

## Chapter I

*Maritime archaeology on the south east coast of South Africa: a historiographical and archaeological overview.*

The Portuguese galleon, the São João, is one of the greatest enigmas in South African maritime history, not only because so little is known about its cargo, passengers and crew, but also because the location of the wreck has puzzled researchers from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century until the present. It is an important part of South Africa's maritime history as it was the first cargo ship wrecked along the country's coastline, and according to early twentieth century historian, George MacCall Theal<sup>1</sup>, it was one of the most richly laden ships to have left India since it was discovered. The coastal town of Port St. Johns, at the mouth of the Umzimvubu River, serves not only as a reminder of the tragic story of the São João and her survivors, since it is named after the great galleon, but also a key component of South Africa's maritime cultural heritage. However, while there is no agreement amongst researchers that this is the wreck site of the São João, recent research done by Bell-Cross presented evidence that the wreck at the Port St. Johns site is that of the Nossa Senhora de Belem (1635).<sup>2</sup>

Speculation as to the location of the São João wreck site started even earlier than that associated with the wreck at Port St. Johns. In the 1900's, Theal was one of the first to refer to Port St. Johns as a possible location and was certain that the resting place of the São João is located at the Umzimvubu River mouth "very near if not exactly off the spot where the English ship Grosvenor was lost".<sup>3</sup> He unfortunately does not give reasons why he believes the wreck is located at this particular spot.

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<sup>1</sup> G. M. Theal, *Records of South East Africa I*, Cape Town, 1964, p. 134.

<sup>2</sup> G. Bell-Cross, "Portuguese Shipwrecks and identification of their sites" in E. Axelson, *Diaz and his Successors*, p. 67.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

Theal's reference to the São João, and other Portuguese shipwrecks, led to the account being analysed by the Swiss missionary H. P. Junod, an authority on Tsonga language and society in 1914, and A.T. Bryant, a South African writer on the oral traditions and history of the Zulu in 1929. Junod states that the São João wrecked on the coast somewhere on 31° S, and gives no other information with regard to the location of the wreck<sup>4</sup>. Bryant refers to Manoel de Sousa and his group of survivors who trekked up the coast to Mozambique, but he does not mention the wreck of the São João or where it foundered.<sup>5</sup> Although Junod and Bryant's reports are more focussed on ethno-linguistic studies they both tend to make unfounded and unsubstantiated comments when referring to sixteenth century Portuguese shipwrecks.<sup>6</sup>

In a very scarce publication of 1926, by Romola (no initials are given) and R.C. Anderson<sup>7</sup>, a description of the São João is given. It is stated that there are several pictures of the São João available, all showing it as a warship at the attack on Tunis in 1535.<sup>8</sup> Anderson's definition of the galleon is as far as can be ascertained the general accepted definition. According to Anderson the galleon was usually a four-masted sailing ship the ordinary ship-rig of the time but with a hull built to some extent on galley lines, with a long beam, more or less straight and flat and with a beak-head low down like a galley's instead of the overhanging forecastle of the ship.<sup>9</sup> The São João seen on the left in figure 1 on page 3, taken from a drawing on a

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<sup>4</sup> H.P. Junod, The condition of natives in South East Africa in the sixteenth century, according to the early Portuguese documents. *Report of the South African Association for the advancement of science*, 1914, p. 139.

<sup>5</sup> A.T. Bryant, *Olden Times in Zululand and Natal*,. London, 1929, pp. 10-12.

<sup>6</sup> P.E.H. Hair, Portuguese Contacts with the Bantu Languages of the Transkei, Natal and Southern Mozambique 1497-1650 in P.E.H. Hair. *Africa Encountered*. X, Great Britain, 1997, pp. 5-6.

<sup>7</sup> Romola and R.C. Anderson, *The Sailing-Ship, six thousand years of history*, London, 1926.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. pp.128-129.

