

SPANISH TREASURE FLEET OF 1715

The Spanish Treasure Fleet of 1715 consisted of 11 ships and left Havana on July 27, 1715 bound for Spain. On the night of July 30 the fleet encountered a fierce hurricane, and a total of 10 of the 11 ships were dashed upon the reefs off the Florida coast between Melbourne in the north to Fort Pierce to the south. The fleet was made up of the Armada de Tierra Firma (6 vessels), which served South American trade routes out of Cartagena, and of the Flota de Nueva España (5 vessels) which served the trade of Mexico and the Manila Galleons out of Vera Cruz, on the southeastern coast of present-day Mexico. The Tierra Firma Armada was under the command of Captain-General Don Antonio de Echevera y Zubiza, and the Nueva España Flota was under the general command of Captain-General Don Juan Esteban de Ubilla. Since the Flota de Nueva España served the trade of the Manila Galleons out of Vera Cruz, Chinese porcelain was known to be included as part of the cargo of the ships. (This is the Condensed Version - for expanded version see further below.)

The Kangxi porcelain fragments described below in **Ceramics Catalogue Entry C-258** are among the very few known to have been recovered from the Spanish galleon Nuestra Señora de Las Nieves of the 1715 Treasure Fleet:

C-258

This assemblage of porcelain shards (4) from the 1715 Spanish Treasure Fleet is believed to be unique in terms of the variety represented: mottled blue glazed, black glazed, Chinese Imari, and blue and white. This is a vivid illustration of the great variety of porcelain carried on the Manila galleons to meet the market demands in the New World and Spain. Each shard is further described as follows:

- No. 1 - Fragment from the side of a bowl with mottled dark blue glazed exterior, white glazed interior, and in roughly

pentagonal shape. Fine grained white colored body is exposed at the fractures. L: 7.3 cm.; W: 5.8 cm.

- No. 2 - Fragment from the side of a bowl or vase with black glazed exterior, white glazed interior, and in roughly rectangular shape. Fine grained white colored body is exposed at the fractures. L: 12.2 cm.; W: 7.8 cm.
- No. 3 - Fragment from the side of a vase with underglaze blue and enamel exterior, white glazed interior, and in roughly elongated rectangular shape. Fine grained cream-white colored body is exposed at the fractures. Décor includes underglaze blue tripartite leaf sprays, along with iron-red enamel chrysanthemum and lotus blossoms. Gilt accents are now eroded and no longer visible. This Kangxi Chinese Imari porcelain fragment is among the very few known to have been recovered from the Spanish galleons of the 1715 Treasure Fleet. L: 13.2 cm.; W: 7.1 cm.
- No. 4 - Blue and white floral motif fragment from a large vase decorated in a dark and rich tone of underglaze blue with a leafy bamboo stalk on one half, the other half adorned with a hydra-headed like element with adjacent leaf forms vividly reserved in white on the dark blue ground. The shard is covered with light bluish white glaze with areas of crackle or fracturing. The underside of this solidly potted thick fragment is plain and glazed. Compact, light grayish cream colored body is exposed at the fractures. L: 11.2 cm.; W: 9.5 cm.

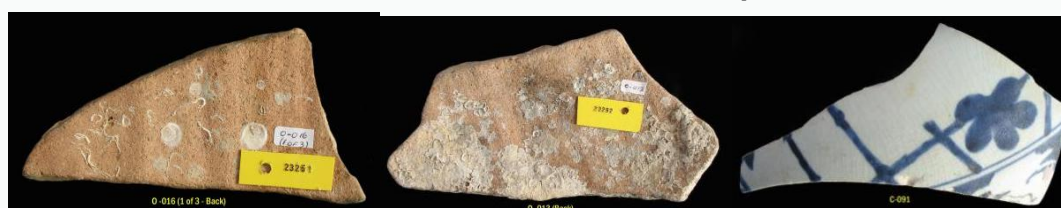
Qing: 1715 of the Kangxi period (1662 to 1722).

Provenance: Nuestra Señora de Las Nieves (1715 Spanish Treasure Fleet) - sunk July 31, 1715 on the reefs off the Florida coast south of the Fort Pierce Inlet at a location known as the North Colored Beach (Douglas Beach) Wreck site.

