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## ***Le Prince* Research Project: Searching The Archivo General de las Indias**

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# *Le Prince* Research Project: Searching The Archivo General de las Indias

by James Spirek

Last October I was awarded an Archaeological Research Trust grant of \$2,000 to hire Claudio Bonifacio, an experienced researcher of the Archivo General de las Indias (AGI) in Seville, Spain, to look for *Le Prince* related documents and other materials about French corsairing.

Bonifacio spent approximately three weeks in the archives looking at 39 bundles of paper and digitized documents looking for information to shed more light on the incidents surrounding the corsair's voyage, shipwreck, and fate of the crew. Sorting through the bundles and scrolling down the computer screen, Bonifacio found several documents mentioning *Le Prince*, or as it was

alternately known by the Spaniards as *La Princesa* or *El Principe*. He also found an abundance of materials related to contemporary French corsairs.

The *Le Prince* documents cover the time the corsair entered the waters off Hispaniola to after the wreck in Port Royal Sound and generally consist of correspondence from a Crown official to the king of Spain, Philip II. The governor of Cuba wrote that the corsair was in company with other French ships in an attempt to take a Spanish ship during a bombardment of Santiago de Cuba, on the southern coast of Cuba. The same letter mentions *Le Prince* as taking on a quantity of foodstuffs in which the crew was in need of, namely lard, corn, and water. Bonifacio also located several documents previously translated by

Jennette T. Connor in her two volume work *Colonial Records of Spanish Florida: Letters and Reports of Governors and Secular Persons* which reveal the circumstances surrounding the shipwreck survivor's battles with the Indians and Spaniards, and for the majority that survived these battles

await their arrival in order that they may be translated and fully gleaned of their information to add to the story of *Le Prince*'s ill-fated voyage of 1576.

A number of other documents found in the bundles Bonifacio consulted included numerous references to French corsair activity. This

material will prove useful in developing a historical context for the corsair.

They will also help to reveal the more human side of the story, especially one letter which mentions the fear of traveling knowing that French corsairs are in the area, probably a fear similar to swimming or diving in an area known for shark attacks. The threat of attack by a French corsair was a distinct possibility for a Spanish traveler sailing from Spain to the New

*Several documents found relating to the French corsair's voyage, shipwreck, and fate of the captain and crew*

World in the sixteenth century, where the sight of an unknown sail on the horizon created an apprehension based on not knowing whether the approaching ship was friend or foe.

The Underwater Archaeology Division is slated to conduct remote sensing operations for the remains of the French corsair and other shipwrecks as part of the ongoing Port Royal Sound Survey in March and April. We will concentrate our survey at the entrance to the sound based on historical research that suggest the corsair wrecked in this vicinity, along with more than 50 other unfortunate vessels.

their final demise at the end of a rope. Another newly found document mentions in more detail the fate of Captain Le Rocque, who was brought to the Spaniards by Indians living in the Appalachians. Other documents mention French depredations along the Venezuela coast at the pearling island of Margarita and the hide producing area of Cumaná on the mainland. Another couple of documents report the sacking of Guadianilla, a town on the island of Puerto Rico.

While these several documents do not specifically mention *Le Prince*, the dates when these letters were written correspond to the time the ship was in the area. We are currently developing a timeline of the corsair's voyage to determine if these letters refer to the actions of *Le Prince*. These documents have been photocopied and we

I would like to express my thanks to the Board of Trustees of the Archaeological Research Trust for providing the funds to continue the search for documents in Spain for this research project.