

São José

SHIPWRECK

São José History



In March 1622, a fleet of ships including the São José hastily departed Lisbon with an urgent mission. Bound for Goa, the capital of Portugal's enormous overseas empire, the fleet carried Francisco da Gama, whose great grandfather, the legendary Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama, was the first European to set foot in India via sea route. When the elder da Gama discovered Goa in 1498 it was the largest trading center on India's western coast and would become Portugal's most important possession in its quest to control the spice trade. Now over a century later, da Gama's great grandson was returning to Goa to reign as the Viceroy of India under the unified Spanish and Portuguese crown.

The small Portuguese fleet, including its Almiranta, the São José, left the country in a hurry following reports that the British planned to take Hormuz, a Portuguese-occupied island ideally situated in the narrow strait between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman. This strategic waterway served as the gateway of the spice trade to Arabia and the Levant and was the only sea route through the Persian Gulf to India. En route to Goa, the Portuguese fleet had plans to block the British aggression and deter the loss of this critical outpost.

The São José was a "carrack," an immense sailing vessel distinguished by her huge stern castle towering high above the sea. Armed with brass cannon, she was typical of Portuguese ships sailing to the Far East, transporting ballast, passengers and the annual consignment of money to support trade with the East and Portuguese outposts along the trade routes. The São José was indeed carrying an impressive cargo, the legendary silver treasure of Philip III, King of Portugal, handed over to Francisco da Gama on his way to India. The shipment included nine chests filled with thousands of silver reales coins produced in both the Old and New World mints. The passengers aboard the São José ranged from nobility to "orphans of the king." The large vessel demanded a big crew which was comprised mostly of ex-convicts and the "low class." In need of able-bodied men, Portugal was scraping the bottom of the human barrel to operate its many ships and offices of the empire.

After the São José and her fleet rounded the Cape of Good Hope, she proceeded up the well-traveled route along the East African coast into the Strait of Madagascar. The evening of 22 July, 1622, as the vessel sailed up the Mozambique Channel, a combined fleet of Dutch and British ships of the East India Company attacked the Portuguese flotilla. Trailing behind the others, the São José was cut off from the rest of the fleet and surrounded by the enemy which allegedly fired more shots into the embattled vessel than ever before recorded in a single-ship attack in the Indian Ocean. As fighting took place, the ship's captain, senior officers and others had fallen ill and the commanding officer and pilot were killed.

Despite damage to her sails and spars, the São José remained afloat and navigable by late 23 July. The carrack attempted to escape the opposing fleet by sailing away from battle—a rare act in Portuguese naval warfare at the time. Fleeing toward the African coast, the great ship ran into a shoal that tore off her rudder. Now drifting at the mercy of wind and wave, failed attempts were made to control the enormous vessel. Anchors were dropped in vain and cannon thrown overboard to lighten the ship.



Despite these heroic efforts, the São José met her demise grounded on a reef off the Mozambique coast, victim to final assault by the Anglo-Dutch fleet. A reported 66,000 Spanish reales were salvaged by the enemy, a small share of the total treasure aboard the ship, lost with some 300-400 passengers and crew as the vessel broke up and sank to the bottom of the Mozambique Channel.

For nearly 400 years, the wreck of the São José remained hidden off the isolated coast of East Africa until her discovery in May 2005 by Portuguese marine archaeology company Arqueonautas.

The most extraordinary find are the over 24,000 silver reales coins recovered so far, representing a rare collection of Old and New World mints with a wide variety of dates and denominations—the stunning remains of King Philip III's royal treasure once bound for India when Spain and Portugal together claimed a vast overseas empire.





São José FAQ

Pronounced: Sow zho-ZAY (zho = similar to French “J” sound as in “Jour”, not Spanish “J”.)

What was the São José?

The São José was a “carrack,” an immense sailing vessel distinguished by its huge stern castle towering high above the sea. Armed with brass cannon, it was typical of Portuguese ships sailing to the Far East, transporting ballast, passengers and the annual consignment of money to support trade with the East and Portuguese outposts along the trade routes. The São José carried an impressive cargo, the legendary silver treasure of Philip III, King of Spain and Portugal, handed over to Francisco da Gama on his way to India. The shipment included nine chests filled with thousands of silver reales coins produced in both the Old and New World mints of Mexico, Bolivia and Spain.

What is the São José’s history?

The São José was lost in 1622 off the coast of Mozambique after being attacked by English and Dutch defense ships while on a mission to deliver Francisco da Gama, great grandson of legendary Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama, to reign as the Viceroy of India. On board, it carried a royal treasure of the Portuguese Empire to support trade with the East and Portuguese Empire to support trade with the East and Portuguese outposts on the trade route.

Who discovered the São José?

After extensive historical research in British, Dutch and Portuguese archives followed by a large area magnetometer survey in 2003 and 2004, Arqueonautas Worldwide – Arqueologia Subaquática SA (AWW), in partnership with its Mozambican counterpart Património Internacional SARL began with the excavation and recovery of the São José in April 2005 off the coast of Mozambique.