These Kangxi porcelain fragments are among the very few known to have been recovered from the Spanish galleon Nuestra Señora de Las Nieves (also known as the Colored Beach Wreck, Douglas Beach Wreck, Gold Wreck) of the 1715 Treasure Fleet. They were recovered in 1989 to 1991 by Salvors, Inc. and Cobb Coin Company, Inc. and original artefact registration color photo Certificates of Authenticity with embossed Company Seal, signed by Melvin Fisher, President, are on file in the Collection Documentation (Fragment No. 1 – Certificate for Artifact Number 20207, Fragment No. 2 – Certificate for Artifact Number 20203, Fragment No. 3 – Certificate for Artifact Number NCB89 – 2807, and Fragment No. 4 – Certificate for Artifact Number NCB89 – 2909 along with original copy of the Log Sheet, number 9663, from the day of find on 19 July 1989 [encrustation cleaned subsequent to COA photograph]).

All four fragments were acquired directly from Captain Bonnie Schubert of Vero Beach, Florida (June 2016: Fragment No. 1, No. 2, No. 3 and No. 4). Captain Bonnie Schubert is an historic shipwreck explorer. Her company is Gold Hawg Treasure, LLC based in Vero Beach, Florida. The company salvage vessel operated by Captain Bonnie is the Gold Quest, a 45 foot Hatteras with twin prop wash deflectors. Captain Bonnie was the object of considerable attention and fame for her 2010 recovery from the 1715 Spanish Treasure Fleet of a unique “bird” (pelican) statue in 22 carat gold, 5.5 inches high, weighing 77 grams, and valued at US\$885,000.

For additional ceramic recoveries from the Nuestra Señora de Las Nieves wrecksite refer to the Spanish olive jar shards at Catalogue Numbers O-013, O-016 (3 shards), and O-017 (3 shards); see as well the large Kangxi blue and white porcelain shard at Catalogue Number C-091, which is also from the 1715 Spanish Treasure Fleet.



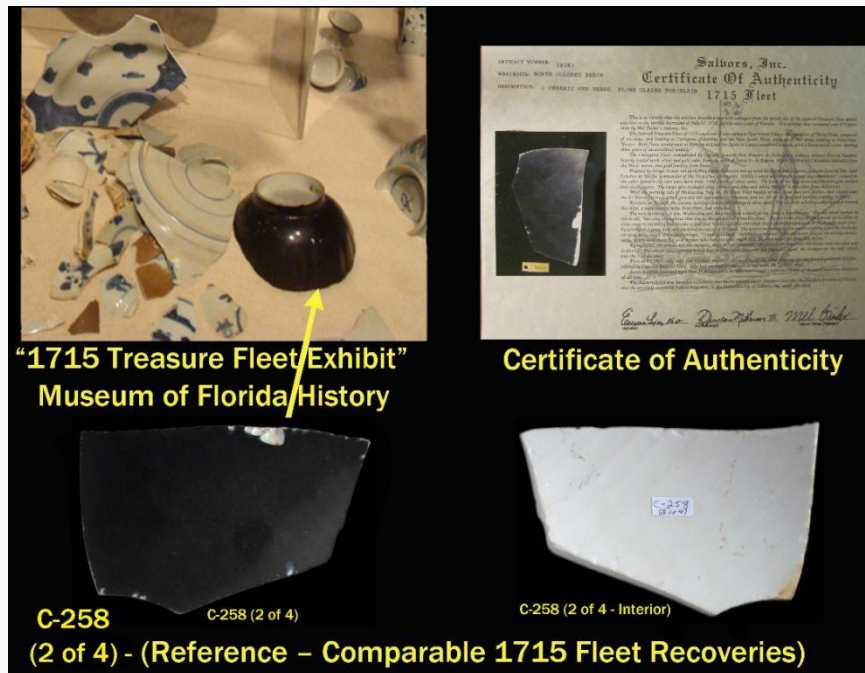
REFERENCES

C-258 (1 of 4) - Photo C-258 (1 of 4) - (Reference – Comparable 1715 Fleet Recoveries) includes an intact blue glazed Kangxi bowl, which is also a 1715 Fleet recovery. This photo was taken by Dr. John de Bry, an historical archaeologist and the director of the Center for Historical Archaeology in Melbourne, Florida. Dr. de Bry has extensive experience in the research and photographing of artifacts recovered from Spanish shipwrecks. Compare also with the cup with blue glazed exterior and white interior, dated to the early 18th century, illustrated in Regina Krahl, *Chinese Ceramics in the Topkapi Saray Museum Istanbul, Volume III - Qing Dynasty Porcelains*, page 1151, Catalogue No. 2767. See as well the bowl recovered from the Ca Mau shipwreck, also with blue glazed exterior and white interior, illustrated in Nguyen Dinh Chien, *Tau Co Ca Mau (The Ca Mau Shipwreck)*, page 189, N.260.



