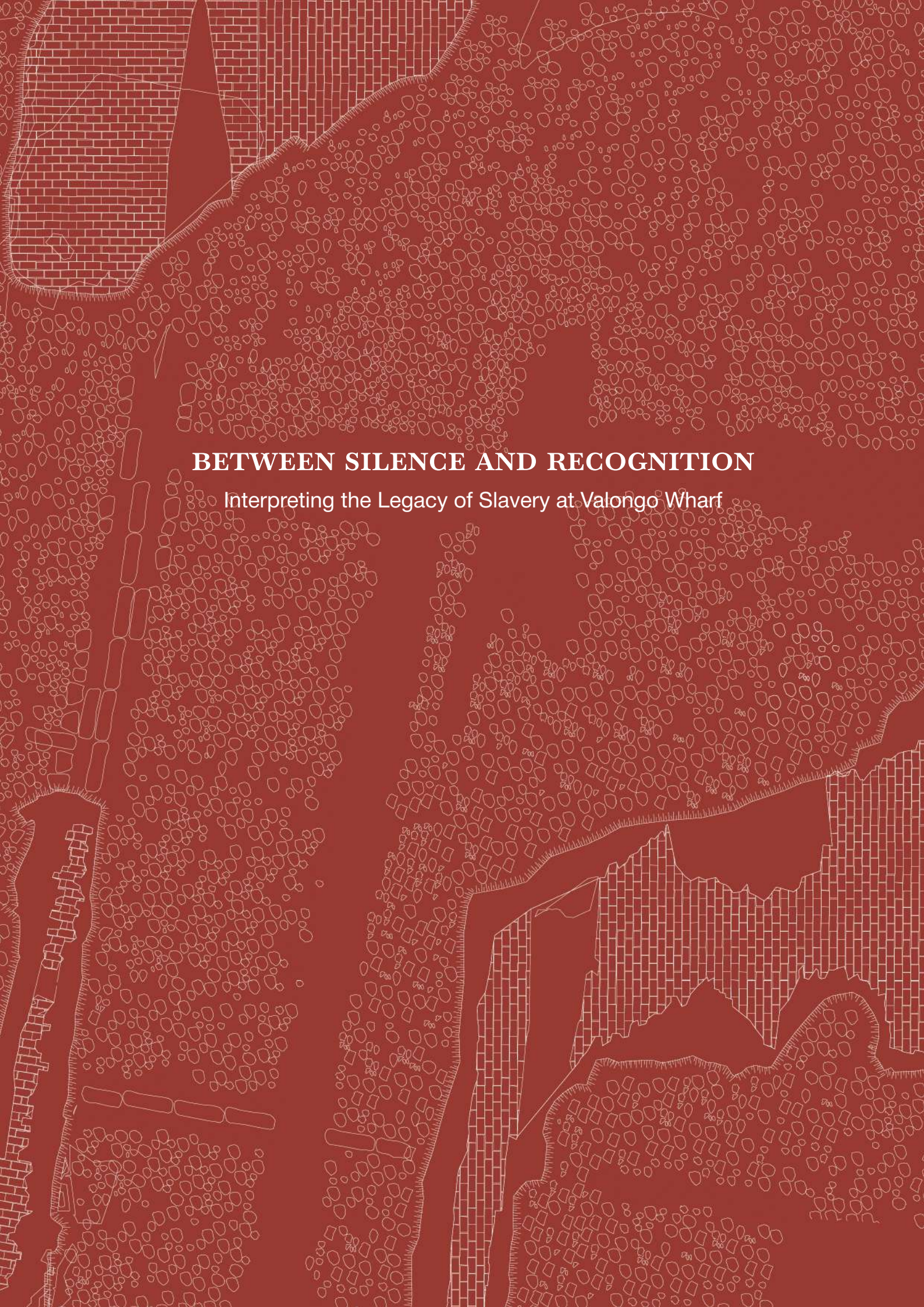

BETWEEN SILENCE AND RECOGNITION

Interpreting the Legacy of Slavery at Valongo Wharf

POLITECNICO DI TORINO

Masters in Architecture Construction City

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BETWEEN SILENCE AND RECOGNITION

Interpreting the Legacy of Slavery at Valongo Wharf

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Abstract.

This thesis explores how dissonant heritage can be approached as a vehicle for memory, social justice, and cultural recognition, through the case study of the Valongo Wharf. Located in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, it is the most important physical trace of the arrival of African slaves on the American continent and was recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2017. The site has long been subjected to erasure, marginalization, and silencing, being rediscovered in 2011 through archaeological excavations. Despite its global significance, it still lacks a place dedicated to its memory, interpretation and to show its archaeological findings. One of the main goals is to understand how the slave trade influenced the urban space of Rio de Janeiro and affected the social-political context, leading to the systematic erasure of narratives and forgotten heritage.

The research investigates Valongo Wharf history since its construction in 1811 and how the archaeological site has been managed since the excavations in 2011, following its listing as an UNESCO World Heritage Site, until now, giving an insight into the process of patrimonialization, conservation strategies applied, controversies, decisions and the actors involved. Through an assessment of what's been done it was possible to understand the current situation of the site, all the demands and hypothesize potential measures and paths to follow in the future with an intervention, seeking to preserve and enhance the memory of the place.

Through case studies, both globally and in Brazil, the study shows how heritage linked to slavery has been dealt, preserved and represented, focusing on the potential of architecture to mediate memory and historical trauma. By a territorial, historical and socio-cultural analysis, the aim is to reflect on the legacy of slavery, understand its impacts on the Valongo Wharf and propose a spatial intervention dedicated to collective memory, where visitors can learn more about the site, its importance and contributions connected to African heritage.

Fig. 01 "Cercanias de Val-Longo" by Thomas Ender, c. 1818. **Source** Bibioteca Nacional

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01
Introduction.

The first chapter introduces the research theme and establishes the foundation for the thesis. It provides a contextualization of the Valongo Wharf as a central case study in the relationship between slavery, memory, and heritage in Brazil. The problem statement highlights the silencing and fragmentation of slavery's memory in the urban and cultural landscape, setting out the motivation for the study. The chapter also defines the research objectives and aims, which focus on analyzing Valongo as a dissonant heritage site and proposing strategies for its preservation and interpretation. Finally, the methodology is presented, combining historical research, bibliographic review, analysis of urban conditions, and the study of heritage management practices.

Fig. 02 Aerial view of Valongo Wharf. Photo by Beth Santos, 2023. **Source** Prefeitura do Rio

1.1 CONTEXTUALIZATION

Located in the port zone of Rio de Janeiro, the Valongo Wharf is one of the most significant archaeological sites related to the transatlantic slave trade in the Americas. Positioned near Praça Mauá and part of the area historically known as “Little Africa”, the site lies within a dense urban context that has long erased its traumatic past. The wharf was rediscovered in 2011, during the excavations linked to the Porto Maravilha (Marvelous Port) urban revitalization project, revealing stone-paved remains that were buried beneath layers of city development. Its location not only highlights the historical centrality of Rio de Janeiro in the slave trade but also places it within a broader network of Afro-Brazilian cultural memory that continues to shape the identity of the city. (Cicalo 2018)

Historically, the wharf served as the main landing point for enslaved Africans arriving in Brazil between 1811 and 1831, a period that marked the peak of slave disembarkations in the country (Suiama 2025, Figueiredo 2016). It was built with the intention to transfer all the activities related to the slave trade that used to take place in the center of Rio de Janeiro to a more remote and controlled area. It is estimated that more than one million Africans passed through this point, making it the largest slave port in the Americas (Chuva, 2022). After the official prohibition of the transatlantic slave trade in 1831, the site was gradually deactivated and later buried under new urban layers, giving place to the Empress Wharf, built in 1843 to commemorate the arrival of Princess Teresa Cristina of Bourbon (Suiama 2025).

The concealment and erasure of the Valongo Wharf over time reflect the broader patterns of silencing Brazil’s history of slavery (Cicalo 2018, Chuva 2022). For decades, the site remained forgotten and unmarked, with no visible traces to communicate its significance to the public. Its rediscovery not only brought to light physical evidence of the slave trade but also opened a public discourse about memory, racial inequality, and heritage in Brazil (Cicalo 2018). The recognition of the site as national heritage by IPHAN (National Institute of Historic and Artistic Heritage) in 2011, and its inscription as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2017, marked a turning point in the institutional acknowledgment of Brazil’s slavery heritage. (Suiama 2025)

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The rediscovery of the Valongo Wharf brought renewed attention to a site that had long been subjected to systematic erasure. But even after its recognition as a World Heritage Site, the wharf remains largely invisible in the daily life of the city. The site is located in a culturally rich but historically marginalized area of Rio de Janeiro. The region contains multiple Afro-Brazilian heritage sites, yet institutional recognition and investment have been inconsistent (Carneiro and Pinheiro 2015). There are ongoing conflicts and debates regarding the future of the site, ranging from political disputes to disagreements over what form preservation and memorialization should take place. These tensions reveal the dissonant nature of the site’s heritage and the broader societal difficulty to engage with the legacy of slavery.

As stated by Tânia Andrade, the archaeologist behind the excavations of Valongo wharf:

> “It’s archaeology’s historical responsibility to bring to light what others wished to bury and conceal forever in the past, to the detriment of minorities and underrepresented sectors of society. By presenting its evidence to present-day societies, people can confront this past and find new ways to deal with it. The historical archaeology that we practice aims to provide an antidote to this kind of social amnesia.” (Lima 2022)

For decades, dominant narratives have celebrated miscegenation and national unity while downplaying or silencing the structural violence of enslavement and its aftermath. Heritage policies have historically privileged colonial churches, official architecture, and monuments celebrating white elites, while Afro-Brazilian heritage has been systematically overlooked or relegated to the margins. Within this context, the Valongo Wharf embodies both a unique opportunity and a profound challenge: how can a site so intimately tied to trauma, violence, and resistance be preserved, interpreted, and activated in ways that acknowledge its painful past while also affirming its cultural and historical significance?

Today, the Valongo Wharf appears as a modest, enclosed section of paving stones in Rio de Janeiro’s port zone, offering limited perception about its historical role as a central point in a system of racialized and exclusionary economic exploitation. Although some signage acknowledges its past as a slave landing site, subsequently buried and renamed before its rediscovery in 2011, it provides minimal insight into the broader and enduring implications of its association with the transatlantic slave trade in both Rio and the wider Brazilian context, offering no structured way for visitors to understand its whole historical significance or connect with its traumatic legacy. (Adams 2021)

This thesis is motivated by the need to address these gaps. It proposes that the Valongo Wharf should be studied not only as an archaeological asset but as a site of memory, whose interpretation must be grounded in historical research, ethical responsibility, and spatial justice. The central problem this thesis addresses is therefore not merely the technical preservation of Valongo Wharf, but the absence of an integrated and culturally sensitive approach to its interpretation. There is a lack of frameworks that connect archaeology, urban planning, and architectural design with the broader social and political debates about dissonant heritage, memory, and racial justice.

1.3 OBJECTIVES/AIMS

This thesis seeks to investigate the Valongo Wharf archaeological site as a case study of dissonant heritage and how this type of heritage, particularly that related to slavery, has been addressed in both national and international contexts. By examining the historical trajectory of Valongo Wharf and following the process through which it became a heritage site, including the actors, narratives, and institutional pathways involved, the research aims to understand how spatial, political and symbolic erasures have shaped the site’s visibility and meaning over time.

A central objective is to analyze how Brazil has dealt with the legacy of slavery in heritage discourse and cultural policies, including the challenges regarding recognition and preservation of sites associated with the topic. It aims to contextualize Valongo within broader debates such as post-abolition inequalities and racialized urban exclusion, observing how these aspects have influenced slavery heritage in the country. It also seeks to evaluate the cultural, political, and architectural interventions that have been proposed or implemented at the site and assess their effectiveness and understanding the dissonance factors.

Finally, another key aim is to propose intervention guidelines and strategies that can contribute to restoring the historical context and strengthening the interpretative potential of the site, drawing on other case studies to offer insights into practices for memorialization, public engagement and urban integration of sensitive archaeological sites.

1.4 METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted in this thesis is interdisciplinary, combining historical research, theoretical reflection, urban and architectural analysis, and design-based exploration. This multi-scalar approach is necessary given the complexity of the Valongo Wharf, which cannot be understood solely as an archaeological site, but as a palimpsest where layers of history, memory, politics, and urban transformation intersect.

The research process unfolds across three main dimensions:

1. Documentary and bibliographic research – The study begins with a review of primary and secondary sources on the history of slavery in Brazil, the development of Rio de Janeiro, and the rediscovery of Valongo Wharf. It also engages with theoretical works on dissonant heritage, memory studies, and heritage management, providing the conceptual framework for the analysis. Archival maps, historical records, and visual representations (such as paintings and travelers' accounts) are used to reconstruct the historical significance of the site.

2. Urban and architectural analysis – Fieldwork observations, cartographic studies, and analysis of planning documents (including materials from the Porto Maravilha project and the UNESCO nomination dossier) provide an understanding of the wharf's present condition and its relationship with the surrounding urban fabric. This analysis focuses on accessibility, visibility, spatial integration, and existing heritage policies, identifying both strengths and shortcomings in the current treatment of the site.

3. Comparative case studies and design exploration – The thesis incorporates international references (Gorée Island, the African Burial Ground, and Gadsden's Wharf) to highlight diverse strategies for interpreting slavery-related heritage. Lessons drawn from these sites inform the elaboration of guidelines for Valongo. These guidelines are developed into a design hypothesis that proposes a masterplan and interpretative infrastructure for the site, including signage and public space interventions, with the aim of re-establishing connections between the wharf, the city, and the memory of the African diaspora.

This methodology thus combines historical depth with contemporary design practice, bridging the gap between theoretical reflection and applied intervention. By integrating different scales of analysis—global, national, and local—it seeks to articulate a holistic understanding of Valongo Wharf and its potential as a site of memory, justice, and urban reinvention.

02

Dissonant heritage and the legacy of slavery.

This chapter develops the theoretical and historical framework for the thesis. It begins with an overview of the Atlantic slave trade, situating Brazil within a broader global system. It then introduces the concept of dissonant heritage, presenting its theoretical foundations and expanding the discussion to the ways in which slavery and colonialism are interpreted as forms of contested or “difficult” heritage. Comparative examples are included through an examination of global approaches to interpreting slavery heritage, drawing parallels between Brazil and other contexts such as the United States, the Caribbean, and Europe. The chapter then turns to the Brazilian case, examining the institution of slavery, the road to abolition, and the post-abolition impacts that shaped racial and social inequality. It concludes with an analysis of how slavery has been addressed in Brazilian heritage practices, emphasizing the challenges of recognition.

Fig. 03 Island of Gorée, Senegal. Photo by Richard Veillon, 10 May 2010. © Richard Veillon. **Source** UNESCO

2.1 THE ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE

The transatlantic slave trade was one of the most extensive and violent systems of human displacement in world history. From the mid-15th century to the late 19th century, approximately 11 to 12 million Africans were forcibly transported across the Atlantic to the Americas, with Brazil receiving the largest portion of these individuals (Lovejoy 2000; Eltis & Richardson 2010). This trade was not only an economic activity, but a complex system of exploitation that helped define the modern world through the formation of racial hierarchies, colonial empires, and plantation economies. As Reinaldo Tavares (2022) observes, the enslaved did not cross the Atlantic empty-handed: they brought with them languages, beliefs, knowledge systems, and cultural practices that would profoundly shape the societies of the Americas.

The Middle Passage, the harsh maritime journey from African ports to the Americas, was marked by dehumanizing conditions. Enslaved individuals were confined in overcrowded holds for weeks or months, often suffering from disease, malnutrition, abuse, and trauma (Fig. 04 and 05). Before even boarding the ships, many had been detained for long periods in fortified coastal depots, enduring violence, separation from their origins, and the erasure of identity. As Tavares (2022) describes, the voyage signified a “second death” for those captured, first separated from their families and homelands, and then from their personal identity as they were commodified across the ocean. Nevertheless, within these terrible circumstances, the enslaved forged new bonds, creating cultural networks that would later influence Afro-diasporic formations in the Americas.

This process was global in scale and extent, involving actors from Europe, Africa, and the Americas. European powers such as Portugal, Spain, Britain, France, and the Netherlands established a vast infrastructure of ports, ships, and trading posts, often relying on African intermediaries who participated in the capture and sale of rival groups (Eltis & Richardson 2010; Thornton 1998). While profit motives largely drove the system, its moral and ideological foundations were deeply rooted in colonial racial theories, which justified the enslavement of African peoples as part of a supposed civilizing mission (Jordan 1968; Hall 2005). These ideas were used to legitimize and sustain the commodification of human lives on an unprecedented scale.

Each region involved in the Atlantic slave trade played distinct roles. Portugal and its colonies, particularly Brazil, were responsible for nearly 40% of all Africans forcibly brought to the Americas (Klein & Luna 2010). In Brazil, enslaved labor was essential in plantation agriculture, especially sugar, tobacco, and later coffee, urban domestic work, mining, and port operations (Karasch 1987; Gomes 2005). In the Caribbean, under British, French, Dutch, and Spanish rule, enslaved people were the foundation of plantation economies, especially in sugar production. In the southern United States, enslaved labor drove the cotton and tobacco industries. Meanwhile, European metropoles profited immensely through banking, insurance, shipbuilding, and the consumption of goods produced by slave labor, creating a system in which wealth extraction was global but suffering was concentrated in Black bodies and communities.

The concept of the African Diaspora, which gained scholarly prominence in the 20th century through Pan-African and Black consciousness movements, has become an essential framework for understanding the historical and cultural consequences of this forced migration. Diaspora, in this context, is not merely the dispersal of a people, but a continuous condition shaped by collective memory, cultural retention, alienation, and resistance. Scholars such as Paul Gilroy (1993) and James Clifford (1994) have emphasized the diasporic experience as dynamic and hybrid, challenging essentialist narratives and instead highlighting the circulation of identities, practices, and historical consciousness across space and time.

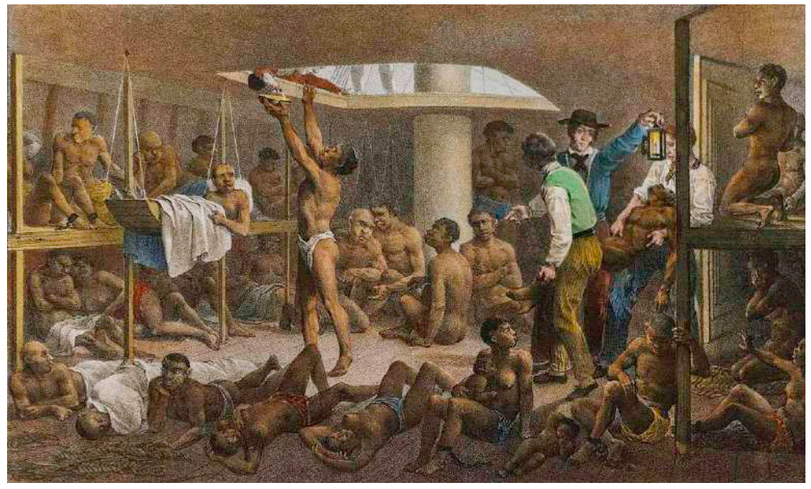


Fig. 04 “Negres a Fond de Calle” by Johann Moritz Rugendas, 1830. **Source** Itáu Cultural

Although archaeology was slow to adopt the term “diaspora” as an analytical framework, since the 1990s there has been increasing engagement with the African Diaspora in the field. Archaeological studies have helped reconstruct the material lives of enslaved peoples, particularly on plantations in the U.S., the Caribbean, and to a lesser extent Brazil and Cuba, highlighting both the diversity of experiences and the common structures of domination across different slave societies (Fennell 2011; Funari 2007).

The legacy of the Atlantic slave trade is therefore not confined to historical texts or isolated monuments. It lives on in the cities shaped by forced labor, in the cultural practices and languages of Afro-diasporic peoples, and in the struggles for memory, justice, and recognition that continue today. This system shaped space, culture, and architecture, reconfiguring cities, territories, and social hierarchies. Understanding this global process is essential for interpreting local sites like the Valongo Wharf, which are both products of this system and witnesses to its enduring consequences.

