

Proceedings American Academy of Underwater Sciences Diving For Science 2015

Editor
Lisa K. Lobel



Using Scientific Diving as a Tool to Tell the Story of Human History: Bringing the São José Paquete de Africa Into Memory

Jay V. Haigler^{1,2,3*}, Paul L. Washington Jr.^{1,2,3}, Kamau Sadiki^{1,2,3}, Dr. Albert José Jones^{1,2,3}

¹ *Diving With a Purpose, 3445 Massachusetts Avenue SE, Washington, DC 20019, USA*
JVista@aol.com.

² *National Association of Black Scuba Divers Foundation, 1605 Crittenden Street NE, Washington, DC 20017, USA*

³ *National Association of Black Scuba Divers, 1605 Crittenden Street, NE, Washington, DC 20017, USA*

* *presenting and corresponding author*

Abstract

Underwater archaeological scientific diving is a powerful tool that can be used to tell the story of human history and past cultural behavior. On December 3, 1794, the *São José Paquete de Africa*, a Portuguese ship transporting over 500 captured Africans, left Mozambique Island, on the east coast of Africa, for what was to be a 7,000 mile voyage to Maranhao, Brazil and the sugar plantations that awaited its human cargo. The ship was scheduled to deliver the enslaved Africans in February 1795, some four months later. However, the journey lasted only 24 days. Buffeted by strong winds, the ship rounded the treacherous Cape of Good Hope and attempted to take shelter in Table Bay off the coast of Cape Town, South Africa. While attempting to anchor in the bay, the ship came apart violently on rocks between two reefs not far from what is known today as Clifton Beach. The *São José Paquete de Africa* represents one of the earliest, “experimental voyages” from East Africa to the Americas that eventually led to the shift that brought East Africa into the Transatlantic slave trade to an unprecedented level. The Slave Wrecks Project (SWP) is a coalition of institutional partners that are dedicated to documenting and preserving the *São José Paquete de Africa*. SWP is a partnership between the Smithsonian Institute’s National Museum of African-American History and Culture (NMAAHC), the George Washington University, the National Park Service – Submerge Resource Center, Iziko Museums of South Africa and Diving With a Purpose (DWP). Diving With a Purpose is supported by scientific divers from the National Association of Black Scuba Divers Foundation. In 2013 and 2014, DWP supported the scientific diving field mission to identify and document artifacts from the shipwreck. The presenter will describe the collaborative efforts of the SWP partnership to identify and document the *São José Paquete de Africa* shipwreck

Keywords: *São José Paquete de Africa*, Diving With a Purpose, Smithsonian Institute’s National Museum of African-American History and Culture, The George Washington University, National Park Service, Iziko Museums, Slave Wrecks Project, Transatlantic Slave Trade.

Introduction

Diving is an integral part of underwater archaeology. Divers assist archaeologists, scientists and researchers in their objectives of analyzing the physical remains of the past to acquire a broad and comprehensive understanding of past human culture. Diving in Cape Town, South Africa has been a critical component in assisting archaeologists, cultural anthropologists and researchers discover and tell the story of the *São José Paquete de Africa*, a Portuguese ship transporting over 500 captured Africans to Brazil, to be sold into slavery to work on the sugar plantations.

Documenting the *São José Paquete de África* shipwreck represents the first opportunity to fulfill a goal of locating, documenting, and preserving the archaeological remains of ships that wrecked while engaged in the international slave trade from Africa. The documentation of even one such ship would represent an archaeological first, since not a single shipwreck of a vessel active in the slaving leg of the trade has ever been documented. Over 600 slaving vessels known to have been lost in the transatlantic trade alone, this mission could bring new archaeological perspective to bear on the scholarly study of the Trans-Atlantic and Indian Ocean slave trades.

SWP field expeditions to the *Sao Jose Paquete de Africa* shipwreck site were conducted during February in 2013 and 2014.

Diving safety is one of the primary objectives when searching, documenting and ultimately excavating any portions of a shipwreck. Dive planning, equipment and water conditions are critical aspects of a successful mission.