<sup>9</sup> P. Cowburn, *The Warship in History*, London, 1966, p. 92.

lid of a chest belonging to Lord Berkeley, is depicted as a fighting ship rather than a cargo ship. It carries no oars at all and is said to have had no fewer than 366 guns.<sup>10</sup>

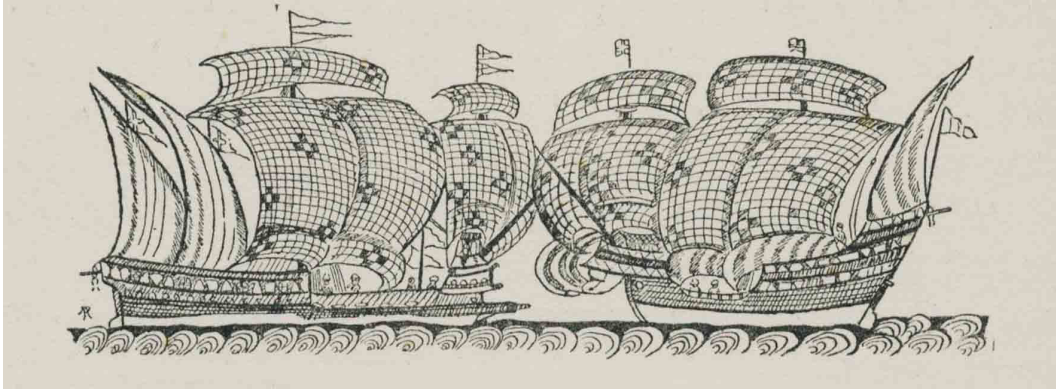


Figure 1: Illustration of the Great Galleon São João on the left and a typical Portuguese Carrack of the sixteenth century.

From: Romola and R.C. Anderson, *The sailing-ship, six thousand years of history* (London, 1926).

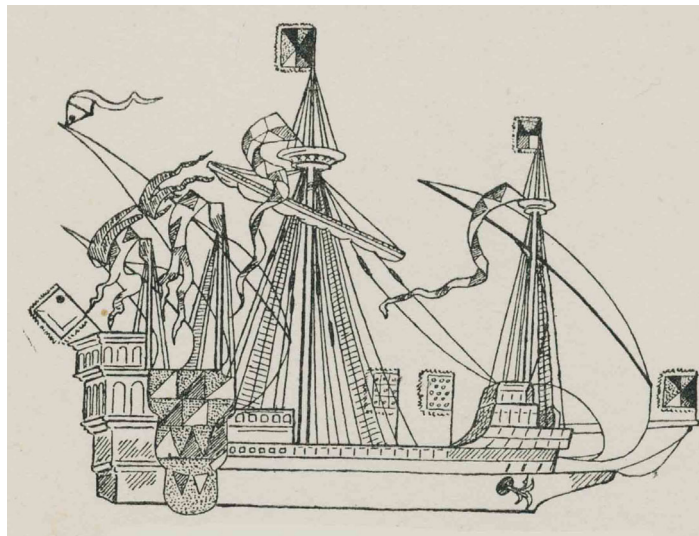


Figure 2: Illustration of the São João as a warship.

From: Romola and R.C. Anderson, *The sailing-ship, six thousand years of history* (London, 1926).

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

The authors of this particular publication were interested in tracing the two main streams of development in sailing-ships, until their junction in the fifteenth century, and therefore no attention is given to the wrecking of the São João but, rather only to its appearance. A large fire in 1916 destroyed among others almost the entire collection of early Portuguese ship models, therefore this is a valuable source since it contains depictions of the galleon not found in any of the other sources dealing with the São João. Researchers have generally shied away from depicting the São João, but when they do, it is depicted resembling a fifteenth century carrack as seen in the other figures. The tile (See Figure 3. page 4) was made for the inauguration of a monument in Port Edward June 2002. The figure (See Figure. 4. on page 5) is of a typical 15<sup>th</sup> century Portuguese carrack.



Figure 3: Tile commemorating the inauguration of a monument in honour of the São João in Port Edward (depicted as carrack).

Artist: Joanne Arkell

Figure 4: Drawing of a carrack or an armed merchantman.

