



An Anchor with a Coded Inscription

by Joost van den Besselaar and Peter Seinen

The anchor from the Netherlands covered with puzzling engravings. Image: Mergor in Mosam

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Peter and Joost are on the board of the foundation Mergor in Mosam (www.mergorinmosam.nl), which is involved in all kinds of underwater archaeological and paleontological projects. Here they present a puzzling anchor find from the Netherlands.

Ship anchors are by no means a rare find in Dutch rivers and channels, and our foundation Mergor in Mosam has rescued quite a few of various types and periods. One of them was very interesting indeed. It was found in the Dutch Pannerden Channel, which has connected the Rhine to the Lower-Rhine since 1707 linking Germany and the northern part of the Netherlands.

The anchor measures 256x137 centimetres and weighs well over 250 kilogrammes. It is made of solid wrought iron and has a wooden stock. The fact that it is a remarkably large anchor makes

one wonder what kind of ship it had served. This size would indicate that anchor was used by a seagoing vessel, but the metal ring through the crown is tell-tale for river anchors, which is useful to 'free' the anchor when it is caught in tree trunks that litter the riverbed.

The excellent concise studies of Dutch river vessels by Haalmeijer and Vuik in 2006 and by Schutten in 2007 (see Haalmeijer, H. and Vuik, D., 2006, *Aken, Tjalken en Kraken*, Uitgeverij de Alk, Alkmaar; Schutten, G. J., 2007, *Verdwenen schepen*, Walburg Pers, Zutphen) provide clues as to what type of

Shank, crown and arms covered with engravings. Image: Mergor in Mosam



ship this anchor may have served. If the date engraved on the anchor's arms, '1765', reflects its production date, the largest ships that sailed at that time were the *herna*, *bijlander* and *samoreus*, which were 35 to 50 metres long – close to seagoing vessels at that time.

Interestingly, in addition to the engraved date, there were some other intriguing marks on the surface of the shank, crown and arms of the find. The marks were made by the use of a steel chisel, which is the most convenient tool to make simple dents and lines on a metal surface. Most of the lines were first marked by small dents. What both these lines and dents mean is still debated.

As for the engravings on our anchor we may distinguish three types: a) the plain engravings that include the production (?) date of the anchor '1765' and possibly the initials, if interpreted correctly, of the previous owner or manufacturer 'I.W.E'; b) the decorative dents that include the four pyramid-shaped clusters of 10 dents, the two rows of

five dents, and the two single dents; and c) the combination of dents and lines, which is difficult to interpret. In fact, the encoded engraving of dents and lines might be a designator of the manufacturer, the owner, or simply the weight of the anchor or the size of the ship it was designed for... opinions are currently divided on the matter.

The opposite side of the anchor also shows markings, but need to be cleaned. Such markings are not extremely rare and are also found on canons. It would certainly be worthwhile to make a comprehensive study of their meaning and possible connections. ♦

The engravings highlighted in white. Image: Mergor in Mosam

