

COLLECTING IN THE SOUTH SEA

The Voyage of Bruni d'Entrecasteaux 1791-1794



edited by

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Back cover; Top and spine: Kanak *bwar* (*baché-ostenoir*), ceremonial axe, collected in New Caledonia, Musée cantonal d'Archéologie et d'Histoire de Lausanne (V/B-025). Photograph Yves André;

Middle: handle of a Māori *toki poutangata*, adze, collected in Aotearoa-New Zealand, Universitetsmuseet, Bergen (BME 10). Photograph Svein Skare

Bottom: Fijian *sedri ni waiwai*, oil dish, collected in Tonga, Museum Volkenkunde – Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, Leiden (RV-34-21). Photograph Irene de Groot

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Bronwen Douglas, as ever, dedicates this book to Charles, Kirsty and Ben, Allie and Andrew, Jean and Owen, whose enduring love and support make everything possible

Wonu Veys dedicates it to her mum and grandmother, to Paul, and to her colleagues and mentors whose enthusiasm, patience, and support made this project possible

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CHAPTER 10

Zeeuws Museum, Middelburg

CAROLINE VAN SANTEN

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The Koninklijk Zeeuwsch Genootschap der Wetenschappen (Royal Zeeland Society of Arts and Sciences), established in Zeeland province in the Netherlands in 1769,¹ comprised a group of well-to-do people who, as a pastime, were engaged in the emerging natural sciences. Membership was only attainable on the recommendation of an existing member and was rather exclusive. It also brought obligations, like the compulsory donations of objects to enlarge the society's collection of natural history specimens, historical objects, and curiosities. Director Aarnout Matthias van Citters donated three Tongan clubs on 6 January 1808.²

The Dutch in India

Aarnout Matthias van Citters's surname suggests a well known family from the province of Zeeland in the Netherlands. However, Aarnout was born on 18 October 1780 in Surat, on the west coast of India, to Cornelis van Citters and Julia Dorothea van Wermelskirchen. Originally from Middelburg, his father came to India as a junior merchant for the Chamber of Zeeland of the Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie (Dutch East India Company, henceforth VOC). Julia was born in Colombo, Sri Lanka, and met Cornelis in 1773 in Cochin in southern India where she was living with her stepfather Adriaan Moens, then director of the VOC district of Malabar.³ At the time of Aarnout's birth, his father worked as a storehouse manager for the VOC in Surat. In 1784, the family moved to Bengal in northeast India. They lived first in the trading post of Patna and later in Chinsura, where Cornelis successively held the posts of merchant, head of the trading post, and chief merchant. Like the other VOC employees, the Van Citters family was well established in local European society. Despite the fact that the different nationalities—British, Dutch, Danish, and French—were trading competitors, their representatives maintained relations with one another, both professionally, with official visits to each other's trading posts, and privately, by attending each other's informal dinners and sometimes very lavish parties.⁴

In 1791, Cornelis van Citters became the director of the VOC district of Bengal. He held this position until the British took possession of all Dutch trading posts in India in 1795.⁵ A year later, he repatriated to the Netherlands, probably taking passage on a British ship. This was unusual since VOC employees were expected to travel on VOC



vessels. Yet, due to organizational and financial problems within the VOC and also to the French occupation of the Netherlands, VOC shipping was very irregular from 1792 onwards. Whether the Van Citters family travelled to the Netherlands as one party is unknown. A letter book of VOC officer Johannes Cornelis Heijning contains several draft responses to letters he had received from Cornelis van Citters. Heijning's correspondence refers only to Van Citters himself and his travels home via St. Helena and London.⁶ However, in a letter to Jan Pieter Baumgardt, Isaac Titsingh mentioned that Van Citters travelled together with his wife.⁷ It was not unusual for the children of VOC employees to be sent to Europe without their parents, to live with relatives in order, for example, to receive proper education. No references to Aarnout Matthias have been traced so far but Titsingh recounted in letters to his brother Jan that one of Aarnout Matthias' younger sisters was supposed to travel to the Netherlands via England on a British ship at the end of 1791. However, her voyage was delayed or perhaps even postponed because of severe burns she sustained a few weeks prior to the intended departure.⁸

The Van Citters family settled in Cornelis's place of birth, Middelburg, but whether Aarnout attended the same Latijnse School (Latin School) there as his father is unknown.⁹ However, he eventually went to the University of Leiden to study law. In July 1804, he graduated with the presentation of his judicial dissertation,¹⁰ after which he established himself as a lawyer in Middelburg. On 6 February the following year, on the recommendation of president Nicolaas Cornelis Lambrechtsen of the Zeeuwsch Genootschap der Wetenschappen, Aarnout van Citters was appointed the society's director.¹¹ Later that year he married Digna Johanna van der Houte but the marriage remained childless. At the beginning of 1811, for reasons unknown, Van Citters resigned as director of the society, having already donated the three clubs.¹²

Possible acquisition routes

Van Citters's gift of the clubs lacks background information. In the society's register of donations, the clubs are described as 'Three pieces of wooden armaments of Indian savages'.¹³ This brief description is quite uninformative. Objects about which scant information was available were often referred to either as coming from China or as 'Indian'—the latter term could signify American provenance but was also widely used in Europe as a general synonym for 'native'.¹⁴

Figure 10.1. Tongan pakipaki, paddle club, in the Koninklijk Zeeuwsch Genootschap der Wetenschappen collection at the Zeeuws Museum (3600-BEV-Z-80).

