
Archaeologists Determined to Uncover Hernan Cortes' Sunken Ship

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“Cortes’ ships are very important for Mexican history; we are talking about some of the first ships that crossed the Mexican waters,” one archaeologist said.

A team of archaeologists is determined to find the sunken remains of Spanish Hernan Cortes’ ship which sank to the bottom of the bay of Villa Rica in Veracruz, Mexico in 1519.

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According to Mexican archaeologist Roberto Junco, the conquistador’s boats could be just 15 meters below the bay’s floors. However, the bay’s silty floor and the years of erosion have made past excursions difficult.

Still, in 2018, during an underwater archaeological dig, Junco assisted a team of scientists to excavate the remains of a 15-century anchor, “magnetic anomalies” which warranted further investigation and wood which was dated to be from 1417 to 1492. Although there are no markings which have linked these artifacts to Cortes and his crew, researchers remain hopeful.

“It is an anchor made in Spain in the 15 century, which was found buried in the sand and it is possible that they are fragments of these ships,” Mexican historian and author, Antonio Garcia de Leon, said.

According to archives, Cortes favored the Veracruz port and 40 years ago, a fisherman in Campeche found treasure just off the coast. In a desperate attempt for control, Cortes sank his

fleet outside Yucatan before conquering the Aztec empire to keep his men from breaking ranks and focused on the goal to reach Tenochtitlan.

“Cortes’s ships are very important for the history of Mexico, we are talking about some of the first ships that crossed the Mexican waters,” Junco said, adding that fleet was essential to discovering the continent and mapping the coasts.

The newest dig will focus, first, in these areas and those of the “magnetic anomalies,” using “state-of-the-art equipment” combined with diving surveys. Due to the sediment’s luminosity and saline nature, the archaeological treasures are expected to have been preserved well under water — better than on land.

“If we find one (ship,) we will have a better idea of where the others are... If we find one, we find them all,” Junco stated.