Methods

Mapping

To document the site, the dive team used trilateration mapping. Because of the surf and underwater surge conditions, the baseline was established using steal nails as datums affixed to the hard-scape ocean floor. Additional stainless steel nails were affixed to rocks on the ocean floor in equal increments along a linear path between the two datums. The extremely dynamic environment of the shipwreck prohibited the use of a tape measure as a baseline. The stainless steel nails in the linear path served as the baseline. When an artifact was identified, a reference point was taken to the nearest datum point. The distance from the artifact and the two nearest steal nails of the baseline were measured. This gave the team sufficient data to determine the location of the artifact relative to the baseline.

Dive Operations

The *São José Paquete de África* went down in 25 feet of water and pounding surf. The wreck site is approximately 110 yards off the shore of an area called Clifton Beach. Thick kelp forest dominates the wreck site with continuous underwater surges of up to 10 to 15 feet. Visibility varies from 5 feet to 25 feet with kelp debris and sand continuously suspended in the water due to the underwater surges. Because of the ocean conditions, the site is only accessible by boat (Figure 1). The site is very dynamic with a constantly shifting sea floor. The water temperature ranges from 47 to 55 degrees Fahrenheit.

The investigation of the *São José Paquete de África* was divided into two phases: 1) survey and dredge the site to remove as much sand accumulation as possible, and 2) document any artifacts or materials uncovered by developing in situ drawings. The field mission consisted of four dive teams of two divers per dive team. The dive plan was to have each team dive for 45 minutes and be relieved by the next team so that the work would be continuous.

To remove the sediment the dive teams used a surface water pump with a suction nozzle and flexible hose to increase the team's mobility on the wreck site (Figure 2). The dredge material was mostly sand. Because of the significant surge conditions, sand would cover an area that was dredged almost immediately. The dive teams engage in dredging activity until they uncover an artifact. Once a team located an artifact, a photograph was taken before sand would re-cover the area. The teams dredge the same area again to uncover an artifact to take measurements for the trilateration mapping.



Figure 1. Wreck site location, aerial view (L). Wreck site location, view from shore (R). The site is located where rocks are breaking the surface. Photos provided by Kamau Sadiki.



Figure 2. Divers using induction dredge to increase mobility on the wreck site. Photos provided by Kamau Sadiki.

The team located ship ballast bars, used to counter balance the ship. The research team determined that these ballast bars were archaeologically significant. Lift bags were used to recover the ballasts (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Diver preparing to recover of ballast (top). Diver recovering ballast (bottom). Photos provided by Kamau Sadiki.

Results

The diving corps discovered the following items from the wreck site: (1) cannons and cannon balls; (2) iron ballasts; (3) copper fasteners; (4) copper sheathing; (5) pulley block; and (6) iron shackles (Figure 4). Through archival research in Mozambique and Portugal, the mission collaborators were able to uncover documents that have revealed the ship's owners, its cargo when it departed from Mozambique and evidence of the sale of a slave by a local sheikh to the ship's captain. The objects recovered from the *São José Paquete de Africa* personalize the grand historical story and brutal nature of the transoceanic slave trade.



Figure 4. Recovered ballast (Top left). Copper fasteners, in-situ (Middle left). Recovered pulley block (Bottom Left). X-ray of iron shackles (Top right). Example of iron shackles (Bottom right). Photos provided by Kamau Sadiki.

As a result of discovered artifacts from the *Sao Jose Paquete de Africa*, the Smithsonian's NMAAHC and IZIKO Museums of South Africa have entered into a formal long-term agreement to loan the artifacts for exhibition in Washington, DC at NMAAHC, which is scheduled to open in in Fall of 2016.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Dr. Stephen Lubkemann, International coordinator and creator of the Slaves Wrecks Project. Dr. Lubkemann is also an Associate Professor of Anthropology & International Affairs at The George Washington University. We would like to give special thanks to Dr. Lonnie Bunch, Executive Director of the Smithsonian Institute for African-American History and Culture Museum and Dr. Paul Gardullo, Curator of the Smithsonian Institute for African-American History and Culture. Jaco Boshoff, Principal Investigator and Curator of the IZIKO – Museums of Cape Town, South Africa was one the driving forces for the success of the *São José Paquete de Africa* mission. Dr. Dave Conlin of the United States National Park Service – Submerged Resource Unit and Mr. Jonathan Scharfman of the African Centre for Heritage Activities made significant contributions to the mission.