



‘Preserved from Decay by Air, Rain and Sun’. Forsaken and then Found: A Biography of the Hartog Plate

• TAMAR DAVIDOWITZ AND GIJS VAN DER HAM •

Over 400 years ago, Dutch skipper Dirk Hartog and his crew left behind a flattened piece of pewter tableware – a dish – on the Australian coast. As the earliest known Western object found on the Australian continent, the Hartog Plate, as it is now called, has become a significant national icon. Not long after its recovery at the end of the seventeenth century, it was brought back to the Netherlands, where it has since remained. For the last two hundred years, the Hartog Plate has been part of the collection of the Rijksmuseum (fig. 1).

The plate has always been surrounded by pervasive anecdotal narratives, some of significant consequence. It has served as an illustration of ever-changing times. As such, it is important to understand what the plate itself can tell us, and to determine what records remain that might help us appreciate the various contexts in which it has existed. Recent material analysis and archival research have provided new insights into the plate, unravelling its biography and shedding light on the various functions and meanings it has had since its placement in Australia in 1616.

An Ordinary Plate

The story of the Hartog Plate began like that of any other piece of pewter¹ tableware used on a ship of the Dutch

< *Fig. 1*
The Hartog Plate,
inscribed in 1616,
after conservation
in 2016.
Tin alloy, diam.
36.5 cm.
Amsterdam,
Rijksmuseum,
inv. no. NG-NM-825.

East India Company (voc – Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie). It was taken aboard the *Eendracht*, built in Amsterdam in 1615.² Considering its size, approximately 36.5 centimetres in diameter, the plate was presumably intended as a serving dish for the senior officers on board; the general crew, some two hundred men, used wooden or ceramic dishes. No documents describing the equipment or cargo on board the *Eendracht* have survived,³ but other voc documents show that every ship had a standard equipage of tin objects.⁴ A printed list published in 1788 describes seven standard types of dishes (*‘schotels’*) present in the cabin of each ship, categorized by weight.⁵

Although it is unclear where and by whom the plate was produced, two touchmarks have been identified. One, likely in the form of an angel, is readily discernible on the reverse and has a clear circular outline (fig. 2a). The other, a crowned rose, is located just below the first line of the inscription on the obverse, and only became visible with the help of a high resolution elemental scan of the plate’s surface, captured with x-ray fluorescence microscopy at the Australian Synchrotron in 2017 (fig. 2c).⁶

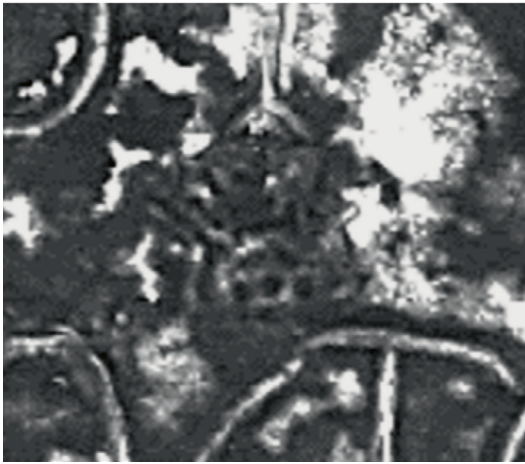
In the Northern Netherlands, the application of a rose mark to denote the quality of the alloy was first used in the second half of the sixteenth



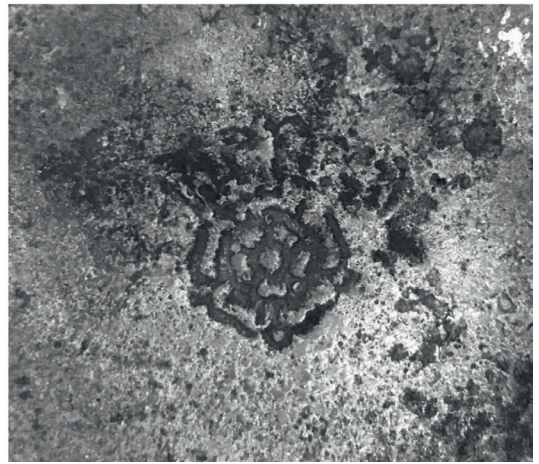
2a



2b



2c



2d

Figs. 2a-d

Detail of touchmark on the reverse of the Hartog Plate, likely in the form of an angel (a). Detail of angel touchmark on a pewter dish recovered from the Batavia shipwreck, 1629. Western Australian Museum, inv. no. BAT560 (b, photo: Tamar Davidowitz). Detail of the x-ray fluorescence microscopy lead map produced at the Australian Synchrotron, showing the upper edge of the Hartog Plate,

revealing a crowned rose touchmark (100 μm /pixel resolution) (c). Detail of crowned rose touchmark on the pewter dish from the Batavia shipwreck (d, photo: Tamar Davidowitz) (images b and d courtesy of the Western Australian Museum).

century.⁷ The angel touchmark, the earliest example of which is found on a piece of pewterware from Amsterdam, emerged only later, at the very end of the sixteenth century.⁸ Both marks refer to the quality of the tin, while their combined presence points to a fine tin alloy, called 'roostin', indicating a maximum of 2% lead.⁹ The Hartog Plate is an early example of a plate on which both touchmarks are combined, though this would soon become commonplace, and the combination of marks appears on other surviving VOC tableware.¹⁰ The overall composition of the plate's alloy, as confirmed by x-ray fluorescence analysis, is consistent with

seventeenth-century Dutch tinware. The same touchmarks are ostensibly present on a plate excavated from the famous shipwreck *Batavia* (sunken in the Houtman Abrolhos island chain off the coast of Australia in 1629), now held in the collection of the Western Australian Maritime Museum (figs. 2b, d). This may imply that the two plates were produced in the same foundry.

Plates like these were cast in a mould, then turned on a lathe to refine the shape and surface.¹¹ The Hartog Plate was no exception. Evidence of this can still be seen on the reverse, where the concentric lines of the turning process are visible on the surviving areas of the original surface (fig. 3). It was manufactured as a reasonably flat model with a slightly elevated outer rim. Another plate in the collection of the Rijksmuseum, though different in diameter, shows what the initial shape may have been (fig. 4).

A Plate with a Message

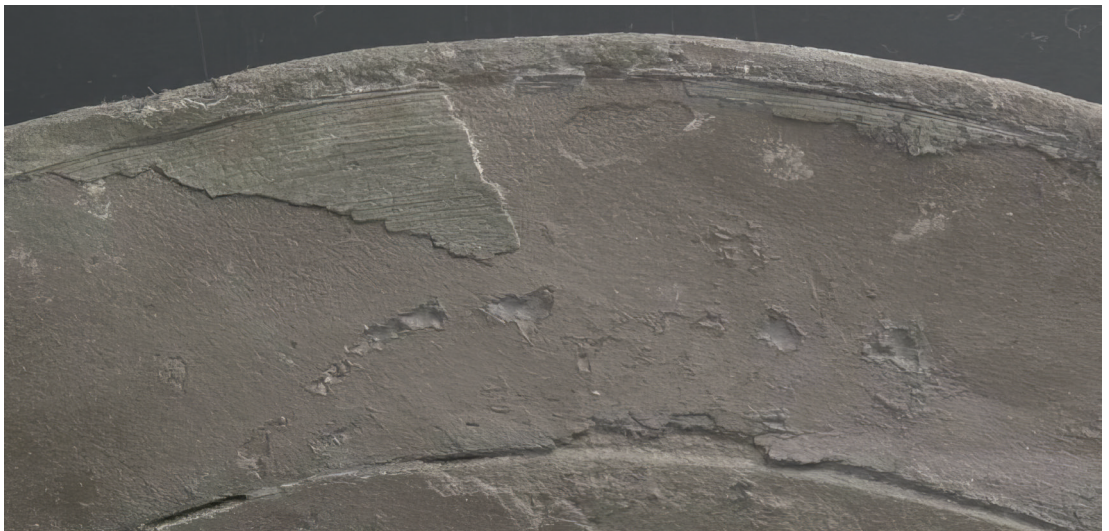
The plate embarked from the roadstead of Texel (the starting point of most VOC ships based in Amsterdam) on the *Eendracht* on 23 January 1616. Dirk Hartog¹² (1583-1621) of Amsterdam was the ship's captain and Gilles

Mibaise¹³ (1571-?) of Liège its upper-merchant. At the beginning of August, the *Eendracht* reached the Cape of Good Hope – the sole ship out of the original fleet of five, by this time all dispersed. It would continue its voyage east three weeks later. Rather than follow the conventional route along the East African coast, the *Eendracht* was the first to attempt a faster, alternative course – a shortcut discovered by the VOC six years before, from 1616 onwards the official route to the East Indies – by sailing directly eastwards into the Indian Ocean. In order to reach Java, where Dutch trade was centred, it was crucial to steer north at a specific longitude, but with longitude still difficult to calculate at this time, Hartog sailed too far east.¹⁴

In the second half of October, the *Eendracht* reached what was then an unknown landmass. On 25 October, the ship anchored near the northern tip of a barren island, now called Dirk Hartog Island, some fifty kilometres off the Australian mainland. What exactly occurred when the ship arrived is unknown, as no logbooks or letters survive, but certain is that Mibaise and Hartog decided to leave

Fig. 3

Detail showing lathe lines visible on areas of intact original surface on the reverse of the Hartog Plate.



*Fig. 4*

Plate, 1580-1600. Tin alloy, diam. 17.4 cm. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. no. BK-1984-16.

Fig. 5

View from Cape Inscription, Dirk Hartog Island, showing the crack in which the pole may have been inserted. Photo: Tamar Davidowitz, 25 October 2016



some kind of sign on the coast to mark their presence. As the land itself was ‘very barren and sandy and without any trees’,¹⁵ and the heterogeneous Tamala limestone easily crumbles under pressure, the only means of leaving a message would have had to come from their ship (fig. 5). A dish made of tin – a material malleable enough to chisel a message into, but hard enough to retain such a message and resist the expected strain and weathering – was therefore a logical choice.

The method used to flatten this already shallow plate did not involve hammering; instead, it was probably

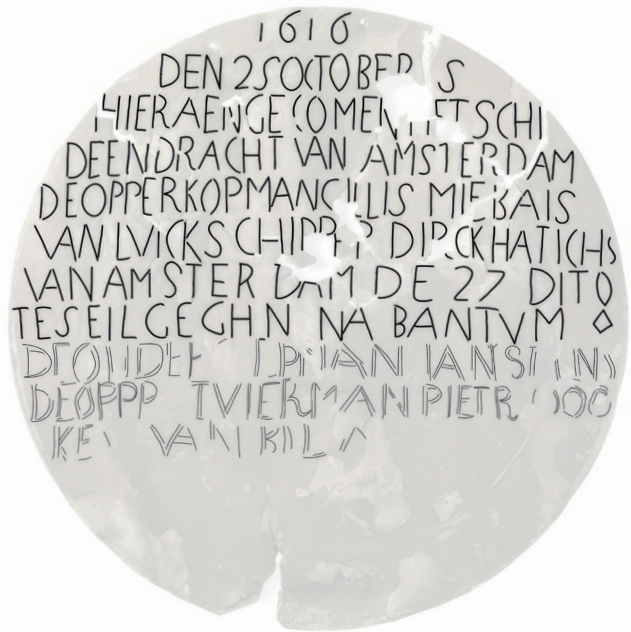
placed between two hard surfaces and then pressed or beaten flat as a whole. A simple visual inspection clearly confirms this: the aforementioned turning lines are still intact, whereas hammering would certainly have eliminated them. Moreover, radiographic imaging shows no trace of hammer marks, otherwise visible in the form of inconsistencies in the thickness of the metal.¹⁶

The plate was inscribed as follows:

1616 / DEN 25 OCTOBER [1]S / HIER
AENGECOMEN HET SCHIP / DEENDRACHT
VAN AMSTERDAM / DE OPPERKOMMAN
GILLIS MIEBAIS / VAN LVICK SCHIPPER
DIRCK HATICHS / VAN AMSTERDAM DE
27 DITO / TE SEIL GEGHN NA BANTVM /
DE ONDER[KO]EPMAN IAN STINS / DE
OPPR[s]TVIERMAN PIETR DOO / KE[s]
VAN BIL (fig. 6)

The inscription tells us the name of the ship, the dates of arrival and departure, and its destination (the city of Banten on Java, then the main port used by the Dutch in the Indonesian archipelago). It also provides the names of the main officers on board in the order of their rank: Gilles Mibaise of Liège was the most important officer as uppermerchant; skipper Dirk Hartog was responsible for the safety of the ship and its crew, as well as the ship's sailing course; Jan (Johannes) Steijns of Antwerp (?-1623) was the undermerchant,¹⁷ and Pieter Doekes from Het Bildt in Friesland (1587/1588-1656?) was the navigating officer.¹⁸ As was common in the seventeenth century, there are alternative spellings for all the names.