From: P. Cowburn, *The Warship in History*. (London, 1966).



Small paintings, however, on the walls of a small room in the Alhambra in Spain depict the São João resembling a fighting ship or galleon rather than a merchant ship.<sup>11</sup> The difference in appearance is evident. It is depicted as a sailing-ship, four-masted and with the ordinary ship-rig of the time, but with a hull built long in beam, straight and flat and with a beak-head low down instead of the overhanging forecastle of the ship.<sup>12</sup>

As is evident in figure 2, galleons were fitted with moderate superstructures and were heavily gunned (See Figure 2. page 3).

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<sup>11</sup> Romola and Anderson, *The Sailing-Ship*. pp.128-129; P. Cowburn, *The Warship in History*, pp. 92-93; C. R. Boxer, *Four centuries of Portuguese Expansion, 1415-1825: A succinct Survey*, Johannesburg, 1969. pp. 96-97. Boxer, *Tragic History of the sea*, 1959, pp. 2-3.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

The author of the account of the wrecking of the São João, which was published anonymously, also refers to the São João as a galleon. According to historian C.R. Boxer, this term is a generic name and does not accurately refer to a specific type. Generally a *nao* was a large merchant ship, broad in beam, with high poop and forecastle, lightly gunned; while a *galleon* was primarily a war vessel and a lighter and hardier ship.<sup>13</sup> Boxer is convinced that there is no significant difference in appearance between the two.<sup>14</sup> If one should, for the purpose of scientific research, wish to make a distinction it would be based on the use the Portuguese made of them. War vessels, however, such as the *galleon* were frequently pressed into service as cargo ships as a result of the increasing number of ships lost at sea.<sup>15</sup>

In support of this theory, is a proclamation by a survivor from the São Gonçalo where reasons are supplied for the loss of so many of the Portuguese ships. He states:

By building galleons instead of large ships, it was thought these losses would be avoided, and the profits being increased here, they should be equipped for battle... The number of galleons that can be built at the cost of three large ships is five, and this number forms a fleet... This being always proclaimed by wisdom born of experience, and contradicted solely by the blindness of covetous, there is no remedy!<sup>16</sup>

A 1930's publication, *The Cradle days of Natal (1497-1845)* by Graham Mackeurtan, describes four shipwrecks and the journeys of the survivors associated with these shipwrecks.<sup>17</sup> In the Mackeurtan's own words "Each of these journeys was marked by suffering so grievous as to be almost beyond belief".<sup>18</sup> The four

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<sup>13</sup> Boxer, *Four Centuries of Portuguese Expansion, 1415-1825: A Succinct Survey*.

<sup>14</sup> Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire 1415-1825*. Johannesburg, 1961, p. 207.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Theal, *Records of South East Africa I*, p. 420.

<sup>17</sup> G. Mackeurtan. *The Cradle days of Natal (1497-1845)*. London, 1930, pp. 10-52.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. p. 16.

ships discussed by the author are the São João, São Bento, São Thomé and the Santo Alberto. Mackeurtan describes the voyage and wrecking of the São João as it was published in Theal<sup>19</sup>, but states that the waterlogged vessel was gradually carried inshore and finally stranded just north of the Umzimvubu River. He continues to claim that the settlement Port Saint Johns at the mouth of this river is named after the Galleon. Nothing else is mentioned to substantiate this claim that the wreck is located at the Umzimvubu River, and since no specific references are given, it is not possible to follow up the sources that were used. In the table of authorities, however, Mackeurtan lists Bryant as one of his sources.<sup>20</sup> This is an indication that Mackeurtan's theories may be merely based upon the research done by Bryant a decade earlier.