An Arqueonautas team of 27 specialists, including trained divers, archaeologists, conservation experts and specialized back-up personnel, has excavated the remains of the São José under the supervision of the Cuban marine archaeologist Alejandro Mirabal.

What has been recovered from the São José so far?

The items discovered and recovered to date include four large bronze cannon and a quantity of rare silver coins.

What makes the coins special?

Based on their remarkable story linking the New World and the Portuguese maritime trade routes, the São José coins are composed of a unique assortment of Old and New World mints. Rated as extremely rare, never before available to collectors for private ownership (by Daniel Sedwick, Author of *The Practical Book of Cobs*), of the 24,000 coins recovered, fewer than 7,200 are collectibles in excellent condition, provenance-certified and graded by NGC.



São José FAQ con't

Was the recovery conducted in an archaeologically sensitive manner?

On any project, Arqueonautas works to established methodologies, highest scientific and archaeological standards and in strict accordance with the license agreement established in 1999 with the Government of Mozambique and Património Internacional, which has been recently prolonged through 2010.

The results achieved and the papers published as a result of the work done will contribute to enhance the scientific knowledge about maritime trade and naval technology in the seventeenth century.

Are the artifacts undergoing appropriate conservation?

Conservation work is being carried out at the "Centro de Conservação Marítima" set up on the Isle of Mozambique by Arqueonautas and Património Internacional SARL and is being carried out following the best available standards.

How are Odyssey and Arqueonautas linked?

Following the successful recovery of the São José coins, and being aware of Odyssey's extensive expertise in coin marketing, Arqueonautas offered Odyssey the exclusive right to market the coins through its distributors. After determining that the coins had been recovered and conserved in the archaeologically sensitive manner that Odyssey's philosophy is based on, Odyssey agreed to collaborate with Arqueonautas on this project and is proud to present this unique, rare, and historic collection to the public for the first time.

About Odyssey Marine Exploration, Inc.

Odyssey Marine Exploration, Inc. (NasdaqCM: OMEX) is engaged in the exploration of deep-ocean shipwrecks and uses innovative methods and state-of-the-art technology to conduct extensive search and archaeological recovery operations around the world. Odyssey discovered the Civil War era shipwreck of the SS Republic® in 2003 and recovered over 50,000 coins and 14,000 artifacts from the site nearly 1,700 feet deep. In May 2007, the Company announced the historic deep-ocean treasure recovery of over 500,000 silver and gold coins, weighing 17 tons, from a Colonial era site code-named "Black Swan." Odyssey has several shipwreck projects in various stages of development around the world.

About Arqueonautas Worldwide

Arqueonautas Worldwide S.A. (AWW) was founded to recover cargoes from historical shipwrecks conducting operations scientifically in an economically viable manner. Registered (ISIN: PTAQW0AE0005) in 1995 in Portugal, AWW is today the leading commercial marine archaeological company for shallow-water operations. AWW has discovered to date over 150 wreck sites in Africa and Asia. The 14 historical shipwrecks so far excavated, with approximately 100,000 coins and over 10,000 artefacts recovered, are documented resulting in scientific publications. AWW is presently conducting survey and recovery operations under exclusive government licenses in Mozambique and Indonesia and is pursuing additional agreements in the Americas and Asia. AWW's mission is to protect the world's maritime heritage and advance learning through marine archaeological survey and excavation.



Cobs Defined



Cobs are the original "treasure coins." Struck and trimmed by hand in the 1500s through 1700s at Spanish mints throughout South America, silver and gold cobs are handsomely crude, nearly all with a cross as the central feature on one side and either a coat-of-arms (shield) or a tic-tac-toe-like "pillars and waves" on the other side. Silver cobs are known as "reales" and gold cobs are known as "escudos," with two 8 reales (about 27 grams each) equaling one escudo. Some cobs were struck with a date, and most show a mintmark and an initial or monogram for the assayer, the mint official who was responsible for weight and fineness. Size and shape were immaterial, which means that most cobs are far from round or uniform in thickness. Cobs were generally accepted as good currency all around the world, and were the exact coins referred to as "pieces of eight" (8 reales) and "doubloons" (any gold cobs but originally 2 escudos.)



Treasure Coin Example

The Anatomy of a Cob

How is a cob made?

These coins are created by forming slabs of silver and alloy into long rolls of irregular thickness. These rolls, while still warm, would be sliced with metal shears or a chisel to form blanks or planchets. Depending on the mint, these blank slices were snipped to form basic round shapes. Since this process was done by hand and much guesswork, many coins had flat edges from the trimming process. The leftover snips were collected and re-melted and used again. Due to this rudimentary process, no two cobs look exactly alike.

Design Attributes





Cobs Defined con't

What drives value?

Detail – More detail on the coin directly relates to a higher value.

Rarity – Level of detail is critical in determining rarity which is driven by many different coin characteristics. Locations of mint and assayer marks, full dates, double assayer marks and die errors are just some examples.

Provenance & Authenticity – Important for coins that carry historical significance. Proving a coin's background and authenticity is a critical component and will greatly increase the value.



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