Since the three clubs are definitely Tongan, the question arises of how Van Citters might have acquired them. His family's ties with the VOC and with Bengal are the most likely source. Archived letters from colleagues of Cornelis van Citters, like Isaac Titsingh and Johannes Cornelis Heijning, reveal extensive contacts between officers and between relatives based in the different posts throughout the VOC region. Besides sending letters to one another, they also looked out for each other's investments and sent packages to and fro.¹⁵ There was also an interest in science in the Van Citters household, since Aarnout's father Cornelis was a member of the Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen (Batavia Society for Arts and Sciences) from 1790.¹⁶ It is very possible that some objects from the Bruni d'Entrecasteaux expedition might have found their way into the household via such channels.

However, the close links with other Europeans in Bengal must also be considered. The British in particular might have contributed to Van Citters's acquisition of the clubs. Commander John Hayes, who led a voyage funded by Calcutta merchants to Australia and New Guinea in 1793 and 1794, in part unintentionally followed Bruni d'Entrecasteaux's route.¹⁷ In May or early June 1794, he stayed briefly at Surabaya, where on arrival he saw the ships *Recherche* and *Espérance* which had been taken by the Dutch. In Surabaya, Hayes gathered much information about the French expedition from, amongst others, Hesmivy d'Auribeau who had taken command on the death of Bruni d'Entrecasteaux in July 1793. Since they shared information and compared notes, it is possible that they also exchanged gifts.¹⁸ Shortly afterwards, Hayes left for Batavia where he met a British squadron from Bengal which had been looking for French cruisers and had stopped at Batavia for provisions and repairs. Instead of being allowed to return to Calcutta directly, Hayes was ordered to proceed first to Canton in China.¹⁹ There he met with the aforementioned VOC officer Isaac Titsingh, a friend of Cornelis van Citters and his predecessor as director of the VOC district of Bengal.²⁰ It is likely that Titsingh gave Hayes letters for his former colleagues in Bengal. So, back in Bengal, where Hayes arrived on 5 December 1794, other exchanges might have taken place, perhaps including pieces from Bruni d'Entrecasteaux's expedition such as the three clubs that ended up in the Zeeuws Museum.²¹



Figure 10.2. Tongan apa'apai, club, in the Koninklijk Zeeuwsch Genootschap der Wetenschappen collection at the Zeeuws Museum (3600-BEV-Z-81).

The clubs

The three Tongan *'akau*, club, in question are each of a different type and most likely had different makers, but they have in common extensive decoration. The first is paddle-shaped (3600-BEV-Z-80; Figure 10.1). This 114 cm long club has a lenticular cross-sectioned head and is an extremely well balanced and easy-to-use piece. A modern Dutch martial arts expert recently demonstrated these qualities to me. The club has a surface decoration throughout, with triangular and frieze zoning, filled in with several different geometric patterns. On one side, a whale ivory inset has been made in the shape of a four-pointed star. It seems to be a later addition since the inlay slightly interrupts the engraved patterns. According to the early 19th-century English castaway William Mariner, clubs that had 'done much execution' might be decorated in this way.²² Such usage could explain signs of damage along the top ridge of the Zeeuws club.

The second club is an *apa'apai* and has a head with a rhomboidal profile (3600-BEV-Z-81; Figure 10.2). It is 79 cm long with a knob at the butt and closely resembles one engraved in the *Atlas* of the naturalist La Billardière.²³ This club's surface is also completely decorated with mainly rectangular zones and friezes filled in with various geometric patterns. The latter are somewhat more coarsely carved than those on the first club. However, the second club is adorned on both sides with anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figures spread over the zoned engravings. From top to bottom, each side has two broad dovetailed pigeon forms and a broad-legged male with enlarged genitals, most likely due to elephantiasis. Below these figures, on one side of the club, are two two-legged walking birds with their beaks towards each other and, on the other side, one two-legged walking bird with its beak towards the right.²⁴

The third club has a rather unusual form since it is a stellate *'akau* (3600-BEV-Z-82; Figure 10.3). The shaft has a decoration of spiralled lines with, at the butt, a zone with a geometric pattern all round. The upper part of the club has eight longitudinal ridges, which are either smooth or serrated. The decoration of the upper part of this club is not quite finished. Some of the serrated ridges have leaf-like carvings on one or both sides, with serrated points as the top of the leaves, whereas other serrated ridges do not have this decoration. Moreover, on one of the smooth surfaces a start has been made towards the creation of a geometric pattern, which has been left unfinished. It is as if the visitors from Europe arrived before the carver could complete his work.²⁵

Figure 10.3. Stellate Tongan *'akau*, club, in the Koninklijk Zeeuwsch Genootschap der Wetenschappen collection at the Zeeuws Museum (3600-BEV-Z-82).

