



# PLVS VLTRA NEWSLETTER



VOL. 28, NO. 4

4TH QUARTER, 2010

PRICE: \$4.50



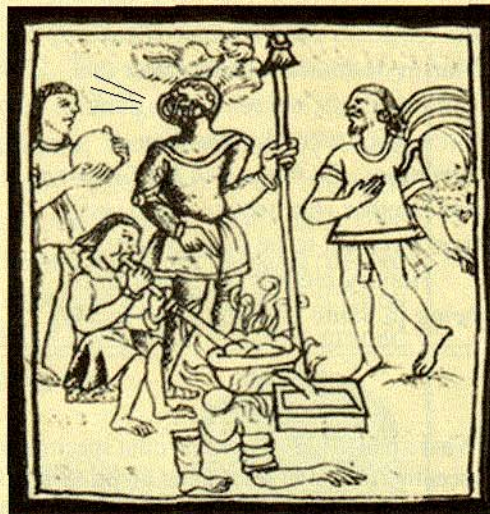
## IS THE "BAHIA MUJERES WRECK" LA NICOLASA OF 1526-27?

*John S. Potter, Jr. tells of the 480-year-old local curse surrounding the "Bahia Mujeres Wreck" and its looted cargo: "...Mayan gold, money and temple stones are guarded by the bells of La Asunción Church which were placed aboard by women and can never be disturbed."*

There is a spot, less than a musket shot off Punta Cancún and less than 18 feet deep, where lies one of the earliest—and most controversial—shipwrecks in the waters of the Americas. The Punta is part of the "mainland" of Cancún, and its rocks then submerge northward to blend in with a reef system which once again rises on the other side of Bahía Mujeres to become Isla Mujeres ... the "Island of Women." Local fishermen, various sport divers, shipwreck enthusiasts, and archaeological teams have known of the site and have probed into it since the early 1950s.

This is a beautiful, peaceful scene, belying the devastating forces of nature which claimed the ancient caravel here so many centuries before. A forest of elkhorn, branch, and other corals stand watch over the hidden, consolidated wreckage below the sand. Daily snorkel trips allow visitors to view this underwater garden through crystal clear water most of the time ... many not knowing the significant history which

lies beneath them. Positioned within El Garrafón National Park, this is a "hands off" site where nothing can be taken except photographs.



**"This Tumbaga ingot will certainly cost me more than just ONE arm and ONE leg...!!!"** (Image from p.20 of Augi Garcia's new book *The Tumbaga Saga*.) Details: see page-10.

The mystery of this wreck, according to the paper written by Keith and Smith, began in 1958 when the site was discovered by José de Jesús Lima and his sons. Lima and sons may have salvaged three iron cannons that year, one of which (an iron breech-loader) was donated to the Isla Mujeres school, in front of which it moldered for decades. The fate of the two others is unknown at this time.

Next to dive on the site were aviation and ocean pioneer Edwin A. Link, his wife Marion, and expedition members from the *Sea*

*Diver*\* in 1959. \*[Later bought by my boss, John H. Perry, Jr., and renamed *Sea Hunter*.—ER] They are credited with the recovery of a forged iron, breech-loading *falconete grande*, which was pictured in the Keith-Smith report.

In 1960, a Mexican dive club called CEDAM\*\*—working on another wreck down the coast at Punta Matanceros—learned of the site yielding cannons off Punta Cancún and did some cursory salvage, returning in 1961 to perform some serious recoveries. Records are sketchy but seem to indicate that CEDAM retrieved 2-3 cannons in 1960 and one more—plus two anchors—in 1961. These have remained in the club's possession and are rumored to be (we could never find the place) in a "museum" in Akumal, not far from Punta Matanceros. Also recovered in those days and "on display" in the *Museo de CEDAM*, were two breech

