

## Conclusion

Unlike other topics within the field of historical archaeology, primary sources pertaining to the São João are rare. The scarcity of sources, as a result of a large fire in 1916<sup>1</sup>, can be blamed for the locality of the wreck mistakenly being designated further south than Port Edward, by most researchers, for the first half of the twentieth century. Many researchers i.e. Theal<sup>2</sup>, Mackeurtan<sup>3</sup>, de Kock<sup>4</sup>, Wilson<sup>5</sup>, Holt<sup>6</sup> and Derricourt<sup>7</sup> place the wreck of the São João at Msikaba River mouth, near Port St. Johns.

For the account of the wrecking of the São João archaeologists and historians are largely dependent on the English translation from Gomes<sup>8</sup>, by Theal<sup>9</sup>. The original account was not written by one of the survivors, but by someone who was told the story and published the account anonymously. This source therefore had limitations with regard to detailed geographical information. From the 1980's, research on the location of the São João wrecksite included the survivor account of the São Bento, wrecked at the Msikaba River mouth. This source, again translated into English by Theal, was written by an actual survivor of the wreck and therefore contains more specified detail, particularly regarding the geography. The São João account used in combination with this source has shown that the published reports of the shipwrecked Portuguese survivors can be plotted with fair to excellent accuracy by relating the features described to the topography of the south-east coast of South Africa.

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<sup>1</sup> O.J.O Ferreira, *Die Stranding van die São João*.

<sup>2</sup> Theal, *History and Ethnography of Africa South of the Zambesi I*, 1910, p.364.

<sup>3</sup> G. Mackeurtan, *The cradle days of Natal (1497 – 1845)*, London, 1930. pp. 10-52

<sup>4</sup> De Kock, *Portugese ontdekkers om die Kaap*, pp. 225 - 228.

<sup>5</sup> Wilson, *The early history of the Transkei and Ciskei*. p. 169.

<sup>6</sup> Holt, *Where rainbirds call, a record of Transkei*.

<sup>7</sup> Derricourt, *Early European travelers in the Transkei and Ciskei*, pp. 278 - 279.

<sup>8</sup> B. Gomes, *História trágico-marítima. Em que se escrevem chronologicamente os Naufragios que triveraõ as Naos de Portugal, depois que se poz em exercicio a Nave gaçaõ da India*. 2 vol. Lisbon.

<sup>9</sup> Theal, *Records of South East Africa I*, Cape Town, 1964.

Added to the problem of sources was the fact that countless rumours and myths around the location of the wreck, its survivor camp and artifacts prevailed. This legacy, though interesting, causes more difficulties for historians and archaeologists because each and every rumour must be investigated to determine its accuracy. In addition, many non-historians authored a lot of literature based on these rumours<sup>10</sup>, which meant a great deal of time was spent scrutinizing and correcting misinformation.

Recent archaeological excavations in the area of Port Edward are yielding artifacts, food remains and other details which complement the historical record and strengthen the theory that Port Edward is the location of the wreck. In the area where the most likely location for the survivor camp was identified, for instance, foreign peppercorns were found. This discovery merits the continuance of this project especially since these are the first cultural remains found that may be linked to a survivor camp.

The shortage of historical sources as well as the uncertainty surrounding the archaeological material relating to Portuguese wrecks along the south-east coast of South Africa was without doubt an important factor, which shaped the methodology for this study. In South Africa, where the study of historical-archaeology is a comparatively new field of research some archaeologists such as Werz<sup>11</sup> have pointed out the value of incorporating historical texts in archaeological investigations and in addition also pointed out the problems experienced because of the lack of such sources. Despite the fact that Portuguese shipwrecks and consequently their survivors form an integral part of South African history from the time of the earliest wreck of the São João in the sixteenth century, they have generally been neglected. Another reason for the neglect is the lack of specialization

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<sup>10</sup> For example, R. Webster, *Fireside tales* and AA Illustrated guide to the Southern African coast.

<sup>11</sup> Werz, *Diving up the human past. Perspectives of Maritime Archaeology*, p. 56.

within the field of archaeology in fields such as maritime- and historical-archaeology.

A solution is presented by this study in the form of a methodology for historic-archaeology. Through a thorough chronological examination of the extent of documentary and field research done by other investigators the researcher has presented the scope of research already done on the specific subject and in doing so highlighted areas that have not been properly investigated yet, such as the survivor camp. In addition, it became apparent that it is crucial to separate the truth from fiction and in doing so identify arguments that go beyond rumours and anecdotes. The identification of wreck sites and survivor camps in documents can be correlated not only with historical and traditional sources, but also with archaeological evidence.

