[Review of: The Ca Mau Shipwreck, 1723-1735]
Kleinen, J.G.G.M.

Published in:
IIAS Newsletter

Citation for published version (APA):
By John Kleinen

S

 sometime between 1723 and 1735, a

 Chinese junk sank off the coast of

 Vietnam’s farthest point in the South

 China Sea. Its cargo consisted of chi-

 naware, porcelains, blue and white

 ware, porcelains decorated in brown,

 white-glazed porcelains over-glazed

 with enamels, and various Stoneware,

 all originating from different kilns in

 southern China. The best-known pieces

 are the porcelains from Jingdezhen in

 Jiangxi province, where ceramics have

 been produced since the fourteenth

 century; other notable pieces include

 those from the Dehua kiln complex

 in Fujian, and from Guangzhou in

 Guangdong. The variety of the chi-

 naware and the different kilns indicate

 that this vessel was part of the large As-

 iatic porcelain trade that developed in

 the early fifteenth century and in which

 the Portuguese and the Dutch played

 an important role. The exact prove-

 nance of the Ca Mau wreck is still not

 clear, but the author believes that the

 ship was on its way to Batavia or anoth-

 er port in order to deliver wares for

 the European market. Similar shipwrecks,

 such as the well-known Vung Tau

 (1690) and the one recently discovered

 off Binh Thuan, north of Saigon,

 belong to a regular trade route along the

 coast of Vietnam. Although the VOC

 was connected to the porcelain trade,

 private traders had already taken over

 the exports to the European and Dutch

 markets at this period. Apart from

 cataloguing a large amount of Chinese

 porcelain, the book includes a series

 of photographs of blue and white

 dishes, sometimes in sets of five, deco-

 rated with the well-known so-called

 ‘Scheveningen’ landscape (formerly

 known as the ‘Deshima’ décor), depict-

 ing a typical Dutch fishing village. In

 the background the sails of fishing

 boats are visible in between the roofs

 of houses, a church, and a fire beacon

 (executed in Chinese style). Chinese

 dishes with European motifs were

 made to order and are known as ‘Chine

 de commande’.

 European motifs were, apparent-

 ly, very popular. They appear not

 only on dishes, but also on cups,

 plates, and other kitchen- or table-

 ware. A number of beer mugs, clear-

 ly made for a European market, also

 make up part of the large collection.

 This bilingual publication traces in

 detail the history of the recovery of

 the wreck and its cargo. The dating of

 the wreck is based on information gleaned

 from the board. Sources include Chi-

 nese porcelain inscriptions reading

 ‘Made in Yongsheng Great Qing’, and

 two coins bearing the inscriptions

 ‘Kangxi issued’, indicating that they

 were produced in the reign of the Qing

 emperor Kangxi (1662-1722), who unit-

 ed China during the seventeenth cen-

 tury. The author also makes clear that

 the ship was involved in trading Chi-

 nese ceramics and participated in the

 large inter-Asian trade between East

 and West. Vietnam was an important

 hub in the flourishing ‘single ocean’

 trade (a term coined by the late histori-

 an O.W. Wolters), which stretched from

 the coasts of eastern Africa and west-

 ern Asia to the immensely long coastal

 line of the Indian subcontinent and on

 to China. The Dutch linked up with

 the inter-Asian trade by trading Chinese

 and Vietnamese porcelain through the

 VOC-network or by ordering special

 objects through private traders. To get

 an insight into this trade, it proves use-

 ful to compare cargos of porcelain arte-

 facts that were intended for different

 clients, as these cargos hold important

 keys to the history of inner-Asian trade

 in which Vietnam’s rulers of the

 southern domain, Dang Trong (the

 inner region), took part. Ultimately, the

 research on wrecks found off of the

 coast of Vietnam contributes to unrav-

 elling Vietnam’s troubled internal his-

 tory between the fifteenth and seven-

 teenth centuries.

 When Vietnamese fishermen discovered a historical shipwreck about 90 nautical miles south of Cap Ca Mau in southern Vietnam in 1998, they hauled up more than 30,000 artefacts and 2.4 tons of metal objects in their nets. Subsequently, a Vietnamese diving and excavation company, working in close collaboration with the Ca Mau Provincial Museum and other responsible agencies, began to salvage the ship. In 1998 and 1999 more than 130,000 artefacts were recovered from this 450m² site. Now, four years later, Nguyen Dinh Chien, chief curator at Vietnam’s Museum of Vietnamese History and a leading specialist on ceramics, has published the results of this find in a lavishly illustrated book under the title ‘Tàu Cô Cà Mau (The Ca Mau Shipwreck), 1723-1735’.

 Dr John Kleinen was the IIAS international representative in Hanoi and Visiting SSRC Professor at the National Centre for Social Sciences and Humanities in 2002 and 2003.

 As an anthropologist with long research experience in Vietnam, his current research topics are integrated coastal zone manage-

 ment and fisheries.

 j.g.m.kleinen@uva.nl

 Notes