

## ATOCHA ONYX SQUARE, TAG #91625

By James Sinclair, MA

(contributions by Gary Randolph)

The Quest for the remainder of the wreckage representing the remains of the Nuestra Senora de Atocha, 1622 moved on with the same dogged determination that has been the hallmark of this endeavor since its inception by the late Mel Fisher in 1969.

The teams that have worked together to find these remains have changed through the years but the heirs of Mel Fisher have kept the dream alive with the same single-minded enthusiasm that has marked all the years of this quest. This is the 47th year of the work undertaken to recover the artifacts and treasures of the Atocha.

Through this time, there have been years that have produced more and less evidence of the wrecking process. 2016 was a year that showed less in the way of significant recoveries. Undoubtedly as the years go by, this pattern will continue. It is the hope of management, Captains and crews and of course the investors that this determined effort will in fact reveal the remainder of the precious cargo and artifacts.

This past year one of the most interesting of the artifacts, unique in fact, was a small square section of onyx.

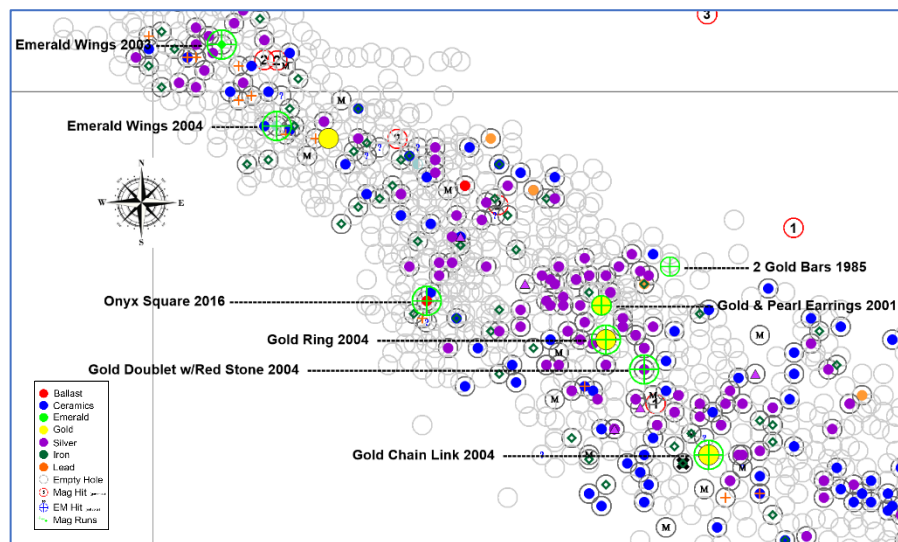


ONYX OBJECT # 91625

Location on Site

The onyx artifact was recovered from the Northwestern track of debris or artifact scatter that is associated with the Stern castle materials. This include items such as bishops cross, gold chain, and many other items of a person and valuable nature.

Some of the other object that have been recovered in close proximity to the onyx artifact include two gold bars as well as items that are associated with more feminine objects.



Atocha Site Chart - excavation circles scale = 30ft dia.



