

***Santa Margarita* Lead Bale Seal: Artifact 49987**

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Artifact 49987 is a well-preserved lead bale seal that was excavated from the site of the shipwrecked 1622 Spanish *Tierra Firme* Fleet vessel *Santa Margarita* during the summer 2000 season, by Old World Survey and Recovery, Inc. It is a stamped single lead seal with a coat of arms on the obverse and the number 20 on the reverse. One side of the seal is folded under, and the other side is folded over indicating that it was fastened to a line or cord encircling a bale or parcel of goods.

Lead seals such as cloth seals and bale seals were widely used in Europe between the 13th and 19th centuries as a means of identification and as a component of regulation and quality control. Cloth seals appear to be the most thoroughly documented type of seal. Cloth seals were typically two disc seals joined by a connecting strip. These were intended to be folded around each side of a textile and stamped closed, in a manner similar to that in which coins were stamped.



Santa Margarita Seal – Obverse

Bale seals such as artifact 49987 were single disc seals, rather than two disc seals, and were also used to identify textiles, as well as parcels and bales of trade goods. The obverse would

typically display a city's arms, and the reverse would record data such as the length or width of fabric or the weight of a parcel.

Design Elements of the *Santa Margarita* Lead Bale Seal:

Obverse: Within a shield frame sometimes referred to as "bouche" style, a centered sword blade points upwards to a cross. Three visible stars located at approximate positions of 1.5 o'clock, 3.5 o'clock, and 10.5 o'clock frame the sword blade, suggesting a fourth star would be located at the 7.5 o'clock position, under the fold. Some letters of a surrounding legend are visible, including the letters "ET", preceded by what could be an "O" or a "D" from approximately 9:00 to 11:00 positions, and an "R" near 4:00.

Reverse: The Arabic number 20.



Santa Margarita Seal – Reverse

A Similar Seal Is Discovered In Ecuador:

Shortly after the discovery of the *Santa Margarita* seal, I was delighted to learn that two lead seals had recently been discovered on a circa 1680 shipwreck project near Ecuador. Though the Ecuador wreck remains unidentified, it has produced a large number of Spanish colonial coins. I asked the project director, Vince Trotta, if he would send me photos or sketches of

the Ecuador shipwreck seals, and he faxed a sketch of one of them, explaining that the two were identical. His sketch shows, within a classic or "heater" shaped shield, an upward pointing sword beneath a cross, with the sword bordered by four stars. The elements within the shield are exactly the same as on the *Santa Margarita* lead bale seal. The only apparent difference between the 1622 Fleet, *Santa Margarita* seal, and the circa 1680 Ecuador shield is the presence of rampant lions as supporters on the Ecuadorian seal.

Provenance:

Initially I suspected that the legend on the 1622 Fleet lead seal was similar to the legend found on Spanish Colonial coins, with the letters "ET" being as in "Hispaniarum ET Indiarum Rex", and I questioned if the addition of the supporting lions on the circa 1680 shipwreck seals signified a different area of origin under shared government, or possibly a change of power that occurred between the two vessels time periods (assuming that the seal on the circa 1680 wreck was not already old when the ship sank).

Internet searches turned up little information on "lead seals" or on "lead cloth seals", except for a referral to British Museum Occasional Paper Number 93, "Lead Cloth Seals and Related Items in the British Museum" by Geoff Egan, which I obtained from a bookstore in England. Internet searches for "lead bale seals" were more successful. Eventually, by this means, I was quite fortunate to locate an expert on lead seals living in the U.S., Professor Alexander Wieber. Professor Wieber soon identified the arms on both the 1622 Fleet seal and the circa 1680 Ecuador shipwreck seals as the arms of the city of Haarlem in the Netherlands.

Professor Weiber explained that the visible letters "ET" in the legend on the Santa Margarita lead seal is a portion of the legend "HAERLEMS GOET" or "Goods from Haarlem". The Low Countries city of Haarlem was renowned for the fine linens it exported, though it was the finishing center for the fabric and not where the fabric was actually woven.

The Symbolism of the Haarlem Arms:

Karla Brouwer of the Stichting Archeologische Werkgroep Haarlem told me that the interpretation of the Arms of Haarlem is found in

a poem by 15th century poet Dirc Mathijszen, inspired by a legend from the time of the Crusades. The legend remembers crusaders from Haarlem who fought as knights and succeeded in taking the town of Damiate in Egypt. In reward the Emperor bequeathed Haarlem a banner red as blood, with a sword pointing toward heaven. The Pope gave them their cross, and because they came so far, the patriarchs of Jerusalem delivered the stars. A painting of this event, titled the *Wapenvermeerdering* (The Increasing of Arms), by Peter de Grebber (1630) still hangs in Haarlem's City Hall. A legend "Vicit Vim Virtus" beneath the coat of arms translates as: "Virtue Has Conquered Violence".