Conventionally one of the main concerns of the archaeologist is the study of artifacts, in other words the cultural resources, i.e. artifacts or material remains found on a specific site. Recent developments in archaeology place more emphasis on non-artifactual remains sometimes referred to as ecofacts, i.e. organic and environmental remains<sup>12</sup>. This is not an inaccurate practice, but what is suggested by this study is that documentary evidence should also be included in archaeological investigations as non-artifactual remains or as termed in this study, historiographical and historical material. So the partnership of historiographical and historical material and artifacts defines the fundamental nature of historic-archaeology, which is the study of events and cultural remains of the past. It is necessary to consult a variety of sources during historiographical and historical research in order to obtain different types of information and therefore it is necessary to make a differentiation between manuscript sources, primary sources, i.e. the survivor or travel accounts, as opposed to secondary sources i.e. published sources written some time after the event. The

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<sup>12</sup> C. Renfrew & P. Bahn, *Archaeology, Theories, Methods and Practice*, London, 1996, p.45.

emphasis, however, is on the partnership for without the archaeological evidence, the historiographical material remains incomplete.

Not unlike the differentiation made with historiographical material, it is suggested that archaeological material can also be grouped into primary archaeological material, i.e. material found by the individual researcher herself as opposed to secondary archaeological material, i.e. material found by other researchers. This clearly defines the differences between existing and new research, and how they complement or contradict one another.

Important to this study is the application of the physical and chemical sciences to primary remains found at the site. An alliance was forged with specialists from QUADRU based at the CSIR in Pretoria to perform stable light isotope analysis on *cypraea moneta* found at the suspected wreck site. This is a breakthrough in the field of maritime archaeology in South Africa since the application of these tests to marine shells originating from the hold of a shipwreck has never been undertaken before. The aim of these tests is again to separate fact from fiction. Up until these tests were performed, researchers only speculated about the origin of the *cypraea moneta* on the south east coast of South Africa. The tests prove that the shells are from warmer water than found on the entire south-east coast of South Africa. Thus *cypraea moneta* pockets along the entire coast of South Africa can now be tested in this manner to trace their origins which can contribute to a better understanding of early trade.

Similarities in Portuguese campsites were investigated through documentary evidence, enabling the researcher to create a generic site plan to assist in the determination of areas to search for the São João campsite. This new methodology does not pertain only to this project, but it can assist archaeologists in determining the location of other similar sites, which are not clearly identifiable. The campsite is

possibly the most important feature of the São João wreck site since it can present convincing proof that the wreck site is located at Port Edward. Only one other researcher explored the possible location of such a camp, but was put off by the farming activities in the area.



Figure 41: Photograph of the proposed development in the area of Port Edward.  
From: R. De Kock. Rich and Poor Rub Shoulders. *The South Coast Herald*.  
63 (25), December, 2001.

Since the start of the Port Edward Project 2001-2003 and even before, the wreck of the São João has enjoyed a lot of attention, both wanted and unwanted. Unwanted attention in the form of destructive excavations in the area, as well as newspaper articles “advertising” the porcelain washed onto the beach practically inviting the public to collect it. An example of such an article is the one published in *The*

*Kwazulu-Natal Tourist* showing a photograph of the stretch of beach designated by the researcher as PED 5, stating underneath the photograph “The beach where the survivors of the wreck of the São João came ashore, with Port Edward in the background. Many of the artifacts from this wreck were discovered here”.<sup>13</sup> Other disturbing articles show plans for development in the area such as the one shown above. In comparing the plan shown in the photograph above and the aerial photograph used in this research it is evident that the proposed development falls within the area of PED 2, where the pepper was found, and PED 3. Development of this magnitude will surely destroy any traces that are left of a survivor camp and for this reason the continued search for the survivor camp of the wreck of the São João is of great importance. Many other archaeologists have terminated their projects on the São João, since compared to other projects relatively few artifacts have been found. However, the partnership with historic documentation gives this project the option of taking the investigations further. The virtual scenario assists in reducing the possibilities and refining the focus as opposed to merely terminating the search.

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<sup>13</sup> D. Watson, Great old wrecks, *The Kwazulu-Natal Tourist*. Kwazulu-Natal, October 2001. pp. 6-7.

## **APPENDICES**

### **APPENDIX 1: Pre-disturbance permit for underwater and beach excavations.**



South African Heritage Resources Agency

111 HARRINGTON STREET, CAPE TOWN, 8001  
P.O. BOX 4637, CAPE TOWN, 8000  
TEL (021) 462-4502 - FAX (021) 462-4509

OUR REF : 9/2/701/85

YOUR REF:

ENQUIRIES: John Gribble, Maritime Archacologist

DATE : 1 August 2001

**PERMIT**  
**No. 80/01/03/013/30**

Issued under Section 35(4) of the National Heritage Resources Act, Act No. 25 of 1999. Permission is hereby given:

to: Ms E Burger,  
of: 90 Tait Street, Colbyn, Pretoria, 0083,  
for: a pre-disturbance survey of the historical wreck believed to be the "Sao Joao" wrecked in 1552,  
with limited sampling of material found on the beach in the vicinity of the wreck,  
at: approximately 31.05S, 30.14E,  
at: Port Edward, Kwazulu Natal Province.