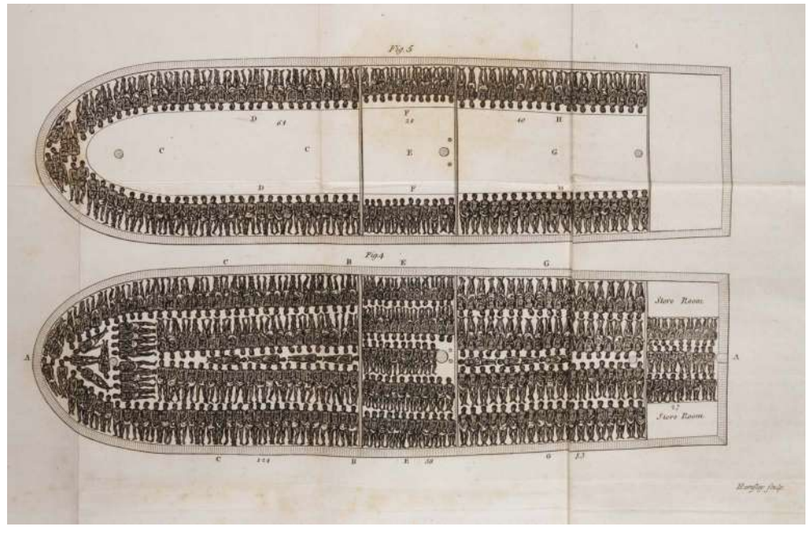
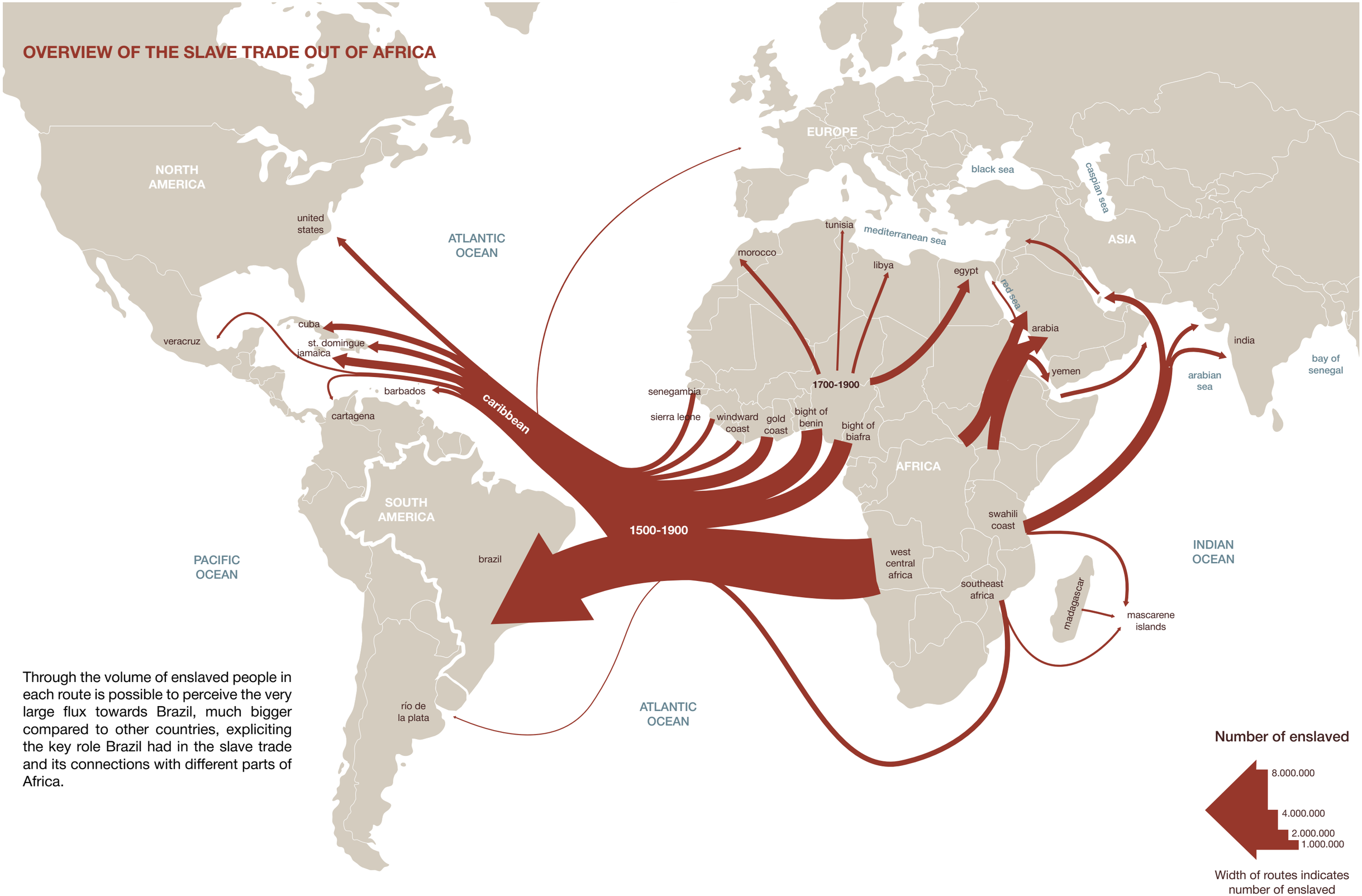


Fig. 05 Deck of a slave ship, 1808. **Source** The Gilder Lehrman Institute



Through the volume of enslaved people in each route is possible to perceive the very large flux towards Brazil, much bigger compared to other countries, expliciting the key role Brazil had in the slave trade and its connections with different parts of Africa.

Fig. 06 Map of the overview of the slave trade out of Africa. **Source** Created by the author based on data from the Slave Voyages Database

2.2 THE CONCEPT OF DISSONANT HERITAGE

The term dissonant heritage refers to heritage that is contested, uncomfortable, or painful, often because it reflects histories of violence, exclusion, or oppression. Unlike traditional narratives that present heritage as unifying or celebratory, dissonant heritage invites confrontation with historical injustices and calls attention to the plurality of memory and the conflicts surrounding what is remembered, by whom, and for what purpose.

The concept was first articulated in the work of Tunbridge and Ashworth, who in their book Dissonant Heritage: The Management of the Past as a Resource in Conflict (1996), argue that heritage is inherently dissonant because different social groups assign different, and often conflicting, meanings to the same historical places or events. They emphasize that heritage is a selective process, shaped by present-day interests and ideologies, and therefore "inevitably involves forgetting as well as remembering". For them, dissonance is not a flaw to be eliminated but a structural feature of how societies construct their pasts.

Sharon Macdonald builds on this idea but approaches it from the perspective of memory politics and museum studies. In her work, she emphasizes how institutions like museums and heritage sites become arenas for negotiating difficult histories, particularly in post-conflict or post-authoritarian societies. In Difficult Heritage: Negotiating the Nazi Past in Nuremberg and Beyond (2009), she explores how dissonant heritage demands careful curatorial and spatial strategies that avoid glorification or erasure. She introduces the notion of "difficult heritage," referring to legacies of violence, authoritarianism, and trauma that cannot be easily assimilated into celebratory national narratives. For Macdonald, the goal is not to resolve dissonance but to create spaces where it can be engaged productively, a process that can promote critical reflection and even social transformation.

In a more recent contribution, Ivana Milojević Kesić (Kisić) advances the discussion by framing dissonant heritage as an opportunity for democratizing memory and promoting social justice. In Governing Heritage Dissonance (2016), she argues that heritage governance must move beyond technical preservation to embrace inclusive and participatory processes. For Kisić, dissonant heritage is not just about difficult content but also about who gets to decide how it is interpreted and represented. She introduces the idea that managing dissonance ethically requires engaging with marginalized voices, including those historically excluded from institutional narratives.

Together, these authors emphasize the importance of treating dissonant heritage not as a problem to be solved but as a resource for dialogue and critical engagement. In the next section this concept will be explored in a more focused view regarding works that discuss heritage related to slavery, to understand the specifics and debates surrounding the topic.

DISSONANT HERITAGE RELATED TO SLAVERY

When the framework of dissonant heritage is applied to slavery, the concept acquires an even more intense resonance. Slavery was not only a legal and economic system but also a generator of profound cultural trauma whose consequences extend into the present. Ron Eyerman's Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity (2001) situates slavery as a foundational wound in the formation of Black identities, arguing that its memory continues to shape struggles for recognition and equality. This perspective highlights that the heritage of slavery cannot be confined to historical sites or museums: it is an active and unfinished process of negotiating the meanings of trauma, identity, and justice, impossible to be separated from questions of race and memory. In this sense, slavery exemplifies and expands Macdonald's notion of "difficult heritage" (2009), as it is a past that resists reconciliation and continually provokes new conflicts over memory and representation. While states and institutions may seek to silence or neutralize its memory, descendant communities mobilize these sites to affirm identity, resilience, and claims for justice.

Sites associated with the transatlantic slave trade are charged with tension. They can be framed as spaces of national shame, collective traume, or resistance, but are also frequently subjected to processes of commodification and depoliticization. Authors such as Ana Lucia Araujo (2014) in Shadows of the Slave Past emphasize that slavery-related heritage often unsettles dominant narratives of national identity, forcing societies to confront histories of racial violence that are otherwise silenced or minimized. This type of heritage is not simply about commemoration but also accountability, recognition and the pursuit of reparative justive. This tension is at the core of dissonant heritage in the context of slavery. It raises fundamental questions about who has the authority to interpret the past, whose voices are amplified and how trauma can be acknowledged without being appropriated or trivialized.

An important aspect of the literature on slavery and dissonant heritage is its emphasis on the role of cities and urban landscapes as archives of enslavement. Ulrike Schmieder's Dealing with Dissonant Cultural Heritage: Traces of Enslavers in European Cityscapes (2023) shows how European cities remain marked by monuments, street names, and architectural legacies that glorify colonial and enslaving elites. These controversies reflect the deep dissonance of slavery heritage in European cities: the very monuments that once celebrated "benefactors" are now being recognized as embodiments of exploitation and violence. Similarly, Tuuli Lähdesmäki and colleagues in Dissonant Heritages and Memories in Contemporary Europe (2019) argue that colonial legacies embedded in the built environment provoke tension between efforts at erasure and demands for public recognition, particularly in multicultural societies. These works reveal that the heritage of slavery is inscribed into the very fabric of modern cities, making the negotiation of these spaces a matter of civic and political urgency. Also, they highlight the paradox of European cities simultaneously celebrating their architecture, often financed by slavery, while struggling to address the moral weight of this history.

Other scholars have examined how slavery-related heritage is mobilized in public history and tourism. The collection Slavery, Contested Heritage and Thanatourism (Dann and Seaton, 2001) addresses the commodification of sites of enslavement, noting how they are often transformed into attractions that oscillate between commemoration, education, and spectacle. The challenge, as they highlight, lies in balancing the demands of accuracy and remembrance with pressures of commercial viability. Similarly, William Logan and Keir Reeves's edited volume Places of Pain and Shame: Dealing with Difficult Heritage (2008) situates slavery within a broader framework of heritage sites linked to atrocity and oppression, showing how such spaces must navigate the expectations of local communities, descendant groups, and state institu-

tions. In these contexts, slavery's heritage emerges as a paradigmatic example of what Tunbridge and Ashworth (1996) describe as the contested management of the past as a resource.

The persistence of memory also plays a crucial role in understanding slavery as dissonant heritage. Jessica Moody's The Persistence of Memory: Remembering Slavery in Liverpool, "Slaving Capital of the World" (2020) shows how, in a city that once thrived economically on the slave trade, the commemoration of slavery remains deeply entangled with questions of identity, pride, and denial. Despite initiatives to memorialize enslaved Africans, Liverpool continues to struggle with confronting its past fully, illustrating how memory of slavery is never settled but constantly renegotiated. Similarly, Maria M. Delgado's Staging Difficult Pasts (2023) explores how theatre and museums across different countries engage with slavery as a transnational legacy, demonstrating how cultural practices can either reproduce silences or open spaces for dialogue and contestation, becoming tools for addressing the legacies of slavery and colonialism. These works highlight the enduring instability of slavery's heritage: it is never a closed chapter but a field of continuous cultural and political struggle.

Other approaches have emphasized the global and comparative dimensions of slavery's dissonant heritage. Cristina Demaria and colleagues in Questioning Traumatic Heritage: Spaces of Memory in Europe and South America (2024) argue that slavery-related sites in Brazil, the Caribbean, and Europe reflect not only local histories but also global entanglements of memory, displacement, and power. Likewise, Ana Lucia Araujo's Shadows of the Slave Past: Memory, Heritage, and Slavery (2014) stresses how the memorialization of slavery operates within transnational networks, where demands for recognition, reparations, and justice circulate across the Atlantic. These perspectives remind us that slavery's heritage cannot be understood solely within national frames: it is a dissonant, interconnected memory that challenges global narratives of modernity and progress.

Into this notion of global dimensions, theoretical discussions have highlighted that slavery-related heritage cannot be understood solely in terms of local memory; rather, it is transnational and diasporic. Ron Eyerman's concept of cultural trauma (2001) positions slavery as a foundational wound shaping African American identity, transmitted across generations even when direct personal memory is absent. Building on this, volumes such as Questioning Traumatic Heritage (2024) and Cultural Heritage and Slavery – Perspectives from Europe (2023) examine how the memory of slavery circulates between Europe, Africa, and the Americas, creating shared but also contested frameworks of remembrance. These works underline that the heritage of slavery operates simultaneously at national, diasporic, and global levels, making it a paradigmatic case of dissonant heritage in a connected world.

In light of these studies, slavery can be seen as a "limit case" for the theory of dissonant heritage. Unlike other contested pasts, slavery represents a history of systemic dehumanization that not only persists in memory but also shapes the structural inequalities of the present. As Tunbridge and Ashworth (1996) suggest, heritage is always a resource in conflict, but in the case of slavery, the stakes involve not only symbolic recognition but also material justice and social transformation. The management of slavery's heritage therefore extends beyond preservation into the realms of politics, law, and morality. By bringing together these perspectives, the studies on slavery and heritage demonstrates how the memory of enslavement both exemplifies and radicalizes the theoretical debates on dissonant heritage, making visible the entanglement of past violence with contemporary struggles for equity and recognition. Far from being static or consensual, slavery heritage remains a living field of contestation, in which memory, identity, and justice are constantly renegotiated.

2.3 GLOBAL APPROACHES TO INTERPRETING SLAVERY HERITAGE

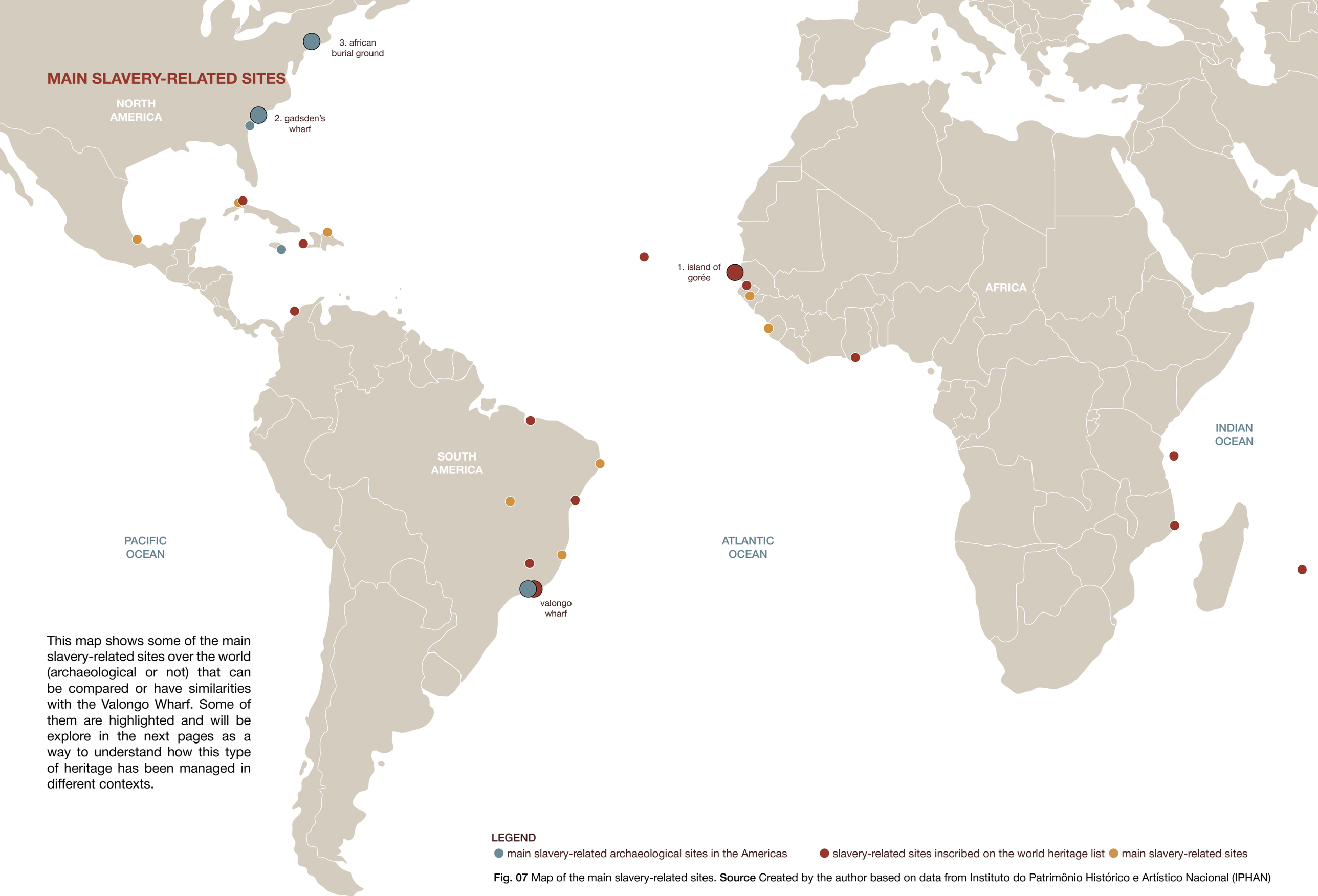
The interpretation and memorialization of slavery have taken distinct paths in different regions of the world, shaped by divergent historical experiences, political landscapes, and societal engagement. Globally, there has been a growing effort to recognize the legacy of the transatlantic slave trade and its enduring consequences, yet the intensity, funding, and frameworks of these commemorative initiatives vary significantly. This section offers a comparative overview of some of the most prominent examples of slavery heritage memorialization.

Brazil, despite being the largest recipient of enslaved Africans, lags in comparison. The Valongo Wharf in Rio de Janeiro, has faced underfunding and administrative neglect. While the site has large symbolic and historical importance, it has yet to receive a fully functional interpretation center as recommended by UNESCO. Initiatives such as the proposed museum faced delays, political interference, and opposition due to differing visions of how to represent the African diaspora, as a story of suffering or resilience.This discrepancy reveals a broader pattern: in Brazil and much of Latin America, slavery-related heritage is often overshadowed by dominant national narratives that celebrate racial harmony and cultural mixing ideologies that mask systemic inequality. As scholars note, Afro-Brazilian heritage sites like Valongo Wharf, Pretos Novos Cemetery, and Pedra do Sal remain underutilized in public historical discourse and policy frameworks. Public memory initiatives tend to be localized, dependent on grassroots mobilization, and frequently unsupported by federal resources. By contrast, in countries like the United States, museums such as the IAAM and the African Burial Ground in New York emerged from sustained political and community activism. These institutions actively contribute to public education, identity formation, and social justice by emphasizing slavery's systemic legacy and its connections to contemporary racial struggles.

UNESCO's Routes of Enslaved Peoples project has attempted to create a global network of remembrance by identifying and promoting sites linked to the slave trade. While the initiative has produced educational resources and cultural programming, it suffers from inconsistent funding and limited integration in national heritage policies, especially in the Global South.

In sum, global approaches to slavery heritage vary in scope and depth. While sites in Europe and North America often benefit from institutional support, financial investment, and public engagement, heritage initiatives in Brazil and other Latin American countries still struggle against structural neglect, political ambivalence, and ideological resistance. Nevertheless, Valongo Wharf represents an important border in this global process. Its rediscovery and partial memorialization reflect both the promise and the challenge of integrating slavery heritage into broader narratives of national identity and global justice.

The global comparison highlights the importance of sustained investment, inclusive policymaking, and community engagement in the preservation of sites of memory. It also points to the need for Brazil to further develop comprehensive strategies that go beyond recognition, ensuring that places like Valongo Wharf can fulfill their potential as tools for historical awareness, justice, and cultural resilience.



This map shows some of the main slavery-related sites over the world (archaeological or not) that can be compared or have similarities with the Valongo Wharf. Some of them are highlighted and will be explore in the next pages as a way to understand how this type of heritage has been managed in different contexts.

Fig. 07 Map of the main slavery-related sites. **Source** Created by the author based on data from Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional (IPHAN)

1. ISLAND OF GORÉE, SENEGAL

One of the most emblematic examples is the Island of Gorée, an UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1978. Situated off the coast of Dakar, Senegal, holds immense historical and symbolic significance as a key site in the transatlantic slave trade. Established as an important commercial port, it operated as one of Africa's largest slave ports from the 15th to the 19th centuries. While initially occupied by Portuguese colonizers in 1444, its control was strongly contested by French, Dutch, and English powers throughout its history. It is estimated that approximately 756,000 Africans were forced through Gorée before being transported to the Americas. Unlike Valongo Wharf in Rio de Janeiro, which primarily served as a reception and disembarkation point, Gorée functioned as a major exit point where enslaved Africans awaited shipment across the Atlantic in "tumbeiros," never to return to their homeland. Various spaces and monuments on the island bear witness to the imprisonment of African people at slave trading posts, with the "Door of No Return" at the Maison des Esclaves serving as a powerful symbol of this tragic history. The island's prominence in the slave trade declined following its definitive prohibition by England in 1831 and France in 1848.

Today, Gorée is recognized as an UNESCO World Heritage site, having been one of the first in Africa to receive this designation and a pioneer on the list of "Sensitive Memory Sites". The Maison des Esclaves (Fig. 10), which had been abandoned, was reconstructed and transformed into a Memorial of Human Trafficking in 1962, and the island has since been incorporated into the UNESCO "Slave Route" project. It remains the most frequented tourist destination in Senegal, drawing descendants of enslaved people from across the globe who seek to connect with their ancestral past. However, this popularity brings challenges, as there are constant pressures on the local population and the aesthetic and social character of the neighborhood due to economic and real estate advances, necessitating protection measures for both its inhabitants and its material and natural assets.

The recognition as an UNESCO World Heritage Site came in 1978 and it was declared to have outstanding universal value. According to the Nomination file published by the World Heritage Centre:

> "The Island of Gorée testifies to an unprecedented human experience in the history of humanity. Indeed, for the universal conscience, this "memory island" is the symbol of the slave trade with its cortege of suffering, tears and death.
>
> The painful memories of the Atlantic slave trade are crystallized in this small island of 28 hectares lying 3.5 km off the coast from Dakar. Gorée owes its singular destiny to the extreme centrality of its geographical position between the North and the South, and to its excellent strategic position offering a safe haven for anchoring ships, hence the name "Good Rade". Thus, since the 15th century it has been prized by various European nations that have successively used it as a stopover or slave market. First terminus of the "homeoducs" who drained the slaves from the hinterland, Gorée was at the centre of the rivalry between European nations for control of the slave trade. Until the abolition of the trade in the French colonies, the Island was a warehouse consisting of over a dozen slave houses. Amongst the tangible elements that reflect Gorée's universal value are, notably, the Castle, a rocky plateau covered with fortifications which dominate the Island; the Relais de l'Espadon, former residence of the French governor; etc…"
>
> The Island of Gorée is now a pilgrimage destination for the African diaspora, an en-

Fig. 08 Aerial view of Island of Gorée, Senegal. Unknow author. **Source** Diaries of Magazine

Fig. 09 View of the coast. Island of Gorée, Senegal. Unknow author. **Source** Diaries of Magazine

Fig. 10 The Slave House (La Maison des Esclaves) at Island of Gorée.
Photo by Pall Stefansson © OUR PLACE The World Heritage Collection **Source** UNESCO

trance for contact between the West and Africa, and a space for exchange and dialogue between cultures through the confrontation of ideals of reconciliation and forgiveness."
(UNESCO 1978)

The site was recognized under the following criterion:

"Criterion (vi): The Island of Goree is an exceptional testimony to one of the greatest tragedies in the history of human societies: the slave trade. The various elements of this "memory island" – fortresses, buildings, streets, squares, etc. – recount, each in its own way, the history of Gorée which, from the 15th to the 19th century, was the largest slave-trading centre of the African coast.

