

SOTHEBY'S TO SELL SHIPWRECK TREASURE

TREASURE recovered from shipwrecks on the reefs of the Cape Verde Islands is to be offered for sale at Sotheby's London on Tuesday, December 19, 2000. The sale starts at 2.30pm.

The treasure, from seven wrecks, is the result of intensive survey and excavation by Arqueonautas, S.A. - a privately-funded marine archaeological organization. Many wrecks were surveyed in full collaboration with the Government of the Republic of Cabo Verde, producing artefacts that provide a window on history for public benefit and academic research.

Count Nikolaus Sandizell of Sandizell Bavaria, and Chief Executive of Arqueonautas said: "We are delighted to be able to offer these artefacts which have been recovered according to the highest scientific and archaeological standards and cost efficiency in this very first project realised by Arqueonautas."

Arqueonautas, advised by Dr Margaret Rule, the renowned marine archaeologist responsible for raising the Mary Rose, was established in 1994. A year later, with the consent of the Republic of Cape Verde and overseen by Oxford don, Mensun Bound, the Arqueonautas team began its painstakingly detailed search of the waters surrounding the Cape Verde archipelago, mapping half of the coastlines and recording more than 100 wrecks over a period of 10 months.

The Cape Verde Islands, off the West Coast of Africa, were a regular staging post on the lucrative trade route between Europe and the Far East during the 16th and 19th centuries. However, treacherous sea fogs, shallow reefs and rocky coastlines made the archipelago a perilous stopover.

The most significant find by Arqueonautas divers was a unique mariner's astrolabe, discovered hidden deep within a gully, a discovery that underlined the thoroughness of the survey. The instrument was found in November 1999 by diver Gigi Fernandes Correia during the routine excavation of the San Francisco wreck site at Pasasa Pau, off Santiago - the largest of the Cape Verde Islands.

Amazingly, the astrolabe has remained remarkably unscathed and free from corrosion. Signed by Portuguese-maker, Nicholae Ruffo, and dated 1645, it was used for measuring altitude. Being silver-plated, it is unique among all other known examples. The instrument, now registered as Number 84 in the National Maritime Museum's list of mariner's astrolabes, is estimated to sell for £100,000-150,000.

A fascinating range of coinage retrieved from the seabed forms a substantial portion of the sale. A Bolivian 'Royal' striking 8 reales, recovered from the wreck of the Princess Louisa, which struck a reef off the island of Maio in 1743, is estimated at £3,000-5,000. Amazingly, the Charles II coin is in impressive condition and in keeping with royal pieces, has been carefully struck with full inscriptions. The Princess Louisa also yielded an unrecorded cob 4 reales, struck at Santa Fé in Colombia, (est: £1,000-1,500) and a Massachusetts pine tree shilling dated 1652 (£700-1,000).

An interesting and varied group of Swedish copper "plate money", dated between 1715 and 1758, includes a rare 4 daler piece of 1717 (£400-600). The largest examples are hefty 10 inch copper squares weighing several pounds apiece. Coin clusters still embedded in marine deposits and lead shot are to be sold "as found" with estimates up to £1,000, while some of the English guineas discovered on the Lady Burgess wreck still retain original mint lustre after 200 years underwater.

A large bronze breech loading gun from the early 16th century and cast with the Portuguese coat of arms, recovered from the anchorage of Cidade Velha is estimated at £8,000-12,000. The cannon is believed to have come from one of the seven Portuguese ships abandoned or scuttled during the raid led by Sir Francis Drake in 1586.

From the San Francisco, wreck a 17th century Dutch cannon, unusual for its layers of copper, iron bands and lead sheeting, is believed to be one of only five similar known examples (est: £5,000-7,000).

The sale's eclectic mix of discoveries also includes:

- An early 19th century American naval sword handle and guard (est: £300-500)

- Seven wine bottles dating from 1800 with the contents still intact (est: £300-500)
- Two 18th century pocket watch movements (£100-150)
- A brass protractor (est: £100-150)
- Remnants of a brass crucifix mid 17th century (est: £150-200)

Note to Editors: Arqueonautas S.A.(ARQ) was established in 1994. Its purpose is to preserve the submerged cultural heritage and advance learning through the archaeological survey and excavation of historical shipwrecks. ARQ currently holds an exclusive license to conduct maritime archaeological operations in the territorial waters of Cape Verde since August 28, 1995.

For further details visit:
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