Conclusion

Research undertaken into the background of the three Tongan clubs, originally described as ‘Indian’ in the registers of the Zeeuwsch Genootschap der Wetenschappen, has provided a wealth of information on persons, objects, and historical events. As such, these Tongan clubs are symbolic of the fact that the history of the province of Zeeland is directly connected to the history of a much wider world.

Notes

- 1 The Koninklijk Zeeuwsch Genootschap der Wetenschappen was first established in Vlissingen. In 1784, a division was created in Middelburg where the society was fully relocated in 1801. It received royal patronage in 1969.
- 2 ZA, ‘Koninklijk Zeeuwsch Genootschap der Wetenschappen’, 1769–1969:139 (Collectie 26).
- 3 Van Haart, [Zeeuwse Elite: Mr. Aarnout Mathias van Citters d.d. 9 September 2007], J.-M. H. van Haart private Archief; Roos, *Zeeuwen en de VOC* (Middelburg, 1987):159–60; UA, ‘Familie Des Tombes’, 1485–1948 (Collectie 26. 2.3.16.1, 832); ZA, ‘Familie Van Citters (1780)’, 1841–2001 (Collectie 319. 1, 3).
- 4 De Waal, ‘Bogaardt parenteel’, *Engelbertus de Waal: Website van de familie de Waal*, 2013; Van Haart, [Zeeuwse Elite]; Lequin, *Het personeel van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie in Azië in de 18e eeuw ...* (Alphen aan den Rijn, 2005):189, 194–5; Roos, *Zeeuwen en de VOC*:159–60; ZA, ‘Familie Van Citters’.
- 5 Van Haart, [Zeeuwse Elite]; Lequin, *De particuliere correspondentie van Isaac Titsingh ... Text brieven* (Alphen aan de Rijn, 2009):194–5; Lequin, *De particuliere correspondentie van Isaac Titsingh ... Commentaar* (Alphen aan de Rijn, 2009):706; Roos, *Zeeuwen en de VOC*:160; ZA, ‘Familie Van Citters’.
- 6 NA, ‘Familie Heijning’, 1713–1986 (Collectie 607. 2.21.281.41, 3).
- 7 Lequin, *Text brieven*:467.
- 8 Ibid.:323, 328; Van Haart, [Zeeuwse Elite].
- 9 The Latijnse School was a grammar school preparing boys for university education or the priesthood.
- 10 Van Haart, [Zeeuwse Elite]; ZA, ‘Familie Van Citters’.
- 11 Kanter, ‘Voorbericht’, *Nieuwe Verhandelingen van het Zeeuws Genootschap der Wetenschappen* 1 (1807):XXVI; ZA, ‘Koninklijk Zeeuwsch Genootschap der Wetenschappen’:64.
- 12 Van Haart, [Zeeuwse Elite]; ZA, ‘Familie Van Citters’; ‘Koninklijk Zeeuwsch Genootschap der Wetenschappen’:64, 139.
- 13 Ibid.:139.
- 14 Douglas, *Science, Voyages, and Encounters in Oceania 1511–1850* (Basingstoke and New York, 2014):47, 58, 70–3, 82, 91–9, 148.
- 15 Lequin, *Text brieven*; NA, ‘Familie Heijning’.
- 16 Ross, ‘Naamlyst der heeren directeuren, dirigeerende en andere leden van het Bataviasch der Kunten en Weetenschappen &c.’, *Verhandelingen van het Bataviasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Weetenschappen* 5 (1790):57; ‘Naamlyst der heeren directeuren, dirigeerende en andere leden van het Bataviasch der Kunten en Weetenschappen &c.’, *Verhandelingen van het Bataviasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Weetenschappen* 6 (1792):43.

- 17 Lee, *Commodore Sir John Hayes ...* (London, 1912):16–80, 107–20.
- 18 Horner, *Looking for La Pérouse ...* (Carlton South, 1996):217–20; Lee, *Commodore Sir John Hayes*:119–21.
- 19 *Ibid.*:121–4.
- 20 Lequin, *Text brievien*:423.
- 21 Lee, *Commodore Sir John Hayes*:134–5.
- 22 Martin, *An Account of the Natives of the Tonga Islands ...* (London, 1817), II:278;
- Mills, ‘Tufunga Tongi ‘Akau ...’ (Norwich, 2007):132–7, 160–2, 375–6; St. Cartmail, *The Art of Tonga* (Honolulu, 1997):124–35.
- 23 La Billardière, *Atlas ...* (Paris, 1800): plate 33 (fig. 38). See Figure 1.8.
- 24 Mills, ‘Tufunga Tongi ‘Akau’:132–7, 160–2, 354–9; Hooper, *Pacific Encounters ...* (London: 2006):266–7.
- 25 Mills, ‘Tufunga Tongi ‘Akau’:132–7, 160–2, 354–9; St. Cartmail, *Art of Tonga*:124–35.