Integrity
The insular nature of Gorée and an arsenal of legal texts contribute to the physical integrity of the site. The Atlantic Ocean provides a natural buffer zone of nearly 4 km.

Authenticity
Listed as a historic site by the colonial administration in 1944, with specific safeguarding measures, Gorée has recorded no major construction since then that might adversely affect the authenticity of the site, the major components of which have remained almost intact. Moreover, the rehabilitations and restorations have been carried out essentially in accordance with the principles of the Convention.

Protection and management requirements
The Island of Goree was designated a historic site in 1944, with safeguarding measures in 1951 (under the colonial era). It was subsequently inscribed on the national heritage list in 1975 (Order No. 012771 of 17 November 1975) and on the World Heritage List in 1978.

In 1979, a Safeguarding Committee was created by Order, comprising all the stakeholders, to monitor compliance with the Convention (conformity of the rehabilitation works, security of the property, etc.). An Order for the appointment of a site manager has been drafted and is currently in the process of aoption.

The replica of the "Gorée Memorial" on the Castle is an eloquent example of what should be avoided when preserving the integrity of the site and, in agreement with UNESCO, a modification of this work will be undertaken."
(UNESCO 1978)

2. GADSDEN'S WHARF, UNITED STATES

The United States, especially in the case of Charleston, South Carolina, has demonstrated an increasingly sophisticated engagement with slavery heritage. Gadsden's Wharf holds a profound and tragic significance in the history of the transatlantic slave trade. Built in 1767, it served as a primary point of entry for enslaved Africans into the United States (Fig. 11). The wharf notably operated as a disembarkation port between 1806 and 1807, a brief period when the slave trade was reopened after an earlier suspension in 1792. During this short window, anticipating an imminent prohibition, traders brought approximately 75,000 Africans to Charleston aboard 400 slave ships. The city of Charleston remained a center for the domestic slave trade until the beginning of the American Civil War. Overall, it's estimated that around 150,000 Africans were forcibly disembarked at Gadsden's Wharf between 1783 and 1808. The site is deeply associated with immense suffering, including a documented tragic event in 1807 by John Lambert, where over 700 individuals died in less than three months due to prolonged captivity on ships and in warehouses. The legacy of this site is so pervasive that it's believed almost 80% of all African Americans have ancestors who disembarked there (Suiama 2025).

Today, Gadsden's Wharf is recognized as a memory site of the transatlantic slave trade and is integrated into the UNESCO "Routes of Enslaved Peoples" project (Vassallo & Cicalo 2015). Archaeological work conducted in 2014 and 2019 unearthed evidence of the original wharf line, a 1795 warehouse, and various artifacts. However, the original structure of Gadsden's Wharf does not resemble Valongo Wharf's irregular stone paving, and its artifact collection contains much fewer items and less diversity compared to Valongo's.

In 2023, the International African American Museum (IAAM) was inaugurated on this historically sacred site (Fig. 12). The building was designed by Henry N. Cobb of Pei Cobb Freed & Partners and the landscape (Fig 13) was developed by Walter Hood of Hood Design Studio, a prominent African American landscape architect known for his work on culturally significant public spaces and memorial landscapes. Cobb designed the building to appear as though it is "floating" above the historic site of Gadsden's Wharf. The museum is elevated on pillars, intentionally leaving the ground below open and accessible. One of the most evocative features of the landscape is the "Tide Tribute", a shallow, reflective pool that aligns with the rhythms of the tidal waters, symbolizing the transatlantic journey and the lives lost and displaced through slavery (Fig. 14 and 15). The tribute invites reflection and remembrance, serving as both a physical and spiritual threshold. The memorial garden also incorporates African plant species and vegetation with symbolic meaning, connecting the site to ancestral geographies. Importantly, a ground-level marking traces the exact line of the original wharf, offering visitors a tangible reference to the past and anchoring the museum in the very soil where thousands of enslaved Africans first arrived.

The museum emphasizes themes of resistance, diaspora, and racial justice, addressing systemic inequalities that persist today. It includes physical and digital exhibits that highlight the Atlantic slave trade, while drawing attention to the structural racism that continues to shape African American lives. Importantly, the IAAM was the result of more than two decades of community advocacy and raised over $125 million in public and private funds, a level of investment and political mobilization rarely seen in Latin American contexts. ICOMOS considered Gadsden's Wharf as the most relevant comparator for Valongo Wharf in its evaluation process, given that Valongo is the only known stone wharf through which enslaved people stepped onto the continent (ICOMOS 2017, Suiama 2025).

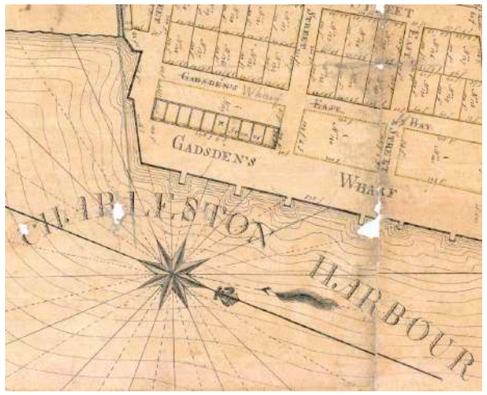


Fig. 11 Plan advertising the subdivision of Gadsden's wharf and related property, 1795 **Source** Charleston County Register

Fig. 12 View of the International African American Museum **Source** Mike Habat

Fig. 13 Ground-floor plan of the museum, showing the ancestor memorial garden and tide tribute **Source** Pei Cobb Freed & Partners

Fig. 14 and 15 Tide Tribute and landscaping design **Source** Sahar Coston Hardy

3. AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND, UNITED STATES

The African Burial Ground, located in Manhattan, New York City, USA, holds profound historical and symbolic significance as the largest colonial-period burial ground of enslaved and free Africans in the United States. From 1626 through the late 1700s, it served as a municipal cemetery where an estimated 15,000 enslaved and free Africans were buried. The cemetery, initially known as “Negros Buriel Ground” on a 1755 map, was located north of the city limits near a ravine, as a 1697 Dutch law had banned African burials in New York City’s public cemetery (Fig. 16). Africans gathered here to bury their loved ones, preserving aspects of their cultures and resisting dehumanization. Historical accounts suggest that African New Yorkers themselves controlled their burial ceremonies, and while some Christian practices may have been used, they were likely interpreted through African beliefs (Fig. 17).

Discovered in 1991 during the construction of a federal building, excavations revealed the remains of an estimated 15,000 individuals buried there during the 17th and 18th centuries. Over 400 enslaved Africans (specifically 435 graves) were exhumed, with 419 individuals re-interred in 2003. This project was widely recognized as the “most important urban archaeological project of the United States”. Initially, the General Services Administration (GSA) had not made adequate plans for the respectful and scientific treatment of the site and human remains. The concerns of the descendant African American community were excluded and ignored at first, sparking immediate and widespread controversy. Protests, including a 24-hour vigil in 1992, erupted over the disturbance of sacred ground and the perceived disrespect shown to the ancestral remains. Critically, the African American community in New York demanded and successfully obtained a central role in decision-making regarding the excavations and preservation of the site. This mobilization led to the site’s designation as a National Historic Landmark in April 1993 and is considered a powerful example of African-American empowerment in heritage management. Unlike conventional cemeteries, this burial ground provided a space where enslaved and free Africans could perform their own funerary rites and cultivate unique cultural practices, as evidenced by the discovery of artifacts like Sankofa symbols on some coffins. (Perry, Howson, and Blakey 2009)

Since 2007 the African Burial Ground has been transformed into a memorial, open to the public, featuring a triangular “Ancestral Chamber” symbolizing the transatlantic crossing (Fig. 18). It serves as a sacred place for African Americans, bringing to light a history that some wished to bury. While its archaeological collection is noted to have fewer items and less diversity compared to Valongo Wharf in Brazil, its significance lies in its direct connection to immense human suffering and the successful efforts for its memorialization. The site’s development contrasts with some initial challenges faced by the Pretos Novos Cemetery in Brazil, where the US municipality actively supported preservation and recognized the importance of African heritage through public engagement. The establishment of this site, alongside the later opening of the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington (2016), exemplifies the increasing recognition of African-descendant heritage in the United States. Researchers anticipate that the site’s material will provide enough study material for 100 years, underscoring its enduring importance.

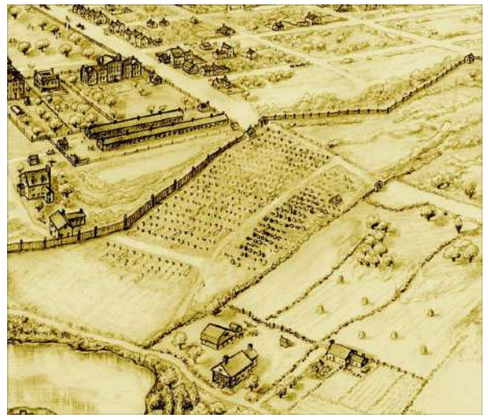


Fig. 16 A late 1700s map illustrates the full, six-acre extent of the Negroes Burying Ground near the location of present-day Chambers Street **Source** New York Preservation Archival Project

Fig. 17 Illustration of a burial ceremony among slaves **Source** Maryland State Archives

Fig. 18 African Burial Ground National Monument **Source** AARIS Design Architects

2.4 SLAVERY IN BRAZIL

Brazil holds the tragic distinction of having received the largest number of enslaved Africans in the Americas. Between the 16th and 19th centuries, it is estimated that more than 4 million people were forcibly brought from the African continent to Brazil, amounting to roughly one-third of all Africans trafficked in the world (Schwarcz 2018). This massive influx played an important role in shaping Brazil's demographic, cultural, and economic landscape. From its earliest colonial stages, Brazil's development was deeply tied to the institution of slavery, which provided the essential labor force for extractive and agricultural economies, including sugarcane, mining, cotton, and, most importantly, coffee.

The Portuguese Empire built a vast commercial network linking its Atlantic colonies, enabling a slave-based economy that lasted longer than in any other country in the Americas. Slavery was embedded in the country's legal, religious, and social systems. According to Mary Karasch (1987), enslaved Africans were integral not only to agricultural labor but also to the formation of Brazil's urban economies, especially in cities like Rio de Janeiro, where they played essential roles in construction, commerce, domestic service, and artisanal work. Slavery in Brazil functioned as both an economic and social system that permeated all levels of life. In urban areas, especially Rio, enslaved people moved through the streets as escravos de ganho, individuals who earned money by selling goods or providing services (Schwarcz 2018).

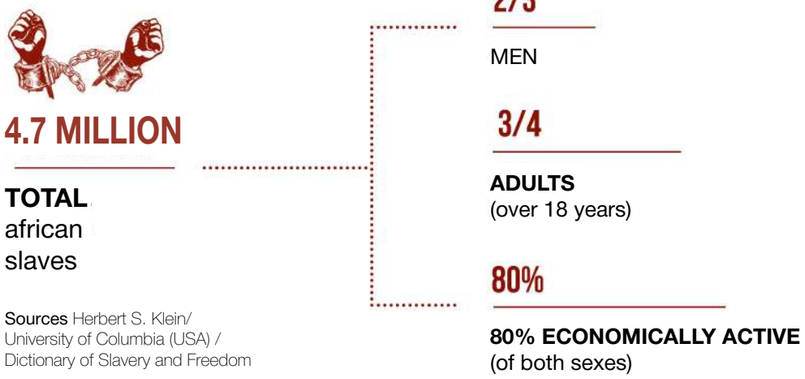
The origins of enslaved Africans brought to Brazil were diverse. A large percentage came from Central Africa, especially the regions of Angola and the Congo, while others were taken from the Bight of Benin, the Gold Coast, and parts of East Africa (Schwarcz 2018). This diversity of African groupings was portrayed extensively by travelling artists, such as the picture in figure 19 by Johann Moritz Rugendas, painted in Rio de Janeiro c. 1822-1825. It shows the physical features of people identified by their region of origin in Africa, like "Cabinda", "Quiloa", "Rebola" and "Mina", which were so far from each other that it is fair to assume they would have had hardly any contact or dealings back in Africa. The people who were identified as Cabinda and Rebolo would have come from the north of Angola, while the Quiloa were from East Africa, between the south of Tanzania and the north of Mozambique, and the Mina people were from the Gulf of Guinea in West Africa.

After arrival, enslaved Africans were integrated into Brazil's labor systems in both rural and urban contexts. In cities like Rio de Janeiro, their visibility was evident. As Flávio dos Santos Gomes (2018) notes, enslaved individuals in the capital were omnipresent, in the streets, the markets, the docks, and the households of the elite. This created what he calls a "cidade negra" or Black city, in which the presence of Africa and its descendants was both culturally vibrant and systemically oppressed (Karasch 1987).

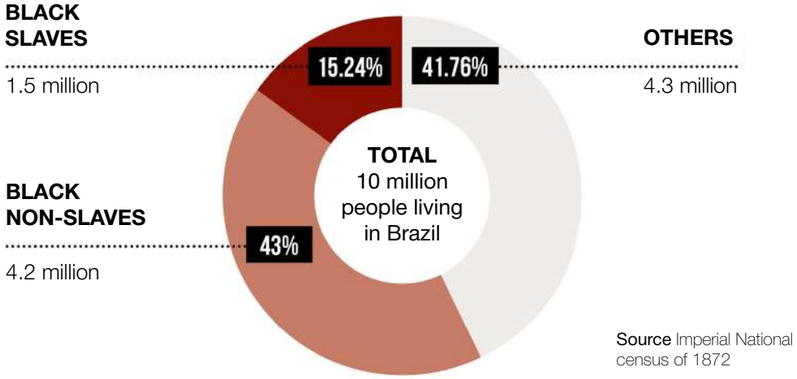
Despite this visibility, there was a systematic effort to suppress the memory of slavery. When the transatlantic trade was officially banned in 1831, though in practice it continued clandestinely for decades, institutions began to obscure or eliminate material traces of the trade. As Lilia Schwarcz and Flávio Gomes (2018) explain, these deliberate acts of silencing illustrate how Brazil has historically avoided confronting its past, often erasing uncomfortable histories to uphold a narrative of modernization and whiteness.

The architecture of slavery in Brazil thus encompassed more than rural plantations and its senzalas (slave quarters), it extended into the very structure of cities. The layout of urban centers, the labor markets, and the built environment were shaped by enslaved Africans and

their descendants. Rio de Janeiro, in particular, was deeply dependent on this labor force, and its urban fabric was constructed, maintained, and sustained through slavery. As Gomes (2015) notes, the city was also a space of resistance, where enslaved people sought autonomy, formed kinship networks, escaped oppression, and left behind a cultural legacy that continues to define the region.



BRAZILIAN POPULATION IN 1872



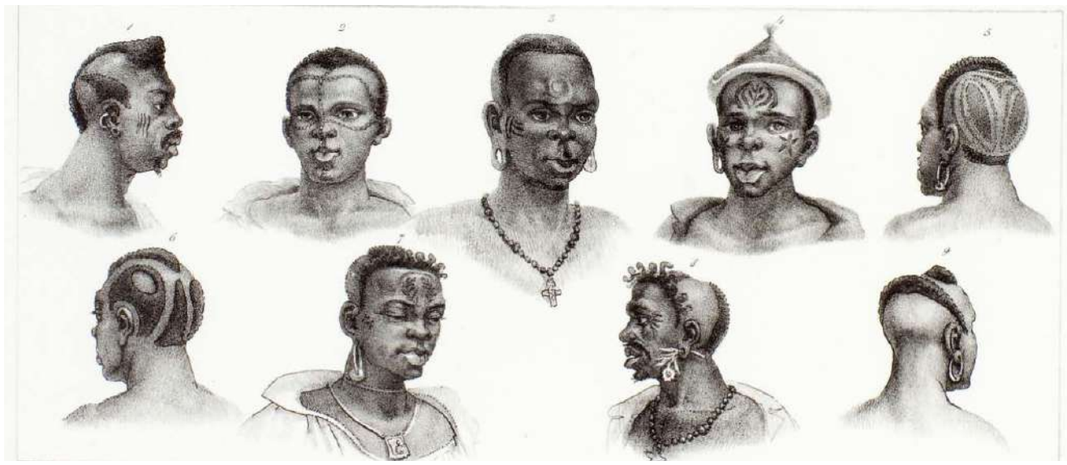
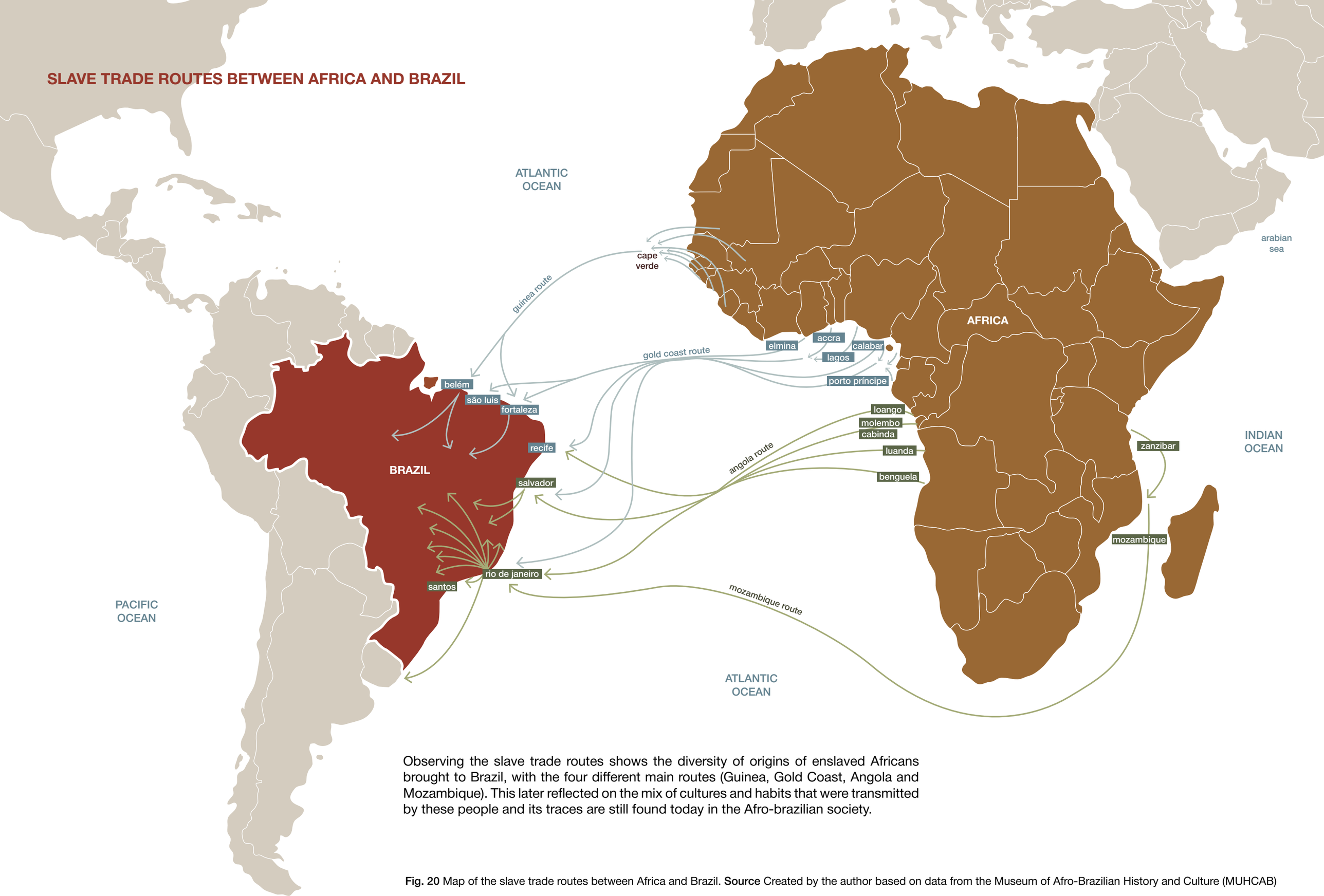


Fig. 19 "Différentes nations nègres" by Jean-Baptiste Debret, 1835. **Source** Brasiliana Iconográfica

SLAVE TRADE ROUTES BETWEEN AFRICA AND BRAZIL



Observing the slave trade routes shows the diversity of origins of enslaved Africans brought to Brazil, with the four different main routes (Guinea, Gold Coast, Angola and Mozambique). This later reflected on the mix of cultures and habits that were transmitted by these people and its traces are still found today in the Afro-brazilian society.

Fig. 20 Map of the slave trade routes between Africa and Brazil. **Source** Created by the author based on data from the Museum of Afro-Brazilian History and Culture (MUHCAB)

TIMELINE SLAVE TRADE IN BRAZIL

All the sources for the figures featured in this timeline are listed in Appendix A


Fig. 21

Portuguese arrival in Brazil
Start of colonization

First large-scale importation of enslaved Africans to Brazil
Primarily for sugarcane plantations in Bahia and Pernambuco


Fig. 26


Fig. 22

Murder of Zumbi dos Palmares
Main leader of the resistance against slavery

Formation of quilombos
Cultural and territorial resistance

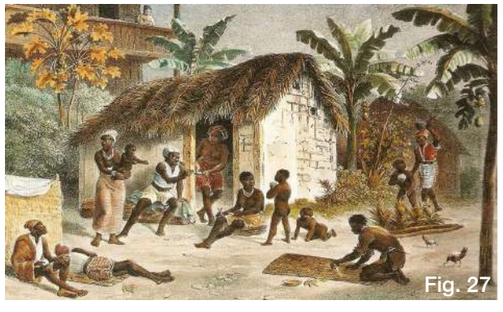


Fig. 27

Slave rebellions
Occur in several regions of Bahia State


Fig. 23


Fig. 28

Portuguese royal court relocates to Rio
City grows, slave imports increase

Anglo-Portuguese treaty
Nominally bans slave trade north of Equator


TRATADO
DE
AMIZADE, E ALLIANCA
ENTRE
OS MUITO ALTOS,
E
MUITO PODEROSOS SENHORES
O PRINCIPE REGENTE
DE PORTUGAL,
E ELREY DO REINO UNIDO
DA GRANDE BRETANHA E IRLANDA
ASSINADO NO RIO DE JANEIRO
PELOS PLENIPOTENCIARIOS
DE HUMA E OUTRA CORTE
EM 19 DE FEVEREIRO DE 1810
E RATIFICADO POR AMBAS
RIO DE JANEIRO
NA IMPRESSÃO REGIA
1810.
Fig. 24

First official ban on transatlantic slave trade
Largelly ignored, illegal trafficking continues

Peak period of African slave imports to Brazil
Rio de Janeiro receives tens of thousands annually

The Law of Free Birth
Children of enslaved women are born free.