C-258 (2 of 4) - Photo C-258 (2 of 4) (Reference – Comparable 1715 Fleet Recoveries) includes an intact black glazed Kangxi bowl, which is also a 1715 Fleet recovery. This photo was included in the “1715

Treasure Fleet Exhibit” at the Museum of Florida History in Tallahassee, Florida in October 2011 (and beyond). Compare also with the bowl with black glazed exterior and white interior, dated to the early 18th century – Qianlong period, illustrated in Christie’s (Hong Kong), *The Imperial Sale & Important Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art, Auction Catalogue*, 3 June 2015, lot 3239.



C-258 (3 of 4) - Photo C-258 (3 of 4) - (Reference - 1715 Fleet Artifact Display) includes a photo of this Chinese Imari fragment as well as photos of the blue and white fragments at C-091 and C-258 (No. 4 of 4). This photo of 1715 Spanish Treasure Fleet Artifact Recoveries of unspecified origin was posted to the “treasurenet.com” website on 24 October 2012 by “Au_Dreamers.” Refer also to the Chinese Imari beaker, dated to the early 18th century, illustrated in Regina Krahl, *Chinese Ceramics in the Topkapi Saray Museum Istanbul, Volume III - Qing Dynasty Porcelains*, page 1208, Catalogue No. 2979, which shares commonalities in décor (underglaze blue tripartite leaf sprays, iron-red enamel chrysanthemum blossoms) with this fragment.

This fragment represents a very unusual recovery from the Nuestra Señora de Las Nieves wrecksite. Chinese Imari wares have typically

only been recovered from the Cannon Wreck (Cannon Pile) wrecksite of the 1715 Treasure Fleet, which lies in the waters near the shore just off of Treasure Shores Park, Vero Beach, Florida. This has reportedly been the only 1715 Fleet site at which such wares have been recovered in the past. It is further speculated that this wrecksite may actually be the location of the Maria Galante, which has never been formally identified. The Maria Galante was a *balandrita* (small one masted ship) used to support the rest of the 1715 Spanish Treasure fleet, and whose cargo manifest is reported to have included 7 chests of Chinese porcelain.



The Spanish Treasure Fleet of 1715 (Expanded Version) - consisted of 11 ships and left Havana on July 27, 1715 bound for Spain. On the night of July 30 the fleet encountered an extremely powerful hurricane, driving the ships shoreward and around 4 a.m. on July 31st some of the ships sank in deep water, some broke up in shallower water, and others ran aground close to the beach. A lone vessel, the accompanying French ship Grifón, sailed onward without incident. A total of 10 of the 11 Treasure Fleet ships were dashed upon the reefs off the Florida coast between Melbourne in the north to Fort Pierce to the south. More than 700 lives and over 14,000,000 pesos in registered treasure were lost. Since the

armadas' departure from the New World had been delayed a full year, a huge quantity of contraband cargo was also aboard its ships. This *sin registrada* (contraband) cargo has been estimated to be as much as 50,000,000 pesos. Of the 11 Treasure Fleet ships caught in the Straits of Florida only one made it safely to Europe, the other 10 vessels were lost. The eleven ships making up the fleet had assembled in Havana in the summer of 1715. The fleet was made up of the Armada de Tierra Firme (6 vessels), which served South American trade routes out of Cartagena, and of the Flota de Nueva España (5 vessels) which served the trade of Mexico and the Manila Galleons out of Vera Cruz, on the southeastern coast of present-day Mexico. The Griffon, a French merchant ship under the command of Captain Antoine Dare, was given permission to sail with the Spanish combined fleet.

The Tierra Firme Armada was under the command of Captain-General Don Antonio de Echeverra y Zubiza, and consisted of six vessels. The Captain-General was in direct command of the (1) Capitana, the flagship (Nuestra Señora del Carmen y San Antonio, which was a captured English ship formerly named the Hampton Court), and was laden with a great number of chests of silver coins, gold coins, gold bars, gold dust, and jewelry, as well as tropical products. The flagship of the admiral, the (2) Almiranta (Nuestra Señora del Rosario y San Francisco Xavier) was equally richly laden. The (3) Nuestra Señora de la Concepcion (known as La Holandesa) carried gold coins and gold bars, as well as a number of chests of silver coins. The frigate (4) San Miguel, the (5) El Ciervo, and a (6) *patache* (La Francesca), a smaller merchant vessel, completed the squadron.