The manner of inscription has always been a source of speculation, as the last two names are inscribed differently. The words in the first eight rows have been deeply incised into the surface with a wedged punch, in some areas almost penetrating the metal core. The last three rows, by



contrast, are lightly scratched into the surface. It has previously been suggested that they simply weathered away, or that the last two officers had added their names in haste just prior to the ship's departure.

The plate itself tells a different story. A close visual inspection of the surface shows evidence of parallel, horizontal lines, spaced evenly between the rows of the text, suggesting that the inscription's positioning and content was carefully planned (fig. 7). This is further corroborated by the presence of what appears to be a light shadow lettering found throughout the more intact areas in and around the chiselled letters. The most logical explanation would be that the shallow lettering was simply intended as a guide for the subsequent incising, which was only partially executed. This also makes sense, given that few members of the crew would have been literate. It would not have been unusual for the text to have been composed by one of the officers, perhaps Hartog himself, with the actual handwork

Fig. 6
Rendering of the
inscription on the
Hartog Plate as
presently seen with
the naked eye.

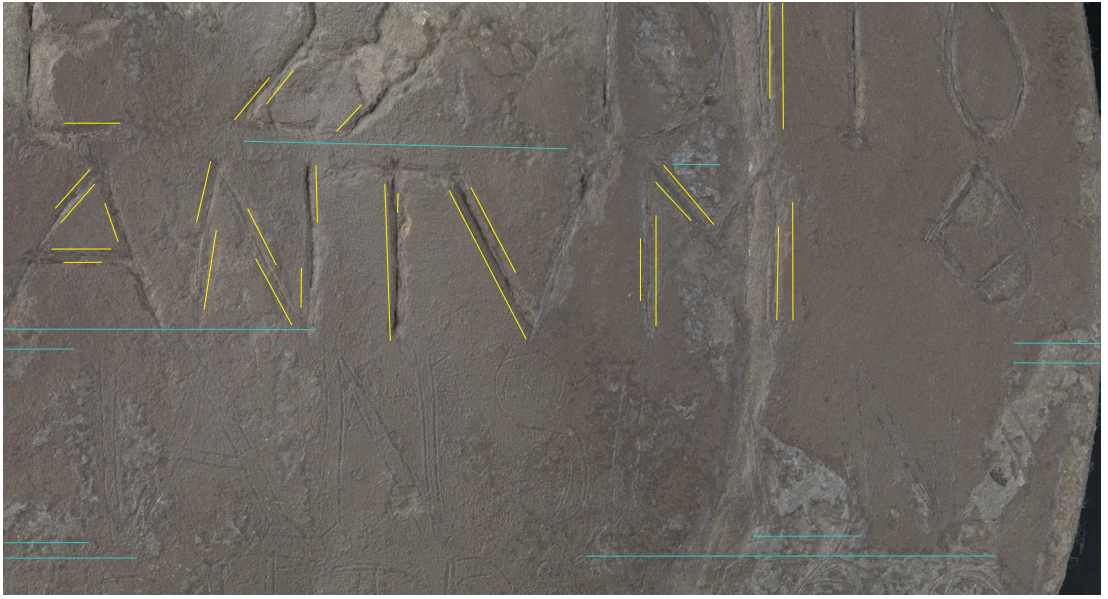


Fig. 7

Rendering of a detail of the inscription (mid-right) with yellow lines highlighting shadow lettering around the chiselled letters and blue lines showing the visible spacing lines.

carried out by another crew member possessing the practical skills.

Careful observation and material analysis furthermore reveal mistakes made in earlier published transcriptions of the inscription, which have been repeatedly adopted over the years. One example is the addition of a variant of 'anno 1616' and another the misrepresentation of the sequencing of the final three rows of text.¹⁹ X-ray fluorescence data acquired at the Australian Synchrotron also revealed a letter not currently visible. The 'p' in the word 'SCHIP' at the end of the third row, completely invisible to the naked eye and undetected in radiographs, can clearly be seen in the Synchrotron scans (figs. 8a, b). The final marking in the inscription, possibly the onset of a letter (A?) or symbol, suggests an unintentional termination of the message. Given that the Eendracht only anchored for two days, there might have been a rush to make the plate and then position it in its designated place. Perhaps it was simply decided not to add any further information.

Once flattened and inscribed, the plate was fastened to a wooden pole

or plank using square, iron nails. The distribution map of the elements on the surface reveals a concentration of iron around the two intact holes. Also indicated is the location of a third nail hole along the plate's upper edge, now in the gap between two fragments (figs. 9a, b).²⁰ In this way, it is possible to estimate that the plank or pole to which it was attached was at least 13 centimetres wide. By studying the plastic deformation of the plate, it is also safe to assume that a nail was placed bottom centre, and perhaps also in one or two points along the middle axis. Acknowledging the extreme environment to which the plate was to be exposed, those leaving the plate understood it would have to be mounted very securely. Naturally, it was paramount for them that the sign be found. It is therefore no coincidence that the plate was placed at the northern tip of the island, mounted high on a pole and made of a resilient and reflective material clearly distinguishable from its surroundings.²¹

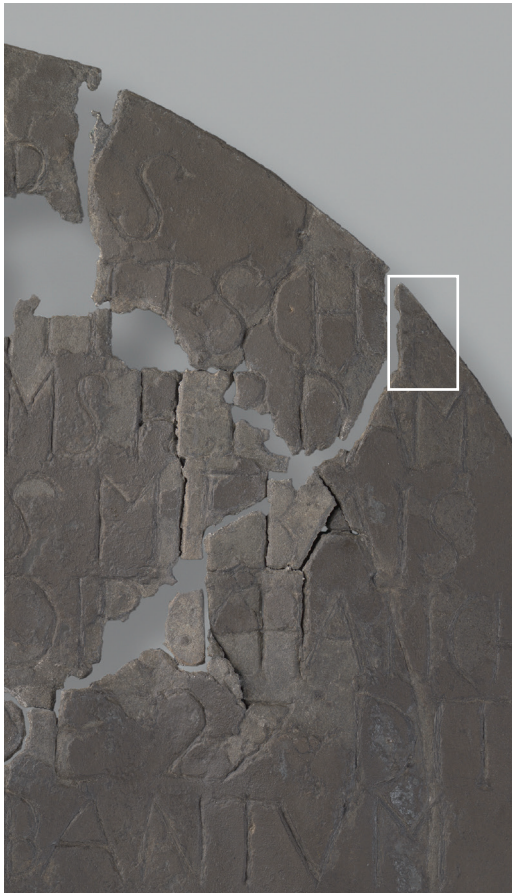
In the early seventeenth century, messages left by European ships on the coasts they encountered were quite common. Indeed, the text on the Hartog

Plate is comparable to other such messages left behind on the African coast.²² In 1622, the Governor-General of the VOC in Asia formally instructed skip-pers exploring the Australian continent to take newly found land 'in formal possession' by leaving 'a stone column', with 'in bold, legible characters, the year, the month, the day of the week and the date, the persons by whom and the hour of the day when such possession has been taken on behalf of the States General'.²³ While this largely aligns with the Hartog Plate inscription, there is no mention of the States General or any other Dutch authority. As this would have been an essential element in such a claim, it seems unlikely the plate was intended to have this function.²⁴

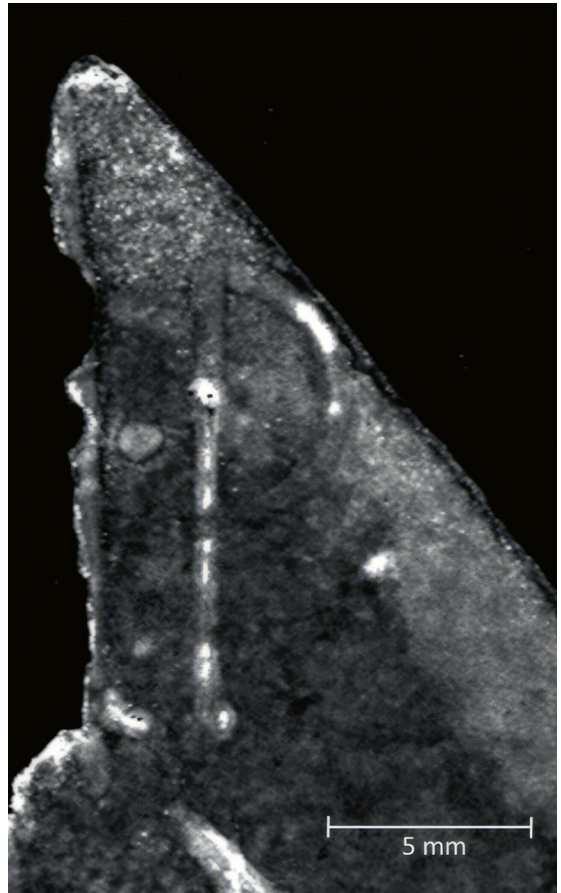
The Environment and its Consequences

The Hartog Plate sustained complex issues of degradation stemming from its time on the Australian coast. While no records of the weather conditions exist for the period it was on the cape, weather records dating back to the mid-nineteenth century show the island is prone to periods of cyclonic activity and severe winds. Between 1890 and 1990, for example, there were six cyclones of significant intensity, reaching wind speeds of up to 140 km/hour and rainfall of up to 120 millimetres in 24 hours.²⁵ Evidence of this can still be found on the plate, where the nails must have acted as a fulcrum, leaving the metal in a stressed and distorted state.²⁶

Figs. 8a, b
Detail of the Hartog Plate showing the inscription in the upper right quadrant (a), and the x-ray fluorescence microscopy lead map produced at the Australian Synchrotron, showing the no longer visible letter 'P' (b).



8a



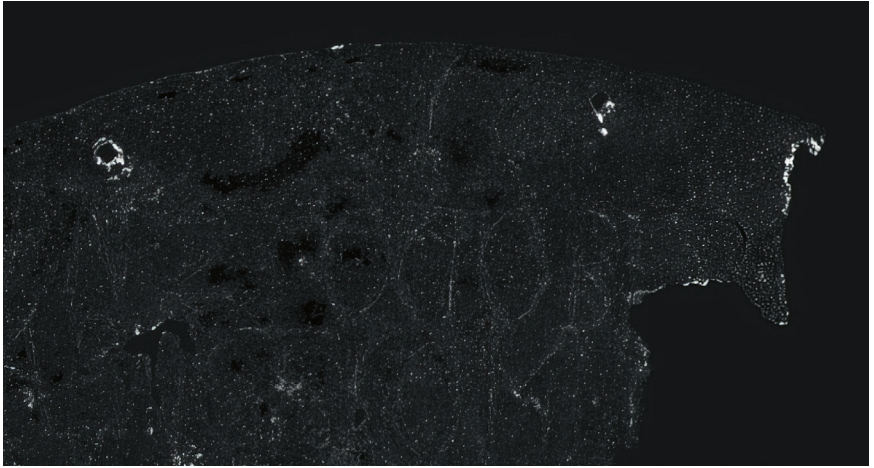
8b

Figs. 9a, b

Detail of the upper rim of the Hartog Plate showing two nail holes (a), and the x-ray fluorescence microscopy iron map produced at the Australian Synchrotron, showing residues revealing locations of iron nails (b).



9a



9b

Exposure to salt water and extreme variations in temperature and humidity also had their effects. Both the flattening of the plate and the deep incising of the inscription made the pewter much more vulnerable to corrosion, leading to severe oxidation of the surface, embrittlement, and crack formation. Multiple cracks have penetrated completely through the metal. The resulting edges have sustained corrosion virtually to the same degree as that found on the surrounding surface, suggesting that this cracking occurred early on, probably on the island itself. The plate's surface, on which one finds

the famous inscription, is extremely fragile, as it consists entirely of brittle and delaminating oxide layers.

