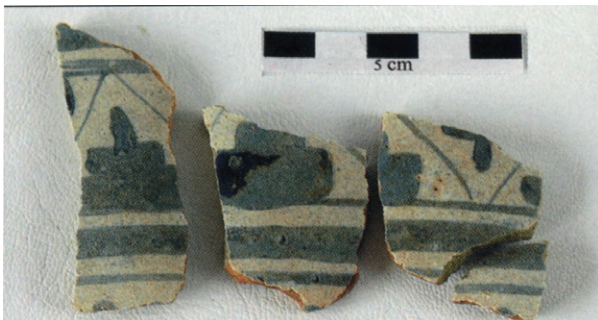


Figure 2 Delft ware from the *Avondster*

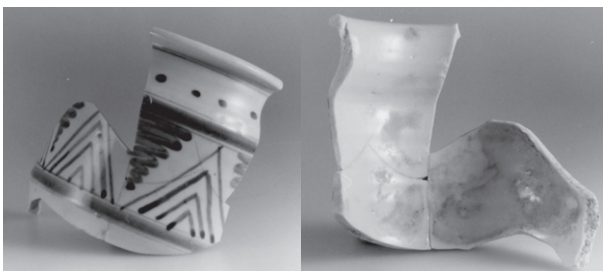


Figure 3 Hizen ware from Sarugawa kiln, Arita



Figure 4 Hizen ware from the *Avondster*



Figure 5 Hizen ware from Arita kiln, Japan

the excavation. These are known in the Netherlands as zalfpotten, which includes majolica alberelli. Such small pots were used by the apothecary to keep ointments and oils. The manufacturing of such medicine jars started in Italy in the 15th century and the technique of firing was brought first to Antwerp in the 16th century and later to Holland, where they were made at different towns such as Haarlem and Delft.

After the VOC came into contact with the porcelains from China in Batavia, they saw a profitable opportunity to obtain porcelain copies of alberelli. When the porcelain trade from China became stagnated around 1648, the VOC started to order porcelain from Japan. At first the VOC orders were not large but already in 1653 there was an order from Batavia : ‘...six pieces of wooden samples of bottleswith an order for a batch of utensils for the surgeon’s shop...’⁴⁾ A few months later ‘ 2200 of various porcelain bottles, pots for salve and preserves...’ were sent back to Batavia. Thereafter each year there is a mention of ‘gallipots, small porcelain phials, medicine phials, small apothecary’s pots for the surgeon’s shop...’ In all VOC settlements there was an apothecary, but the VOC ships always had a ‘surgeon’ on board so it is not surprising that pieces from this type were found in the wreck of the *Avondster*. Pieces have also been found at the kiln site Sarugawa in Kyushu, proving the

manufacture place.

Another type of Hizen ware is represented among the ceramic shards. They are from plates of a diameter of about 20 cms. This type of plate is known as kraakware which has a specific decoration pattern: the rim is divided into narrow and broad panels and the central decoration usually has a decoration of waterfowl or an auspicious symbol. This type was imported into Holland in large quantities from China, but after the closing of the kilns in Jingdezhen, the VOC had to find another manufacturing factory. Japan had started to make porcelain ordered by the VOC at Deshima from about 1650 and Japanese kraakware was copied from Chinese kraakware porcelain which had already been imported into Japan. The type found at the *Avondster* site is of a lesser quality than the early kraakware from China from the period 1600-1630. After that period, the quality of Chinese kraakware declined due to over demands from the VOC and the problems of production at Jingdezhen.⁵⁾ The Hizen kraakware is found at several VOC posts around Asia.⁶⁾ as well as archaeological sites in the Netherlands.⁷⁾ Only few pieces were found at the *Avondster* site because there was no cargo of porcelain so these pieces were probably owned by the captain or officer of the ship. Porcelain was still a precious and rare item to possess at that period.

1) For complete story see the *Avondster* website:<http://hum.uva.nl/galle>

2) 1656: *Avondster* voyage to Japan

This [letter] should reach you safely with God's help, directly with the yachts *Avontster* and *Calff* which have loaded together a cargo of diverse merchandise as requested at a cost of f.571221:11:14, as in the first f.302495:7:4 and in the other f.268776:4:10 in such form as the accompanying papers will show. also sent with these ships are four chests with all kinds of expensive silk which have been asked for specially from the Netherlands to be used as a gift instead of woolen goods for the emperor, the councilors and other authorities. ...Apart from these silks and curiosities we send you with these [ships] some strings of very special Coral [beads] and two very large globes, which were specially asked for from Japan and a number of geometrical instruments, and while we doubt whether the Japanese know how to handle these instruments with this yacht *Avontster* also goes under merchant Jan Verschuren Pieterszoon who is rather experienced in the art of geometry, and you can take him with you in the place of someone else on the voyage to Yedo so he can explain to the high-ranking

persons there how these instruments and globes are used.

Dutch National Archives, 1.04.02, 880 [outgoing letters from Batavia, 1656] fol. 268-282: letter to Boucheljon and the Council at Nagasaki, 11-07-1656, fol. 278.

3) C. Vialle'. The records of the VOC concerning the trade in Chinese and Japanese porcelain between 1634 and 1661. *Aziatische Kunst* 1992.

4) C. Vialle'. The records of the VOC concerning the trade in Chinese and Japanese porcelain between 1634 and 1661. *Aziatische Kunst* 1992.

5) C.L. van der Pijl-Ketel: Shipments and Shards. Dated finds of trade ceramics and the Dutch East India Company at the beginning of the 17th century. Paper for conference: Exchange of Material Culture Over the Seas. *Academia Sinica, Taipei*. 31 October-2 Nov. 2007.

6) T. Nogami: Hizen Ware transported by Galleon Ships. *The Journal of Underwater Archaeological Studies*, no.1, 2005.

7) Akemi Kaneda: What's the matter with porcelain? Japanese porcelain in Dutch households. Paper for conference: Exchange of Material Culture Over the Seas. *Academia Sinica, Taipei*. 31 October-2 Nov. 2007.

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