Gold Doublet Jewelry, #71695



Pearl Earrings, #51237

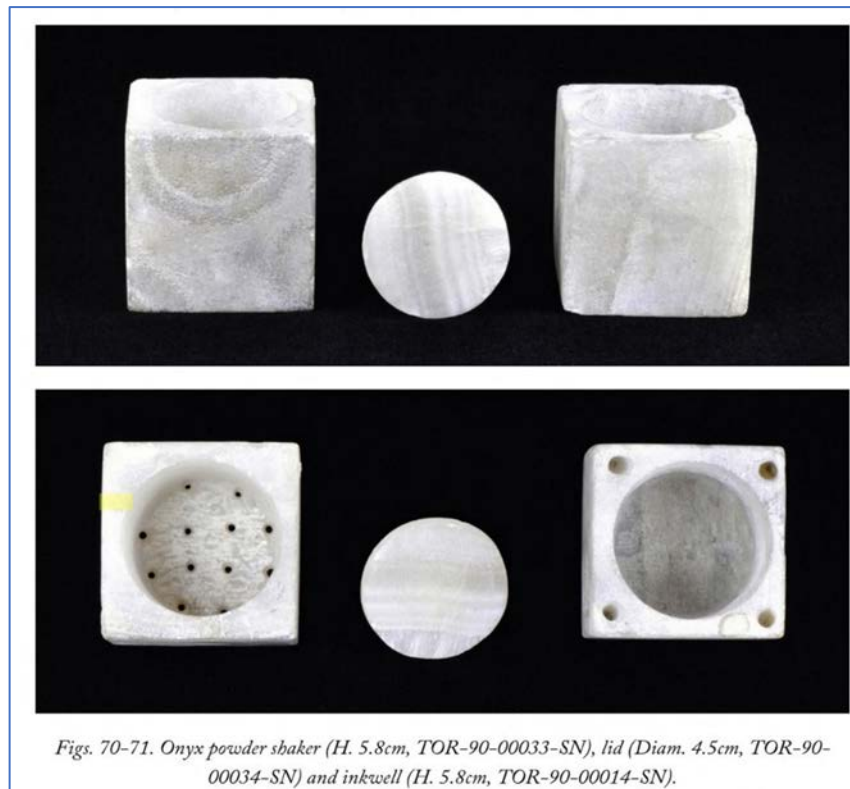
Legends Associated with Onyx

The word 'onyx' is a Greek word that means a claw nail or a human fingernail. The legend is that while Venus slept, Cupid clipped her fingernails and she would never succumb to death because none of her body could die. So, the gods turned the nail clippings into the stone which later became known as onyx. Romans soldiers would also use onyx as talismans with the image of Mars the god of war, to promote courage in battles.

Geology of Onyx and Mexican Onyx

Geologically Onyx is a form of Agate. Onyx is only found in three places: Mexico, Arizona and Algeria. In the New World during the Colonial Period Mexico would have been the source, onyx is mined in Chihuahua, Puebla and Oaxaca. While not a true agate it is a form of banded calcite but it has been called Mexican Agate for years. More modern writers from the early 20th century equated its beauty with that of Carrera marble. It is likely that the onyx object was perhaps part of a larger object such as the one found from the Tortugas wreck site by Odyssey Marine Exploration.

One of the more interesting cultural and social aspects of both this and another section of onyx previously discovered on the Atocha show at least some level of intercolonial trade. And while this was prohibited under many Royal edicts, there was obviously intercolonial trade that occurred despite these prohibitions. This speaks to both the nature of the far-off royal systems of governing, and enforcement as well as the blind eye local officials turned to these activities. Royal edicts and rules were often ignored and circumvented for both financial gains and expedience. This extended from the slave trade to the rampant transport of contraband cargos back to Spain. That small objects originating in other Spanish colonies is perhaps not so surprising. And from the historic documents we do know that last minute cargo originating from Mexico was loaded aboard the Atocha before Sailing on September 4, 1622.



*Figs. 70-71. Onyx powder shaker (H. 5.8cm, TOR-90-00033-SN), lid (Diam. 4.5cm, TOR-90-00034-SN) and inkwell (H. 5.8cm, TOR-90-00014-SN).*

Sand shakers were used to dry ink on documents and it may be that the onyx object recovered from the Atocha was a part of a similar object, however, there are no obvious attachment points visible and it appears to be worked into a smooth and beveled square.

One other larger piece of similar material was recovered from the Atocha during the 1985 recoveries from the Primary Cultural Deposit. This other object was a worked flat slab of onyx. And can be seen under the sections of rosaries in the following picture. In both cases the use of these objects remains an unknown.

Onyx while unusual on shipwrecks show the Spanish utilizing resources throughout the conquered territories. It is likely that our small onyx artifact is representative of some of the objects and persons that came aboard in the last stages of the loading of the *Atocha*. It's uses at the time like the slab recovered in 1985 is ambiguous at best. Whether it was a part of a larger object or perhaps a sample for a business concern is unknown. That the two objects occur in both the high value areas associated with the wealth of the Colonial empire, i.e., the primary cultural deposit and the track of debris associated with stern castle wealthy passenger's belongings.



ONYX SQUARE TAG #1147-3 FOUND BY THE DAUNTLESS ON JUNE 11, 1986

The onyx object must remain an unusual and unique object from the growing collection of the *Nuestra Senora de Atocha, 1622*.