The five ships of the Nueva España Flota were under the general command of Captain-General Don Juan Esteban de Ubilla, who was himself on the (1) Capitana (Nuestra Señora de la Regla), which carried some thirteen hundred chests containing 3,000,000 silver coins. There were also gold coins, gold bars, silver bars, and jewelry,

as well as emeralds, pearls, and precious Kangxi Chinese porcelain which had been brought to Mexico by the Manila Galleons. The (2) *Almiranta* (*Santo Cristo de San Roman*) carried nearly a thousand chests of silver coins, each individual chest containing some 3,000 coins. The (3) *Refuerzo* (*Urca de Lima*) carried eighty-one chests of silver coins, over fifty chests of worked silver, thirty-two chests of Chinese porcelain and various other commodities. Another ship, a (4) *patache* (*Nuestra Señora de las Nieves*), carried some 44,000 pieces of eight, 63 *serones* (leather bags) of cochineal (dried insects used to produce red dye), 169 *serones* (leather bags) and chests of indigo, seven chests of Chinese porcelain and various other commodities. One (5) *balandrita* (*Maria Galante* - whose cargo manifest is reported to have included chests of Chinese porcelain) or frigate or *patache* (*Santo Cristo del Valle*) - accounts vary, completed the Flota. The French ship *Griffon*, commanded by Captain Antoine Dar, had received permission to sail with the fleet.

All five ships of the Nueva España Flota under Ubilla sank off the Florida coast, south of Cape Kennedy: the *Capitana*, the *Almiranta*, two *pataches*, and the *Urca de Lima*. Three of the ships of the Tierra Firme Armada under Echevera were also lost off Cape Kennedy: the *Almiranta*, the *Concepcion*, and the *Holandesa*. Two others were lost at sea: the *Francesa* and the *San Miguel*. In typical fashion, the 1715 Fleet was a case of overloaded Spanish galleons foundering in a hurricane after a delayed departure, but on a larger scale than anything before. The principal elements of the fleet, known as the Nueva España (New Spain, i.e., Mexico) Fleet, had gone to Veracruz in Mexico to deliver mercury (an essential substance in the refining of silver), sell merchandise, and pick up quantities of Mexican-minted bars and cobs. There was also a shipment of porcelain, ivory, and silk being delivered to the fleet in Vera Cruz, and the pack-mule trains carrying that shipment were very slow. King Phillip further complicated matters when he ordered that a special shipment of specific jewels being given to the Duchesse of Parma be included with the fleet's shipment. Details of the jewelry are vague, but

appear to have included a heart composed of 130 matched pearls, an emerald ring weighing 74 carats, a pair of earrings each of 14-carat pearls, and a rosary of pure coral the size of small marbles. There were eight chests of the jewelry in all, and they were stowed in Ubilla's personal cabin. After still more delays in Havana, what was ultimately a 12 or 13 ship convoy (depending on which account you prefer) did not manage to depart for Spain until July 24, 1715, well into hurricane season. The best estimate is that there were 11 major Spanish ships plus a small Cuban "Frigatilla" within the fleet when it left Havana harbor. General Ubilla had purchased a small new Cuban boat to help transport some of the general cargo back to Spain, and several references to 12 ships in the fleet possibly include his vessel.

References (Partial Listing)

Burgess, Robert F. and Carl J. Clausen, 1976. *Gold, Galleons, and Archaeology*. Port Salerno: Florida Classics Library.

Burgess, Robert F., and Carl J. Clausen, 1982. *Florida's Golden Galleons: The Search for the 1715 Spanish Treasure Fleet*. Port Salerno: Florida Classics Library.

Fernandez Duro, Cesareo, 1900. *Armada Espanola*.

Gaither, Catherine M., 1996. *The 1715 Spanish Plate Fleet: Picking up the Pieces of a 281-Year-Old Disaster*.

Haring, C. H., 1918. *Trade and Navigation Between Spain and the Indies*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Horner, D. 1971. *The Treasure Galleons*. New York: Dodd, Mead, & Co.

Sedwick, Daniel Frank, 2008. *Treasure Auction #3, Closing May 29 2008, Sale Catalog - Shipwrecks & Hoards after 1700*. Florida: Winter Park.

Sedwick, Daniel Frank, 2008. *Treasure Auction #4, Closing Nov. 6th, 2008, Sale Catalog*. Florida: Winter Park.

Wagner, Kip, 1965. *National Geographic Magazine*, January 1965, "Drowned Galleons Yield Spanish Gold".

Wagner, Kip as told to L.B. Taylor, Jr., 1966. *Pieces of Eight, Recovering the Riches of a Lost Spanish Treasure Fleet*. New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc.

Weller, Robert F., 1993. *Sunken Treasure on Florida Reefs*. Lake worth, Florida: Crossed Anchors.