A few decades later historian S.R. Welch dedicated a whole chapter to the wrecking of the São João in his 1948 publication *South Africa under John III*<sup>21</sup>. He states that on the 8<sup>th</sup> of June the crew saw the north bank of the Umtavuna River and here they anchored in 10 fathoms of water. This detail given by Welch must be carefully considered since it could be valuable with regards to the wreck site, as well as the location of the survivor camp. Welch does however not substantiate his claim with reference to the survivor accounts or any other source and so it is doubtful that it was the survivor's themselves who referred to the river they saw as the Umtavuna. An investigation of the marine charts of the mid-sixteenth century also shows no indication of a river called the Umtavuna.<sup>22</sup> According to cartographer Colin Martin, early marine charts were dependant upon actual scientific observation and as a consequence unknown areas were left blank on the charts. On all of the charts pre and post dating the wrecking of the São João the area around 31° is left blank.

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<sup>19</sup> Theal, *Records of South East Africa*.

<sup>20</sup> Bryant, *Olden Times in Zululand and Natal*.

<sup>21</sup> S.R. Welch, *South Africa under John III*, Cape Town, 1948.

<sup>22</sup> M. Colin, Portuguese marine cartography of southern Africa in the 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries in E. Axelson, *Diaz and his Successors*, pp. 81-137.

Reference to the Umtavuna River however indicates that Welch supports the theory that the wreck of the São João is located near Port Edward.

A passage in Welch's account contains the following statement: "They decided to stay near the river for twelve days".<sup>23</sup> Since there are three perennial rivers in the area, this statement causes much uncertainty as to the location of the wreck site. If it refers to the Umtavuna River, it would mean a reformulation of the hypothesis with regards to the location of the wreck, as well as the survivor camp, since the mouth of the Umtavuna is 6km away from the site identified in Port Edward. Furthermore, Welch concludes categorically that they camped on the stretch of coast where Port Edward is today, thus the river he is referring to could either be the Inhlanhlinhlu or Kuboboyi River. His grounds for this statement are that this part of the coast is naturally fertile and sheltered from cold winds.<sup>24</sup>

The tragic story of its survivors and the historic significance of the São João prompted other researchers, such as the English historians C.R. Boxer and James Duffy, to analyse the survivors accounts which may reveal clues to the chain of events prior to, at the time of and after the wrecking of the São João.<sup>25</sup> In his book, *The Tragic History of the Sea*, published in 1957 Boxer does not consider the São João directly, but refers to it often when discussing the other Portuguese wrecks of the time such as the São Thomé, the Santo Alberto and the São João Baptista. In the survival account it is stated that after about three months the party of survivors of the São João met with a black king who was the head of two kraals. He apparently promised not to harm them because of his previous acquaintances with the Portuguese through Lorenço Marques and Antonio Caldeira who had visited him. A geographical investigation by Boxer of the area where the São Thomé survivors

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<sup>23</sup> Welch, *South Africa under John III, 1521-1557*. p.329.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. p. 331.

<sup>25</sup> Boxer, *The Tragic History of the Sea, 1589-1622*, London, 1959; Duffy, *Shipwreck and Empire*, 1959.



travelled fourteen years later revealed the following:

a few years ago that king ordered this bush to be cleared and the ground to be cultivated, in the course of which the native Kaffirs say that they found two richly bejewelled rings, which the king has, and shows to this day to the Portuguese who go to trade there. We heard this from several people, who assured us that they saw these rings, which in all probability are those of the said Manuel de Sousa, who was wearing them on his fingers.<sup>26</sup>

Unfortunately, no mention is made of where this piece of information originates or what became of these rings. According to Boxer, the survivors of the Santo Alberto met with a black man who had remained in that region since the time of the wreck of the São João.<sup>27</sup> Boxer concurs with Anderson and Romola, that the São João was a warship when he points out that galleons were frequently pressed into service as merchant ships.<sup>28</sup>

By concentrating on the incidences of shipwreck, the research done by James Duffy in the 1950's focussed mainly on finding answers to the collapse of the Portuguese empire. His research is of great relevance to this study since he examined all the narratives contained in the *História trágico-marítima* for their accuracy, literary qualities and the historical significance. He concluded that a lack of knowledge about the authors of various narratives compiled in the *História trágico-marítima* has made it difficult to define the purposes of many of the narratives. According to Duffy, a great deal of speculation exists about the authorship of the narrative of the São João. Still, he concludes that the emphasis on detail in the account of the São João points to a "Fairly faithful transcription of Alvaro Fernandes' story".<sup>29</sup> Alvaro Fernandes was the São João's storekeeper who told the story of its wrecking to an

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<sup>26</sup> Boxer, *The Tragic History of the Sea*. pp. 73-74.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. p. 178.