Fig. 25

Eusébio de Queirós Law
Effectively ends slave imports into Brazil


Fig. 29

1500 1550 1695 1700 1808 1810 1815 - 1831 1850 1871

TIMELINE SLAVE TRADE IN BRAZIL

All the sources for the figures featured in this timeline are listed in Appendix A

1888

The Golden Law
Formal abolition of slavery in Brazil.


Fig. 32

1934

Voting rights granted to literate citizens
Excludes most Afro-Brazilians

1940

Racial democracy
Arthur Ramos popularizes the concept

1951

The Sexagenarians Law
Frees enslaved people over 60 (rarely applied)

1988

Fig. 30

Afonso Arinos Law
First anti-discrimination law (symbolic impact)


Fig. 33

New Constitution
Recognizes Afro-Brazilian culture as part of national heritage

1996

Public acknoledgement of racism
President Fernando Henrique Cardoso

2003

Law 10.639
Mandates Afro-Brazilian history and culture in school curricula

2010

Fig. 31

Statute of Racial Equality
Promoted affirmative action policies such as racial quotas and strengthened historical reparations and attention to vulnerable groups

2012

Quota Law passed
Implements affirmative action in public universities

Fig. 34

2.5 THE ROAD TO ABOLITION

The abolition of slavery in Brazil was the result of a long and complex process that combined legal reforms, international pressure, elite negotiation, and, most decisively, resistance from enslaved people themselves. Although official narratives often highlight the role of political elites in the passing of abolitionist laws, a growing number of studies emphasizes the central role of enslaved and free Afro-Brazilians in destabilizing and undermining the institution of slavery (Cicalo 2018).

Throughout the colonial and imperial periods, acts of resistance were frequent and multifaceted. Individual and collective rebellions, everyday forms of resistance, and the establishment of fugitive communities (quilombos) challenged the system from within. Enslaved people resisted through escape, work slowdowns, sabotage, arson, theft, the maintenance of cultural practices, and open revolt. As João José Reis and Flávio dos Santos Gomes have shown, Brazil witnessed several major slave uprisings, especially in Bahia, where urban and rural revolts posed real threats to the colonial order.

One of the most notable examples was the Malê Revolt of 1835 in Salvador, led by Muslim enslaved Africans, which combined religious identity and anti-colonial sentiment. Although the revolt was suppressed, it revealed the strategic capacity of enslaved people to organize across ethnic and linguistic lines and to formulate political objectives, including freedom and repatriation (Cicalo 2018). Other notable revolts occurred in Maranhão, Alagoas, and Minas Gerais, illustrating the geographic spread and frequency of resistance efforts across different regions.

Beyond revolts, quilombos, autonomous communities of fugitive enslaved people, represented enduring structures of Black resistance. The Quilombo dos Palmares, active in the 17th century, was one of the largest and most famous, housing thousands of formerly enslaved people and operating as an independent polity for nearly a century. Quilombos continued to exist into the 19th century, often forming in the hinterlands near plantations and cities, where they negotiated, fought, or traded with surrounding populations (Schwarcz 2018).

During the 19th century, especially in the final decades of the Empire, enslaved and freed Black people also participated in abolitionist organizing in urban centers. In Recife, Rio de Janeiro, and São Paulo, Afro-Brazilian associations, literary societies, Black newspapers, and mutual aid groups supported emancipation through fundraisers for manumission, public campaigns, and even legal challenges to enslavement. These actions intersected with those of liberal students, religious figures, and members of the press, who increasingly denounced the contradictions between slavery and the image of Brazil as a modern imperial nation (Cicalo 2018).

The official legal path to abolition was paved through a series of gradualist measures. The Law of 1831 outlawed the transatlantic slave trade, though it was never enforced. The Eusébio de Queirós Law of 1850 reiterated the ban with more practical effect. In 1871, the Law of the Free Womb (Lei do Ventre Livre) granted freedom to children born of enslaved mothers, while the Sexagenarian Law (Lei dos Sexagenários, 1885) offered freedom to those over 60, though few reached this age due to the harsh conditions of enslavement (Schwarcz 2018).

Despite these reforms, it was the widespread resistance of the enslaved population, coupled with growing flight from plantations, that made slavery increasingly unsustainable. By the 1880s, entire communities were becoming ungovernable. Plantation owners, facing rising costs and labor shortages, began turning to European immigrant labor, setting the stage for a shift in labor regimes.

On May 13, 1888, Princess Isabel signed the Lei Áurea, which officially ended slavery in Brazil (Fig. 35). However, the law contained no provisions for land redistribution, compensation, or integration of formerly enslaved people into society. As historians like Lilia Schwarcz (2018) have argued, the act of abolition was framed as a gift from the monarchy, erasing the decades of resistance that had forced the issue onto the national agenda.

Abolition marked the end of legal slavery, but not the end of racial inequality or structural exclusion. The struggles of Afro-Brazilians continued into the post-abolition period, as they sought to claim space, dignity, and memory in a society that continued to marginalize their past and contributions.

Fig. 35 Poster made in 1888 by a textile factory, illustrating the formal abolition of slavery in Brazil
Source Arquivo Nacional

2.6 POST-ABOLITION IMPACTS

Although Brazil officially abolished slavery in 1888, its legacy continues to shape the country's social, economic, and spatial structures. The end of slavery did not bring about reparations, land redistribution, or integration mechanisms for the newly freed population. Instead, Afro-Brazilians were systematically excluded from education, property ownership, and political representation, relegated to precarious labor and segregated spaces. As a result, Brazil's cities and social structures carry the marks of slavery in enduring racial inequality, spatial marginalization, and historical silencing (Lima 2020).

In the immediate post-abolition period, freed individuals were abandoned to their own fate. As noted by historians like Boxer and Schwartz (2018), labor had been so tightly associated with Blackness and slavery that even after abolition, manual work continued to be seen as undignified and inherently racialized (Lima 2020). Afro-Brazilians, lacking access to land or compensation, remained trapped in cycles of poverty and informal labor, often experiencing new forms of coercion and exploitation. These systemic exclusions, far from being corrected over time, became embedded in Brazilian urban development and labor markets.

Urban segregation deepened in the 20th century. Afro-descendant populations, disproportionately poor, were increasingly pushed to the city peripheries or favelas, areas marked by a lack of infrastructure, public services, and recognition. These zones of exclusion were not merely economic outcomes, they were the spatial expression of a racialized social order rooted in Brazil's slave past. As D'Adesky documented, even in cities with large Afro-descendant populations, such as Rio de Janeiro and Salvador, the presence of Black people in public monuments and official memory remained minimal.

This absence of representation in urban heritage is directly linked to the construction of a powerful national myth: the myth of racial democracy. Developed in the early 20th century and crystallized in the 1930s under Getúlio Vargas, this ideology framed Brazil as a racially harmonious nation, made strong by its mixture of European, Indigenous, and African ancestries. The sociologist Gilberto Freyre played a central role in shaping this view, presenting miscegenation not as a source of tension but as the basis of Brazil's cultural and biological uniqueness (Lima 2020).

While this narrative promoted national unity, it also functioned to erase structural racism, suppress race-based claims for justice, and silence the memory of slavery. As scholars such as Florestan Fernandes and Hanchard have shown, the racial democracy ideology concealed the persistence of discrimination, inequality, and the lack of opportunities for Afro-Brazilians well into the 20th and 21st centuries.

In reality, Brazilian society remained deeply unequal along racial lines. Afro-Brazilians continue to earn lower wages, face disproportionate levels of police violence, have less access to education and healthcare, and remain underrepresented in elite professions and government. These conditions are the product of a system that not only failed to address the injustices of slavery but actively denied their legacy. The myth of racial democracy has operated as a mask, "a fiction", designed to preserve national pride at the expense of historical truth (Lima 2020).

Despite the dominant narrative, resistance never ceased. From the 1970s onward, Black movements in Brazil increasingly contested the ideology of racial harmony and demanded recognition, rights, and reparations. The formation of the Movimento Negro Unificado in 1978

marked a turning point, as activists began to publicly denounce racism and recover historical figures like Zumbi dos Palmares as symbols of Afro-Brazilian resistance (Cicalo 2018). The 1988 Constitution, promulgated exactly one hundred years after abolition, was influenced by these movements and included provisions for the protection of Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous cultures, and land rights for quilombo communities (Lima 2020).

In the 2000s, these efforts gained further traction with the introduction of affirmative action policies, the establishment of federal bodies like SEPPIR (Special Secretariat for Policies of Racial Equality Promotion), and laws mandating the teaching of Afro-Brazilian history and culture in public schools (Law 10.639/2003). These measures aimed to counteract centuries of exclusion and promote historical reparation, cultural recognition, and structural change (Lima 2020).

However, these initiatives have been met with resistance. Critics argue that racial quotas and recognition policies threaten Brazil's supposed racial harmony and import divisive models from other contexts, such as the United States (Lima 2020). Others point to the enduring strength of the racial democracy narrative, which continues to inform public discourse and limit the scope of transformative change. Even progressive policies are often embedded in a double discourse, one that embraces difference but simultaneously reinforces the ideal of mixture and national unity (Cicalo 2018)

The case of Valongo Wharf illustrates these tensions. It is one of the first sites in Rio de Janeiro to publicly commemorate the memory of slavery. Yet, as scholars like Cicalo note, its integration into the Circuit of African Heritage reveals the ambivalence of Brazil's recognition discourse. While the site is framed as a step toward inclusion, its official narrative often avoids direct confrontation with the violence of slavery and its modern consequences, instead embedding it within a broader story of national diversity and cultural richness (Suiama 2025)

Therefore, the post-abolition reality in Brazil is marked by a paradox: a growing discourse of ethno-racial recognition coexists with deep-rooted inequalities and symbolic erasure. Urban space remains largely alien to Black subjectivities; historical narratives continue to downplay the role of slavery and resistance; and the official embrace of mixture often serves to mute the specificity of Black suffering and resilience.

Fig. 36 Map of the points of arrival of the slave trade in Brazil. **Source** Created by the author based on data from the Inventory of Sites of Memory of the Atlantic Slave Trade and the History of Enslaved Africans in Brazil

2.7 THE HERITAGE OF SLAVERY IN BRAZIL

Despite being the country that received the largest number of enslaved Africans in the Americas, Brazil has only recently begun to recognize and preserve sites linked to slavery. For much of the twentieth century, national heritage policies reflected Eurocentric priorities, preserving colonial mansions, baroque churches, and governmental buildings, while omitting the spaces inhabited, built, or marked by enslaved populations. This exclusion was reinforced by the dominant ideology of racial democracy, which celebrated Brazil's racial mixture while systematically concealing the violence and enduring legacies of enslavement (Skidmore 1993; Schwarcz 1998). As a result, the heritage of slavery, its material remains and symbolic significance, was long neglected, both institutionally and culturally.

The first substantial step toward institutional recognition came with the democratic transition in the 1980s. The 1988 Federal Constitution, enacted exactly one hundred years after abolition, formally acknowledged the duty of the State to protect Afro-Brazilian cultures and granted territorial rights to the descendants of maroon communities (quilombos) (Arruti 2006; O'Dwyer 2002). These provisions laid the legal foundation for the later recognition of quilombola lands and the preservation of Black heritage sites. However, implementation was slow and uneven, and until the 1990s, official heritage narratives continued to prioritize symbols of whiteness and colonial power. During this period, public monuments in cities like Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo overwhelmingly depicted European figures or abstract ideals, while the presence of enslaved Africans and their descendants remained largely invisible in the symbolic landscape (Gomes 2005).

Academic interest in Afro-Brazilian archaeological heritage began to grow in the 1990s, with pioneering studies of quilombo sites such as Quilombo do Ambrósio in Minas Gerais and Quilombo dos Palmares in Alagoas (Funari 2007; Guimarães & Moura 2005). Excavations of former plantations, including the senzalas of the Fazenda São Fernando in Vassouras and the Fazenda São Joaquim in Pirenópolis, explored material traces of slavery and cultural resistance. These studies reflected a shift from earlier interpretations that emphasized cultural mixture toward an effort to understand enslaved life through the lens of resistance, inequality, and African agency. Nevertheless, this field remained largely dominated by white scholars, and its impact on public heritage policies was limited (Cicalo 2012).

A critical moment in the struggle for recognition occurred in 1996, when the Cemetery of Pretos Novos was accidentally discovered during home renovations in the Gamboa neighborhood of Rio de Janeiro. The site, a burial ground for Africans who died shortly after arriving at the Valongo Wharf, revealed the harsh conditions endured by those forcibly brought to Brazil. Despite its historical importance, the discovery received little institutional support at the time. For years, the site remained neglected, underfunded, and poorly integrated into public historical consciousness. It was civil society, rather than heritage authorities, that led efforts to transform the site into a memorial, highlighting the systemic barriers to state-led preservation of dissonant heritage (Lima, 2021).

The rediscovery of the Valongo Wharf in 2011 marked another milestone. Located near the same port district as the Cemetery of Pretos Novos, the Valongo was the primary landing site for enslaved Africans in the nineteenth century. Its unearthing, during urban redevelopment for the 2016 Olympics, sparked national and international debates about Brazil's history and memory. In 2012, it was designated a national heritage site, and in 2017, it was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List, the first site in the Americas

Fig. 37 Map of the heritage of slavery in Brazil. **Source** Created by the author based on data from the Inventory of Sites of Memory of the Atlantic Slave Trade and the History of Enslaved Africans in Brazil

explicitly linked to the transatlantic slave trade (UNESCO 2017). Its preservation has raised difficult questions about how to memorialize traumatic histories in public space and how to connect these efforts with contemporary demands for racial justice (Nascimento 2021).

Brazil's few monuments dedicated to Black history and resistance also illustrate the tensions of representing slavery in the public realm. One of the earliest examples is the Monument to Zumbi dos Palmares, inaugurated in Rio de Janeiro in 1986 (Fig. 38). Zumbi, the leader of Palmares, became a symbol of resistance, and his commemoration coincided with the centenary of abolition and the re-emergence of Black political activism (Almeida, 2020). However, monuments that critically engage with slavery remain rare. The Monument to the Black Mother in São Paulo, unveiled in 1955, depicts an enslaved woman nursing a white child, a representation that reinforces maternal servitude and racial hierarchy under the guise of interracial harmony (Gonzalez 1988). Overall, public monuments have historically served to project a national identity rooted in whiteness and to silence the contributions and suffering of Black Brazilians.

In recent years, a growing number of heritage sites have been recognized for their connection to slavery and Black cultural memory. These include the Quilombo dos Palmares in Alagoas (Fig. 39), the Casa Branca do Engenho Velho in Salvador (Fig. 40) (one of the oldest Candomblé temples in Brazil), and the Museu do Negro in Ouro Preto, housed in a former church built by and for Black lay religious communities (Silva, 2020). Cultural centers such as the Casa das Pretas in Rio de Janeiro, formerly a shelter for freedwomen and now a site of Black feminist organizing, reflect grassroots efforts to reclaim and reinterpret historical spaces. Despite their diversity and symbolic power, these initiatives often face chronic underfunding, bureaucratic obstacles, and a lack of visibility in national narratives (Mendes, 2019).

In 2014, the Inventory of Places of Memory of the Atlantic Slave Trade and the History of Enslaved Africans in Brazil was produced with the intention of bringing together the 100 most important places for the slave trade. According to the authors, this work should be seen as a point of departure for new and future actions in the federal, state and municipal spheres in the fields of historical research and teaching, heritage education, publicizing and development of cultural tourism of Sites of Memory of the Slave Trade and the History of Enslaved Africans in Brazil. The work, coordinated by the Oral History and Image Laboratory (LABHOI) of the Federal University of Fluminense, in partnership with the International Scientific Committee of the UNESCO Project "Slave Route: Resistance, Heritage, and Freedom," was built based on the recommendations and contributions of various historians, anthropologists, and geographers from around the country. Priority was given to documentary evidence, written or oral, of the historical and cultural presence of Africans, with the aim of focusing on the actions and legacy of the new arrivals. The inventory covers places where it is possible to remember the arrival of Africans or identify the marks of their presence and intervention. It was divided into multiple categories, according to the types of heritage. This list was used as a base for the maps on the current and previous page (Fig. 36 and 37).

The challenges to preserving slavery-related heritage in Brazil are both structural and symbolic. Financial investment in Afro-Brazilian sites remains low, and preservation strategies often prioritize tourism or beautification over critical engagement with history. The heritage bureaucracy itself lacks racial diversity, and the absence of Black professionals in archaeology, conservation, and heritage planning limits community participation and narrative control (Cicalo 2012). In addition, the trauma associated with slavery has contributed to silences within Afro-Brazilian communities, where, for decades, the emphasis was placed on cultural pride and resistance (e.g., music, religion, quilombos), rather than on the direct memory of

suffering and violence. Scholars such as Michael Pollak (1989) and André Cicalo (2012) have discussed how trauma, more than lack of knowledge, may explain the historical reluctance to confront slavery through archaeological and heritage work.

Furthermore, the ideology of racial democracy continues to shape public discourse around heritage. State-led initiatives to recognize Afro-Brazilian sites often balance between acknowledging cultural difference and reaffirming Brazil's national identity as a racially mixed society. This ambivalence can weaken the critical and reparative potential of such sites, reframing them as symbols of national unity rather than as testimonies of injustice and exclusion. The case of Valongo Wharf, with its contested interpretations and delayed institutional support, exemplifies this tension (Lima 2021).

In response to long-standing demands by Black and traditional communities, IPHAN (National Institute of Historic and Artistic Heritage) has, in the past two decades, begun formally recognizing a broader spectrum of Afro-Brazilian heritage. One notable development was the listing of several terreiros (Afro-Brazilian religious temples) as intangible cultural heritage, including the Casa Branca in Salvador and the Terreiro Ilê Axé Iyá Nassô Oká (Gantois), both central to Candomblé practices (IPHAN 2020). Similarly, the process of recognizing quilombola communities and their territories, although administratively complex and still under threat, has advanced through joint efforts between IPHAN and other federal institutions, particularly after the 2003 National Plan for the Promotion of Racial Equality. In 2018, IPHAN published guidelines for safeguarding Afro-Brazilian heritage, explicitly acknowledging the need for participatory approaches and intersectional justice. While these measures represent significant institutional progress, their full implementation depends on continued advocacy, funding, and the dismantling of ingrained structural racism within state agencies.

Ultimately, the heritage of slavery in Brazil remains fragile and deeply dissonant. Its preservation demands not only legal and technical measures but also political will, community protagonism, and a shift in national memory culture. Recognizing these sites as integral to Brazilian history, and as spaces for reflection, justice, and reparation, is essential for transforming the landscape of memory and confronting the enduring legacies of slavery in the country.

Fig. 38 Monument dedicated to Zumbi dos Palmares. **Source** Prefeitura do Rio

Fig. 39 Quilombo dos Palmares. **Source** Bruno Reis

Fig. 40 Casa Branca do Engenho Velho. **Source** Terreiros do Brasil

03

The Valongo Wharf: History, silencing and legacy.

The third chapter focuses specifically on the history and transformations of the Valongo Wharf. It begins with the creation of the wharf in early nineteenth-century Rio de Janeiro, explaining its role as the main landing site for enslaved Africans and situating it within the dynamics of the city's port area. The analysis then moves to the successive layers of silencing that reshaped the site: its transformation into the Empress Wharf in 1843 to mark the arrival of Princess Teresa Cristina, and its burial during Mayor Pereira Passos's urban reforms in the early twentieth century. The rediscovery of the wharf in 2011, during the Porto Maravilha redevelopment works, is presented as a turning point that brought new archaeological findings and reframed public debates about memory and heritage. It continues with the recognition of Valongo as a World Heritage Site in 2017, outlining the nomination process, the involvement of Afro-Brazilian groups, and the site's international significance. The last section develops a historical analysis of the buildings Docas D. Pedro II, connected with the history of the wharf.

