

Department of Marine Ecosystems and Society Seminar Series

In Search of Conquistador Shipwrecks: The Lost Ships of Cortés Project Results 2018-19

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DATE: Friday, 02/14/2020 **Time:** 10:30 am **Location:** SLAB 103



Abstract: The discovery and exploration of Mexico during Spanish expeditions in 1517 and 1518 set the stage for the conquest of the Aztec capital Tenochtitlán in 1521 and was a crucial event that truly set the stage for what would become modern globalization. Appointed by the Governor of Cuba in 1519, Hernán Cortés led an expedition to explore and establish trade along the Gulf Coast of Mexico. While Cortés forged alliances with indigenous communities, he also decided to break from the Cuban Governor and establish the town of Villa Rica de la Vera Cruz. As a result, a faction of his men loyal to the governor mutinied and Cortés ordered ten of his eleven ships sunk in order to quell the unrest and ensure obedience and slow down communication to Cuba of what had transpired. The eleventh vessel, Cortés' flagship, was sent to Spain with news of his discoveries and intentions, laden with gifts from the Aztecs. Shortly afterward, Cortés marched inland and began his conquest of Mexico. In May of 1520, the governor sent 18 ships and approximately 800 men to arrest Cortés and return him to Cuba in chains. Having paid a good amount of influential soldiers in advance, Cortés launched a surprise attack at night and overcame his would-be captors and subsequently sunk 16 of the 18 ships. In 2018 and 2019, multi-disciplinary, international team of archaeologists, historians, geophysicists, geologists, and engineers of the Lost Ships of Cortés Project led exploratory expeditions to conduct geophysical and diver visual surveys coupled with test excavations in the search of the 500-year-old remains of these scuttled conquistador vessels.

Bio: Dr. Frederick H. Hanselmann ("Fritz") is an underwater archaeologist and Faculty in the Department of Marine Ecosystems and Society and part of the Exploration Sciences Program at the Rosenstiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Sciences at the University of Miami, where he directs the Underwater Archaeology Program. Having worked on underwater sites from a wide variety of time periods, his exploration and research ranges from submerged prehistoric deposits in springs and caves to historic shipwrecks in Latin America and the Caribbean.