During the years following the placement of the Hartog Plate, the VOC sent several expeditions to the west coast of Australia to assess its resources for potential trade. Not one reported having seen the pewter sign, including the merchant ships *Leyden* and *'t Wapen van Hoorn*, which either anchored or at least passed by the sign in July 1623 and in September 1627 respectively.²⁷ In the same period, Hartog and his crew's charting of the coast of western Australia, after he returned to Amsterdam in October

1618, found its way into maps produced by the VOC. In 1627, the official cartographer of the company, Hessel Gerritsz (1581-1632), produced a map on which the known parts of Australia were named 'the land of the Eendracht, after the findings of Dirck Hartogs with the ship d'Eendracht in October 1616'. As indicated on this map, the place on the coast where the Eendracht anchored and left the plate was named 'Dirck Hartoghs ree' (Dirk Hartog roads). Moreover, the company's official documents referred to the newly discovered land as 'Eendrachts-land'. Nowhere in these documents, however, is there any mention of the plate.²⁸

voc Relic

On 3 May 1696, a fleet of three ships left Holland with the instruction to explore the coast of 'the Southland or the land of the Eendracht', and more specifically, to search for the ship *Ridderschap van Holland* and members of its crew, which departed from the Netherlands in July 1693 but never reached its destination, Batavia. Led by captain Willem de Vlamingh (1640-1698 or later), the expedition consisted of the frigate *Geelvinck*, the hooker *Nijptangh*, and the galleon 't *Weseltje*.²⁹ As recorded in extensive logbooks recounting De Vlamingh's journey, their first encounter with Australia took place on 29 December 1696 at Rottnest Island, just off the coast of modern-day Perth. From there they sailed northwards, measuring the depth of the sea and surveying, charting and drawing the coastline along the way.

A month later, on 31 January 1697, the small fleet reached the island where Hartog had made landfall. It was some time before the crew realized they were on an island and not the mainland. On 3 February, a party was sent ashore, led by first mate Michiel Blom (?-1698), who found the plate that Hartog had left

behind. In the *Geelvinck's* logbook, the finding was described as follows: 'two hours after sunrise they came near the outermost corner of the sea-side of the island, where they moored the boat and climbed a mountain to have a look seawards, whether there should be anything left of ships or anything else; found on the top of the mountain a pole, with a tin plate lying near it, which they took aboard'.³⁰

The discovery of Hartog's plate is also mentioned in another direct account of the same voyage published in 1701, written by a crew member of the *Nijptangh*.³¹ This, in addition to the *Geelvinck's* logbook, would have been used by François Valentijn (1666-1727), who mentions the discovery in the third volume of his impressive and influential *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indien*, published in 1726. It seems he had access to different sources as well, as he provides other details, describing the plate as beaten flat and attached to the pole with two nails, one almost disintegrated, the other still distinguishable. It was Valentijn who first published a transcription of the text on the Hartog Plate, though his version is inexact. He moreover noted that the last lines of the inscription must have been carved with a knife.³²

Not only written sources exist of this finding. Another person on board the *Geelvinck* was Victor Victorsz (1653-?), charged with caring for the sick as well as the drawing of maps and the contours of the coastlines visited by the fleet. On his profile of 'Dirck Hartooghs reede', Victorsz indicated the exact place where the plate had been found (figs. 10a, b). He also did so on the main map he later drew of the west coast of Australia, or 't *Zuydlandt*': 'alhier de schootel gevonden' (here the plate found) (figs. 11a, b). This latter map would go on to be used by other cartographers to make printed maps also including this detail.³³



10a



10b

Figs. 10a, b
VICTOR VICTORSZ,
Contour of 'Dirck
Hartoogs Reede',
made during Willem
de Vlamingh's
expedition to the
South Land, 1697.

Maritime Museum
Rotterdam, inv. no.
K268-5 (a), and detail
showing the location
of the plate with an
inscription (b).

In the ensuing days, De Vlamingh ordered his crew to explore the island and the mainland coast more extensively. On the morning of 11 February, he took a pewter plate from his own cabin, ordered it to be flattened and had a message written on it, starting with the full text on Hartog's plate and ending with 'anno 1616'. To this, he added his own message in the same style: the date of arrival and departure, the names of the three ships and their officers, and their final destination, Batavia (fig. 12).³⁴ De Vlamingh then had his plate nailed to a pole, this time made from wood they had brought from Rottneest Island; both plate and pole are still extant.³⁵ Hartog's original plate was taken as a kind of trophy on board the Geelvinck.

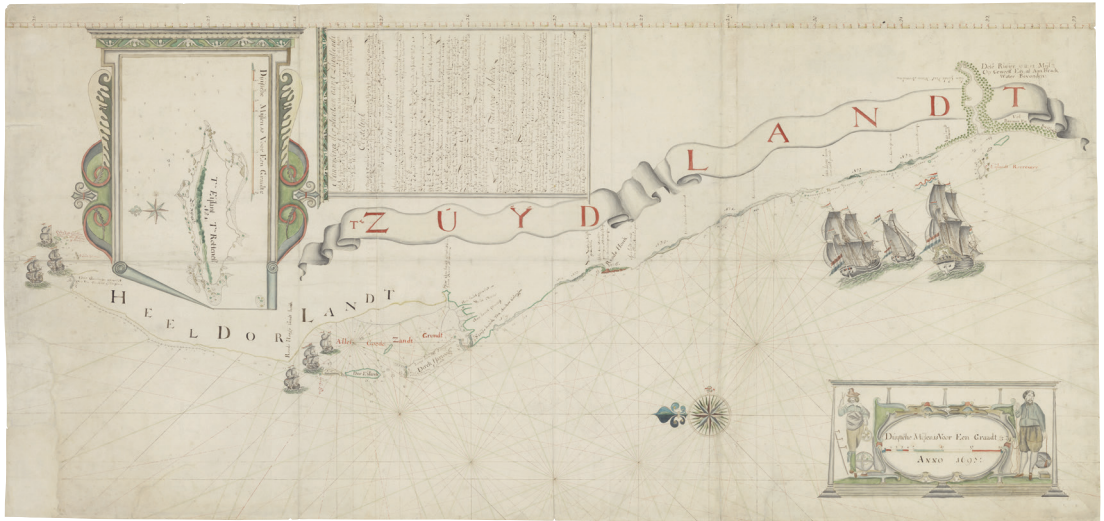
Upon his arrival in Batavia, De Vlamingh reported his findings

to Governor-General Willem van Outhoorn (1635-1720) and presented him with the plate. Van Outhoorn subsequently transferred the plate and all other worthwhile objects obtained during De Vlamingh's voyage into the custody of Claes Bichon (1660-1734), the commander of the returning fleet, whose departure from Batavia to Amsterdam was planned for 30 November 1697. In his accompanying letter to the board of the VOC, the Heeren XVII, Van Outhoorn referred to the plate as 'een bijzondere gedagtenis' (a special memento) and briefly recounted the story of its recovery,

expecting these gentlemen to be astonished that 'this old plate' had been preserved all these years on the coast 'from decay by air, rain and sun'.³⁶

The objects were stored in Bichon's private cabin on the VOC ship's *Lands Welvaren*, which arrived in Holland on 26 June 1698.³⁷ Although Governor Simon van der Stel at the Cape of Good Hope found the plate worth mentioning when 't *Weseltje* anchored there on its return journey,³⁸ there is no reference to it in the minutes of the three meetings Bichon had with the board after his return to Amsterdam, nor when its members

Figs. 11a, b
VICTOR VICTORSZ,
Main map of the west
coast of Australia
't *Zuydlandt*.
The Hague, National
Archives, P.A. Leupe
Collection (acc. no.
4.VEL), inv. no. 509 (a),
and detail showing
'Dirck Hartog
Eilandt' with an
inscription (b).



11a



11b

read and discussed the Governor-General's letters on 4 September.³⁹ In fact, there is no reference to the plate in any other surviving document of the company directors.⁴⁰

The most logical place for the plate to be kept was the main room in the *voc*'s Amsterdam headquarters, the Oostindisch Huis on the Hoogstraat, where many significant and exotic objects were also displayed. However, there is no information to confirm this.⁴¹ Even Valentijn, who knew of the plate's existence and had transcribed its inscription some thirty years after it returned to Amsterdam, offers us no clue regarding its whereabouts.

Museum Object

Over a century later, in 1799, the *voc* went bankrupt. The new Dutch state, the Batavian Republic, took over the buildings of the company's headquarters, with newly founded state institutions charged with overseeing the colonies in Asia and managing trade there. Eventually, the seat of government was established in The Hague, and at some point, the Hartog Plate was moved there, as were many other objects and paintings related to the activities of the *voc*.

The first mention thereafter of the Hartog Plate is found in a letter from the minister of the Colonies, Anton Reinhard Falck (1777-1843), to the director of the Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden (Royal Cabinet of Curiosities), dated 3 October 1820. According to the minister, a number of the objects once belonging to the *voc* were worthy of placement in this museum. Among these was 'a flatly struck plate, on which a Dutch inscription, and which plate in 1610 was found by *voc* ships gone astray in the Strait of Magellan, nailed to a pole, where it seems to have been placed by the authorities of the East Indiaman the Eendracht, according to what is legible of the said Inscription'.⁴² 1610? Found? Strait of Magellan? Evident is that the

plate's actual meaning and significance had somehow been lost the century before, with the inscription apparently illegible or carelessly misread to such a degree that even the year had been stated incorrectly and moreover misinterpreted as the year in which the plate had been found.

The director of the Koninklijk Cabinet, Reinier Pieter van de Kastelee (1767-1845), accepted the offer, and in this manner, the Hartog Plate was musealized. Even so, it remained part of the collection of the Dutch state, both formally and legally, as it still does today. Founded in 1816 and housed in the Mauritshuis in The Hague from 1822 onwards, the museum was filled with historical and ethnographical objects and decorative arts.⁴³ In the 1823 museum guide, the Hartog Plate was again dated 1610 and linked to South America and the Strait of Magellan, with the addition of the theory that it had been left behind on the coast by castaways. Interestingly, the description closes with a precise reference to the passage in Valentijn's book, in which the author recounts De Vlamingh's journey and clearly states that the plate had been found when exploring the 'Southland'.⁴⁴ The confusion is somewhat explicable, as an unsanctioned 1616 expedition led by Willem Schouten (c. 1577-1625) and Jacob le Maire (c. 1585-1616), aiming to find an alternative route to Indonesia via South America, also included a ship called the Eendracht.⁴⁵

In 1874, the Dutch government decided to establish a new museum and close the obsolete Koninklijk Kabinet. All Dutch objects were transferred to this Nederlandsch Museum voor Geschiedenis en Kunst (Dutch Museum for History and Art), also in The Hague.⁴⁶ In 1879, director David van der Kellen Jr (1827-1895) wrote a short article about the plate, published in the popular

Fig. 12

De Vlamingh Plate,
inscribed in 1697.
Tin alloy, diam. 35 cm.
Western Australian
Museum, inv. no.
DH14139.



magazine *Eigen Haard*. He corrected the date to 1616, but also created greater confusion by misreading the name of Mibaise's place of birth Luick (Liege) as 'Cuijck', spelling Hatichs (Hartog) as 'Statichs', and again repeating the story of the Strait of Magellan.⁴⁷

In the meantime, the new Rijksmuseum was being built in Amsterdam, where the Nederlandsch Museum would come to be housed. The collection was moved there in 1883. During the inventory taken in this period, it was noted for the first time that the dish was 'geschonden' (damaged).⁴⁸ In 1888, the second edition of the visitor's guide mentions that the plate was exhibited in the eastern courtyard, shown in a horizontal display case together with weapons and other historical objects. The guide still upheld the claim that the plate had been left behind in the Strait of Magellan.⁴⁹ The plate was on display, visible to everyone, but no one really seemed to see it.

The Hartog Plate Rediscovered

The turn of the twentieth century would be a pivotal time for the Hartog Plate, as new technologies and revived interest in its story would have significant consequences for its perceived value and condition. In 1899, the Dutch archivist and historian Jan Ernst Heeres (1858-1932) published a bilingual study titled *The Part Borne by the Dutch in the Discovery of Australia 1606-1765*, which included documents and commentary on this subject. He relates how a French ship had discovered the plate left behind by De Vlamingh in 1801. It had been found lying on the ground near the pole from which it had apparently fallen. At this time, the plate was rehung and left there until another French ship took it to Paris in 1818. Heeres knew of a publication from 1824 by navy officer Louis C.D. de Freycinet (1779-1841), who had witnessed the finding of the plate and included a reproduction of the



13a



13b

Figs. 13a, b
The earliest surviving photograph of the Hartog Plate, published in *Eigen Haard*, 2 September 1899. The Hague, National Archives, J.E. Heeres Collection (acc. no. 1.13.04), inv. no. 42 (a) and detail showing a fly happily resting on its edge (b).

De Vlamingh Plate in his book. In a note on page 84, however, Heeres claims that the original Hartog plate 'would appear to be no longer extant'.⁵⁰

This short remark led to a crucial reaction by Jan F.L. de Balbian Verster (1861-1939), who published an article in *Eigen Haard* on 2 September 1899 claiming that the plate had by no means been lost. In a letter sent to the Australian government official Malcolm A.C. Fraser (1857-1923) in 1903, he subsequently stated that after 'reading Professor Heeres' work ... I remembered to have seen a plate ... in our States Museum ... I immediately went there, and you can easily imagine my satisfaction, seeing at once that this was the real, the only genuine plate'.⁵¹ He described it in his article as 'a weathered pewter plate, the origin of which had so far been misdeclared', and went on to say that it could be found in the museum's maritime section, below the imposing stern of the English man-of-war Royal Charles from 1664.⁵² In his letter, he himself called this 'a small discovery ... that at its best could be called a historical peculiarity'. In fact, it meant that the plate had resurfaced a second time.

