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## **Artifacts From Slave Shipwreck Arrive at the National Museum of African American History and Culture**

Artifacts from the wreck of Portuguese slave ship, the São José, have made a trans-Atlantic journey to arrive at the Smithsonian. The items, recovered off the coast of Cape Town, South Africa, are on long-term loan to the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) and will be on view when the museum opens Sept. 24. The arrival of the artifacts in the U.S. marks a milestone in the effort to advance understanding of the slave trade and showcases the results of the Slave Wrecks Project, a unique global partnership among museums and research institutions. On July 13, the South African Embassy in Washington, D.C., will host a celebration of the international research partnership, which includes NMAAHC, Iziko Museums of South Africa (Iziko) and George Washington University.

The São José artifacts, including iron ballast to weigh down the ship and its human cargo, remnants of shackles and a wooden pulley block, will be featured in NMAAHC's inaugural exhibition entitled "Slavery and Freedom." Beginning in the 15th century with the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the exhibition will explore the complex story of slavery and freedom through personal stories that illuminate the economic and political legacies of slavery for all Americans.

"Perhaps the single greatest symbol of the trans-Atlantic slave trade is the ships that carried millions of captive Africans across the Atlantic never to return," said Lonnie G. Bunch III, founding director of NMAAHC. "This discovery is significant because there has never been archaeological documentation of a vessel that foundered and was lost while carrying a cargo of enslaved persons. The São José is all the more significant because it represents one of the earliest attempts to bring East Africans into the trans-Atlantic slave trade—a shift that played a major role in prolonging that tragic trade for decades."

## **São José Wreck**

The São José's voyage was one of the earliest in the trans-Atlantic slave trade from East Africa to the Americas, which continued well into the 19th century. More than 400,000 East Africans are estimated to have made the Mozambique-to-Brazil journey between 1800 and 1865. The ship's crew and some of the more than 400 enslaved on board were rescued after the ship ran into submerged rocks about 328 feet from shore. Tragically, more than half of the enslaved people perished in the violent waves. The remainder were resold into slavery in the Western Cape.

## **About Iziko Museums of South Africa**

Iziko Museums of South Africa (Iziko) is a declared national heritage institution established as a flagship museum bringing together 11 museums under a single governance and leadership structure. Iziko is governed by a council appointed by the Minister of Arts and Culture. The core mission of the institution is to manage and promote Iziko's unique combination of South Africa's heritage collections, sites and services for the benefit of present and future generations.

## **Slave Wrecks Project History**

Founded in 2008, Slave Wrecks Project (SWP) brings together partners who have been investigating the impact of the slave trade on world history and spearheaded the recent discovery of the São José wreck. Extensive archival research was conducted on four continents in six countries that ultimately uncovered the ship captain's account of the wrecking in the Cape archives as well as the ship's manifest in Portuguese archives. SWP partners include George Washington University; Iziko Museums of South Africa; the South African Heritage Resource Agency; the U.S. National Park Service; Diving With a Purpose, a project of the National Association of Black Scuba Divers; and the African Center for Heritage Activities.

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