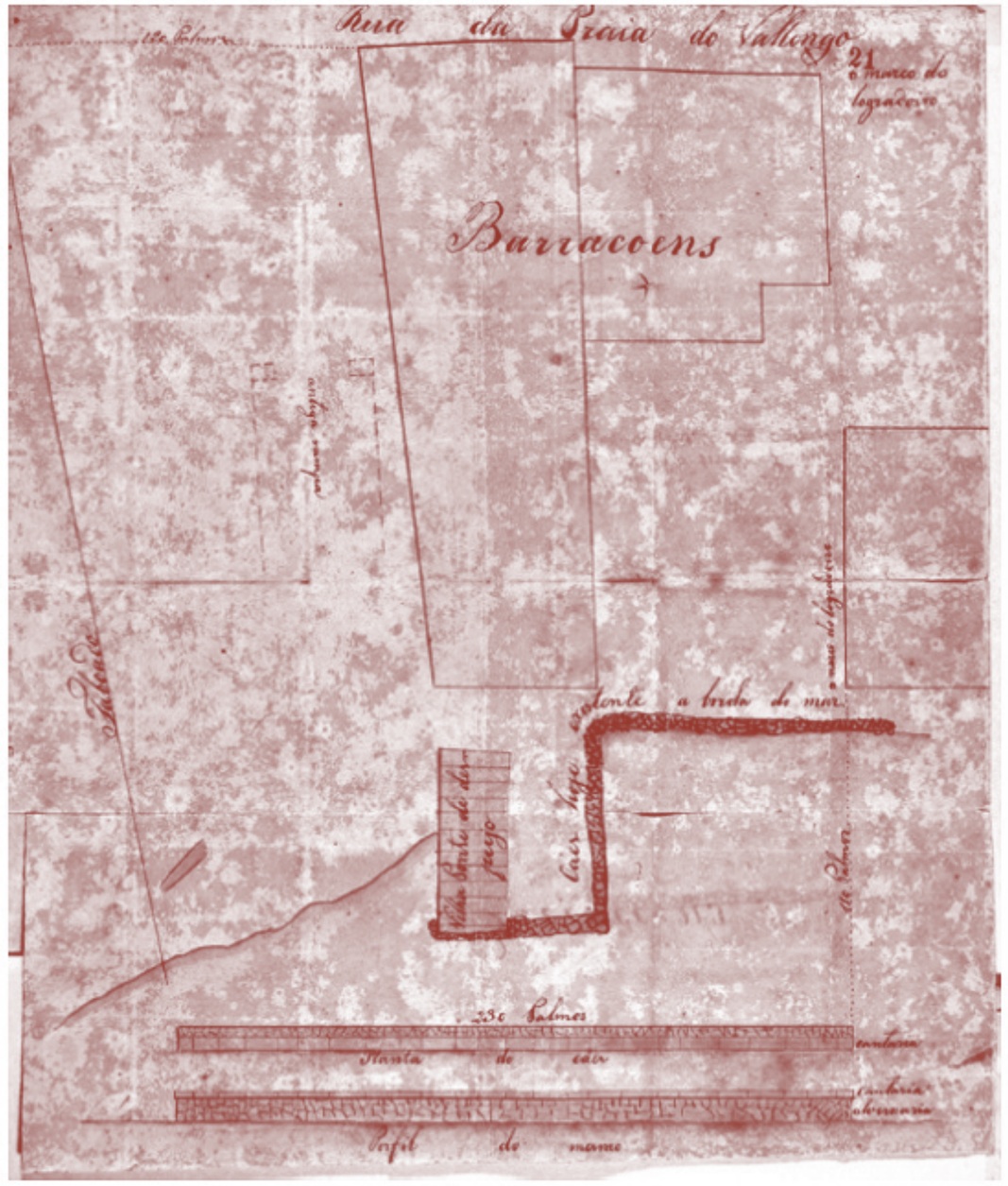
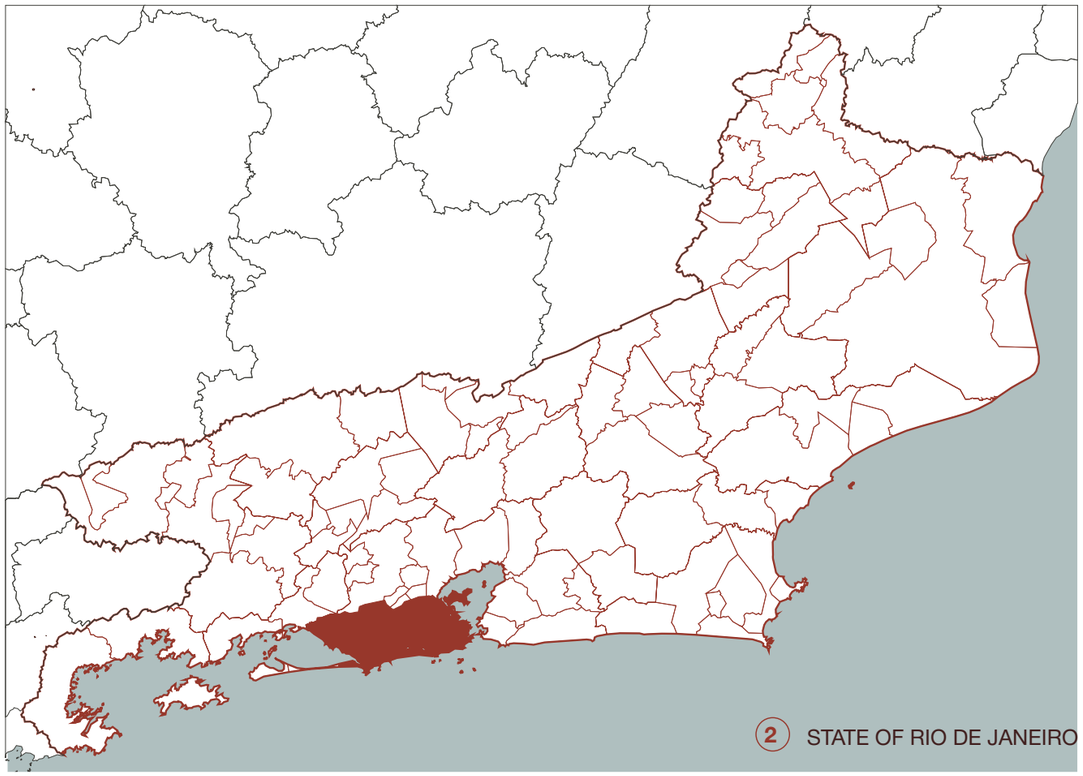


Fig. 41 Plan of Valongo Wharf, 1837. **Source** Arquivo Geral da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro

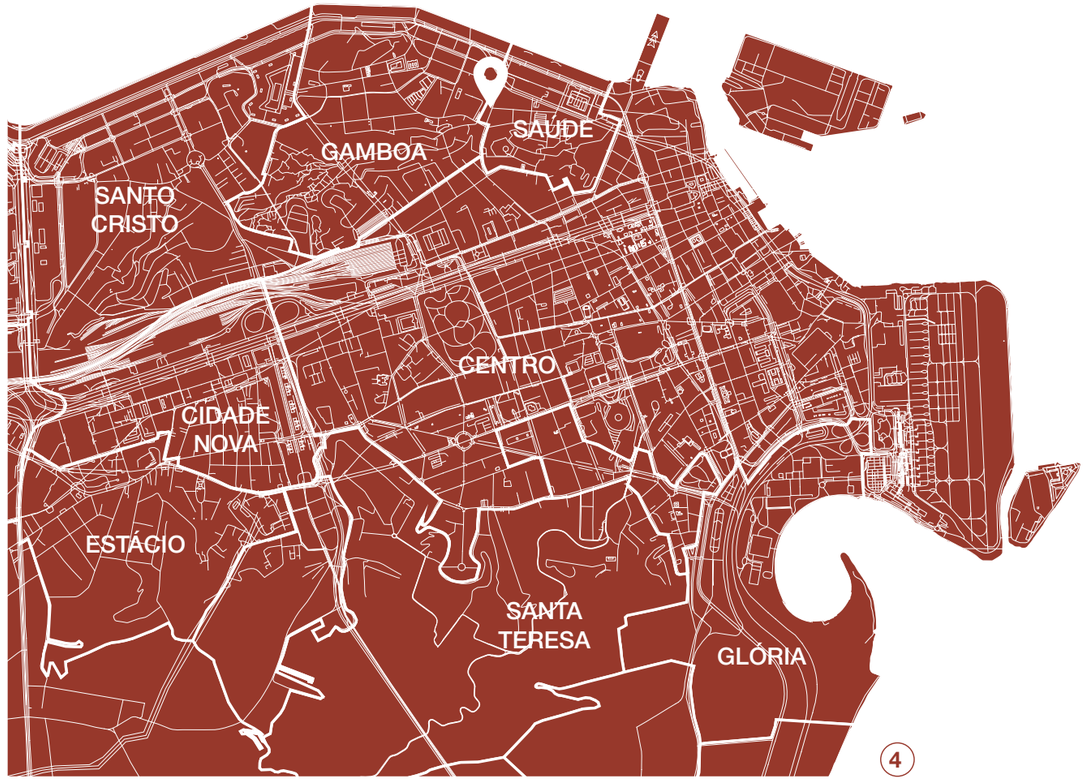
LOCATION

1 BRAZIL



2 STATE OF RIO DE JANEIRO

3 METROPOLITAN CITY OF RIO DE JANEIRO



4

Fig. 42 Location diagrams of the Valongo Wharf. **Source** Created by the author

3.1 RIO DE JANEIRO AND THE CREATION OF VALONGO WHARF

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the city of Rio de Janeiro became the principal hub for the transatlantic slave trade in the Americas. As the capital of the Portuguese colony from 1763 and later of the empire itself, Rio was strategically positioned to control and distribute the flow of enslaved Africans who arrived in Brazil in staggering numbers. By the early 1800s, Brazil had already received more enslaved Africans than any other country in the Americas, with over 4.8 million individuals brought from the African continent between 1560 and 1852 (Eltis & Richardson 2008). Of these, more than half disembarked in Rio de Janeiro, which became the most significant entrance of forced human traffic in the modern world (Florentino & Góes 1997).

This influx shaped the city's social and economic fabric. In 1821, enslaved individuals made up approximately 46% of Rio's urban population, nearly equal to the free population. Including rural areas, enslaved people constituted about 49% of the total population, underscoring the deep roots of slavery in every facet of Brazilian life (Karasch 2000). Enslaved Africans worked in a wide array of trades, from carrying goods and serving in households to laboring in workshops and construction, forming the labor backbone of both urban and rural Brazil. The near-total reliance on enslaved labor created an intense and anxious social landscape: foreign travelers often remarked on the city's paradoxical beauty and fear, fascinated by its natural splendor but scared by the visible presence of masses of Black bodies in the streets (Karasch 2000; Cavalcanti 2009).

Until the late eighteenth century, the arrival and sale of enslaved people took place in the heart of Rio's urban center, particularly along Rua Direita near the customs house. It was the busiest area of the city, home to the Mesa do Bem Comum (later the Junta do Comércio), the Governors' Palace, the most important public offices, and the warehouses and homes of the new slave traders (Fig.43). This prominent visibility led to discomfort among the city's elite, who feared disease, disorder, and contamination. Sanitary concerns, combined with anxieties about public space and the increasing frequency of imported captives, led to pressure from both civil and medical authorities to relocate the market (Pereira 2007; Andrade 2008).

A significant turning point came in 1774, when the city council, following a report from the Marquês do Lavradio, moved the official slave trade from Rua Direita to the peripheral region of Valongo. The decision was justified by health and public order concerns, but it also reflected a desire to physically and symbolically distance the slave trade from the seat of political power. From then on, once they had disembarked and completed the legal customs formalities, the new slaves were to be re-embarked and taken to Valongo, which was reached via the Valongo pier located in a cove northwest of the city, in the parish of Santa Rita. (Andrade 2008; Cavalcanti 2009).

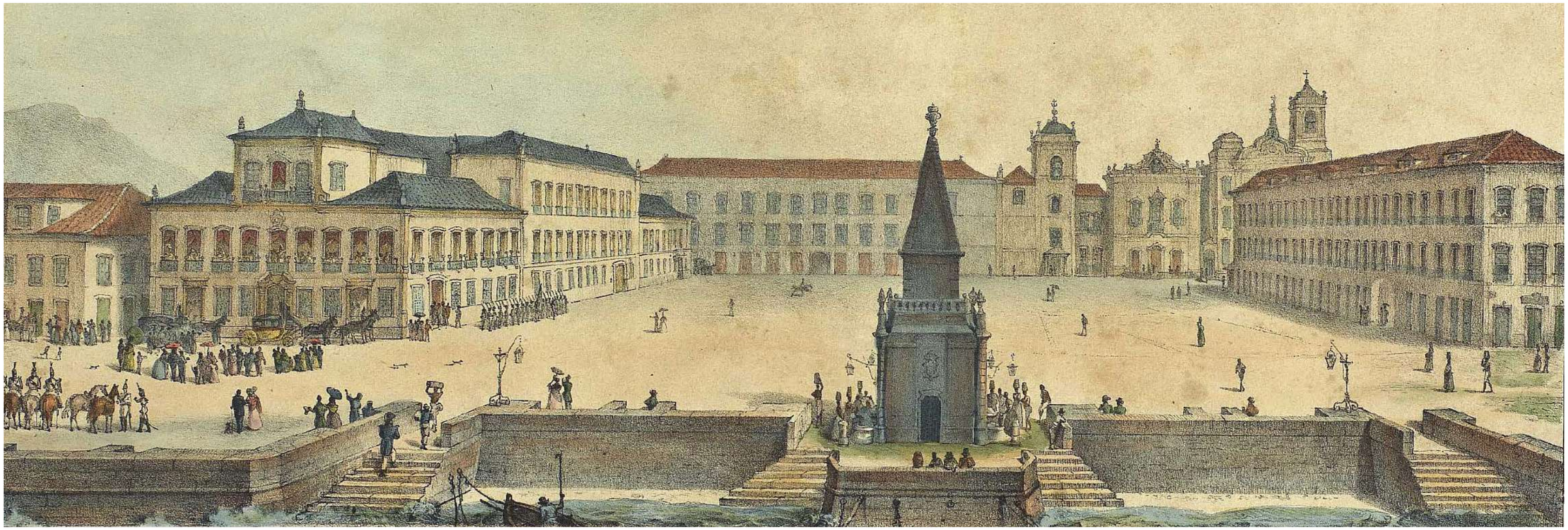


Fig. 43 "Vue de la place du palais" by Thierry Frères, 1839. **Source** Brasiliana Iconográfica

TIMELINE VALONGO WHARF

All the sources for the figures featured in this timeline are listed in Appendix A

1570

First arrival of enslaved Africans to Rio de Janeiro
Began in small numbers. Initially, used in domestic and agricultural labor

1700

Rio de Janeiro becomes the main port of entry for enslaved Africans in southeastern Brazil
Tens of thousands were marched inland from the city


Fig. 48

1774

Arrival of enslaved Africans to Valongo Beach
Becomes a main landing point

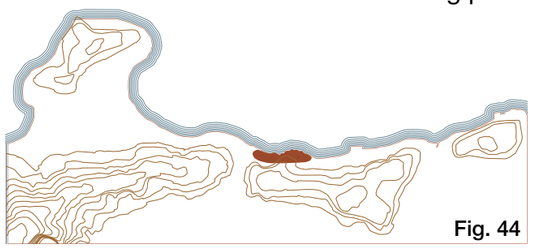


Fig. 44

1811

Slave market transferred to the Valongo region
Previously worked at Rua Direita

Wharf built with stone paving
Becomes formal infrastructure for the transatlantic slave trade

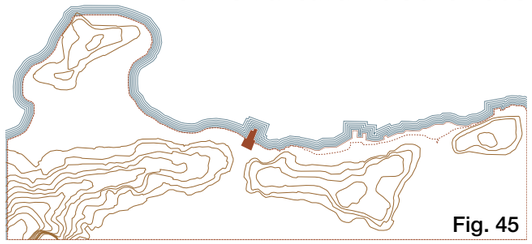


Fig. 45

1831

Abolition of legal slave trade
Wharf closed, traffic shifts to clandestine ports

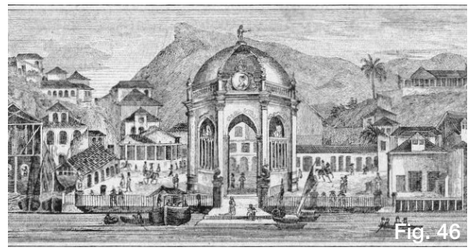


Fig. 46

1843

Empress Wharf
Wharf filled in, area restructured and renamed. Erasure of the slave past to welcome Princess Teresa Cristina

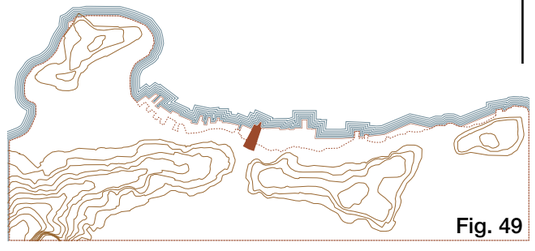


Fig. 49

1875

Docks D. Pedro II
Constructed adjacent to the Wharf. The public space becomes a square


Fig. 47

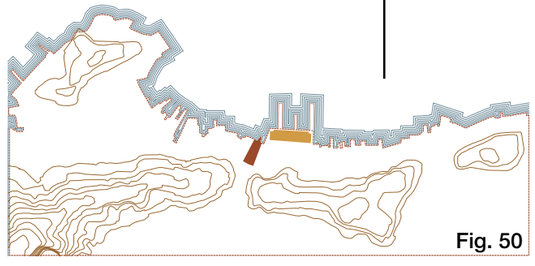


Fig. 50

TIMELINE VALONGO WHARF

All the sources for the figures featured in this timeline are listed in Appendix A

1911

Discovery of Pretos Novos Cemetery
Raises awareness of African heritage


Fig. 51

1911

Praça Jornal do Commercio
Wharf filled in again and renamed

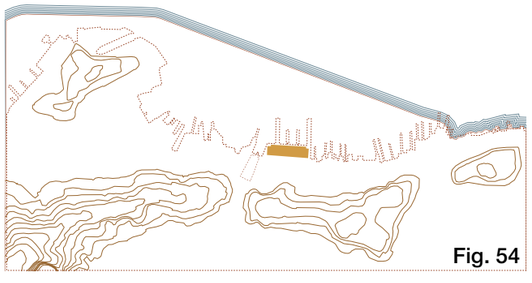


Fig. 54

1996

Historical and Archaeological Circuit of African Heritage
Created to promote the area

2011

Listed as Brazilian archaeological heritage
By IPHAN

2011

Excavations during Porto Maravilha
Reveal of Valongo Wharf remains

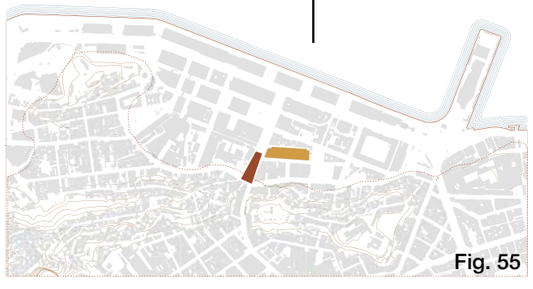


Fig. 55

2012

“Valongo Charter”
Recommendations for preservation


Fig. 52

2013

International Scientific Committe of the Slave Route
Recognizes Valongo’s importance

2013

Recognized as Cultural Heritage of the City of Rio de Janeiro
By IRPH

Fig. 56

2017

Attempt to create a Museum of Slavery
Debates between the Afro-Brazilian community and the government

2017

Renovation of the site
Installation of a new railing, memorial sculpture, signage and drainage works


Fig. 53

2017

Valongo Wharf inscribed as UNESCO World Heritage Site
Most significant physical evidence of an arrival point of African enslaved people to the Americas

Fig. 57

2023

The term “Valongo” derives from “Vale Longo” (long valley), referring to the geographic depression between the hills of Conceição and Livramento. By the late 1700s, the Valongo area was already home to infrastructure tied to slavery, including the Cemetery of the Pretos Novos (where Africans who died during the Middle Passage were buried), a lazaretto for quarantine, and scattered warehouses. In 1811, under the orders of Prince Regent Dom João VI, the Valongo Wharf itself was built to formalize and enhance the infrastructure for disembarking enslaved people (Pereira 2007; Tavares 2018). As stated by the General Intendant of Police, Paulo Fernandes Viana, the wharf was designed with ramps and stairs for efficient unloading, lit with lanterns, and intended to be an orderly gateway for thousands of Africans (National Archives, RJ, Box 746).

The relocation of the slave trade to Valongo also reshaped the city’s social geography. While the elite sought to sanitize the city center and maintain its image as a seat of political and administrative authority, the Valongo district became marked as a space of marginalization and violence, where the presence of enslaved Africans was highly visible. This spatial segregation reflected broader dynamics of urban planning in colonial and imperial Rio: spaces associated with European elites were progressively “cleansed” of what authorities considered disturbing elements, while Black life and suffering were pushed toward peripheral zones. Yet, paradoxically, Valongo was never an isolated space; rather, it was integrated into the city’s economy and daily life, with streets bustling with merchants, sailors, dockworkers, and free and enslaved Africans interacting in a dense network of exchanges (Soares 2007; Gomes 2005).

The construction of the wharf in this context can also be understood as part of Rio’s transformation into an imperial capital after the arrival of the Portuguese court in 1808. The sudden elevation of the city demanded new infrastructures to handle both commercial and political functions. In this framework, the Valongo Wharf served as a pragmatic yet politically charged intervention: it provided an organized, state-regulated site for one of the most profitable trades in the empire while keeping the spectacle of human suffering at a controlled distance from the center of power (Lima 2013; Karasch 2000).

The region quickly transformed into a vibrant, if brutal, commercial hub. By 1817, Valongo contained over thirty-four large commercial houses related to the slave trade, including depots, brokers’ offices, and warehouses (Pereira 2007). The market itself did not consist of a centralized plaza but a network of individually operated stores lining the streets (Fig. 61). Many of these establishments had an open ground floor for the display of captives, with the merchant and their family living on the upper floor (Fig. 60). Enslaved people, often arriving emaciated and ill after the Atlantic crossing, were subjected to rudimentary medical treatment and fattening procedures to increase their sale value (Karasch 2000).

Moreover, the broader Valongo Complex illustrates how slavery was not only an economic institution but also a deeply urban one. The area brought together multiple infrastructures: the Pretos Novos Cemetery for those who did not survive the voyage, rudimentary medical facilities for quarantine, warehouses for “fattening” captives before sale, and auction houses where merchants and buyers negotiated prices. This network reveals a harsh efficient system that connected the Atlantic crossing directly to Brazil’s internal slave economy. The district became a transitional space where Africans were transformed, through processes of violence and commodification, into units of labor to be dispersed across the plantations and cities of the empire. As such, Valongo was not just a port facility but an urban machine designed to absorb, process, and redistribute human lives on an industrial scale (Florentino & Góes 1997; Fennell 2011).