According to seal expert Professor Alexander Weiber, coat of arms supporters varied and included such elements as angels, unicorns, lions, eagles, plants and griffins. For instance, arms on a 1426 seal of the city are supported by two angels. On seals, the inclusion or exclusion of supporters could have been dictated by the size of the seal or by fashion.

The Meaning of Number 20 on the Seal's Obverse:

The Arabic number 20 located on the reverse of the Santa Margarita lead seal refers to the length of fabric measured in Dutch els. As explained by Mr. Wiard Krook, Amsterdam Department of Archeology: "From the official regulations of the city of Leiden, we know that one full woolen laken (in 17th Century Dutch spelled as "laeken" or "laecken", meaning one uncut length of woven woolen fabric packed and folded to a bundle), should measure 40 Leidse (or old Dutch) el in total. So a half laken should be 20 el long. Before it was released for selling it was officially measured and the final length indicated on a lead seal. One Leidse el is converted to 69 centimeters, making one full laken 27.6 meter and one half laken 13.8 meter. The width of a laken from Leiden was between 1 el (69 cm) and 3 ¾ el.

The Historic Significance of the Find:

The presence of a Haarlem, Netherlands seal on the Santa Margarita shipwreck is particularly interesting because of the complex historic relationship that existed between the Netherlands and Spain in 1622. By 1519, the Netherlands were under the rule of Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor, and King of Spain. Charles was of the

Spanish branch of the house of Habsburg. Later, he resigned Spain and the Netherlands to his Spanish born son, Philip II. Philip's oppressive rule led to the Dutch waging a long war for independence from Spain. Eventually, Haarlem was liberated from Spain and the city was incorporated into the Dutch Republic of the United Provinces, which consisted of the Low Countries Northern Provinces. The Southern Provinces remained loyal to Spain.

By the late 1500s the Dutch were emerging as a formidable commercial power. While Spain declared it illegal for Spanish colonists to trade with the Dutch, nonetheless the Dutch were forging into the Americas, bringing to Spain's colonists desirable, high quality goods, undercutting Spanish merchants and traders and upsetting Spanish profits. Spain and the Dutch signed a truce in 1609, though Spain sought to maintain control of its colonial interests by asserting monopoly in areas it already occupied. However, Spain did acknowledge the right of the Dutch to trade in the countries of all "other princes, potentates and peoples who were willing to trade with them, without any hindrance from the Spanish King." Historian Timothy Walton writes in his book *The Spanish Treasure Fleets*, that the Dutch as well as the English "refused to accept Spanish claims in areas they did not occupy. In time, this principle of effective occupation became an important part of international law."

By 1621 the Spanish/Dutch truce had ended. The Dutch had grown in strength and influence. They had made settlements between the Orinoco

and the Amazon and had "secured between half and two thirds of the carrying trade between Brazil and Europe". The Netherlands controlled the Hudson River Valley from 1609 until 1664. New York City was originally named New Amsterdam, and Harlem, New York, was named after Haarlem, Netherlands.

It was on June 3, 1621 that the Dutch West India Company was formed and received an official charter, and initially I wondered whether the *Santa Margarita* lead seal had come to the Americas via one of the earliest voyages of the Dutch West India Company. However, it appears that though the organization was founded in 1621, it actually took until 1623 to raise sufficient capital to become operational. It was on July 16, 1623, that the company's first ship, *Makreel*, sailed under the "Geocroijjeerde Westindische Compagnie" flag.

After several months of inquiries and research, I have only learned of one other seal of Dutch origin found on a Spanish Colonial New World shipwreck site before the middle 1600's and that other seal, which is from Amsterdam, was also discovered on the *Santa Margarita* shipwreck (M81 #1973). Because the Dutch had such an extensive New World presence underway by 1622, there are various intriguing possibilities of how the Haarlem and Amsterdam seals came to be on the *Santa Margarita*.

Interestingly, the Ecuador team also located an Amsterdam seal on the site of their circa 1680 shipwreck project later in the summer of 2000.

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Publications: *The Dutch Seaborn Empire 1600 - 1800*, C.R. Boxer; *Search For the Motherlode of the Atocha*, Dr. Eugene Lyon; *The Spanish Treasure Fleets*, Timothy Walton; *Imperial Spain 1469 - 1716*, J.H. Elliot; *The Avalon Project at Yale Law School*; *Spain and Its World 1500-1700*, J.H. Elliot, British Museum Occasional Paper Number 93, "Lead Cloth Seals and Related Items in the British Museum" by Geoff Egan.

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