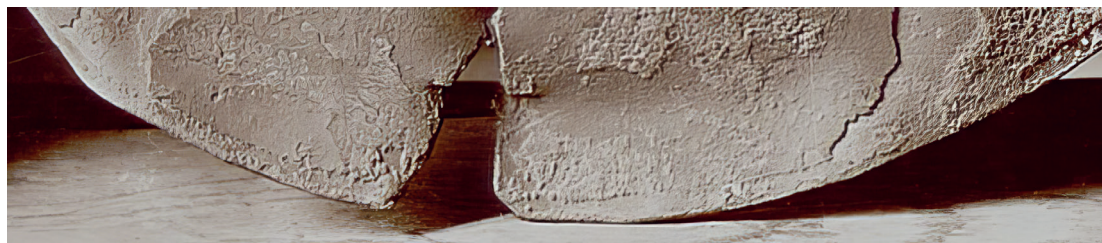
Verster's article included the earliest surviving photograph of the Hartog Plate – a document essential to our understanding of it. The original photo, which can be found in the Heeres collection at the National Archives (figs. 13a, b), provides invaluable insight into the plate's condition at the end of the nineteenth century and makes it possible to track the plate's deterioration from that time forward. Clearly, the plate could stand vertically on its own, leaning against the top of a ladder. While the large cracks and tears that would later lead to fragmentation are visible, it appears to be intact, along with highly informative oxide layers and original surface that have since been lost.

The impact of the *Eigen Haard* article was far reaching. Verster

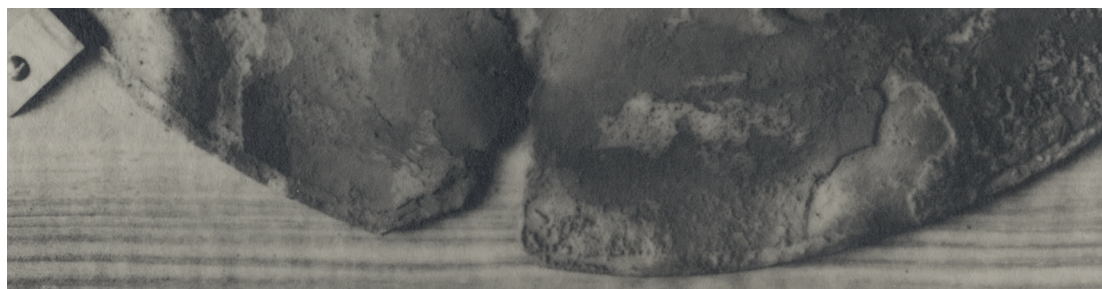
himself wrote in 1903 that, thanks to his publication, 'the inscription at the Museum was, of course, corrected'.⁵³ It was only after the 1932 refurbishment of the museum's historical department, however, that a new guide would describe the plate correctly. By that time, the plate was characterized as a relic, with emphasis placed on its historical significance. It had become the main proof that the Dutch were the first Europeans to set foot in Australia. For this reason, it was now exhibited in a room dedicated to the 'first voyages to India' and placed in the centre of a display case.⁵⁴

The Material of the Plate

In his article, Verster had likened the appearance of the plate to 'paper mâché'. This description intrigued a young chemist at the University of Amsterdam, Ernst Julius Cohen (1869-1944), who in early 1900 approached the director of the Rijksmuseum requesting permission to examine it. He feared the plate was suffering from tin pest, a phenomenon that causes the allotropic transformation of metallic tin into a much more voluminous non-metallic form, an irreversible change that would destroy it.⁵⁵ Having published his research on this subject the year before (he would go on to become a world-renowned expert on the allotropy of metals), Cohen received permission to sample several grams of material to test his hypothesis: the first material analysis of the plate. Precisely where the sample was taken can clearly be seen when comparing the 1899 photograph with the next image taken (sometime before 1938) (figs. 14a, b). Thankfully, Cohen's analysis showed no evidence of tin pest, only the presence of reasonably stable oxides. He assured the director that the plate would therefore remain in the same condition, and that no drastic action would be necessary to ensure its preservation.⁵⁶



14a



14b

Figs. 14a, b
Detail of the lower rim from the 1899 photograph, before sample-taking (a), and the same detail of the lower rim from a later photograph (before 1938), after sample-taking (b).

The plate would remain on display until 1939, when the threat of war forced the Rijksmuseum collection to be moved for safekeeping. It was stored in a crate together with objects recovered from Nova Zembla: first in a school building in Wieringerwerf in 1939 and later in a much safer depository near Steenwijk.⁵⁷ Not until the first half of 1947 were the objects transported back to the museum. A note on the plate's inventory card states that, by this time, its condition was so poor that it could no longer be displayed, no doubt due to handling, transport, and storage environment.⁵⁸ The changes in its condition can be seen when comparing photographs taken in 1938 and 1951 (figs. 15a, b). New areas had fragmented, with some fragments even missing in the 1951 photograph, suggesting they had become detached and would need to be re-adhered before the plate could be displayed.

By 1953, Arthur F.E. Van Schendel (1910-1979), the then director of the department of paintings in the Rijksmuseum and general director from 1959 on, had taken the initiative to have the plate examined and treated. This is a clear sign that, by this time,

the plate's importance as a historical object of national glory was now acknowledged by the museum – all the more remarkable given that questions concerning conservation were largely reserved for paintings and other artworks of high aesthetic value.

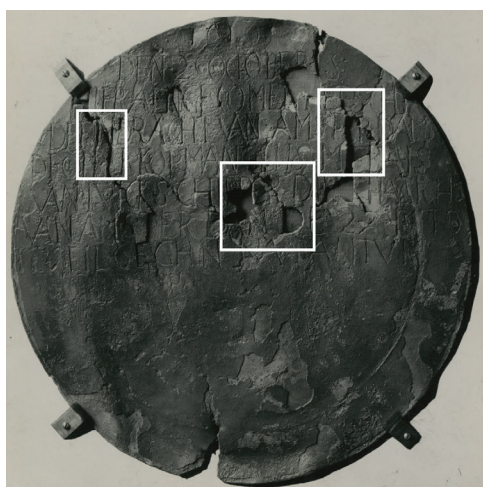
Unclear is whether the museum was still aware of Cohen's work on the plate. Regardless, the British Museum was approached for new analysis, as there was again fear of the presence of tin pest. Harold Plenderleith (1898-1997), an early and prominent pioneer in the technical analysis and conservation of objects of cultural heritage, carried out a metallographic study of a microsection of the plate. Consistent with Cohen's findings, Plenderleith confirmed that no tin pest was present, but he expressed his concern that the oxide layers were delaminating from the metallic core. He suggested to either encase the plate in plastic or impregnate it with a neutral synthetic resin and frame it in unplasticized Perspex. He also observed that a previous treatment had been performed, with the object coated by a 'resinous matter', though precisely when and how this occurred is not known.⁵⁹

<

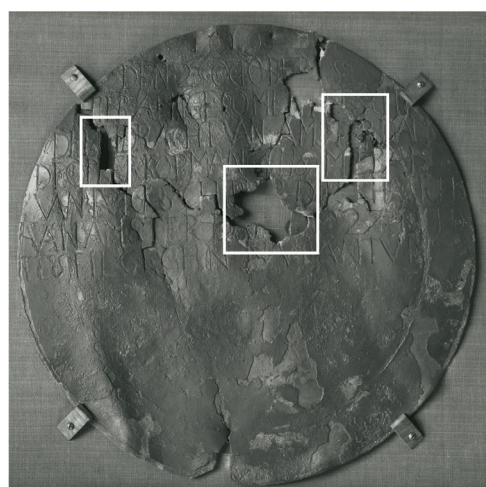
As a direct reaction to Plenderleith's findings, it was decided to subject the plate to a more thorough analysis and treatment, a task assigned to the Koninklijk Instituut voor het Kunstpatrimonium (KIK-IRPA, Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage) in Brussels.⁶⁰ Identifying the presence of tin pest and other forms of degradation was a priority, with an extensive suite of analytical techniques also applied to better understand the material.⁶¹ Only tin oxide was found on the surface, and again, there was no evidence of allotropic tin pest. Furthermore, no traces of soluble salts were found, and solvent testing

showed that the plate had never been fully impregnated and instead only coated with a soluble material. Sample material was taken in the same place as before on the plate's bottom edge, using a jeweller's saw.⁶² Cross sections revealed that a metallic core of approximately 1 millimetre thick was still present, and that the oxide layers penetrated deeply into it. The crystal structure was hypothesized to be severely disrupted due to the cold-working that occurred during the initial flattening. This needed to be resolved to ensure the plate's long-term preservation.

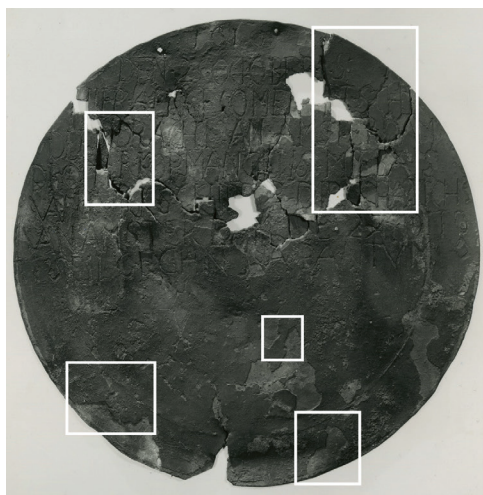
Figs. 15a-d
Increased damage and fragmentation over time, visible in series of photographs from Rijksmuseum object folder: 1938 (a), 1951 (b), 1953 (c), 1963 (d).



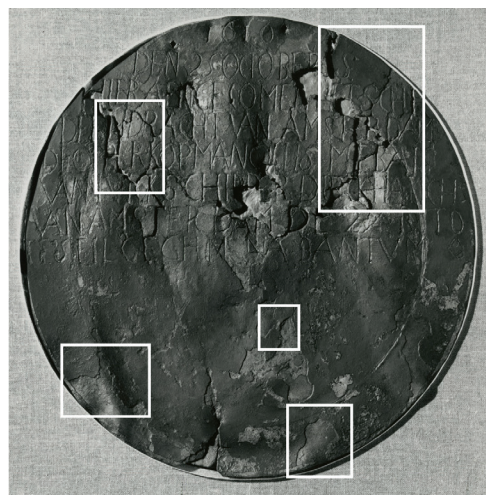
15a



15b



15c



15d

Chemical treatment was ruled out, in light of the potential risk to the oxide layers containing the inscription. Only the coating and pulverized corrosion were removed. A bold treatment, however, would ensue. It was decided to anneal the plate to ensure the stabilization of the crystal structure of the metal. After the surface was cleaned,⁶³ it was heated in an oven for four days at 115 degrees Celsius, the lowest temperature at which recrystallization occurs in tin.⁶⁴ The plate was then impregnated with liquid paraffin to prevent further delamination of the oxide layers, the fragment joints were filled and retouched, and to create a support, a silicone mould was made of the reverse. The plate and its support were then mounted on a wooden backing with a plexiglass frame, in the hope that this would distribute the stress on the object more uniformly (fig. 16).

For its time, this treatment was state of the art. Even so, it caused evident changes to the plate's condition, clearly visible when comparing photographs taken before and after.

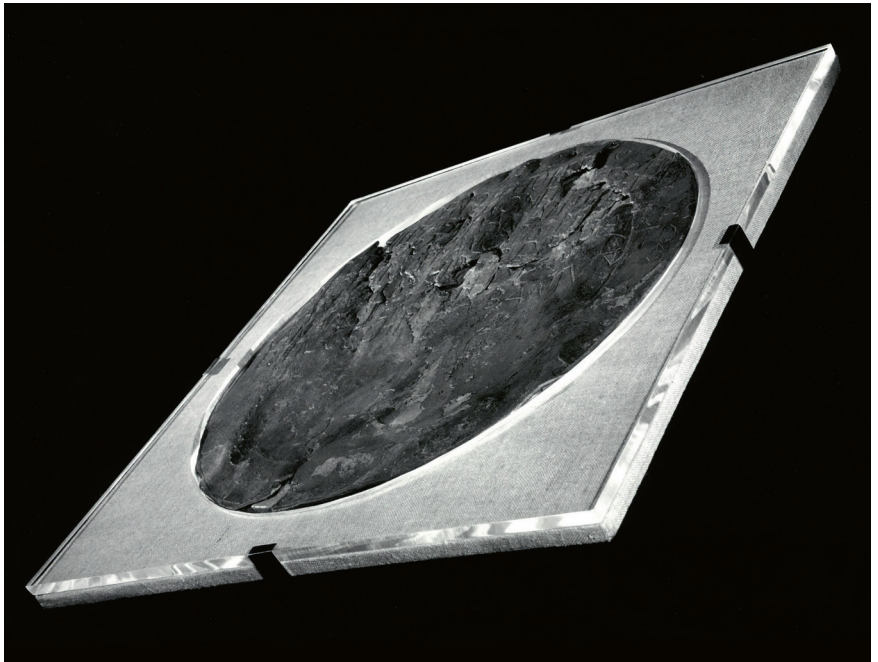
New fragments were created and further delamination of the surface oxide layers occurred, despite the impregnation. Three of the fragments were even filed down to facilitate a better placement and adhesion, as can still be observed today.⁶⁵ It remains to be seen to what degree the annealing of the metallic core and the irreversible impregnation with paraffin prevented possible corrosion, and whether the damage done by this treatment was a worthwhile sacrifice.