<sup>28</sup> Boxer, *Four centuries of Portuguese Expansion, 1415-1825*.

<sup>29</sup> Duffy, *Shipwreck and Empire*, pp. 26-27.

anonymous author in Mozambique.<sup>30</sup>

In 1957, in a book entitled *Portugese Ontdekkers om die Kaap*, the author, W.J. de Kock, at the time a senior lecturer of history at the University of Pretoria, appears to support the theory that the São João foundered at the Umzimvubu River, though he does not substantiate this claim with any further evidence. He does, however, indicate that other sources point to the Umtavuna River as the wreck site.<sup>31</sup> De Kock mentions that the survivors from the São Bento encountered the São João wreck site two years later, as well as some of the survivors, but he positions the wreck site of the São Bento too far south.<sup>32</sup> It is clear that this erroneous calculation contributed to the subsequent possible incorrect positioning of the São João wreck site.

Monica Wilson, former professor in social anthropology at the University of Cape Town, published a paper in 1959 that assessed the evidence given in Portuguese records on Nguni-speaking people who were living in the coastal districts of the Transkei and Ciskei in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>33</sup> In this paper she claims, “the São João went ashore in what is now Pondoland a little way north of the Mzimvubu River”.<sup>34</sup> She cites Theal’s *Records of South East Africa* as her source, but does not supply any further reasons for placing the wreck of the São João in this area. In a later joint publication entitled *Oxford History of South Africa*<sup>35</sup> with Leonard Thompson, a lecturer at the University of California, Wilson again reiterates her earlier statement, but again does not supply any reason for placing the landfall of the

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> W.J. De Kock, *Portugese ontdekkers om die Kaap*, Kaapstad, 1957, pp. 225-228.

<sup>32</sup> According to De Kock the landing place of the São Bento was just north of the Fish River and west of the Umtata River mouth.

<sup>33</sup> M. Wilson, The Early History of the Transkei and Ciskei. *African Studies*. 1959, 18(4).

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p.169.

<sup>35</sup> M. Wilson and L. Thompson, *Oxford History of South Africa*, Vol I, Oxford, 1969.

São João in this area.<sup>36</sup>

Philip Cowburn, formerly senior lecturer at the department of humane studies at Royal Naval College in Greenwich, did comprehensive research on war vessels throughout history. Significantly, the São João is the only Portuguese vessel included in his book *The Warship in History*.<sup>37</sup> He states that the São João was built in 1534 and classifies her as a galleon or warship.

According to Cowburn, tapestries woven to celebrate the attack on Tunis in 1535, located in Madrid, paintings in the Alhambra and some drawings, depict the São João as an efficient, up-to-date four-masted fighting ship and not a “stately Spanish galleon” as is the popular assumption.<sup>38</sup>

In 1972 Basil Holt published a work entitled *Where Rainbirds call, a record of the Transkei*.<sup>39</sup> He states that on the 10<sup>th</sup> of June 1552 the São João, “the largest vessel in the Portuguese trade with India was wrecked somewhere east of the Umzimvubu River”.<sup>40</sup> He believes that the name of the galleon survives in that of the nearby town Port St. Johns, but does not substantiate his claims with historical or archaeological evidence.

A paper published in 1976 by anthropologist Robin M. Derricourt, focussed on the distribution of human groups in the Transkei and Ciskei in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Derricourt concluded that the previous attempts, mainly by Theal, to locate the position of landfalls and travel routes by the survivors from the various shipwrecks, were incorrect due to miscalculations of positions. He claims

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>37</sup> Cowburn, *The Warship in History*.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., pp. 92-93.

