

UConn Archaeologist Discovers 17th-century Shipwreck

The Dutch ship *Huis de Kreuningen* went to her watery grave on 3 March 1677. But no one knew precisely where that grave was “until a group led by professor and maritime archaeologist Kroum Batchvarov, from University of Connecticut, USA, found what are believed to be her remains this past summer in the waters of the southern Caribbean.

Batchvarov, assistant professor of maritime archaeology in UConn's Department of Anthropology, is an internationally known researcher specialising in 17th-century ship building and maritime archaeology. He is leading a multi-phased investigation to find and study the remains of 16 vessels that were sunk in a fierce battle that took place in what is now known as Scarborough Harbour in the Republic of Trinidad & Tobago.

The battle was fought between the invading French and the Dutch, who controlled the island of Tobago at that time. Although often overlooked by students of maritime history, the confrontation was significant, both in terms of the number of lives lost and the damage done to both fleets.

Earlier this year, Batchvarov and his team were conducting a remote sensing survey in the Harbour when they picked up some promising signals. An exploratory dive struck pay dirt.

His research team went on to survey and map the wreck over the summer. Batchvarov says although his team didn't find hull structure intact, they have found a cultural material that dates to the third quarter of the 17th century, including seven or eight canons; Delft and Bellarmine pottery jars; lead shot that was never fired; dozens of Dutch smoking pipes; and bricks that perfectly match the standard dimensions for bricks made in the Dutch city of Leiden in 1647. No material was recovered at this exploratory stage. What was found was left safely buried on the bottom.

The *Huis de Kreuningen*, though the largest in the Dutch fleet at 39.6 metres in length and 9.62 metres in breadth, was only about three quarters of the size of her French foe, the much newer and better armed *Glorieux*. With only 56 guns to her opponent's 72, and with a crew of 129 instead of her full complement of 290 sailors aboard, existing records of the battle report that she put up a valiant fight until her captain, Roemer Vlaccq, either cut her anchor cables so she would run aground, or set her afire – accounts vary – in order to avoid capture.

Another benefit of the project is the opportunity it provides for students to participate in Batchvarov's ongoing research. Students enrolled in maritime studies at UConn's Avery Point campus, the only undergraduate program in the country with a maritime archaeology minor, have a singular opportunity.

Permission to excavate the shipwrecks in and around Scarborough Harbour has been granted by the Tobago House of Assembly to the Rockley Bay Research Project, which is supported by the University of Connecticut and the Institute of Nautical Archaeology of the United States. Artifacts and other items found in the shipwrecks are the property of Tobago and will eventually be displayed on the island. Excavation is expected to take three to five years.

Batchvarov says the project has also been the grateful recipient of financial help from the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Trinidad and Tobago.

In addition to his work in Tobago, Batchvarov is one of the world's leading experts on the Swedish warship, *Vasa*, which sank in Stockholm Harbour in 1628. He has worked on Ottoman, Greek, English and American and Phoenician ships, and has recently been invited to participate in an international collaboration that will study ships of state from 1300 to 1800. Batchvarov will concentrate on 17th-century shipbuilding technology development. He is also the only person, in collaboration with Bulgarian colleagues, he only person to have successfully excavated a Black Sea shipwreck.