An Australian Icon

While the Dutch were happy to embrace the Hartog Plate and its story, in Australia its acceptance was far from immediate. In 1895, George Collingridge (1847-1931), in his influential *The Discovery of Australia*, openly questioned the very existence of the Hartog Plate: 'the plate we would like to see when found, if it is ever to be found, indeed, if it ever existed'. He moreover suggested that De Vlamingh had invented the 1616 text and included it in his own inscription

Fig. 16

Photograph of the support, published by the KIK-IRPA in 1963.



to make the claim that Australia was discovered by the Dutch, not the British.⁶⁶ In 1913, he cited Verster's letter sent together with the photo of the plate in 1903 to Fraser, also editor of the *Western Australian Year Book*, which subsequently published the photo.⁶⁷ Collingridge – as ever denying that the Dutch had come to Australia before the English – maintained that the plate in the Rijksmuseum was not original and instead a forgery made by De Vlamingh.

Despite this nationalistic approach, in the ensuing years Australians would come to see the plate in Amsterdam as genuine. In 1929, for instance, its story was told in an article in the Melbourne newspaper *The Age*, even ending with the wish that 'someday it will be returned to Australia' because 'it has a very real significance for us, as being the first memorial set up by a white man in our country'.⁶⁸ The plate would remain in the Rijksmuseum, but as an alternative, in 1937 the Western Australian Historical Society requested that a replica be made. This reproduction was presented by the government of the Dutch East Indies at an official ceremony in August 1938 in Perth.⁶⁹ The condition of the original plate had not allowed for a direct cast to be made.⁷⁰ Instead, a plaster interpretation was modelled after a photograph and subsequently cast in bronze. Considering the level of detail and materials used, the intention of this replica was clearly a figurative one and had very little to do with the materiality of the original plate. Earlier that year, the Australian government had decided to erect a commemorative tablet on the Cape Inscription lighthouse, near the place where Hartog had left it.⁷¹

By February 1943, *The School Magazine of Literature for Our Boys and Girls* had the plate itself telling Australian youngsters its story: 'I am old and cracked and broken now, but

there was a time when I was bright and new and handsome' the text begins, closing with 'I have heard that the little folk who live in Australia learn about me at school. I should dearly love to see them, and I am sure they would like to see me. What do you think?'⁷²

This educational text shows that in Australia the knowledge and status of the Hartog Plate had been growing, along with the wish that the plate would be returned. In 1954, *The Sydney Morning Herald* published a letter from the well-known Australian journalist, naturalist and author, Alec H. Chisholm (1890-1977),⁷³ who asked why Holland had not given the Hartog Plate to Australia, as France had done several years earlier with the De Vlamingh Plate. Only a few days after Chisholm's publication, the Royal Netherlands Embassy published a response, claiming that the plate was 'one of the most precious relics from the Golden Age of the Netherlands voyages of discovery and is therefore cherished by the Dutch people as a poignant reminder of the links between our two countries', calling to mind that a replica had been presented in 1938.⁷⁴ He might also have added that, contrary to the Dutch affinity with the Hartog Plate, the De Vlamingh Plate had no historic value for the French.

From this moment on, the Western Australian authorities would repeatedly contact their Dutch counterparts for the 'return', as it was often phrased, of the Hartog Plate. The pressure escalated in the years before 1966, when the 350th anniversary of Hartog's landfall was to be celebrated. For this occasion, the Rijksmuseum decided to send a new replica. As R. Munnikendam of the Centraal Laboratorium voor Onderzoek van Voorwerpen van Kunst en Wetenschap (Central Laboratory for Research of Objects of Art and Science) in Amsterdam

wrote in an internal memo in 1965, the decision to produce a replica was also a reaction to the Australian authorities' claim that they were the lawful owners of the plate.⁷⁵ This institution, founded in 1963 on Van Schendel's initiative, was asked to make two replicas: one for the future Western Australian Maritime Museum as a stand-in for the plate itself, and one to remain in the Rijksmuseum as a means to monitor the plate's degradation.⁷⁶ It was an invasive and risky endeavour: unlike the 1938 sculpted replica, this time the replication process involved the making of a mould by means of applying silicone rubber directly to the plate. The replicas themselves were cast in Araldite epoxy and finished with acrylic paints and pigments.⁷⁷

The quality of these replicas is impressive, particularly the plate at the Western Australian Maritime Museum, still on display today. They were meant to reflect every detail of the object itself. The nuance and attention paid to the surface texture and colour show that a shift had occurred in the appreciation of the plate's materiality and the story it could tell, and that a certain level of authenticity had become important.

This approach suggests that Australia was no longer simply looking for a symbolic substitute for the plate, but rather a replacement matching the original to the highest possible degree. Nevertheless, the desire for the actual Hartog Plate persevered, with unsuccessful pleas to have it gifted to Australia submitted in the nineteen seventies, especially by Governor-General Sir Paul Hasluck (1905-1993), who had even contacted Prince Bernhard, consort of Queen Juliana, on the matter. Remaining steadfast, however, the Rijksmuseum advised against this. Following this advice, the Dutch government denied the requests.⁷⁸

In 1988, the issue again came to a head, stemming from celebrations marking Australia's bicentenary. The Western Australian Maritime Museum asked to receive the plate on loan; in reality, however, they hoped to obtain the plate on a permanent basis. Influential Dutch authorities likewise appeared sensitive to a 'return'. The Dutch ambassador to Australia even suggested to his minister of Foreign Affairs that the Hartog Plate would be the ideal gift for Queen Beatrix (who had succeeded her mother in 1980) to present during her visit to Australia in that year. He pointed out that very few visitors to the Rijksmuseum had shown an interest in the object.⁷⁹ This met with resistance at the Rijksmuseum itself, where general director Simon Levie (1925-2016) and the director of the history department, Wim Vroom (1930-2019), presented every conceivable argument against it. They described the plate as 'one of the highlights' of the museum's permanent exhibition of Dutch history, which opened in 1971, where the plate was prominently displayed in its own showcase. They also argued that, together with surviving documents preserved in the Dutch National Archives, the plate was part of a unique ensemble of historical sources representing VOC heritage.⁸⁰

In government circles, the ambassador's suggestion led to an interesting correspondence between the minister of Foreign Affairs, Hans van den Broek (1936-2025), and his colleague in the department of Culture, Elco Brinkman (1948). Following the Rijksmuseum's advice, Brinkman stressed that the plate's presentation as a gift to Australia would be a very unwise move, given its utmost importance to the Netherlands. Van den Broek dismissed this, however, replying that it was just 'a utensil with a bit of text on it', and an object of some value as a curiosity, but nothing

more.⁸¹ Arguments provided by the Rijksmuseum strengthened Brinkman in his resolve, and in the end, the gift was never realized. While this debate was going on in the Netherlands, the Hartog Plate itself was in fact in Australia – for the first time since 1697 – featured as the centrepiece of a touring exhibition titled *Shipwreck!* In preparation for the tour, the Rijksmuseum had invested a significant amount of time and money in the design of a nitrogen-rich capsule to ensure the plate's safety during transport and exhibition. To facilitate the capsule's production, multiple institutions and experts were involved. Besides a 1980 showing at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, the Australian tour was only the second time that the plate had been lent for an exhibition.⁸² Over the course of eighteen months, the plate was shown in every state and major city in Australia, returning to the Rijksmuseum no earlier than the second half of 1989, where it was again placed on permanent display.⁸³

Conservation

In the late nineteen nineties, the plate would undergo another period of intense scrutiny and intervention, again in preparation for an exhibition in Australia.⁸⁴ At this time, it was still being displayed on the support produced at the KIK-IRPA. The plate looked to be in poor condition, raising questions about the corrosive properties of the conservation materials and whether these were causing stress to the object.⁸⁵ Moreover, the nitrogen-rich capsule made for the previous exhibition was no longer functional, with solutions consequently sought for the necessary conservation treatment. To this end, spectroscopic analyses were again carried out at the Instituut Collectie Nederland (ICN), successor of the Centraal Laboratorium. The plan was to remove the plate from its support, reusing elements

where feasible. Epoxies were determined to be the most desirable type of adhesive, with new neutral-coloured fill materials to be used for the gaps, slightly different than the colour of the plate itself.⁸⁶

By the time the capsule was opened in 1997, the plate had broken into at least eleven different fragments (fig. 17). Complying with the results of the ICN research, the fragments were then re-adhered with a two-component Araldite epoxy resin, and the surface retouched with acrylic paints.⁸⁷ In an effort to provide the plate with the best possible treatment, thorough research was again conducted, with only the highest quality, state-of-the-art materials employed. Despite the best inten-

Fig. 17

Photograph of the Hartog Plate in 1997 during treatment at the Rijksmuseum. Photo: Dutch Culture

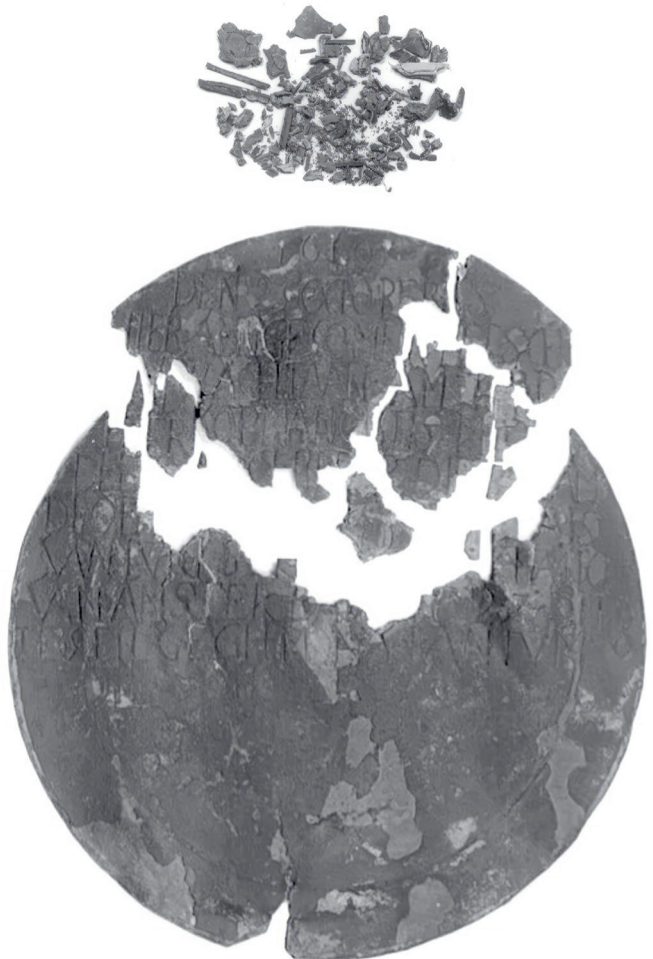




Fig. 18

The Hartog Plate on display in the Rijksmuseum in the nitrogen capsule in 1999, designed by Fokker Aerospace the year before. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. no. HA-0017397.

tions, and though in some ways beneficial to the overall condition of the plate, this treatment would also prove to have unfortunate consequences.

Fokker Aerospace was tasked with designing a new glass capsule with a slight over-pressure of nitrogen. To ensure minimal intervention during transport and exhibition, silicone moulds were made of the reverse and obverse. Once on display, the mould of the obverse was to be removed and the volume filled with nitrogen gas (fig. 18).⁸⁸ It was this capsule that was used to transport and display the Hartog Plate in 2000, at which time the plate once again travelled to Australia, now for an exhibition on Dutch-Australian relations at the Australian Maritime Museum in Sydney.