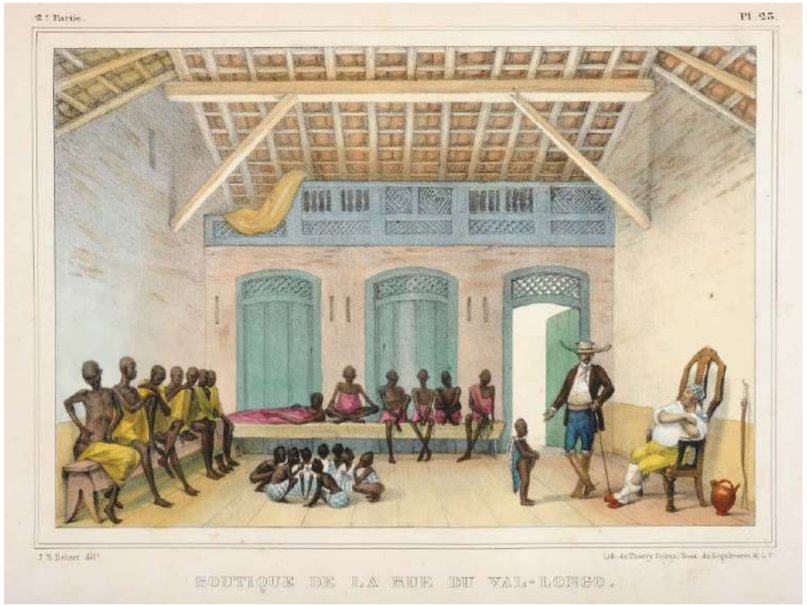


Fig. 58 Slave market at Valongo Street by Jean Baptiste Debret, c. 1816-1828. **Source** Brasiliana Iconográfica

Fig. 59 Valongo Street by Thomas Ender, 1817 **Source** Brasiliana Iconográfica

Through the records contained in the books of the Décima Urbana, it can be verified that most of the properties on Valongo Street were townhouses and commercial stores, mostly rented. The ground floor was adapted for the exhibition of slaves and kept without internal walls, like a hall, some larger and some smaller, depending on the size of the townhouse, which allowed for such disparate evaluations. The owner lived upstairs with his family, and the slaves for sale were kept downstairs. The hall extended to the backyard, where other slaves remained on the floor or on benches, often exposed to the sun and rain.

Descriptions by European visitors highlight the reality of the Valongo complex. British traveler Charles Brand, writing in 1822, described hundreds of children crammed into dark, fetid warehouses with only a cloth apron as clothing (Karasch 2000). Maria Graham, a British writer who visited Rio in the 1820s, recorded her impressions of children with shaved heads and emaciated bodies sitting in long rows, some too weak to move, and others attempting to engage with her in African languages. Jean-Baptiste Debret, a French painter who lived in Brazil, produced vivid illustrations of these scenes, encompassing everything from branding rituals to the spatial organization of the market (Fig. 58). He noted how enslaved people were marked with hot irons, often in sensitive parts of the body, to denote ownership.

The peak of the transatlantic trade through Valongo occurred between 1811 and 1831, with an estimated 550,000 Africans passing through its stone-paved dock. According to Florentino, this made Rio de Janeiro's port the single largest site of slave importation in the Western Hemisphere during that period (Florentino & Góes 1997). This high-volume trade, however, became increasingly scrutinized by international and domestic actors. In 1831, Brazil passed the "Feijó Law" (also known as the "Law to Suppress the African Slave Trade"), which nominally abolished the transatlantic slave trade. In practice, the law was largely ignored, and clandestine landings continued throughout the 1830s and 1840s, often bypassing official ports or using bribery to continue the traffic. Enforcement only intensified with the passage of the Eusébio de Queirós Law in 1850, which finally succeeded in ending the Atlantic trade to Brazil (Klein & Luna 2010; Araujo 2014).

Nevertheless, the relocation of the market and the physical infrastructure developed at Valongo had a lasting impact on the urban layout of Rio de Janeiro. The "Valongo Complex" included not just the wharf, but also the entire logistical and social network tied to human trafficking, extending to the routes used to transport enslaved individuals to inland plantations, particularly in the Paraíba Valley, São Paulo, and Minas Gerais. By reconfiguring both the geography and symbolic landscape of the city, the Valongo Wharf played a central role in the consolidation of Rio as an imperial capital, while simultaneously exposing the contradictions of a city striving for European modernity while deeply dependent on African labor.

The legacy of Valongo is deeply entangled with Brazil's imperial ambitions and the systematic erasure of its African heritage. From the initial displacement of the slave market to the marginal zone of the city to the subsequent burying of the wharf under layers of urban development, the site's history reflects both the brutality of slavery and the long-standing efforts to conceal its memory.

Fig. 60 "Marché aux Negres" by Johann Moritz Rugendas, 1835. **Source** Wikimedia

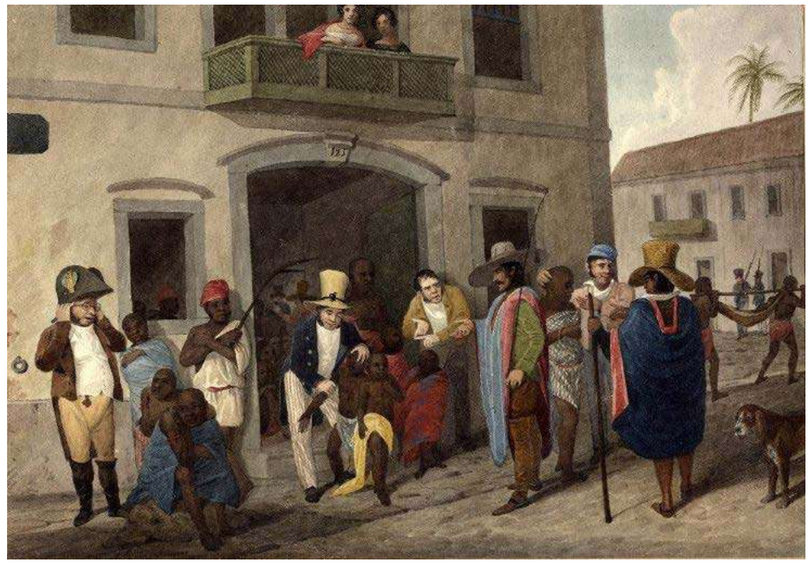


Fig. 61 Slave market at Rio de Janeiro by Edward Finden, 1824 **Source** Wikimedia

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

This analysis was made using a historical map and highlighting the location of the structures connected to the slave trade in Rio de Janeiro in different moments. It's possible to see the initial complex, in the center of Rio, where the enslaved used to disembark (Imperial Palace Square) and where they used to be sold (Rua Direita).

As mentioned in the chapter, the whole complex was moved later to the Valongo area, with the intention of keeping it far from the city center. There we can see the Lazaretto, where the enslaved would go through quarantine, the cemetery where they were buried and the warehouses and slave markets. Overlapping it with the current land outline of the Port it's evident how disconnected from the sea this area is nowadays.

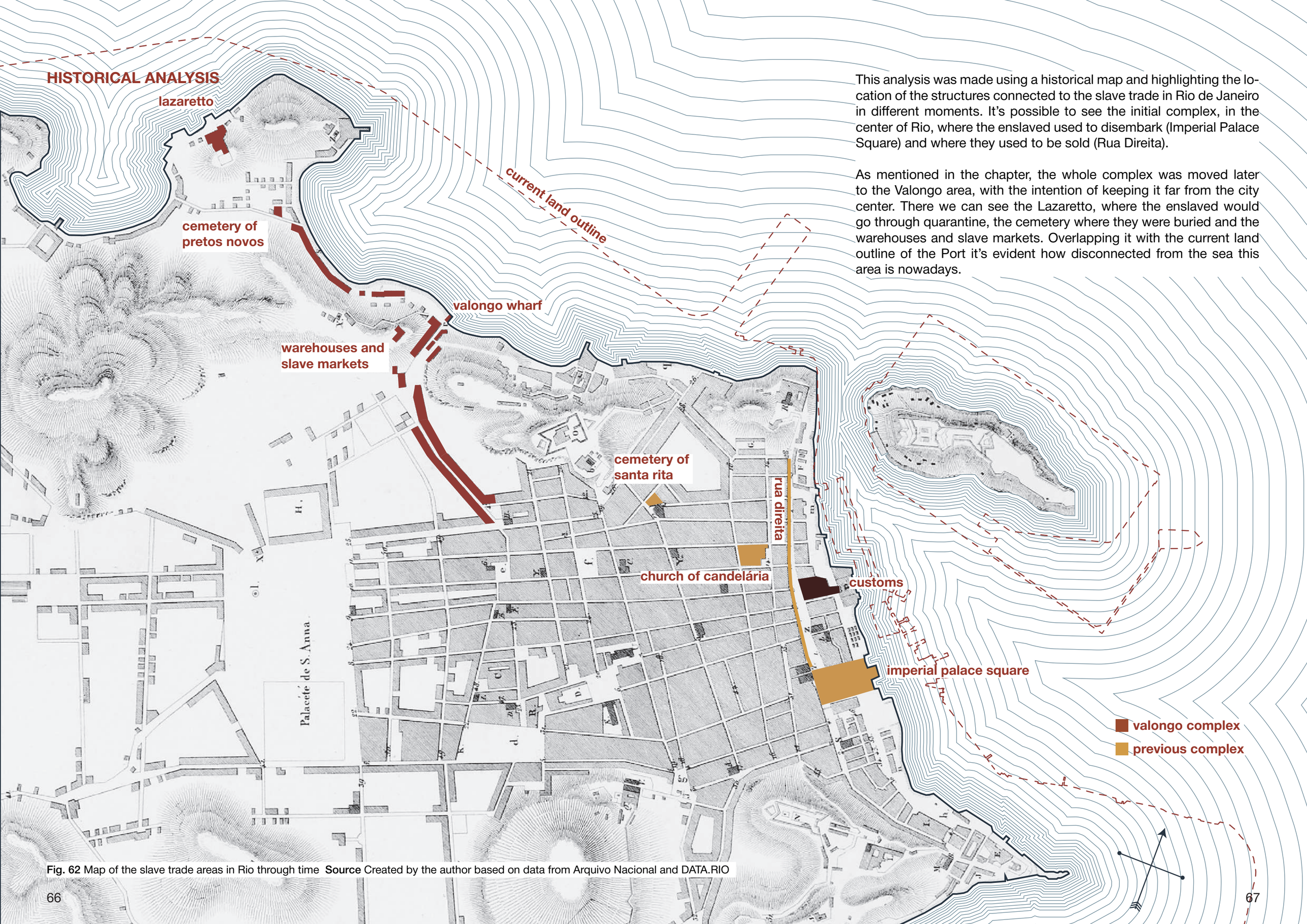


Fig. 62 Map of the slave trade areas in Rio through time **Source** Created by the author based on data from Arquivo Nacional and DATA.RIO

3.2 LAYERS OF SILENCING: THE EMPRESS WHARF AND PEREIRA PASSOS'S RENOVATION

The history of the Valongo Wharf did not end with the cessation of the transatlantic slave trade. Instead, what followed was a deliberate and multilayered process of erasure, in which physical transformations of the site were imbued with powerful symbolic meanings. These acts of spatial reconfiguration and renaming actively obscured the traumatic heritage of the Valongo Wharf, transforming it from a point of memory into a terrain of silence. The two most defining episodes in this process were the construction of the Empress Wharf in 1843 and the urban reforms of Mayor Francisco Pereira Passos in the early twentieth century.

Although the slave trade had been officially outlawed in 1831 with the implementation of the Feijó Law, which declared as free all Africans illegally brought to Brazil after that year, the illicit trafficking of enslaved people persisted for two more decades, reaching a peak in the late 1820s. After 1831, the Valongo Wharf began to lose its central function in the slave trade, although the region continued to host commercial activities and receive goods and people. The definitive break with its former use, however, came in 1843, when the site was chosen as the ceremonial point of disembarkation for Princess Teresa Cristina of the Two Sicilies, who had sailed to Brazil to marry Emperor Dom Pedro II.

This choice was highly symbolic. The imperial ceremony required a stage that conveyed civility, progress, and modernity. Yet the chosen site, Valongo, was historically tainted as the largest slave disembarkation point in the Americas. The decision to receive the future empress in a location so saturated with the memory of enslavement necessitated a profound aesthetic and symbolic transformation. On imperial orders, the Valongo Wharf was buried under landfill, and in its place, a new, ornamented quay was built, the Cais da Imperatriz (Empress Wharf) (Fig. 65). The surrounding area underwent renovations, and Valongo Street was renamed Rua da Imperatriz, signaling a state-led effort to overwrite the past with a new imperial narrative (Lima, Sene, & Souza 2016).

The transformation was far more than material. It marked an intentional displacement of collective memory, replacing the image of thousands of Africans disembarking in chains with that of a European princess welcomed in splendor. As Lima, Sene, and Souza (2016) argue, this juxtaposition between enslaved masses and imperial royalty staged a symbolic reversal: "the wretched masses coming from Africa were replaced by a European princess and her court," erasing the former presence and trauma in favor of monarchical grandeur. The very act of renaming streets and reconstructing public spaces was a strategy of urban and historical whitening, attempting to suppress the African legacy embedded in that geography.

The plan for the renovation likely involved the participation of the French architect Grandjean de Montigny, a member of the French Artistic Mission who had become a professor at the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts. Although there is no definitive primary source confirming his authorship, his architectural training and position made him a likely candidate to design the neoclassical embellishments required for an event of such grandeur. (Fig. 64) A hexagonal monument adorned with the bust of the empress, bronze dolphins, and

Fig. 63 Detail of the plaque at the base of the Obelisk at Valongo Wharf. Photo by Alexandre Macieira, 2017.

Fig. 64 Commemorative fountain project by Grandjean de Montigny, 1843. **Source** Biblioteca Nacional

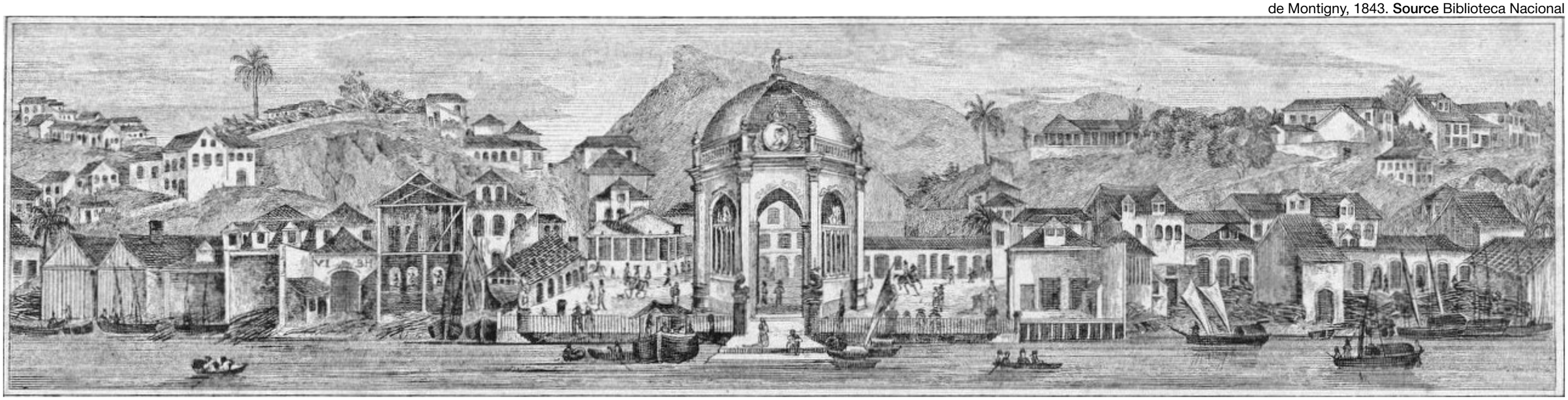


Fig. 65 Cais da Imperatriz by J Friedrich Pustkow, c. 1844. **Source** Biblioteca Estadual do Rio de Janeiro

balustrades was erected at the pier. A monumental square, Praça Municipal, replaced the old Largo do Valongo, and urban furnishings aligned with European aesthetics replaced any trace of the site's original function (Fig. 66).

Despite these changes, the transformation of the region did not erase its social marginality. In the decades that followed, the area fell into disrepair. By the early twentieth century, it had once again become a neighborhood associated with poverty, informal housing, and Afro-Brazilian presence. Yet rather than acknowledge this continuity, the new republican regime engaged in further acts of spatial erasure. As part of his modernization project between 1903 and 1906, Mayor Francisco Pereira Passos implemented sweeping urban reforms modeled on Baron Haussmann's transformation of Paris. These reforms included the demolition of colonial buildings, the expansion of boulevards, and the construction of new port facilities, all meant to showcase Brazil's alignment with European modernity and capitalist development (Needell 1987; Sevcenko 2003).

Pereira Passos's renovations targeted not just architectural forms but also the urban populations that inhabited them. The city's predominantly Black, poor, and working-class residents were evicted from the central neighborhoods under the pretense of hygiene and public order. As Fabiola López-Durán (2018) highlights, these reforms were informed by eugenic theories, which associated moral and physical degeneration with environmental conditions. Afro-Brazilians were thus removed from the urban core and pushed to peripheral areas, while their historical presence in neighborhoods like Gamboa, Saúde, and the old Valongo was buried under concrete and landfill.

In 1911, the Empress Wharf itself, already a layer built upon the Valongo Wharf, was buried during the expansion of Rio's port infrastructure. With this, any visible trace of the Valongo complex disappeared from the landscape. As if repeating history, the republican regime did to the imperial monument what the empire had done to the site of enslavement: it buried the past to make way for a sanitized and future-facing urban project. The Praça do Valongo, once renamed Praça Municipal, was again transformed and eventually became the Praça Jornal do Commercio, erasing all references to its layered past (Souza 2017).

This recursive process of forgetting through urban intervention has been the subject of critical scholarship. Guimarães (2011) notes that it was only in 1988, over a century after abolition, that the port area began to be recognized officially as a historic zone, through the creation of the Environmental Protection Area SAGAS, named after the neighborhoods of Saúde, Gamboa, and Santo Cristo. Even then, several critical spaces, such as the Morro da Providência and the Cais do Valongo, were excluded from preservation measures, reflecting the persistent undervaluation of Afro-Brazilian heritage in official narratives.

The burying of Valongo Wharf, first under imperial elegance and later beneath republican modernity, represents more than the physical disappearance of a structure, it exemplifies how urban transformation can be a mechanism of historical silencing. As such, the story of Valongo is not just one of maritime logistics or architectural shifts, but of memory, identity, and the contest over what deserves to be remembered. Each reconfiguration of the site served to reinforce dominant narratives while pushing the history of slavery further into oblivion, allowing a nation built on racial inequality to preserve an image of unity and modernity untethered from its violent foundations.

Only in the twenty-first century, through archaeological excavations and Afro-Brazilian activism, would the buried truths of the Valongo Wharf begin to reemerge, challenging the sanitized narratives that had dominated for centuries. The layers of stone and soil laid over the wharf can now be read not just as physical sediment, but as the accumulation of ideological efforts to suppress a past that remains unresolved.

Fig. 66 Empress Square. Photo by Augusto Malta, 1904. **Source** Arquivo Geral da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro

Fig. 67 Obeslik of the Empress Square. Unknown Author, 1922. **Source** Brasiliana Fotográfica

3.3 REDISCOVERY AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDINGS

The rediscovery of the Valongo Wharf in 2011 marked a turning point in Brazil's confrontation with its silenced history of slavery. Ironically, this reemergence was not the result of heritage policy, but of large-scale urban redevelopment, specifically the Porto Maravilha (Marvelous Port) operation, a public-private partnership launched to transform Rio de Janeiro's long-neglected port zone in preparation for the 2016 Olympic Games. Lead by the Municipal Urban Development Company (CDURP) and financed through the sale of Certificates for Additional Construction Potential (CEPACs), the program was meant to modernize the infrastructure, transport, and image of the city's central districts. It also reflected a long-standing desire among Rio's elites to repackage its historic core in line with global urban trends (Guimarães 2011; Rolnik 2015).

While Porto Maravilha's official discourse focused on revitalization and economic development, it initially offered little attention to the deeply layered Afro-Brazilian history of the region. As Lima (2016) and Santos and Goulart (2016) emphasize, the plan's early documents prioritized real estate value and tourism while erasing the memory of slavery. Yet, because of national and municipal legislation, Federal Law No. 3.924/61 and Municipal Decree No. 22.872/2003, any large urban intervention had to be preceded by archaeological monitoring.

This legal requirement opened a critical window for historical archaeology. Under the coordination of archaeologist Tânia Andrade Lima, a team was tasked with investigating whether vestiges of the 19th-century Valongo Wharf and its successor, the Empress Wharf, still survived beneath the contemporary pavement of Praça Jornal do Commercio. The excavations, which began in early 2011, quickly obtained extraordinary results: beneath layers of modern landfill, the stones of the Empress Wharf emerged, and deeper still, some 60 centimeters below, lay the rough basalt slabs of the original Valongo Wharf, constructed in 1811 to receive enslaved Africans (Fig 68 and 69).

The archaeological process, however, was full of challenges. Pressed by Porto Maravilha's tight construction timeline and dependent on city hall's logistical support, the team had to conduct partial and often emergency excavations rather than ideal systematic digs (Lima 2013). The archaeological project carried out was the monitoring and excavation of Valongo Wharf / Empress's Wharf, which was presented to IPHAN for analysis and approval in October 2010, the official ordinance to begin the work was emitted by the Institute, and the research was initiated on 25 January 2011.

The project initiated from the assumption of an existing archaeological site, above all the presence of Empress's Wharf covering Valongo Wharf, proposing to save both structures, with the main object being to reveal Valongo Wharf, or "the slave wharf" (Lima, 2013, p.15). During the research 110 sectors and 6 trenches were excavated, and the whole extension of Praça Jornal do Comércio was monitored (Fig. 70) . The object of the research was fully reached, revealing the structures of the Empress's Wharf, the paving of Valongo Wharf, and other structures directly or indirectly related to them.

