

**Boletín N° 551**  
**December 16, 2019**

## **500 years after the landing of Cortes, researchers discover two iron anchors in Villa Rica, Veracruz**

\*\*\* By their morphology, they would be linked to the sixteenth century; their orientation would also indicate that its placement had a logic, that could be associated with the location of the Hernán Cortés fleet

\*\*\* Underwater archaeologists of INAH and American colleagues add this pair to a first anchor discovered in 2018, whose wood has been determined is from the 15th century

Although today the waters of Villa Rica mainly have a tourist and fishing vocation, 500 years ago, the Veracruz coast was the scene of one of the most important cultural encounters in history, which is now being investigated, with positive results, by underwater archaeologists of the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH), and international colleagues.

In their most recent field season the - Underwater Archeology in Villa Rica Project - two iron anchors were located, whose characteristics refer them to the 16th century, and whose alignment in a southwest direction, could even indicate that they followed a port dynamic in its placement on the seabed.

Both objects, add to a first anchor discovered in 2018, whose laboratory study has proven that the wood of its stocks belongs to a tree of the Cantabrian cornice of Spain, which was alive in the second half of the fifteenth century.

Dr. Roberto Junco, head of the Underwater Archeology Office (SAS) of INAH, who co-directs the project together with underwater archaeologists Dr. Christopher Horrell, Melanie Damour and Dr. Frederick Hanselmann, details that the two new anchors were registered 300 meters north of the previously found, and they are larger: 2 meters long and 66 centimeters between the tips of his arms.

The most voluminous anchor of the set, measures 3.68 meters long and has a width of 1.55 meters between its tips, while the other is 2.60 long by 1.43 meters. Unlike the object

analyzed in 2018, the two anchors located this year did not retain their wooden stocks. In both, a pair of bumps running parallel to the arms can be seen in the cane at the height at which the stocks adjusted, a typical feature of the manufacture of anchors in the 16th century.

"It is until after that century when perpendicular tabs are seen instead of parallel to anchor arms," explains Christopher Horrell, an academic at the Meadows Center for Water and the Environment at Texas State University, and a member of the organization Submerged Archaeological Conservancy International (SACI). Melanie Damour, also a member of the SACI and Frederick Hanselmann, researcher at the University of Miami, agrees with Junco and Horrell, about how preliminary it is to talk about whether the anchors belong to the Hernán Cortés vessels, since, until the 19th century, Villa Rica - the second Spanish city hall in continental America – was an active port for navigation. "It is not clear if all three anchors belong to the same historical moment, but their alignment to the southwest coincides with the logic of Villa Rica as a port that protects ships from the north and northwest winds," says Junco.

For researchers it is already valuable to know that they follow the correct route to locate wrecks linked to the arrival of Europeans to Mesoamerica, of which little is known archeologically. "The Conquest of Mexico was a seminal event in human history, and these shipwrecks, if we can find them, will be symbols of the cultural collision that led to what is now the West, geopolitical and socially speaking," says Dr. Hanselmann. Until now, the team agrees that Cortes sank its ships in that spot, to force dissident members of its army, who sought to return to Cuba.

Thanks to a sum of international and multidisciplinary efforts, the project has strengthened its capabilities. An example is that of the Marine Magnetics firm, whose technicians, in addition to developing a portable magnetometer for the project, came from Canada to Veracruz to collaborate with archaeologists and provide them with equipment, software and field methodologies. Thus, the simultaneous use of two magnetometers towed in water, an additional stationary magnetometer which contrasted its measurements with those of the rest of the equipment measuring the magnetic field of the area, subtracting 'noise' from the readings of magnetometers that were dragged by a vessel through transects.

The above allowed experts to refine their search for 'anomalies' (as they named the ferrous elements detected) and return to the points they had seen in 2018, which resulted in the finding of the two anchors; located between 10 and 15 meters deep, at an average of 1 and 1.5 meters below sea sediment.

Both have a good state of conservation, thanks to the same sediment that protected them for five centuries. For this reason, and once their recording, measurement and documentation with photogrammetry were completed, they were covered again for protection in situ, a measure attached to the archaeological protocols of conservation.

Junco and Horrell anticipate that, in the following season, the group will focus on 15 other anomalies that showed a great potential to also be anchors, as they follow the same alignment as the three historical vestiges located so far.

“If they are, it would reaffirm the hypothesis that we are facing the port of what was Villa Rica in its short duration, or the other assumption, that we have located the point where the Cortés fleet sank and we could begin to assemble the puzzles from where to look for other types of objects such as wooden hulls”.

Further support, came from other specialists, such as Iván Negueruela, director of the Museum of Underwater Archeology (ARQUA) of Spain, and the Iranian underwater archeologist, Shadi Kalantar.

In addition to SAS and other areas of the INAH, the Underwater Archeology in Villa Rica Project, received help from the Grupo Salinas Art & Culture Foundation, which, led by Sergio Vela, generously supported the project; the Mexican Association for the Protection of the Submerged Cultural Heritage, which donated diving tanks to the SAS; and those of companies such as Aquadive, Marine Magnetics, YETI Coolers, Hypack and Diver’s Alert Network.

The experts also highlighting the support of the community near the exploration area, which have joined in the documentation, protection and investigation of their cultural heritage.