<sup>39</sup> B. Holt, *Where Rainbirds Call, a record of Transkei*, London, 1966.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

that the positions were given too far to the north-east. According to Derricourt, these miscalculations were the result of former assumptions of the later entry and movement of Bantu-speaking people in the area. He admits that the same mistake was made by himself, as well, in his earlier estimates. In his research he rejects nineteenth century interpretations of the original texts, as well as twentieth century assumptions about the location of the shipwrecks. Instead, he closely examined the texts themselves.<sup>41</sup>

He estimated the landfall of the São João somewhere in the Ciskei, further south of the 31° given in the survivor account of the São João. His calculations were based on the survivor company travelling an average distance of twenty kilometres per day, which would correspond to the figures given in the text of a hundred leagues in one month and twenty leagues in five days. Moreover, he claims that these figures are in line with the progress of other groups of the same size. Also, according to his theory previous researchers such as Wilson and Thompson, who do not supply any further reasons for placing the wreck of the São João in the most southern part of Natal, erred in their hypotheses. Their claims correspond to the degree reading given by the survivors, but according to Derricourt's estimates it does, however, imply a 17% error in the estimate of direct distance. Thus Derricourt suggests that there is no real evidence for a landfall of the São João further south than the starting point of Pondoland (the former Transkei).<sup>42</sup>

In the late 1970's to the mid 1980's research on the location of the wreck of the São João was carried out by the Archaeology Department of the Natal Museum, which tracked down and recorded ceramic fragments and cornelian beads washed onto the beaches of the Natal South coast in the vicinity of Port Edward (31°02'S and

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<sup>41</sup> R. M. Derricourt, Early European Travellers in the Transkei and Ciskei. *African Studies*. 1976, 35(3-4), pp. 278-279.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

30°14'E).<sup>43</sup> According to their findings, only two sites on the South African coastline produce porcelain with styles datable to the mid-sixteenth century, the site of the São Bento (1554) at the Msikaba River mouth and a site at Port Edward.<sup>44</sup>

Extensive research done by archaeologist Tim Maggs in 1978 was aimed at dating and identifying two wreck sites on the Natal South Coast, namely: the São João and the São Bento. He did a comprehensive archive and literature study to gather information on the possible identity of the wreck sites. This research concluded that most of the ships that foundered on the African coastline before 1650 were Portuguese on the homeward bound voyage and that some of them had blue-and-white Chinese porcelain onboard. A detailed beach survey from the Mozambique/South African border (26°51'S) to Plettenberg Bay (34°06'S) was initiated by Maggs. The objective of this survey was to find and plot the deposits of blue and white porcelain and any other artefacts related to mid-sixteenth century shipwrecks.

Available artefacts from these early shipwrecks held in both private collections and museums were inspected. The results of this investigation pointed to the site in Port Edward as the landfall of the São João.<sup>45</sup>

A definite breakthrough in the search for the wreck site of the São João was the identification of the site of the São Bento landfall. According to Maggs, the detailed description of the walk north and the discovery of the wreck of the São João supplied by the survivors from the São Bento is a key to the location of the São João. Maggs used the specific information about the landscape, supplied by the São Bento survivors, to trace the steps of the survivors from Msikaba Island to the site at Port

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<sup>43</sup> T. Maggs, The Great Galleon São João: remains from a mid-sixteenth century wreck on the Natal South Coast. *Annals of the Natal Museum*. 1984, 26(1), p. 173.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Bell-Cross, Portuguese Shipwrecks and identification of their sites, p. 47.