The research carried out at the Valongo Wharf Archaeological Site was also extremely prolific with regard to mobile artefacts. Within the context of the excavation the concentration of mobile archaeological material related to the African Diaspora collected near the wharf and along the sides of the site must be considered exceptional. This material is directly related to those who lived and dwelt in the neighbourhood and inhabited the wharf, considering

Fig. 68 Excavation of the Valongo Wharf. Photo by Rafael Andrade **Source** Folhapress

Fig. 69 Excavation of the Valongo Wharf. Photo by Paula Huven, 2012 **Source** Agência O Globo

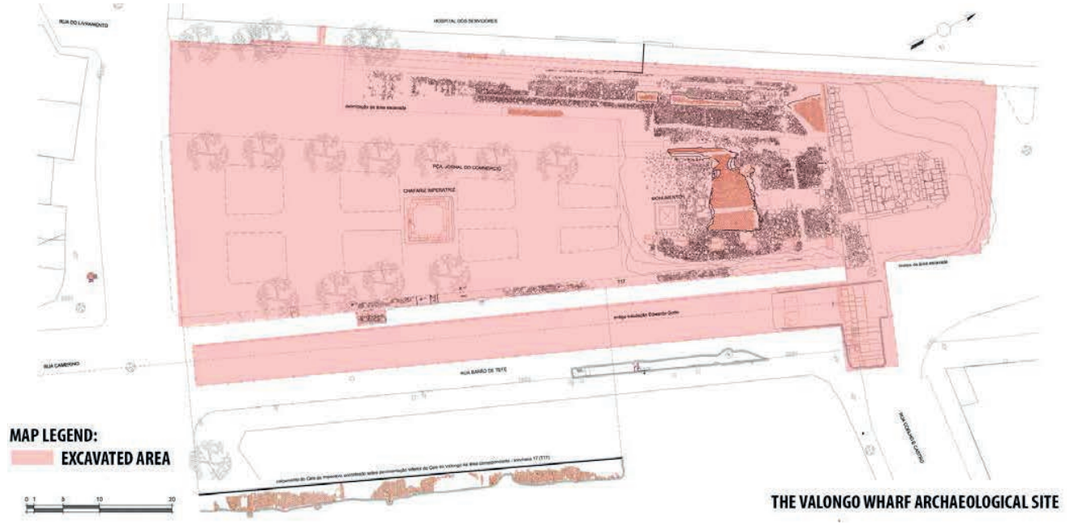


Fig. 70 Map of the excavated area. **Source** Valongo Wharf Nomination File, UNESCO

that space their own. During the research various kinds of artefacts were dug up, such as shells or adornments, earrings and metal bracelets (Fig. 73), almost all charged with profound symbolism. It is worth emphasising that many metals, especially iron, had a symbolic and religious significance for these groups.

One of the most remarkable aspects of the excavation was the team's conscious attempt to involve Afro-Brazilian religious and cultural communities in the interpretation of the site. Lima's team encountered an unexpected silence from these communities at first, likely the result of longstanding trauma and social stigma surrounding the memory of slavery (Pollak 1989; Singleton & Orser 2003). This distance began to shift when the team reached out directly to Black leaders, activists, and institutions such as the Palmares Foundation, CEPPIR, and CEDINE. At a meeting on March 17, 2011, held at the excavation site, the Valongo Charter was drafted, calling for the recognition of the wharf's importance and proposing the creation of a memorial to the African Diaspora.

In the months that followed, Afro-Brazilian religious authorities such as Mãe Meninazinha de Oxum, Mãe Celina de Xangô, and Mãe Edelzuíta de Oxaguian were invited to interpret ritual objects discovered on-site. Their interpretations underscored the sacred dimensions of the space, confirming that Valongo was not only a site of suffering but also of spiritual endurance. This collaborative model of community-engaged archaeology challenged traditional academic hierarchies and affirmed the cultural autonomy of Afro-Brazilian epistemologies (Lima 2016; Pinsky 1989).

According to the UNESCO Nomination File, there are 466,035 artefacts in the Valongo Wharf archaeological collection (Fig. 72). Its significance lies not only in the quantity of pieces, but for the diversity and concentration of materials connected to the African diaspora. These findings deserve special attention in their own right as they provide unique insights into the everyday lives, religious symbolism and resistance of the African people enslaved in the system imposed on them. The value of this collection extends beyond its tangible remains, but more importantly from its intangible value and the meanings attached to them. Preserving these objects carries a powerful socio-political dimension, as it amplifies the visibility of African material culture, which has historically been overshadowed by the monumental architecture and collections of ruling elites that often dominate preservation efforts (UNESCO 2017).

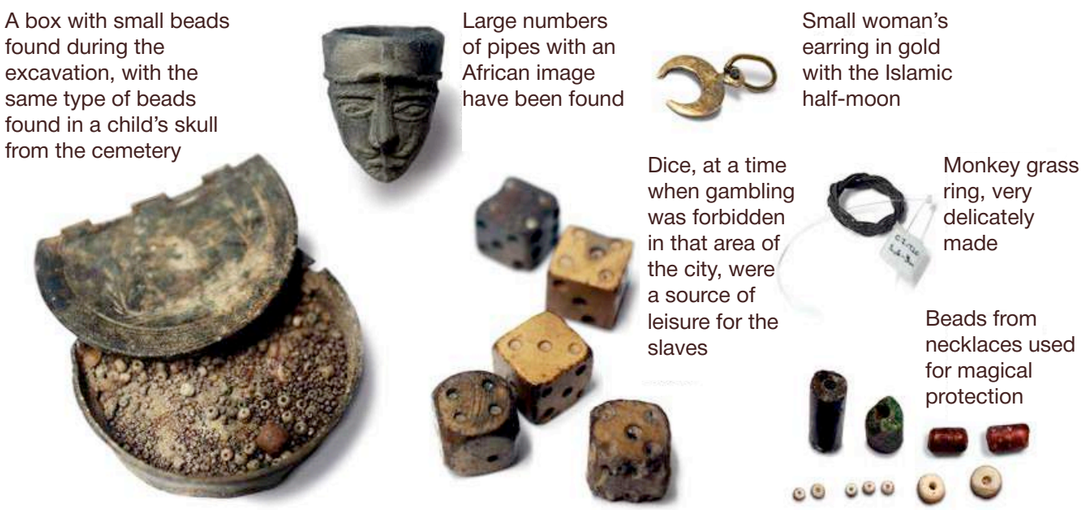


Fig. 71 Objects found in Valongo. **Source** Leo Ramos / FAPESP

Fig. 72 Artifacts stored in a warehosue. **Source** ANPR

Fig. 73 Crystals, beads and adornments in different materials, forms, and colors. **Source** Tânia Andrade Lima

Fig. 74 Exhibition of the artIfacts found in Valongo at MUHCAB, 2022. **Source** Prefeitura do Rio

In this context, the archaeological investigations at Valongo Wharf have revealed not only the remarkable architectural remains of the wharf, exceptionally preserved and almost intact, but also a vast and heterogeneous set of artifacts. Together, these elements narrate the experiences of hundreds of thousands of enslaved and freed Africans who passed through the site, endured oppression, and forged shared cultural practices in the face of adversity.

The excavation also prompted the creation of the Historical and Archaeological Circuit for the Celebration of African Heritage. This initiative brought together activists, scholars, and city officials, and in May 2012 produced the "Recommendations from Valongo", a document calling for stronger public policies for racial equality, cultural preservation, and inclusive education. However, despite promises, the municipal government sidelined the proposals, failing to act on them during the 2012 reelection campaign. The document was only formally handed to Mayor Eduardo Paes after his reelection and never received a response.

A symbolic breakthrough came on November 20, 2013, Black Awareness Day in Brazil, when a UNESCO delegation led by Ali Moussa Iye visited Valongo and unveiled a plaque recognizing it as one of the most significant sites of memory of the transatlantic slave trade. This gesture occurred under the framework of the UNESCO Slave Route Project, launched in 1994 to identify, preserve, and promote such sites worldwide. Though modest in scale, attended by only a few dozen people, the event was a turning point, embedding Valongo within a broader international network of heritage connected to African diaspora history (UNESCO 2013).

Meanwhile, the excavation had deeply altered the urban space. The Praça Jornal do Commercio was reurbanized in 2012 to showcase the uncovered structures (Fig. 76). The ground was lowered by 60 centimeters to expose parts of the Empress Wharf and the Valongo layers beneath (Fig. 75). Ramps, viewing platforms, and interpretive signage were installed (Fig. 77). Yet, archaeologists criticized some aesthetic decisions, like partial reburying for landscaping, that muted the site's full visibility and failed to convey its complex stratigraphy (Lima 2016).

Cultural responses also emerged. The Kabula group, composed of Afro-Brazilian capoeira practitioners and educators, began holding monthly gatherings at the site to re-signify it as a place of empowerment. Filmmaker Zózimo Bulbul's 2013 project "African Heritage: Urban Interventions on the Port Path" further helped embed Valongo into the cultural landscape of Little Africa (Bulbul 2013).

Still, the engagement of the broader Black population with the site remained uneven. As Lima (2013) noted, the enduring stigma of slavery and the silence inherited from generations of marginalization posed significant obstacles to the appropriation of Valongo as a place of identity, memory, and struggle. While elite and religious actors recognized the site's importance, many remained distant, reflecting Brazil's long history of denial and historical silencing.

Yet the rediscovery of Valongo set in motion a process that would soon reach international dimensions. The archaeological excavation had unearthed not just stones and artifacts, but a legacy buried by centuries of indifference. It positioned Rio de Janeiro and Brazil as custodians of a global site of conscience, opening the path toward a long-overdue recognition.

Fig. 75 Laying of the new pavement with granite slabs. Source Tânia Andrade Lima

Fig. 76 The redeveloped Jornal do Comércio Square. **Source** Tânia Andrade Lima

Fig. 77 Stairs, access ramps, and observation point for the public. **Source** Tânia Andrade Lima

URBAN TRANSFORMATION OF THE AREA

1928

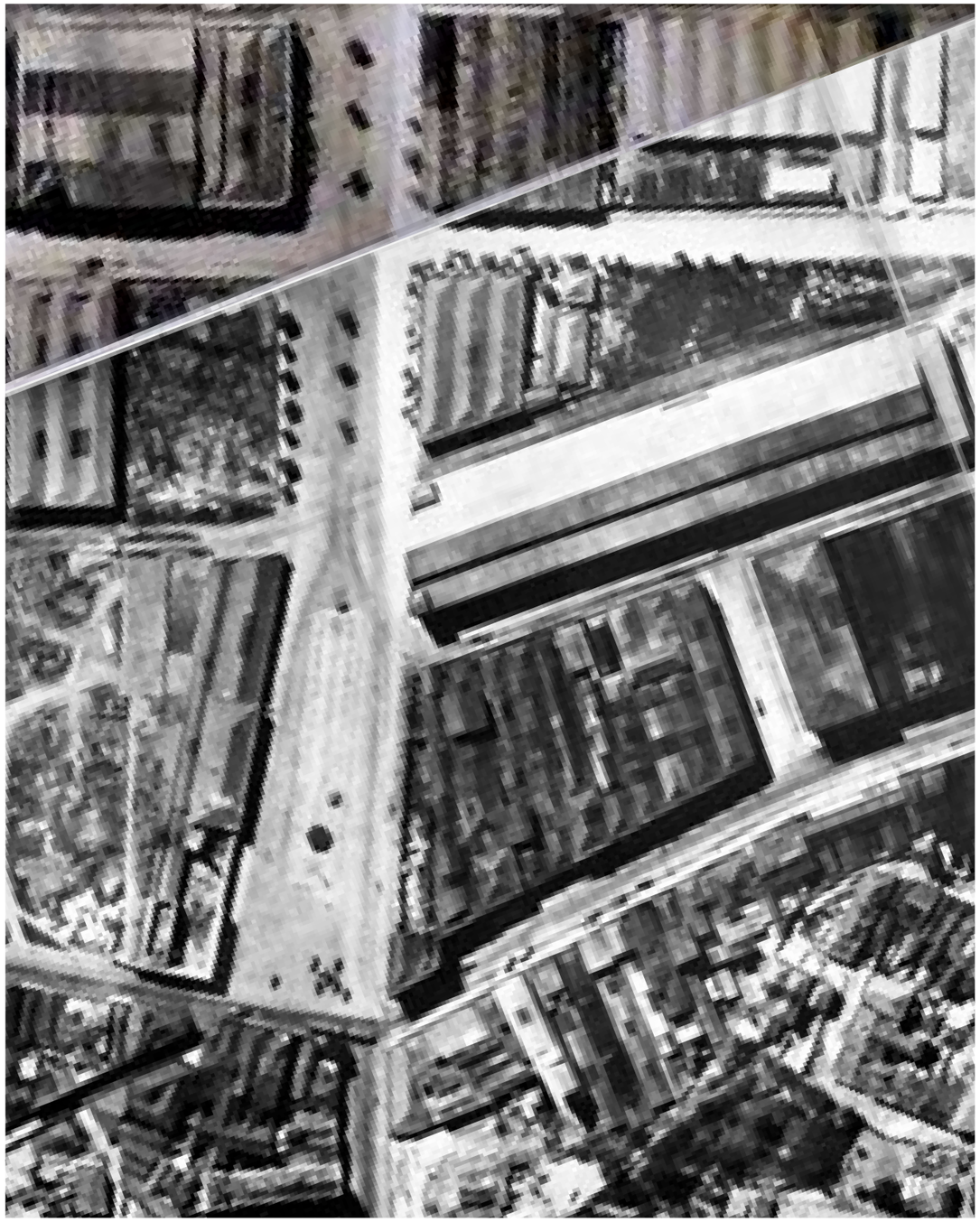


Fig. 78 Satellite image of the area, 1928. **Source** Arquivo Geral da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro

2009

Fig. 79 Satellite image of the area, 2009. **Source** Google

URBAN TRANSFORMATION OF THE AREA

2010

Fig. 80 Satellite image of the area, 2010. **Source** Google

2024

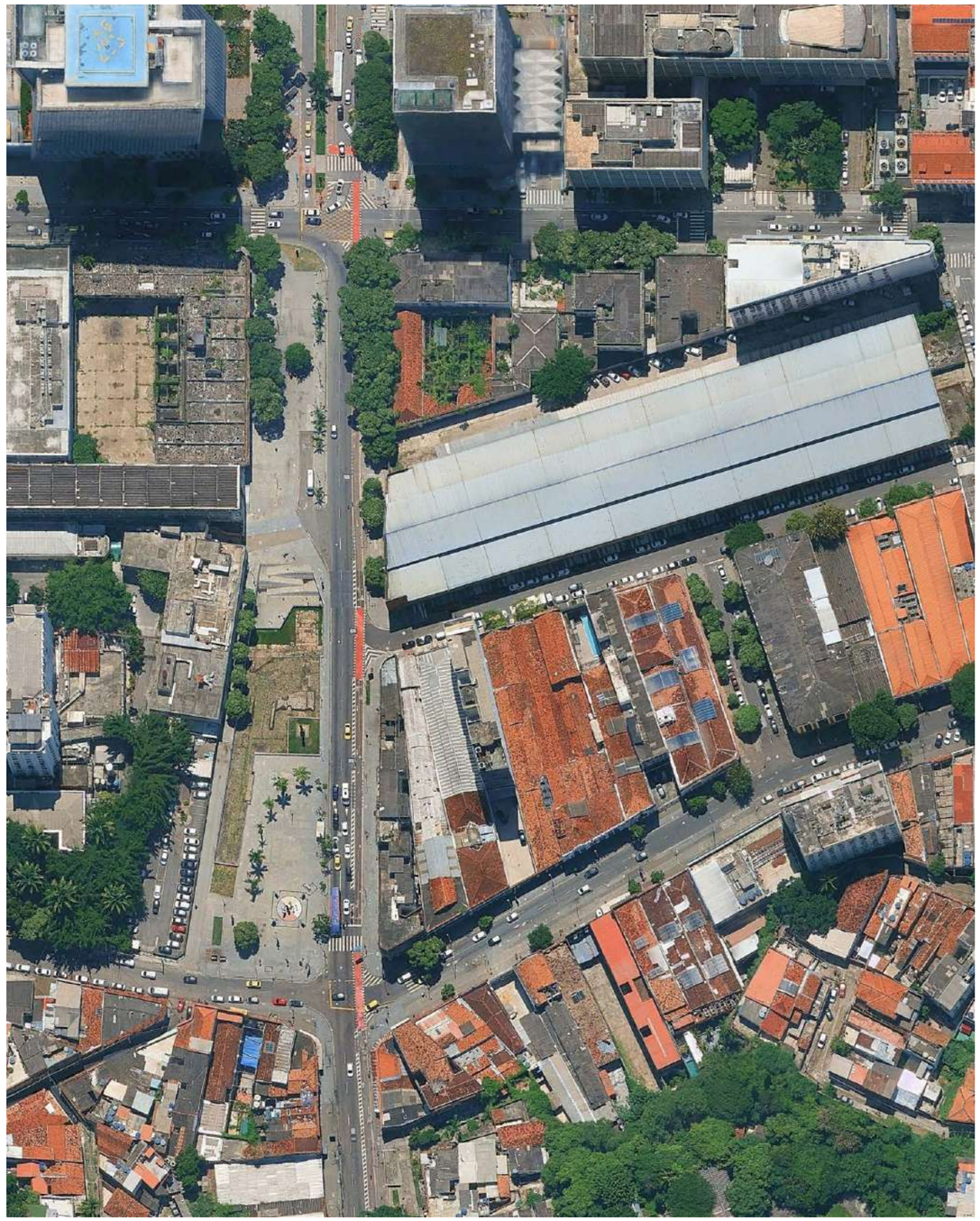


Fig. 81 Satellite image of the area, 2024. **Source** Google

3.4 RECOGNITION AS A WORLD HERITAGE SITE

The rediscovery of the Valongo Wharf in 2011 triggered not only renewed public interest in Brazil's role in the transatlantic slave trade, but also an urgent call to preserve and formally recognize the site's profound historical significance. For Afro-Brazilian activists, intellectuals, and cultural leaders, Valongo was not just an archaeological site, it was a living monument to the experiences of millions of Africans forcibly uprooted and trafficked into slavery, and a place of ancestral memory that had been erased for more than a century. As excavations continued and media coverage expanded, demands to include the site on UNESCO's World Heritage List began to gain traction, supported by civil society, heritage professionals, and eventually federal institutions (Lima 2013; Pereira 2017; Guimarães 2021).

The first major institutional effort toward international recognition occurred during the 2012 international seminar "Herança, Identidade, Educação e Cultura: gestão dos sítios e lugares de memória ligados ao tráfico negreiro e à escravidão," held in Brasília. Organized by the Fundação Cultural Palmares and UNESCO within the framework of the "Slave Route: Resistance, Liberty and Heritage" program, the seminar brought together Brazilian ministers, Black movement representatives, and UNESCO officials, including Ali Moussa Iye, then Director of UNESCO's Department of History and Memory for Dialogue. During the opening ceremony, Minister of Culture Ana de Hollanda and Minister for Racial Equality Luiza Bairros publicly advocated for the inclusion of the Valongo Wharf on the World Heritage List, citing its exceptional value for humanity and the need to address the silence surrounding Brazil's slaveholding past (Lima 2020).

The case for Valongo was strengthened further in November 2013, when a UNESCO delegation visited Rio de Janeiro and installed a commemorative plaque on the site. The plaque officially recognized the Valongo Wharf as one of the most important places of memory of the African diaspora, a milestone as it was the first of its kind in the Americas. The timing of the event, held on Black Awareness Day (Dia da Consciência Negra), underscored its symbolic power. It was also at this point that UNESCO delegates began encouraging Brazilian institutions to prepare a formal nomination for inscription on the World Heritage List (UNESCO 2017).

The preparation of the nomination dossier was entrusted to IPHAN (National Institute of Historic and Artistic Heritage), Brazil's federal heritage body. Recognizing the complexity and sensitivity of the task, IPHAN established a task force in 2014, including not only technical staff from its own agency but also representatives from the City of Rio de Janeiro, specifically, the Municipal Secretariat of Culture, the Rio World Heritage Institute (IRPH), and the Port Region Urban Development Company (CDURP). An interdisciplinary Scientific Council was created, with over 40 members, including historians, archaeologists, anthropologists, and notably, leaders from Black cultural and religious communities, to ensure that the process would reflect the voices of those most affected by the legacy of slavery (Costa e Silva 2014).