Newly treated and better prepared for transport, in 2006 the plate was again loaned out for an exhibition, this time at the State Library of New South Wales in Sydney. During the preparation for this loan, possibly while testing the nitrogen delivery system, the top sheet of protective glass shattered directly onto the plate. The plate's surface sustained damage from sharp glass shards in several places; even ten years later, glass

splinters were found embedded in the plate. The glass sheet was simply replaced, enabling the transport of the plate for the Sydney exhibition as planned. Although well meaning, the nitrogen capsule systems demonstrated above all that complex solutions are vulnerable to design flaws and errors in handling, with a potential for negative effects.

During the extensive renovation of the Rijksmuseum (2003-13), the Hartog Plate was exhibited in the National Maritime Museum from 2004 to 2007 (except in 2006, when on loan to Australia). From 2007 on, it was kept in the Rijksmuseum depots in Lelystad. During this time, a new approach to its display was developed. It was clear that, in the long-term, the nitrogen capsules were not functional. Accordingly, the focus shifted to creating a more fail-safe and passive system: a customized showcase with such a low air exchange rate that very little oxygen could reach the plate. Furthermore, the plate was 3D-scanned to create a fitted and chemically inert aluminium support. The historical context in which the plate was to be displayed would remain the same: the Dutch commercial expansion in the world from the late fifteen nineties onwards.

The most recent milestone in the life of the Hartog Plate came in 2016, the year of the 400th anniversary of its placement. After a brief exposition in the Aboriginal Art Museum in Utrecht, attended by Australian and Dutch dignitaries, among them King Willem-Alexander, the plate travelled to exhibitions at the Western Australian Maritime Museum and the National Maritime Museum in Sydney. A series of preliminary examinations, however, revealed how fragile the plate's condition was and how precarious another transport would be. The nature of the damage indicated that this was not due to the object's chemical instability, but to

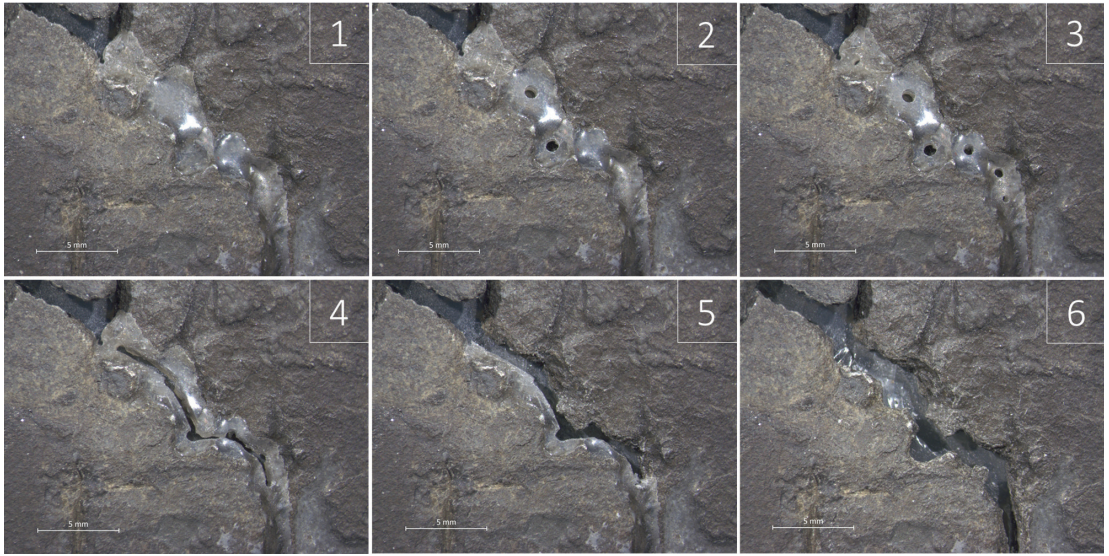


Fig. 19
Sequence of macro-
photographs,
showing the six stages
of epoxy removal.

the various interventions intended to ensure its preservation. The effect of past treatments, particularly the aging epoxy, was actively harming the plate. The fragments were under such severe stress that the plate could not be moved or handled without significant risk. The examinations also made clear how much information contained in the original material was being hidden by the fill materials and retouching.

In collaboration with a team of experts at the Rijksmuseum, the decision was made by the conservator and curator of the plate – the authors of the present article – to break this cycle of intervention by reversing all previous treatments and return the plate to its most authentic state, respecting the history of the object. To relieve any unnecessary stress, all restoration materials (including retouches, fill materials, adhesives, mould-making residues, and glass splinters) were removed. Furthermore, it was decided that the fragments would not be re-adhered; instead, a support was to be made allowing them to lie separately, positioned in the optimal orientation and fit. This would alleviate any residual stress in the fragments

but still ensure that the plate would be presented as a whole.

The removal of the epoxy was deemed feasible, though an extremely risky endeavour: it had become far more rigid than the fragile plate and was completely embedded in the complex geometry of the fragment edges. Because the epoxy joins could only be approached from the obverse (the plate could not be turned over safely in this state), this meant that they had to be removed in a particular sequence and according to a specific protocol in order to avoid unnecessary pressure and stress (fig. 19). It was also concluded that the only safe way to remove the epoxy was by hand, using precisely customized tools, requiring hundreds of hours of meticulous work under high magnification (fig. 20).

With a complex treatment protocol in place, and all risks considered, this method proved successful, with absolutely no damage done to the fragments. Next, the fragments were scanned individually, enabling the digital, 3D-reconstruction of the plate. These scans and the reconstruction were used not only for research purposes, but also for the design and creation of the customized transport

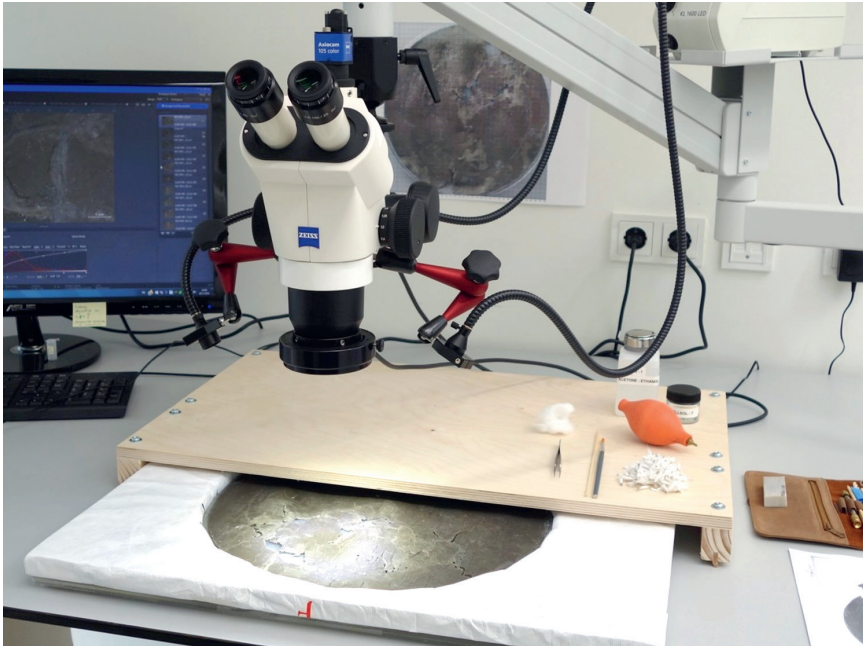


Fig. 20

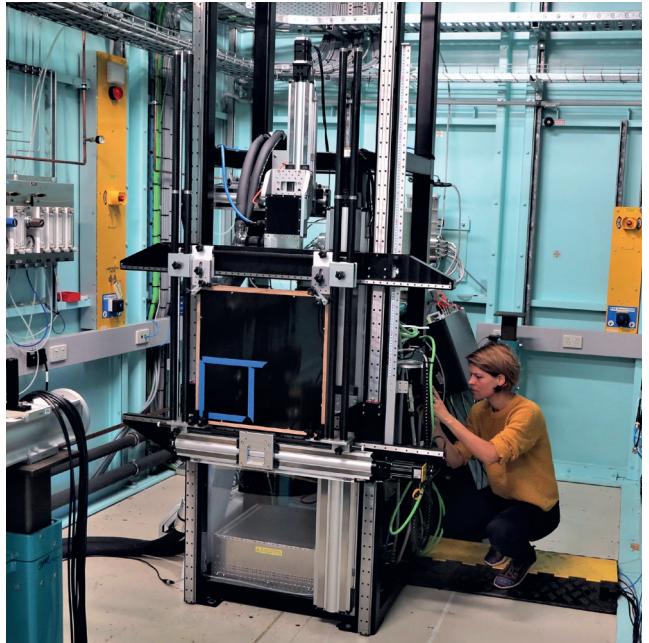
Treatment set-up for the removal of past restoration materials.

packaging, milled for each individual fragment, and the multifunctional exhibition support.⁸⁹ With the successful treatment and packaging completed, it was decided that the plate could be transported safely to Australia, or at least within the limits of acceptable risk, ensuring the Hartog Plate could take part in the historic celebrations.

During the plate's exhibition in Australia in 2016 and 2017, collaborative initiatives were established between Dutch and Australian conservators and scientists in a joint effort to better understand this important object and its history. This led to the analysis of the plate at the Australian Synchrotron in Melbourne, carried out after the exhibition tours and an additional brief exhibition at the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery in Launceston, Tasmania. Equipped with its new Maia detector, the Australian Synchrotron was able to provide the highest resolution elemental mapping found anywhere in the world. The mapping of the plate's surface helped the two nations

Fig. 21

Hartog Plate set-up at the xFM beamline at the Australian Synchrotron, 2017. Photo: David Thurrowgood



gain knowledge into the Hartog Plate's production, degradation and conservation history, and would also enable the important comparative analysis with the De Vlamingh Plate, which had been scanned at the same facility a few years before (fig. 21).⁹⁰

Conclusion

The anecdotes, narratives and emotions that have always surrounded the Hartog Plate reveal not only its importance to both the Netherlands and Australia, but also how drastically these can change over time. The plate transformed from a VOC landmark into a forgotten relic, lost in plain sight, before emerging as a symbol of Dutch exploration and an icon of Australian history. Today, shifting perceptions of the plate continue to elicit necessary discussions about colonialism and its aftermath.

While perspectives are perhaps subject to change, it is important to have an accurate point of departure. Although it is no longer possible to determine the degree to which the plate's condition deteriorated in the period between its recovery and the first photograph taken in 1899, it has undeniably suffered significant damage since. The nature of the damage indicates that this was not due to chemical instability, as was the perpetual fear, but rather the interventions intended to ensure its preservation and presentation. Moreover, these efforts also involved a certain degree of interpretation. Even the inscription, arguably the most important aspect of the object, had not been given the attention one would expect. Speculations, such as those regarding the moment of inscription or the consistently disproven fear of devastating tin pest, have always persisted, making it clear that only the Hartog Plate itself can tell its true story. Besides its preservation, the primary aim of the most recent analyses, treatment, and presentation

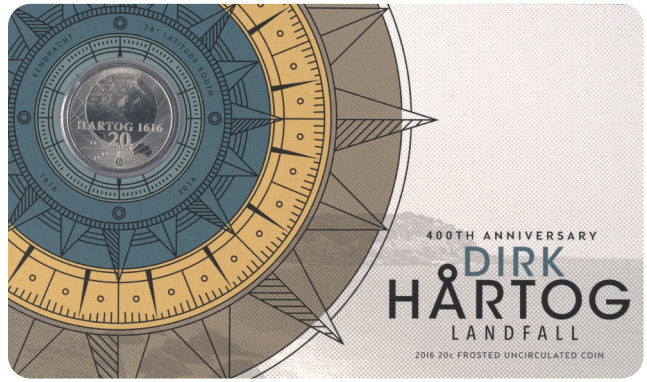


Fig. 22
BRONWYN KING
(design), Royal
Australian Mint,
Special Coin
400th Anniversary
Dirk Hartog
Landfall, 2016.
Copper, nickel,
diam. 28.5 mm, 11.3 gr.
Amsterdam,
Rijksmuseum,
inv. no. NG-2017-8,
gift of the Royal
Australian Mint,
Canberra.

of the plate has been to let the plate itself provide the most authentic account of the history it reflects.

Formal Australian claims to the plate have ceased, though many would certainly still wish to see it permanently moved to an Australian museum. The 400th anniversary of the Hartog Plate's placement was widely celebrated (fig. 22). Nevertheless, the plate's status as the first western object on Australian soil has become more complex and multifaceted. Cooperation between the Netherlands and Australia has also grown, and the Hartog Plate has proved to be an excellent example of how understanding and preserving our shared cultural heritage can lead to better exchanges, helping both countries move forward, out of – and with – the past.