Edward. Thus, the evidence presented by Maggs proved that the locations suggested by both Wilson and Derricourt were erroneous.<sup>46</sup>

Local Natal diver L. Harris did tentative underwater surveys on the site at Port Edward in 1980 that yielded archaeological evidence in the form of a fragment of a bronze cannon. As far as can be ascertained, Harris did not continue with any further salvage operations on the São João and did not publish any articles or reports on his find. Maggs, did however, include reference to the cannon fragment in his article published in 1984.<sup>47</sup>

A comprehensive search was undertaken three years later in June 1983, by a team of four divers led by J.R. Wood and E. Roest. Their survey of the area lasted for two weeks and covered the stretch of coastline and areas north and south of it. They found nothing more than the usual ceramic fragments. As far as can be determined the work done by these divers did not contribute to any new findings or information on the São João and did not result in any published information, except featuring in Maggs's 1984 article.<sup>48</sup>

Publications produced by Bell-Cross in the eighties mainly focussed on shipwreck legislation and underwater cultural management in South Africa. However, he did some research on the maritime history and shipwrecks along the South African coast, among others, the Bennebroeck and the São João.<sup>49</sup> He also did some comprehensive research on the occurrence of cornelian beads at shipwreck sites along the South African coast, wherein he lists twelve Portuguese East Indiamen and

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<sup>46</sup> Maggs, *The Great Galleon São João*, pp.173-186.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 174

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> G. Bell-Cross, *Bennebroeck Story*. *Coelacanth*. 32(2), pp 9-20; The occurrence of cornelian and agate beads at shipwreck sites on the South African coast. *Coelacanth*, 1987, 25(1). A brief Maritime History of the coast between the Kei and Fish Rivers. *Coelacanth*. 20(2), pp 27-40.

the possible localities of these wrecks. For the São João, he lists three possibilities, namely: Ivy Bay, Port Edward and Natal.<sup>50</sup> As far as can be determined, the bulk of his research on the São João is based on the conclusions made by Maggs and the information the latter gathered on the wreck of the São Bento.

Former Director of the Natal Museum, Brian Stückenber, published an article in 1987 relating the events surrounding the wrecking of the São João. He believes that it foundered “in the area between the Port Edward bathing beach and T.O. Strand.”<sup>51</sup> Stückenber did some surveys in the area mentioned above in search for the survivor camp, but did not make any significant contributions to the search for such a site. He generally felt that such a site could not be located as it may have been destroyed due to agricultural activities in the area<sup>52</sup>.

In the 1988 publication *Shipwrecks and Salvage*, scuba diver M. Turner relates the story of the wrecking of the São João and states that it is not exactly clear where it was wrecked<sup>53</sup>. He does mention that in all possibility it wrecked along the lower South Coast of Natal in the vicinity of the Umtavuna River.<sup>54</sup> He substantiates his claims by referring to the Chinese porcelain that is frequently washed ashore in the area of Port Edward. No mention is made of the survivor camp.

Interestingly, the *British Museum Encyclopaedia of Underwater and Maritime*

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<sup>50</sup> G. Bell-Cross, The occurrence of cornelian and agate beads at shipwreck sites on the South African coast. *Coelacanth*, 1987, 25(1). p. 29.

<sup>51</sup> B. R. Stückenber, The wreck of the St. John. *Neon*. vol. 52, August, 1987, p. 38.

<sup>52</sup> Personal communication with Stückenber, August, 2002.

<sup>53</sup> M. Turner, *Shipwrecks and Salvage in South Africa*, Cape Town, 1988, p. 36.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

*Archaeology* published in 1997 lists the São Bento. Here it is stated that the São Bento wrecked in 1554 and reference is made to the work done by Maggs, but no mention is made of the wreck of the São João.<sup>55</sup>

Curator of the Van Tilbugh collection at the University of Pretoria and cultural historian Valerie Esterhuizen, did extensive research on porcelain from Portuguese shipwrecks dating from the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>56</sup> Although her doctorate focussed on the development of the decorative motifs of the porcelain of shipwrecks, her research gives valuable information with regard to the various locations of the Portuguese wrecks along the east coast of South Africa. According to Esterhuizen, the identification of the wreck of the São Bento was, as Maggs indicated, without a doubt a key to the identification of the Port Edward wreck site as that of the São João. Together, the shipwreck narratives, the porcelain found at Port Edward and the research done by Maggs confirmed that the landing of the São João was indeed at Port Edward. The details and scientific findings of Esterhuizen with regards to the porcelain will be discussed in a later chapter.

