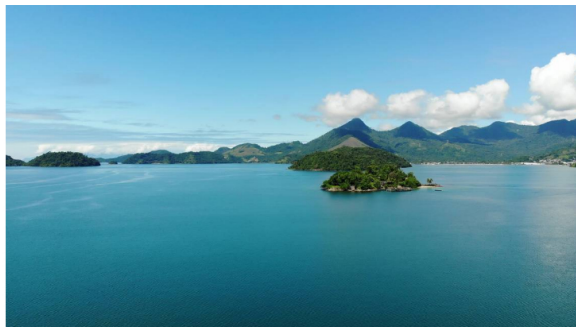
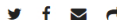


WORLD

Sunken ship of the only slave trader executed in US may have been found off Brazil

BY ASPEN PFLUGHOEFT

UPDATED JULY 13, 2023 12:45 PM



Archaeologists think they found the wreckage of Camargo, a ship sunk by the only slave trader executed in the U.S., off the coast of Angra dos Reis, Brazil. Photo from Aventuras Produções



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They called it "The Boat." It was a reef-like spot off the coast of southern Brazil where the fish seemed to gather, and the fisherman seemed to get lucky.

The local Black community passed on the tradition of "The Boat" for years, wondering occasionally if this spot could be *the boat* that brought their enslaved ancestors to shore.

Now, archaeologists think that's exactly what it might be.

"In 1851, this young captain Nathaniel Gordon from Maine was commissioned to bring the ship Brig Camargo from San Francisco to New York. Halfway, he decided to steal the ship so he became a pirate," Yuri Sanada, an explorer, film producer and the founder of the AfrOrigins Institute, told McClatchy News on July 12.

Gordon sailed the ship "to Mozambique and bought about 490 or 500 enslaved people and went to Brazil," Sanada said. The pirate-turned-slave-trader arrived in the Angra dos Reis bay, about 100 miles west of Rio de Janeiro, in 1852 when slave trading was already illegal in Brazil.

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"When he got to Brazil, he was chased by the British Navy and the Brazilian Navy. He couldn't leave the bay," Sanada said.

"After he offloaded his cargo, he decided to scuttle the ship. He set fire to the ship and made a hole in it and it sank," Sanada said. Gordon wanted "to erase his tracks, just eliminate all the proof by sinking the ship."

The enslaved Africans who Gordon brought to Angra dos Reis were likely sold to a large farm in the area which was established "to receive illegal slaves," Sanada said.





Aerial photos show the coastline near Angra dos Reis. Photo from Aventuras Produções

The wanted captain fled Brazil “dressed as a woman” and spent a decade on the run, Sanada said. “After 10 years, Gordon was caught in the mouth of the Congo (on a ship) with 980 enslaved (people) aboard.” He was captured and taken back to the U.S. in 1860.

Gordon faced two trials during which he was convicted and sentenced to death. He became “the only man in U.S. history to have been executed for the crime of slave trading,” Ron Soodalter, author of the book ‘Hanging Captain Gordon,’ told McClatchy News.

The sunken Brig Camargo proved more elusive than its infamous captain.

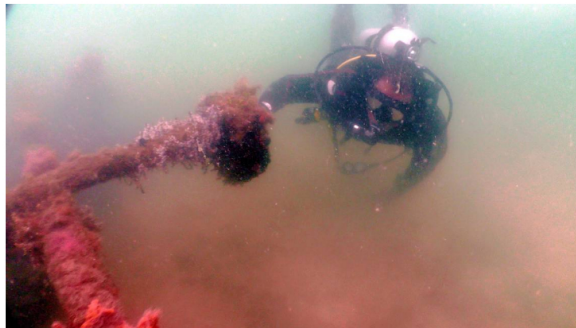


A scuba diver jumps off the boat during a research expedition. Photo from Aventuras Produções

A team of researchers, led by Sanada, decided to search for the 170-year-old Camargo shipwreck. With the local Black community's help, researchers determined a possible location of the wreck, then scanned the area using sonar and conducted scuba dives.

Researchers identified a large shipwreck buried under 15 feet of mud at the spot locals referred to as “The Boat,” Sanada said. They think the wreckage is the lost Camargo.

Because of the mud and “very bad” visibility in the area, researchers will have to return in the fall to dredge and study it closer to confirm their preliminary conclusion.



A scuba diver looks at an underwater structure in the bay's murky waters. Photo from Aventuras Produções

“We have lots of information from the boatyard about the Camargo,” Sanada explained. The size of the ship, the material it was made of and other key details will allow archaeologists to determine if this wreck fits the Camargo's description.

Sanada also hopes to find artifacts on the wreck — “beads from Africa or spoons from America” — that match the Camargo's age and route.

Still, for the local Black community who are the descendants of the enslaved Africans brought over on the Camargo and other ships, the preliminary findings already have a deep significance.

Emerson Luiz Ramos, a member of the [local Black community](#), expressed the importance of finding the shipwreck. “The Brig Camargo is a denunciation, in reality finding her is a denunciation that says the Atlantic Slave Trade was forbidden and Brazil allowed this slave trade,” he said in a translated video from AfrOrigins.



Some members of the research team and local community during a scuba diving expedition. Photo from *Aventuras Produções*

The research team included [the AfrOrigins Institute](#), the Smithsonian Institution National Museum of African American History and Culture, George Washington University, the Fluminense Federal University and other independent researchers.

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This story was originally published July 13, 2023, 11:10 AM.



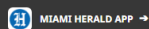
ASPEN PFLUGHOEFT



Aspen Pflughoeft covers real-time news for McClatchy. She is a graduate of Minerva University where she studied communications, history, and international politics. Previously, she reported for Deseret News.

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