ABSTRACT

The Hartog Plate, left by Dutch skipper Dirk Hartog on the Australian coast in 1616, is the earliest known western object found in Australia, making it a significant historical artefact. Over the centuries, its status has evolved from an ordinary pewter plate into an iconic symbol of the shared history between the Netherlands and Australia. The plate's fragile condition serves as a testament to what it has endured, including the various efforts undertaken to preserve it. Even if well meant, these efforts highlight the past challenges of balancing preservation with maintaining the integrity of the object's history. Recent material analysis and archival research have provided new insights into the plate's story, helping to determine the latest conservation efforts, aimed at restoring the plate to its most authentic state. Through a biographical approach, the authors examine how the plate and its meaning have changed throughout its existence and underscore how its historical value and relevance have been, and continue to be, interpreted from different perspectives.

NOTES

- 1 Pewter from this period refers to a tin alloy containing lead, copper, and other trace elements.
- 2 Graeme Henderson, 'Hartog's ship *Eendracht*', in Wendy van Duivenvoorde (ed.), *Marking our History, Celebrating our Future: Dirk Hartog in Western Australia (October 1616)*, Fremantle 2016; Jaap R. Bruijn et al. (eds.), *Dutch-Asiatic Shipping in the 17th and 18th Centuries*, 3 vols., The Hague 1979-87, no. 0201.1.
- 3 Günter G. Schilder (ed.), *De ontdekkingsreis van Willem Hesselsz. de Vlamingh in de jaren 1696-1697*, 2 vols., The Hague 1976, vol. 1, p. 65; research by the authors conducted in the archives of the VOC (The Hague, National Archives (henceforth NL-HANA), acc. no. 1.04.02) has not revealed new information.
- 4 J.E. (Han) Wustenhoff, 'Tin aan boord van VOC- en WIC-schepen', *De Tinkoerier* 6 (1998), no. 1, pp. 8-12, esp. p. 10.
- 5 *Lyste, van 't gene tot d'equipage behorende*, Amsterdam 1788, p. 21.
- 6 The Hartog Plate was analysed at the Australian Synchrotron's x-ray fluorescence microscopy (XFM) beamline, resulting in extremely high-definition maps of the elements present on the surface. The data was acquired using the Maia 384 detector array, with an energy sensitivity down to approximately 2 keV. An incident excitation beam energy of 18.5 keV was used to achieve the best fluorescent yields for the elements being examined, requiring dwell times of approximately 2 ms to 3 ms per pixel for a 70 µm pixel-size. See Tamar Davidowitz et al., 'Conservation and Examination of an Iconic 17th-Century Pewter Object: The Hartog Plate's History Revealed through Synchrotron Analysis', in *Metals 2019: Proceedings of the Interim Meeting of the ICOM-CC Metals Working Group*, Neuchâtel 2019, pp. 108-16, esp. p. 114.
- 7 Berend Dubbe, *Tin en tinnegieters in Nederland*, Lochem 1978, p. 108.
- 8 Dubbe 1978 (note 7), p. 115.
- 9 Dubbe 1978 (note 7), pp. 85, 116.
- 10 Dubbe 1978 (note 7), p. 454.
- 11 J.F.H.H. Beekhuizen, *De schoonheid van het oude tin: Een overzicht van vijf eeuwen tin*, 's Hertogenbosch 1998, p. 13.
- 12 This spelling of his name corresponds to that found in most English-language publications; however, his name was written in many different ways (e.g. Hartoghs, Hartochs, and Hatichs). As Dirk was the son of Hartog, the most correct way to write his name by modern standards would be Hartogs.
- 13 For Gilles Mibaise, see <https://lepassabelge.blog/tag/mibaise-gilles/> (consulted 17 January 2025).
- 14 Peter Sigmond, 'Two Pewter Plates', in Leo M. Akveld (ed.), *In het kielzog: Maritiem-historische studies aangeboden aan Jaap. R. Bruijn ...*, Amsterdam 2003, pp. 245-56, esp. p. 250.
- 15 'Het lant is alhier heel dor en sandig en sonder geboomte.' As mentioned in the logbook of the Geelvinck: NL-HANA, VOC (1.04.02), inv. 1587, Overgekomen brieven en papieren uit Indië aan de Heren XVII en de kamer Amsterdam, 1698, Eerste boek Batavia, fol. 672r, 4 February 1697, transcribed in Schilder 1976 (note 3), vol. 1, pp. 183-84.
- 16 Radiographs were captured at 200 kv, 3 mA for a duration of 20 seconds.
- 17 Steijns would play an important role when the ship arrived at Makassar on 10 December 1616, and upon its subsequent arrival in Amboina on 30 December. The journal he continued recording during these days has survived (NL-HANA, VOC (1.04.02), inv. no. 1064, Kopie-resolutie van gouverneur-generaal en raden ... uit Indië, fol. 172-176v). Steijns would stay in the Indonesian archipelago; he died in 1623 following several eventful years,

- remarkably just after receiving the commission to explore parts of the Australian continent. See J.W. IJzerman, 'Het schip "De Eendracht" voor Makassar in december 1616: Journaal van Jan Steijns', *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch-Indië* 78 (1922), no. 1/2, pp. 343-72, esp. pp. 348-52.
- 18 See Hans Zijlstra, 'Pieter Doekes van Bil, opperstuurman van Dirk Hartog in 1616', blog van Historische Vereniging Noordoost-Friesland, <https://www.hvnf.nl> (consulted 17 January 2025).
- 19 François Valentijn, in *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indien*, vol. 3, part 2: *Verhandeling der zee-horenkens en zee-gewassen in en omtrent Amboina ...*, Dordrecht/Amsterdam 1726, p. 70, was the first to transcribe the Hartog Plate; his interpretation contains multiple misspellings. Also, he added 'Ao. 1616' at the end of this transcription, though there is no physical evidence of this on the plate itself. Later transcriptions also included 'ANNO 1616'. It would make sense that Willem de Vlamingh added this to the end of his transcription of Hartogh's text on the plate he left behind in 1697, to denote that this was the original inscription and the date that it was written (see under VOC Relic). The arrangement of the final three rows has often been published with the name 'Dookes' written on the same row, instead of (divided) on two rows. It is unclear whether presenting it on one row was done to improve the inscription's legibility by distributing it more clearly, or simply a failure to examine the plate itself.
- 20 Davidowitz et al. 2019 (note 6), p. 113.
- 21 Tin is more resistant to chloride (salt) corrosion compared to other metals. This would have been common knowledge among those spending their lives largely at sea.
- 22 Sigmond 2003 (note 14), pp. 248-51.
- 23 'eygendom ende possessive nemen'; 'een steene columme'; 'daerin met goede leesbare letteren verhalende 't jaer, de maendt, dach ende datum, by wien ende wanneer de possessie van sulcken lant, voor de gemelde Heeren Staten genomen sy'. 'Instructie voor de jachten den Haringh ende den Hasewint, gedestineerd om in Compe 't Zuyderlant te gaen ontdekken, 29 September 1622' ('Instructions for the yachts Haringh and Hasewint having destination jointly to discover and explore the Southland, 29 September 1622'), given by the governor-general in Batavia, published in Dutch and in English translation by Jan Ernst Heeres, *Het aandeel der Nederlanders in de ontdekking van Australië 1606-1765* | *The Part Borne by the Dutch in the Discovery of Australia 1606-1765*, Leiden/London 1899, no. XIII, pp. 18-21, esp. 20.
- 24 See Susan Broomhall, 'Dirk Hartog's Sea Chest: An Affective Archaeology of VOC Objects in Australia', in Stephanie Downes et al. (eds.), *Feeling Things: Objects and Emotions through History*, Oxford 2018, pp. 175-91, esp. p. 178. In her 'Dishes, Coins, and Pipes: The Epistemological and Emotional Power of VOC Material Culture in Australia', in Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello (eds.), *The Global Lives of Things: Materials, Material Culture and Commodities in the First Global Age*, London 2015, pp. 145-61, Broomhall elaborates on her conclusion that the plate was meant as a claim.
- 25 Ian D. MacLeod, Tamar Davidowitz, Daryl Howard, David Paterson, David Thurrowgood, David Hallam and Dudley Creagh, 'Decay Induced by Manufacture and Environment: Synchrotron Revelations on the Hartog (1616) Plate', in *Australasian Corrosion Association's Annual Conference: Corrosion and Prevention 2019*, vol. 2, Melbourne, 24-27 November 2019, pp. 489-500, p. 491.
- 26 Davidowitz et al. 2019 (note 6).
- 27 Schilder 1976 (note 3), vol. 1, p. 72.
- 28 "'t Landt van de Eendracht, opghedaen by Dirck Hartogs met 't schip d'Eendracht in October Ao. 1616.' See, for instance, NL-HANA, Inventaris van de verzameling buitenlandse kaarten Leupe, 1584-1813 (acc. no. 4 VEL), inv. 502. Quoted in Schilder 1976 (note 3), vol. 1, p. 68.
- 29 'het Zuijtlant off 't lant vand'Eendraght'. NL-HANA, VOC (1.04.02), inv. no. 244, Resoluties Kamer Amsterdam: 9 February 1693, 21 November 1695, 1 December 1695 (quote), 16 January 1696, 15 March 1696, 29 March 1696, 19 April 1696, transcribed in Schilder 1976 (note 3), vol. 2, appendix 6; mentioned in vol. 1, pp. 3-4. This overview is based on vol. 1, pp. 1-27.
- 30 'Twee uren naer sonsopgang quamen sij bij de uiterste hoek aen de zee kant van 't eijlant, dear zij met de schuijt aenlijden en berg opging om zeewaert te sien of dear iets anders soude wesen vant overblijfsel van schepen of iets anders. Vonden boven op den berg een pael vastgezet, dear een tinne schotel bij lag, die sij mede aen boort bragt'. NL-HANA, VOC (1.04.02), inv. no. 1587 (see note 15), fol. 671r, quoted in Schilder 1976 (note 3), vol. 1, p. 183. Translation taken from William C.H. Robert, *The Explorations,*