According to the recent extensive research done by cultural historian O.J.O Ferreira, original documents regarding the wrecking of the São João are scarce, because so few of the initial survivors were left to tell the tale. As is the case with many other researchers, Ferreira also views the anonymous publication of the survivor account contained in the *História trágico-marítima* as the most valuable source. According to Ferreira, the three slave women present at the tragic death of Dona Leonora and her sons, survived the ordeal and once back in Goa India they gave statements

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<sup>55</sup> J.P. Delgado, *British Museum Encyclopaedia of Underwater and Maritime Archaeology*. London, 1997.

<sup>56</sup> L.V. Esterhuizen, *Dekoratiewe Motiewe op Chinese Porseleinskerwe uit Portugese Skeepswrakke aan die Suid-Afrikaanse Kus, 1552-1647: 'n Kultuurhistoriese Studie*. Ph.D Thesis, Universiteit van Pretoria, 2001, pp. 77-95.



regarding their experiences, which were later recorded by historians.<sup>57</sup> As already mentioned another survivor, Alvaro Fernandes, the ship's storekeeper told the story to someone in Mozambique in 1554, who then later published the account anonymously. The exact publication date is unknown, but it is believed to be sometime during the sixteenth century.<sup>58</sup> The thorough research done by Ferreira reveals that the story of the tragedy of the São João has been published in numerous forms, under diverse titles by a variety of authors for a period of over three and a half centuries.

Table 1: São João publications and authors

DATE	PUBLICATION	AUTHOR
1594	Navegação e lastimoso sucesso da perdiçam de Manoel de Sousa de Sepúlveda	Unknown
Unknown	Relação do naufragio do galeão grande S. João	Unknown
1609	Ethopia Oriental	João dos Santos
1614	Relação do naufragio do galeão grande S. João	Unknown
1625	História da muy notavel perda do galeão de São João.	Álvaro Duarte Fernandes
1735-1736	História trágico-marítima	B.G. de Brito
1898-1903.	Records of South-Eastern Africa.	Theal, G.M.
1912	The Cape of Adventure	I.D. Colvin
1947	Portuguese Voyages	C.D. Ley
1959	The Tragic History of the Sea	C.R. Boxer

In his book, which was published in 2002 to commemorate the 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the wreck of the São João, Ferreira lists secondary sources that were of great value in his research. Besides these already discussed above, he also refers to A. Duncan<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> O.J.O Ferreira, *Die Stranding van die São João*, Jeffreys Bay, p. 9.

<sup>58</sup> C.R. Boxer, *An Introduction on the História trágico-marítima*. in Bell-Cross "Portuguese Shipwrecks and identification of their sites" in Axelson, *Diaz and his Successors*. p.50.

<sup>59</sup> A. Duncan, *A mariners chronicle*, London, 1904.

and Axelson<sup>60</sup>. He, however, expresses his disappointment in the fact that in the publication of Boxer *The Portuguese seaborne empire, 1415-1825*<sup>61</sup> no attention was given to the São João. Boxer did however focus on the São João in an earlier publication in 1957, entitled *The Tragic History of the Sea*.<sup>62</sup>

A chronological examination of the extent of documentary and field research done by other investigators has been presented in this chapter. Some uncertainty still exists as to the exact location of the wreck of the São João. Part of the reason for this is that certain researchers such as Welch and Maggs supporting Port Edward as the site of the wrecking only refer to the Umtavuna River and do not mention the Inhlanhlinhlu or Kuboboyi Rivers, two other key rivers in the vicinity. Even so, through the research conducted over the past decade some groundbreaking achievements have been made with regard to the location of the wreck site of the São João. To date little research has been conducted to establish the location of the survivor camp.

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<sup>60</sup> Axelson, *Diaz and his Successors*.

<sup>61</sup> C.R. Boxer, *The Portuguese seaborne empire, 1415-1825*, Lisabon, 1991.

<sup>62</sup> C.R. Boxer, *The Tragic History of the Sea, 1589-1622*, Cambridge, 1959.