

**Press Release**  
**For immediate release**  
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## **Slave wreck artefacts set for next trans-Atlantic journey**

Over 220 years after it foundered just off the Clifton coast in Cape Town, the discovery of the shipwreck of the Portuguese slaver, *São José* Paquete de Africa was the first successful effort ever, to bring to light the archaeological vestiges of one of thousands of vessels that brought over ten million Africans in chains to the Americas. The submerged site of the *São José* and the artefacts recovered from this wreck are both unique and priceless.

These artefacts are set to depart on a further trans-Atlantic journey. They are destined for display as part of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture's (NMAAHC) inaugural exhibition entitled "Slavery and Freedom" when the museum opens its doors in Washington DC on 24 September 2016. It is apt that this opening coincides with South Africa's celebration of Heritage Day.

On 13 July 2016, the South African Embassy in Washington DC will host a celebration of the international research partnership between Iziko Museums of South Africa (Iziko), the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) and George Washington University (GWU). These institutions are part of a broader global partnership, the Slave Wrecks Project (SWP) that spearheaded the historic discovery of the *São José* wreck. The SWP has been investigating the impact of the slave trade on world history for nearly a decade and the on going documentation, retrieval and conservation of select artefacts.

*"The São José slave shipwreck site reverberates with historical significance and represents an addition to our underwater heritage that has the potential to advance knowledge and understanding of slavery, not only at the Cape, but on a global level. The São José narrative, while linking with sites such as the Iziko Slave Lodge, where many enslaved Mozambicans were incarcerated, simultaneously opens up opportunities for links with sites of enslavement in Mozambique and Brazil.*

*The story of the Saõ José is more than an African story. It is a story that transcends time, space, place and identity. It is a global story of our interconnectedness as a human race. It is a story of migration, and of untold human wrongs,"* said Rooksana Omar, CEO, Iziko.

The *São José* artefacts significantly represent a narrative that intersects the story of slavery at the Cape with that of the enslavement of Mozambicans, and with the trans-Atlantic slave trade, particularly in relation to Portugal and Brazil. Remnants of shackles; four iron ballast - to weigh down the ship and its human cargo; a wooden pulley block, and a portion of ship's timber, retrieved from the wreck site of the *São José* will be on loan to NMAAHC for a period of ten years. Thereafter, the objects will re-join the remainder of the Iziko collection. During the loan period, the majority of archaeologically documented artefacts from this site will remain in South Africa.

The recovered artefacts bear testimony to the tragic events of December 1794, which witnessed the *São José* break up and disappear under the turbulent Cape waters, just off the area now known as Clifton Beach, carrying 211 enslaved Mozambicans to a watery grave. The 200 enslaved Mozambicans rescued from the sinking slave ship were sold into slavery at the Cape.

Bringing the developing story of this one ship – and the stories of those who were enslaved on board – into the collective memory of people across the globe represents the collective effort by SWP researchers and scholars from Mozambique, South Africa, Portugal, Brazil, and the United States.

Iziko Maritime archaeologist and primary investigator of the *São José* project, Jaco Boshoff noted: *"This work demonstrates how we build global networks. That's how we advance science, that's how we generate new knowledge, and I think it is a model that we could develop to use elsewhere."*

In addition Lonnie G. Bunch, III, Founding Director of the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) remarked: *"Perhaps the single greatest symbol of the transatlantic slave trade is the ships that carried millions of captive Africans across the Atlantic never to return."*

*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. Locating, documenting, and preserving this cultural heritage through the São José has the potential to reshape our understandings of a part of history that has been considered unknowable."*

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## Editor's Notes:

### About Iziko Museums of South Africa (Iziko)

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.

Rooksana Omar is the first woman, and of colour, Chief Executive Officer of the Iziko Museums of South Africa.

Jaco Jacques Boshoff is a Maritime Archaeologist at Iziko, the co-ordinator of the Slave Wrecks Project, and Principal Archaeological Investigator on the *São José* shipwreck excavation. <http://www.iziko.org.za/>

### About National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC)

Scheduled for an official opening on 24 September 2016, the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture broke ground in February 2012 on the National Mall in Washington, DC. The 400,000-square-foot building is being built on a five-acre tract adjacent to the Washington Monument at a cost of \$500 million. While construction is moving forward, the museum is hosting public programmes, organising travelling exhibitions, and producing books and recordings. Lonnie Bunch is the Museum's Founding Director; and Dr Paul Gardullo, Museum Curator, serves as the NMAAHC's chief representative to the Slave Wrecks Project. <http://nmaahc.si.edu/>

### About George Washington University (GWU)

The George Washington University (GWU) is a private research university located in Washington, DC. It is the largest institution of higher education in the District of Columbia. <http://www.gwu.edu/>. Based at GWU, the Capitol Archaeological Institute aims to protect and preserve cultural heritage through advocacy programmes and initiatives by utilising the multitude of diplomatic and governmental resources in the Washington, DC area. Dr Stephen Lubkemann, Associate Professor of Anthropology, Africana Studies and International Affairs at George Washington University, is co-founder of the Slave Wrecks Project, and serves as its international coordinator. <https://www.gwu.edu/>

### About the Slave Wrecks Project (SWP)

The SWP brings together partners who have been investigating the impact of the slave trade on world history for nearly a decade and spearheaded the recent discovery of the *São José* wreck and the ongoing documentation and retrieval of select artefacts. In addition extensive archival research conducted on four continents and 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: The George Washington University, Iziko Museums of South Africa, the South African Heritage Resource Agency, the US National Park Service, National Association of Black Scuba Divers (Diving with a Purpose), and the African Centre for Heritage Activities.

<http://www.iziko.org.za/static/page/the-slave-wrecks-project>