- 1696-1697, of *Australia* by Willem de Vlamingh, Amsterdam 1972, pp. 104-06. The elevation of Cape Inscription is 39 metres.
- 31 Mandrop Torst, *Journal wegens een Voyagie ... in de jaaren 1696 en 1697 door het hoekerscheepje de Nyptang ...*, Amsterdam 1701, quoted in Schilder 1976 (note 3), vol. 1, p. 21.
- 32 'een platgeklopte tinneschotel op de aarde vinde leggen, die met twee spykers aan een paaltje vastgespykert geweest, en waar van de eenen meest vergaan, en de ander nog kenbaar was ... en was het onderste (zoo men niet anders zien kon) met een mes ... gesneden'. Valentijn 1726 (note 19), p. 70.
- 33 The profile of Dirck Hartooghs reede: 'hier de tinne schotel gevonden' (here the tin plate found). Main map 't Zuydlandt: 'alhier de schootel gevonden' (here the plate found). Mentioned in Schilder 1976 (note 3), vol. 1, pp. 17-18, 114-28; vol. 2, p. 304.
- 34 'Voorts 1697 den 4e Februarij is hier aen-gekomen het schip de Geelvink van Amsterdam, den Commandeur Schipper Willem de Vlamingh van Vlielant, adsistent Joannes van Bremen van Coppenhagen, opperstierman Michiel Blom van Bremen; de hoecker de Nijptangh, Schipper Gerrit Colaert van Amsterdam, adsistent Theodoris Heermans van dito, opperstierman Gerrit Gerritsz. van Bremen; 't galjoot het Weseltje, gesaghebber Cornelis de Vlaming van Vlielant, stuurman Coert Gerritsz. van Bremen, en van hier gezeijlt met ons vloot den 12 dito, voorts het Z[u]idlant te ondersoecken en gedistinceert voor Batavia. A/VOC.' NL-HANA, VOC (1.04.02), inv. no. 1587 (see note 15), fol. 676r, transcribed in Schilder 1976 (note 3), vol. 1, p. 187.
- 35 The De Vlamingh Plate and the remains of the pole are currently on display in the Western Australian Museum, inv. nos. DH14139 and CH1970.1003 respectively.
- 36 'Sijnde dese oude schootel, die ons schipper Willem de Vlaming heeft toegebracht, nu mede den commandeur inhandigt om UEdele te bestellen en te verwonderen hoe dezelve daer soo een reex van jaren voor 't verderff der lugt, regen en sonne is gepreserveert gebleven.' (Being this old plate, that skipper Willem de Vlaming brought to us, now handed over to the commander in order to be delivered to Your Worships and to marvel how the same for such a series of years has been preserved from decay by air, rain and sun. (Translation by authors)). NL-HANA, VOC (1.04.02), inv. no. 1587 (see note 15), fol. 399r-434v, esp. fol. 404v-405r, transcribed in Schilder 1976 (note 3), vol. 2, pp. 284-87.
- 37 NL-HANA, VOC (1.04.02), inv. no. unknown (previously KA 1476), fol. 1095-97, 'Ladingh vant schip 's Lanswelvaren', transcribed in Schilder 1976 (note 3), vol. 2, pp. 292-93.
- 38 NL-HANA, VOC (1.04.02), inv. no. unknown (previously KA 4015), fol. 3r-21r, 'Extract uit een missive van gouverneur S. van der Stel en raden aan de Heren XVII', 24 juni 1698, transcribed in Schilder 1976 (note 3), vol. 2, pp. 288-89.
- 39 The return of Claes Bichon and the debriefs he gave are described in NL-HANA, VOC (1.04.02), inv. nos. 112, Resoluties Heren XVII (5 March 1696/23 July 1700), 440 (16 July 1698), 513 (30 July 1698), 527 (31 July 1698). On 1 August 1698, Bichon also reported to the States General, but again, the plate is not mentioned: NL-HANA, Archives of the States General (acc. no. 1.01.02), inv. no. 3338, fol. 110v-111v. The States General resolutions can be searched via <https://www.goetgevonden.nl> (consulted 17 January 2025).
- 40 In the VOC archive in the National Archives in The Hague (NL-HANA, 1.04.02), the resolutions of the board for 1698 have been searched (inv. nos. 33, 112), and those of the Chamber Amsterdam (inv. no. 245), as well as the letters from the board to the Governor-General in Batavia (inv. nos. 323, 352). Also Nicolaas Witsen, who had encouraged the expedition, makes no mention of it in letters to his friends; see Nicolaas Witsen, *Noord en Oost Tartarye*, Amsterdam 1705, pp. 179-83, overgenomen in Schilder 1976 (note 3), vol. 2, pp. 290-91, 294-302; and Marion Peters, *De wijze koopman: Het wereldwijde onderzoek van Nicolaes Witsen (1641-1717), burgemeester en VOC-bewindhebber van Amsterdam*, Amsterdam 2010, pp. 87-92.
- 41 See Joke van der Aar, 'Het Oost-Indisch Huis', in Frouke M. Wieringa (ed.), *De VOC in Amsterdam: Verslag van de werkgroep*, Amsterdam (University of Amsterdam) 1982, pp. 35-62.
- 42 'een plat geslagen tinnen schotel, waarop een Hollandsche inscriptie en welke schotel in 1610, door de afgedwaalde o.i. Compagnie schepen in Straat Magelbaan is gevonden aan een paal gespykerd en aldaar schijnt geplaatst door de overheden van het o.i.c. schip de Eendracht, volgens het leesbare der genoemde Inscriptie.' Haarlem, Noord-Hollands Archief (henceforth NL-HlMNH), Rijksmuseum en rechtsvoorgangers te Amsterdam (acc. no. 476), inv. no. 843, Stukken betreffende de overdracht van kunst- en andere voorwerpen..., 1815-1820, no. 13, Letter from the minister of Colonies to the director of the Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden, 3 October 1820.

- 43 On the Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden, see Gijs van der Ham, *200 jaar Rijksmuseum: Geschiedenis van een nationaal symbool*, Amsterdam/Zwolle 2000, pp. 64-68, 88-96; Justine Rinnooy Kan and Sheila Reda (eds.), *The Lost Museum: Royal Cabinet of Rarities in the Mauritshuis*, The Hague/Zwolle 2024.
- 44 Reinier Pieter van de Kastele, *Handleiding tot de bezigtiging van het Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden op Mauritshuis*, in 's Gravenhage, The Hague s.a. [1823], cat. no. 58. In later editions, the catalogue number of the plate was changed to 698 and 733.
- 45 Willem Anton Engelbrecht et al. (eds.), *Voorbij het eind van de wereld: De ontdekkingsreis van Jacob le Maire en Willem Cornelisz. Schouten in 1615-1617*, Zutphen 2015 (photomechanical reprint, original edition 1945).
- 46 NL-HlMNHA, Rijksmuseum (476), inv. no. 917, Proces-verbaal 31 Maart 1875 betreffende overdracht van voorwerpen van het Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden aan het Nederlandsch Museum, lijst A, no. 49: 'Een tinnen plat-geslagen schotel'; another list in the same document, dated 18 January 1875, describes it as no. 48: 'een tinnen plat geslagen schotel met een opschrift van schipbreukelingen in 1610 in de straat van Magellaan, aan een paal gespijkerd gevonden.'
- 47 David van der Kellen Jr, 'Het Nederlandsch Museum voor Geschiedenis en Kunst te 's Gravenhage', *Eigen Haard* (1879), pp. 79-80, esp. p. 80.
- 48 Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, Inventaris van het Nederlandsch Museum voor Kunst en Geschiedenis, 1864-1881: Nederlands Museum 1-3106.
- 49 David van der Kellen Jr, *Gids voor de bezoekers van het Nederlandsch Museum voor Geschiedenis en Kunst*, Amsterdam 1888, p. 9.
- 50 Heeres 1899 (note 23); Louis C.D. de Freycinet, *Voyage autour du monde: entrepris par ordre du roi ... exécuté sur les corvettes ... l'Uranie et la Physicienne, pendant les années 1817, 1818, 1819 et 1820 ...*, Paris 1824.
- 51 Jan F.L. de Balbian Verster, 't Onbekende Zuytlandt (De geschiedenis van twee tinnen schotels)', *Eigen Haard* (1899), pp. 556-60. Letter from Jan F. L. de Balbian Verster, dated February 1903, to Malcolm A.C. Fraser, the Government Statistician's Office, Perth, cited by George Collingridge in 'Dirck Hartog's Plate: A Dutch Conundrum II', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 August 1913. Collingridge incorrectly dated this letter February 1913.
- 52 'een verweerde tinnen schotel, waarvan de herkomst tot dusver verkeerd was opgegeven'. De Balbian Verster 1899 (note 51), p. 560.
- 53 Collingridge 1913 (note 51).
- 54 Frederik Schmidt Degener and Henricus P. Baard, *Rijksmuseum: afdeling geschiedenis ter zee; gids met afbeeldingen*, Amsterdam 1932, p. 11.
- 55 Lyndsie Selwyn, *Metals and Corrosion: A Handbook for the Conservation Professional*, Ottawa (Canadian Conservation Institute) 2004, p. 141.
- 56 NL-HlMNHA, Rijksmuseum (476), inv. no. 984, nos. 21, 32, Letters of Ernst J.E. Cohen to the Rijksmuseum Director, 19 January 1900 and 18 February 1900 respectively.
- 57 NL-HlMNHA, Rijksmuseum (476), inv. no. 1437, Letter from mej. Marjorie H. Bottenheim to Henricus P. Baard, 22 November 1939.
- 58 Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, Inventory card NG-NM-825.
- 59 Harold J. Plenderleith and Robert M. Organ, 'The Decay and Conservation of Museum Objects of Tin', *Studies in Conservation* 1 (1953), no. 2, pp. 63-72, esp. pp. 66-67.
- 60 Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, Inventory card NG-NM-825.
- 61 Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, Documentation file NG-NM-825, Letter from R. Lefève (KIK-IRPA) to A. van Schendel, 11 February 1963.
- 62 Denise Thomas-Gooriecx, 'Le plat de Hartogsz du Rijksmuseum: Examen et traitement particulier d'un étain', *Bulletin IRPA* 6 (1963), pp. 69-79, esp. p. 74.
- 63 With xylol applied by brush and then removed with cotton swabs.
- 64 Oxidation was mitigated during this process by embedding the object in sawdust for the first day, and then immersing it in melted paraffin.
- 65 Remark made in the 1999 treatment report (Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, Documentation file NG-NM-825). Although it cannot be proven that this was done at the KIK-IRPA, no other known intervention before or after suggests another possibility.
- 66 George Collingridge, *The Discovery of Australia: A Critical, Documentary and Historic Investigation concerning the Priority of Discovery in Australasia by Europeans before the Arrival of Lieut. James Cook, in the 'Endeavour', in the year 1770*, Sydney 1895, pp. 261-65.
- 67 See note 51 and Malcolm A.C. Fraser, 'The Discovery of Western Australia', *Western Australian Year-Book for 1902-1904*, Perth 1906, pp. 1-20, esp. p. 3-4; the photograph of the Hartog Plate is opposite p. 2.

- The photograph itself, bearing a dedication to Fraser, is in the State Library Perth, call no. 106B, vol. 39.
- 68 J.O., 'Dirk Hartog's Island', *The Age*, 8 June 1929.
- 69 *The Western Australian*, 17 July 1937 and 25 August 1938.
- 70 Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, Annual Report 1938, pp. 23-24. A second copy is in the collection of the Rijksmuseum.
- 71 *The Western Australian*, 6 April 1938.
- 72 *The School Magazine of Literature for Our Boys and Girls*, 1 February 1943, pp. 5-10.
- 73 Alec H. Chisholm, 'Letters to the Editor: Historic Relic in Holland, Australia and the Hartog Plate', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 June 1954.
- 74 *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 June 1954. In the Netherlands, articles were published by *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden* (8 July 1954), *Leeuwarder Courant* (15 July 1954) and *De Volkskrant* (2 August 1954), among others, via <https://delpher.nl> (consulted 17 January 2025).
- 75 Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, Documentation file NG-NM-825, Typescript note by R. Munnikendam, 15 February 1965: 'Aangezien de eigendomsrechten van bovengenoemde tinnen schotel ... door Australische autoriteiten betwist worden heeft men gemeend dezen tegemoet te komen door van de schotel een copie te maken en deze ter beschikking te stellen.'
- 76 Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, Annual Report 1966. The replicas were almost certainly produced by Kees Herman Aben, who was also conservator of sculpture at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. no. NG-NM-825-REP-1.
- 77 Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, Annual Report 1966.
- 78 See for instance Athol Thomas, 'A Sense of History', *The Canberra Times*, 28 October 1970, via <https://trove.nla.gov.au> (consulted 17 January 2025); 'Australiërs azen op plaque', *De Tijd*, 13 November 1970, via <https://delpher.nl> (consulted 17 January 2025); and Malou Nozeman and Ton Smit, 'Een etensbord in een gastank', *NRC-Handelsblad*, 26 October 1987, via <https://delpher.nl> (consulted 17 January 2025), mentioning a letter from the general director of the Rijksmuseum to E. Vernède, private secretary of Prince Bernhard, 13 June 1976. The whereabouts of this letter are unknown to the authors.
- 79 Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, Documentation file NG-NM-825, Copy of letter from the ambassador of the Netherlands in Australia to the Dutch minister of Foreign Affairs, 8 July 1987.
- 80 Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, Documentation file NG-NM-825, Note by W.H. Vroom, director of the history department of the Rijksmuseum, 30 March 1988.
- 81 'De vergelijking van het bord met een voorwerp, dat voor het Nederlandse cultuurbezit dient te worden behouden gaat m.i. ten enenmale mank, omdat het bord geen stuk "kunst", maar een gebruiksvoorwerp was, waarop een tekst is gegraveerd. Meer dan curiositeitswaarde heeft het eigenlijk niet, en die is dan ook van een geheel andere aard dan het in je brief genoemde schilderij van Mondriaan.' Ibid., Letter from the minister of Foreign Affairs to the minister of Education, Culture and Sciences, 22 January 1988.
- 82 From 24 May to 17 November 1980, the plate was shown in Paris at the *Cartes et Figures de la Terre* exhibition at the Centre Pompidou. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, Documentation file NG-NM-825, Registration form NG-NM-825, Document no. COL19016326, April 1987, p. 2.
- 83 From 8 January 1988 to 18 June 1989, the exhibition was shown in eight Australian cities.
- 84 In 1973 and 1991, a technical analysis of the plate and the potentially corrosive materials in contact with it was conducted.
- 85 Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, Documentation file NG-NM-825, ICN report by P.B. Hallebeek 5 March 1997, p. 1.
- 86 Ibid., p. 3.
- 87 Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, Documentation file NG-NM-825, report by G. Hoekstra, 1999.
- 88 As with the capsule produced for the 1988 tour, extensive documentation exists surrounding the production of this nitrogen capsule and the discussions that led to its production, now found in the object's documentation file. The thought that went into its design cannot be understated.
- 89 The 2016 analysis, treatment, and transport of the Hartog Plate has been reported in several publications, including Davidowitz et al. 2019 (note 6).
- 90 Ian D. MacLeod, David Thurrowgood, Gwynneth Pohl, Daryl Howard and D. Patterson, 'Centuries of Decay Revealed by Synchrotron Analysis of the De Vlamingh 1697 Pewter Plate', in J. Bridgland (ed.), *ICOM-CC 17th Triennial Conference Preprints, Melbourne, 15-19 September 2014*, art. no. 0903, 6 pp., Paris 2014. See also note 6.