The following conditions apply:

1. Work must be limited to the exploration of the "Sao Joao". A limited collection of archaeological material, to be used for dating and identification purposes, may be made on the beach adjacent to the wreck, but nothing may be recovered from the wreck itself.
2. This permit gives the holder the sole right to work on the site for the duration of the permit period.
3. Adequate recording methods must be employed. The positions of all datum points and excavations, and all artefacts removed from the beach must be marked on an accurate plan of the site, which must also include a title, date, north arrow and scale.
4. A detailed log book must be kept to record daily progress, the mapping and location of finds, features of the wreck, and sea and weather conditions.
5. All artefacts removed from the site must be tagged and numbered, and the number and description of each artefact entered into an accession register with pre-numbered pages. A copy of this accession register must be submitted to SAHRA with the annual report.
6. The permit holder must work closely with the Natal Museum, and all artefacts and materials recovered must be recorded, preserved and identified in collaboration with the Natal Museum. No artefacts may be disposed of without the permission of SAHRA.
7. An annual progress report on activities connected with this permit must be submitted to SAHRA on or before 31 December 2001, and a final report is due on or before 31 December 2002. Reprints of all papers, theses or reports resulting from this work must be lodged with SAHRA.
8. If satisfactory progress reports are not received, this permit may be cancelled. If a published

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report has not appeared within three years of the lapsing of this permit, the report required in terms of the permit will be made available to researchers on request.

9. It is the responsibility of the permit holder to obtain permission from the landowner for each visit, and conditions of access imposed by the landowner must be observed.
10. It is the responsibility of the permit holder to fill in excavations and protect the site during and after excavation to the satisfaction of SAHRA.
11. SAHRA shall not be liable for any losses, damages or injuries to persons or properties as a result of any activities in connection with this permit.
12. SAHRA reserves the right to cancel this permit upon notice to the permit holder.

This permit is valid until 31 December 2002.

for **CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER** .....

Date: 1 August 2001



Place: Cape Town

**APPENDIX 2: Damage or destruction for analysis/dating permit.**



**SOUTH AFRICAN HERITAGE RESOURCES AGENCY**  
111 HARRINGTON STREET, CAPE TOWN, 8001 P. O. BOX 4637, CAPE TOWN, 8000  
TEL: (021) 462 4502 FAX: (021) 462 4509

OUR REF: 9/2/701/85  
YOUR REF:  
ENQUIRIES: **PERMIT**  
**No. 80/02/01/009/54**  
DATE: Issued under Section 35(4) of the National Heritage Resources Act, Act No. 25 of 1999. Permission is hereby given:

to: Ms E Burger,  
of: 90 Tait Street, Colbyn, Pretoria, 0083,  
for: the damage or destruction for analysis/dating of a cowrie shell and iron nail,  
from: the wreck of the Sao Joao, Port Edward,  
in: the Port Shepstone District, KwaZulu Natal Province.

The following conditions apply:

1. Samples must be selected by the permit holder in consultation with the excavator or curator who must ensure that comparative samples are retained in the collections, and that any samples not used by the analyser are returned to the collections.
2. Sampling must be done with minimum damage to the artefacts or objects and according to principles outlined in the application from the permit holder.
3. The samples must all be labelled with the relevant accession numbers and all packets and boxes containing the samples must be labelled with accession number, the name of the site, and the name and address of the institution where the collection is kept.
4. An annual progress report on the results of the analyses must be submitted to SAHRA on 1 December 2002, and a final report is due on or before 12 February 2003.
5. Reprints of all published papers, or copies of theses or reports resulting from this work must be lodged with SAHRA.
6. SAHRA shall not be liable for any losses, damages or injuries to persons or properties as a result of any activities in connection with this permit.
7. SAHRA reserves the right to cancel this permit upon notice to the permit holder.

This permit is valid until 12 February 2002.

for **CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER** 

Date: 12 February 2002 Place: Cape Town

**APPENDIX 3: Survey and excavation permit for land sites.**

**PERMIT**  
No.02/02

Issued under Section 26.(6) of the KwaZulu-Natal Heritage Act No.10 of 1997.

Permission is hereby given to Elizabeth Burger for the survey and excavation of the inland portion of the wreck site of the Sao Joao, Port Shepstone.

This permit is valid until 1 February 2005.

Please read the attached Regulations.

  
Annie van de Venter  
Head of Archaeology  
pp Director