

UNESCO report: Wreck off Haiti not 'Santa Maria'

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A report from the U.N. cultural agency released Monday concludes that a shipwreck found off northern Haiti could not be the Santa Maria, the lost flagship from Christopher Columbus' first voyage to the Western Hemisphere, as a U.S. explorer had claimed.

UNESCO said a team of experts who explored the site at the request of the Haitian government determined the wreckage was from a more recent vessel because they found copper artefacts. The Santa Maria would have had parts made of iron or wood, the agency said in a press release announcing its findings.

The report, which the agency said was conducted in a "neutral and scientific manner," found that it is possible the actual wreckage may be buried under what is now land because of heavy sedimentation from nearby rivers.

U.S. explorer Barry Clifford had announced in May that he believed that he may have found the Santa Maria near the city of Cap-Haitien in what would have been a major archaeological find. The ship struck a reef and was abandoned by Columbus in December 1492 and about two dozen crew members were left behind.

Last month, Haiti's culture minister told The Associated Press that preliminary research indicated that the ship was not the Santa Maria and Clifford said that he expected that the UNESCO report would raise doubts about his claims. He said he believed that the ship could have had

copper components and believed it could still be the lost vessel. The explorer also said the agency had not consulted with him or reviewed his photos and charts before issuing its report.

In its report, UNESCO says Clifford announced his findings in the media before officially informing the Haitian government of his intention to continue his research in the bay of Cap-Haitien. The explorer said he had a permit.

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