Presiding over the council's inaugural meeting in September 2014, held at the Gustavo Capanema Palace in Rio de Janeiro, IPHAN's then-president Jurema Machado emphasized that the recognition of Valongo would serve not only to honor historical truth, but also to advance

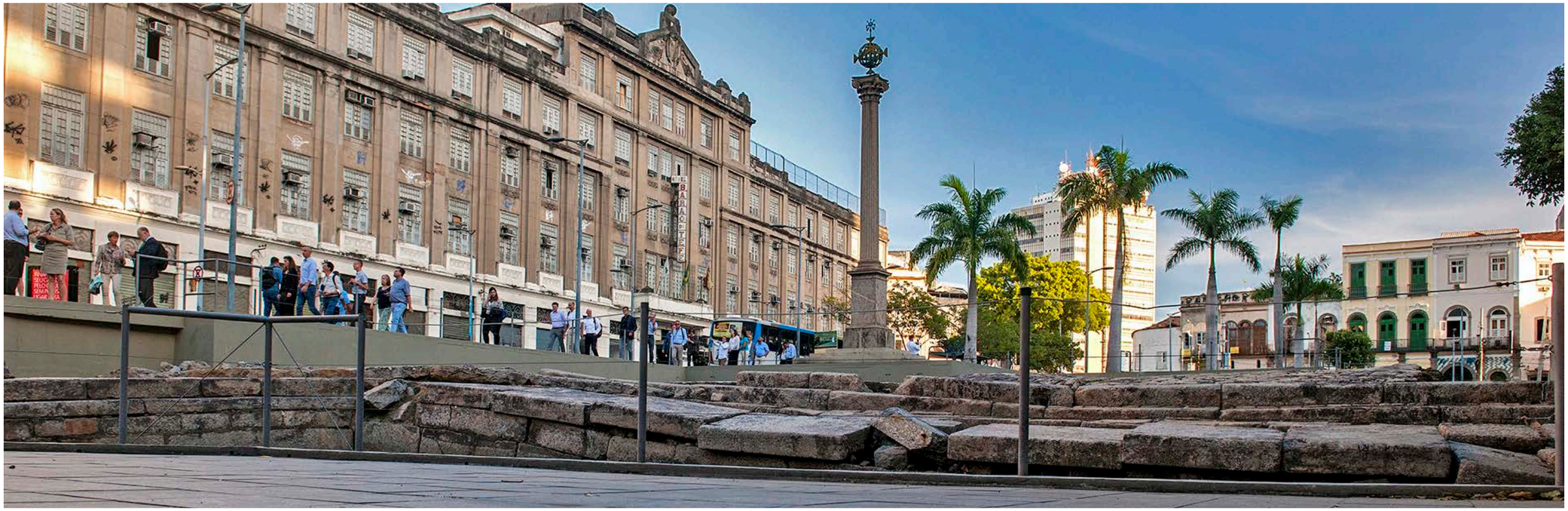


Fig. 82 View of the ramp, Valongo Wharf. **Source** Institutio do Patrimônio Histórico Nacional (IPHAN)

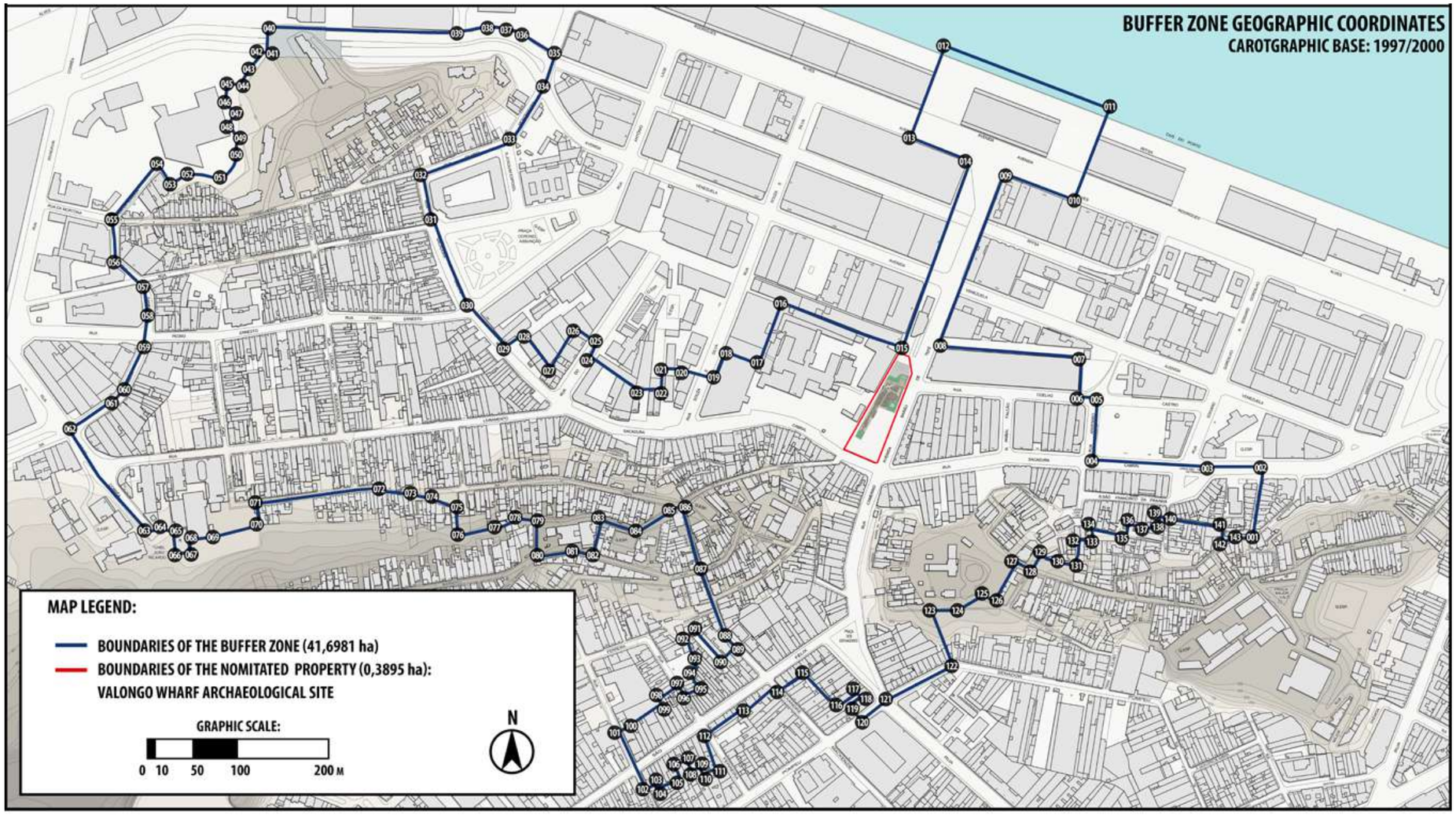


Fig. 83 Map of the inscribed property - Valongo Wharf Archaeological Site, 2017. **Source** Valongo Wharf Nomination file, UNESCO

racial justice in contemporary Brazil. The Nigerian-Brazilian historian and diplomat Alberto da Costa e Silva, in his opening address, framed the site as a "living scar" in the landscape, whose stones bore witness to unspeakable suffering and thus required no further explanation to affirm their universal importance (Costa e Silva 2014).

The first version of the nomination dossier was submitted to UNESCO in September 2015, coinciding with the launch of the International Decade for People of African Descent (2015–2024), a UN initiative aimed at promoting recognition, justice, and development for Afro-descendant populations worldwide. The dossier emphasized Valongo's role as the only known and physically preserved landing site for enslaved Africans in the Americas, highlighting its unique archaeological integrity and its deep emotional, political, and educational significance. The site was proposed under Criterion (vi) which recognizes places directly associated with events or traditions of outstanding universal value, placing Valongo in the same category as sites such as Auschwitz-Birkenau, Robben Island, and Hiroshima Peace Memorial (UNESCO 2017; Deacon et al. 2004).

According to the Nomination file:

"The buffer zone (Fig. 83) consists of 41.6981 ha and was established with the object of contributing to the protection, conservation, management, integrity, authenticity and sustainability of the VUE of the property. It was delimited with the idea of including all the elements of this reception system of the African slave trade extended as a result of Valongo Wharf – the slave holding areas and warehouses, graveyard and lazaretto. However it was also necessary to observe other contexts, which were initiated or strengthened as a result of Valongo Wharf or even contributed to its establishment in that area. In this sense, it is relevant to mention Pedra do Sal, Largo do Depósito - now Praça dos Estivadores, the Hanging Gardens of Valongo and the Docas Pedro II Building. The concern in delimiting the buffer zone was to preserve the perspective of the relationship between the archaeological site and its surrounding context, above all the context linked to the African Diaspora: the arrival of the enslaved, the market and the social relationships and resistance established between them and the local society."

"In fact, the establishment of the buffer zone seeks to articulate all the points which compose a timeline before and after the existence of Valongo Wharf, including those that offer support to the cultural manifestations which derive their existence and the

nomenclature which confirm traditional occupation of the region by Africans and their descendants to this day, integrating the archaeological site with the daily life of the population."

"There was a concern to alleviate the distance that presently exists between the sea and the archaeological site and, for this reason, the buffer zone includes the Valongo Passage, a corridor that grants access to Guanabara Bay through the existing Port. Also, via the same corridor, there's the idea of linking the archaeological site of Valongo Wharf to Rio Harbour, with the intention of maintaining a chronological interpretation of the permanence of port activity in the region." (UNESCO 2017)

In March 2016, UNESCO officially accepted Valongo's candidacy, prompting renewed interest from civil society. Afro-Brazilian groups, often marginalized in cultural policy debates, began to see the site not only as a memory space but also as a political platform, a rare opportunity for global visibility and reparation. After additional technical work, the final version of the dossier was submitted in February 2017, with a strong emphasis on Brazil's historical accountability and on the contributions of enslaved Africans to the country's development in economic, social, and cultural terms (Guimarães 2017; López-Durán 2018).

Finally, on July 9, 2017, during its 41st Session in Kraków, Poland, the UNESCO World Heritage Committee officially inscribed the Valongo Wharf Archaeological Site on the World Heritage List. The committee underscored that the site represented the most complete and tangible evidence of the transatlantic slave trade in the Americas. In the words of Brazilian representative Katia Bogéa: "At a time of increasing global intolerance, recognizing sensitive sites such as Valongo compels us to embrace a more humanistic vision of society" .

Quoting the information available in the UNESCO website:

Criterion (vi): Valongo Wharf is the most important physical evidence associated with the historic arrival of enslaved Africans on the American continent. It is a site of conscience, which illustrates strong and tangible associations to one of the most terrible crimes of humanity, the enslavement of hundreds of thousands of people creating the largest forced migration movement in history. As the very location the African stepped onto American soil and with it into their new lives as enslaved labour, the site evokes painful memories, which many African Brazilians can strongly relate to. Preserving these memories, the vicinity of Valongo Wharf has become an arena for various manifestations celebrating African heritage on an ongoing basis.

Integrity
The modest fragments of Valongo Wharf, which were left exposed to the public after their excavation in 2011, encompass the complete remains of the original stone disembarkation wharf. The wharf's function was originally related to auxiliary structures, such as warehouses, quarantine facilities, the lazaretto and the New African cemetery. These are either lost or preserved only as underground remains in the buffer zone and are legally protected.

As the debarkation point after long and painful journeys across the Atlantic Ocean, Valongo Wharf and the sea were closely related. Therefore, integrity is presently reduced by the disconnection between the archaeological site and the seafront which is removed as result of land reclamations in the dock area. To ensure legibility of the property, it is essential to undertake measures, which assist in reconnecting the sea to the archaeological site.

The intensification of real estate development on all sides of the property and, in particular, towards the sea front is of concern as it will continue to significantly transform the landscape and could have negative impacts on the perception of the property. As future excavations may uncover further auxiliary functions of the wharf, it is essential that detailed archaeological investigations are conducted before any project is undertaken. While the Special Urban Interest Area of Rio's Porto Region, which lies at a distance of about 50 metres to the site, is not included in the buffer zone, it will be necessary to ensure that developments will not negatively impact of the Outstanding Universal Value of the property.

Authenticity
Valongo Wharf Archaeological Site preserves the remains of Rio de Janeiro's slave disembarkation wharf in the 19th century. Its earthen cover for the past 168 years has enabled this sensitive site to be preserved with the design of the former disembarkation slipway, drainage system and paving. No reconstruction was undertaken which retains the archaeological remains as an exact fragmented reflection of the early 19th century. These remains are authentic in terms of their material, location, workmanship, substance and, as much as can be perceived, design.

In addition, the modest physical remains are highly authentic in spirit and feeling evoking a memory reference and identity marker for the large Brazilian population of African origin and African Americans at large. This aspect is underlined by creation of religious rituals, such as the Washing of the Wharf, during the merely five years period that the site has been rediscovered."

This global recognition was a landmark for Afro-Brazilian communities, yet it was also entangled in the shifting political landscape of Brazil. The recognition came during a period of increasing conservatism and budget cuts in cultural policy. President Michel Temer had taken office following the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff in 2016, and soon afterward, Rio de Janeiro elected Marcello Crivella, an evangelical bishop, as mayor. In 2018, Jair Bolsonaro was elected president. This rightward turn resulted in the marginalization of cultural initiatives tied to racial equity, including the Valongo site (López-Durán 2018; Guimarães 2021).

UNESCO's approval came with a set of conditions. Chief among them was the construction of a Memorial to the African Diaspora within 500 days of the designation. Yet despite a series of public consultations and proposals, the memorial was never built. The municipal administration, under Crivella, failed to prioritize the initiative, and repeated attempts to push it forward were ignored. The lack of follow-through threatened the site's status and led to warnings from UNESCO about possible delisting if the memorial was not realized (UNESCO 2018; Pio 2012).

The UNESCO recognition of the Valongo Wharf marked an unprecedented shift in the global acknowledgment of slavery's legacies, placing Brazil at the center of a transnational heritage discourse. However, as scholars like Pio (2012) and Guimarães (2017) note, this recognition has not translated into sustained political commitment or local engagement. The site remains under-visited and underfunded, and many Afro-Brazilians remain ambivalent about a place so intimately tied to ancestral trauma. As the scholar Tânia Andrade Lima observes, heritage alone cannot reconcile a fractured public memory: "The Valongo exhales oppression, racism, intolerance, inequality, and extreme marginality… Its transformation into a space of engagement depends on the willingness of society to remember, act, and repair" (Lima 2013).

3.5 DOCAS D. PEDRO II: HISTORY

Located in the immediate vicinity of Valongo Wharf, the building known today as Docas D. Pedro II, also referred to as the Armazém nº 5, is a structure filled with deep historical, technological, and symbolic significance. Its relevance goes beyond its original function as a warehouse supporting port activity; the building is a testament to the modernizing ambitions of the 19th-century Brazilian Empire and, crucially, a powerful symbol of Black intellectual and technical contributions to Brazil's urban development.

The Docas D. Pedro II were conceived by the Afro-Brazilian engineer and abolitionist André Rebouças during a transformative period in Brazilian history. Born into a prominent Black family and educated at the Instituto Polytechnico Brasileiro, Rebouças envisioned the docks as part of a broader strategy to modernize Brazil's port infrastructure. Inspired by European models such as the Royal Victoria Docks in London and the port systems in Marseille, his plan proposed a network of docks connected to the railway system to streamline the loading and unloading of goods, particularly coffee, which was then Brazil's main export.

The plan, initiated in 1862 and officially approved in 1871, was innovative not only in its technical scope but also in its political and social context. Rebouças's refusal to use enslaved labor in the construction of the Docas, at a time when slavery was still legal, was a radical stance, aligning his engineering practice with his commitment to abolition. His moral and professional position exemplifies how technical infrastructure can also serve as a platform for political resistance and racial dignity.

Construction of the Armazém nº 5 began with a ceremonial laying of the cornerstone in 1871, attended by members of the imperial family. The warehouse was completed in 1875 and stood as a symbol of state-supported infrastructure modernization. Technically sophisticated, the building employed more than 1,000 hardwood pilings and included functional features such as elevated ventilation systems, translucent roofing for natural lighting, and a vertical and horizontal circulation design that optimized the storage and movement of goods.

The building's structure was praised for its engineering excellence, with its timber framework described as a veritable "museum of Brazilian woods." These design decisions underscore Rebouças's commitment to combining elegance with efficiency, and local expertise with global influence. Despite its promise, Rebouças's broader vision for a port complex integrating rail and sea transport was never fully realized, curtailed by logistical obstacles and political opposition. However, the Armazém nº 5 remains as the only built remnant of his larger plan.

The Docas D. Pedro II building holds a unique place in Afro-Brazilian memory. André Rebouças, whose engineering achievements were rare for a Black Brazilian in the 19th century, became a symbol of Black excellence and resistance. When Rebouças died in exile, his body was brought back to Brazil and, at the request of his co-workers, his wake was held in the warehouse he had designed. This moving gesture, reported in the Jornal do Brasil in 1925, reflects the reverence with which he was regarded, especially among Black communities and the Irmandade do Senhor do Bonfim, a Black brotherhood that participated in his memorial.

After its completion in 1875, the building quickly became a landmark in Rio de Janeiro's expanding port zone. However, the broader plan envisioned by André Rebouças, linking the maritime terminal to the D. Pedro II railway, was never fully realized due to logistical constraints and the unsuitability of the proposed routes, particularly the narrow and curved Rua

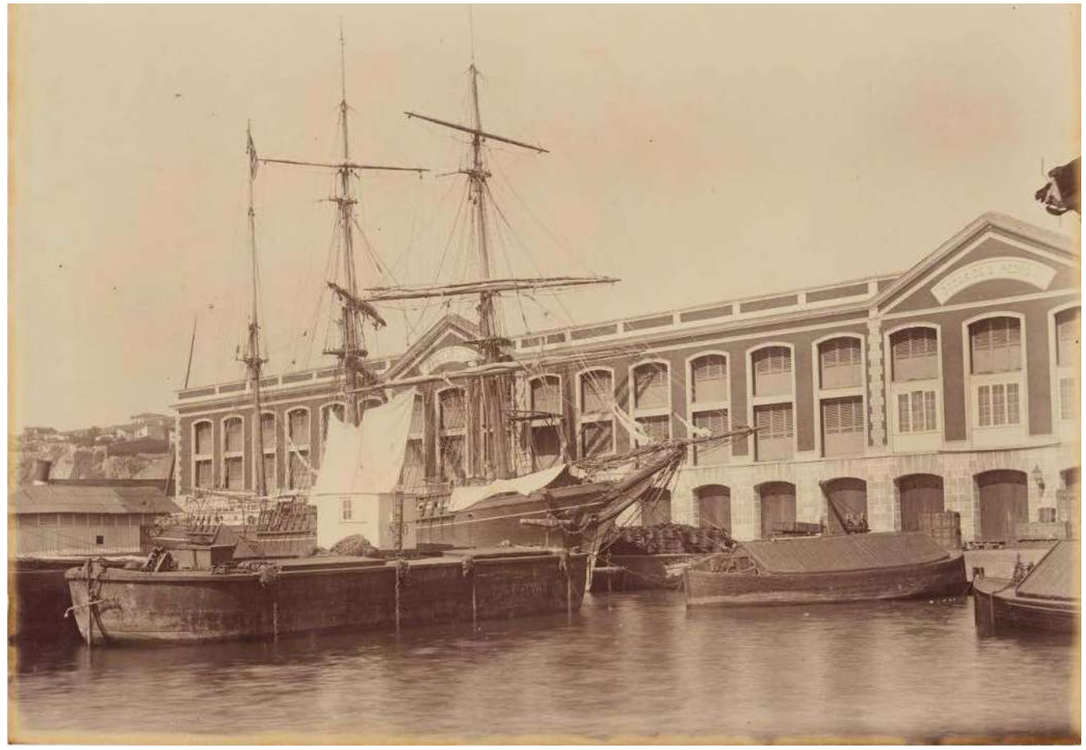


Fig. 84 Docks of D. Pedro II and vessels.Photo by Marc Ferrez, c. 1885. **Source** Instituto Moreira Salles

Fig. 85 North facade of the Docks of D. Pedro II. Photo by Juan Gutierrez, c. 1875. **Source** Google Images

da Imperatriz (now Rua Camerino), which impeded railway infrastructure (Rios, 2019, p. 74). As a result, the warehouse remained an isolated fragment of a much larger modernizing vision.

In the early 20th century, significant urban transformations would further alter the function and context of the building. Between 1904 and 1915, land reclamation works radically changed the topography of the area. Large-scale landfill operations extended the coastline and disconnected the Docas D. Pedro II from direct access to the sea, making the structure obsolete for its original maritime purpose (Rios, 2019, p. 81). As a result, many of the older warehouses and trapiches along Rua da Saúde lost their functionality, and complaints from their owners, concerned about economic losses, were disregarded by authorities.

The turning point in the building's history came in 1919 when a devastating fire destroyed the roof, the internal wooden structure, and most of the upper-level facades, leaving only the east and west masonry walls intact (Rios, 2019, p. 85). The ruins remained in that state for several years until, in the early 1920s, the federal government decided to adapt the structure for military use. Between 1920 and 1922, it was rebuilt to serve as a warehouse for the War Ministry, known as the "Depósito ou Armazém de Transição no Cais do Porto desta Capital." This reconstruction preserved the surviving external walls but introduced reinforced concrete slabs and pillars, adapting the interior to modern logistics (Rios, 2019, p. 87).

Throughout the mid-20th century, the building served a series of military and logistical functions: in 1954, it housed the "Batalhão de Manutenção do Exército," followed by use as a vehicle auction site in 1955 and later, in 1961, as a firearms warehouse managed by the "Diretoria Geral de Material Bélico" (Rios, 2019, p. 92–94). These utilitarian reuses reflected a broader trend of assigning strategic government functions to large, centrally located but underutilized heritage buildings.

In 1977, the building was acquired by the Companhia Brasileira de Armazenamento (CIBRAZEM), a federal entity responsible for storing food stocks, marking yet another shift in usage. However, in the late 20th century, in the middle of growing civil society movements for cultural democratization, the site began to be viewed as a potential space for cultural reinvention. In 1996, the "Warehouse Theater" project briefly occupied the space, offering performances and engaging the community, although the initiative was short-lived (Rios, 2019, p. 97). Another turning point occurred in the early 2000s when the NGO Ação da Cidadania, founded by sociologist Herbert de Souza (Betinho), acquired usage rights over the building. The building was renovated between 2002 and 2005 under the direction of architect Hélio Pellegrino, preserving the surviving facades while adapting the interior for public events, exhibitions, and social activism (Rios, 2019, p. 101).

The heritage recognition process began in 2012 and culminated in 2016, when IPHAN officially listed the Docas D. Pedro II as a historical site. This listing acknowledged not only its architectural and technical significance but also its symbolic relevance to Afro-Brazilian history and memory (IPHAN, 2016). Most recently, between 2020 and 2022, an architecture firm was contracted to develop a new renovation and reuse proposal, with the goal of turning the building into a cultural and interpretative center that could house exhibitions related to Valongo Wharf and the broader Afro-Brazilian diaspora (Rios, 2019, p. 109–112).

Fig. 86 Comparison of the facades of the Docks D. Pedro II through time. **Source** Created by author based on data from survey executed by the Insitituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional

TIMELINE DOCAS D. PEDRO II

All the sources for the figures featured in this timeline are listed in Appendix A

Fig. 87

1862

Project for the docks
Conceived in London by the engineer André Rebouças

1875

Construction completed
Started working for port logistics

Fig. 91

1904

Landfill
Make the building obsolete as a dock facility

Fig. 88

1919

Fig. 92

Fire damages
Only east and west facades survived

1920

Rebuilt and adapted
Became a warehouse for the War Ministry

Fig. 89

1977

Purchased by Companhia Brasileira de Armazenamento
Kept being used as a warehouse

2002

Officially listed as national heritage
By IPHAN

2016

Acquired by NGO Ação da Cidadania
Renovated by architect Hélio Pellegrino

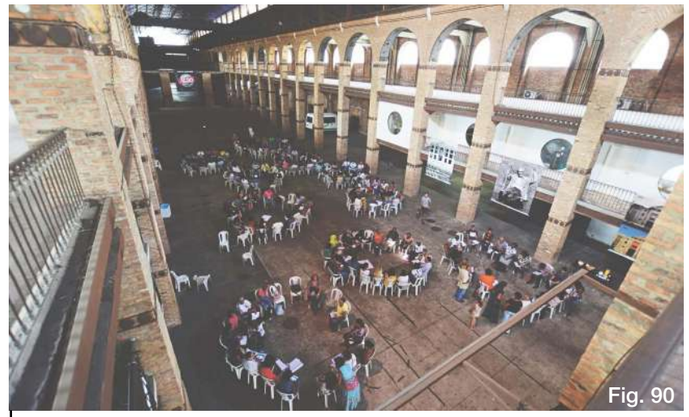


Fig. 90

2020

Fig. 93

Waiting for renovation works
Began to host the Palmares Foundation and LAAU

04

Ongoing situation / Urban analysis.

This chapter is a result of analysis regarding the current urban context, in order to understand the problematics and potentials of the area. The analysis is done through the use of thematic maps, going from the bigger scale to a more detailed one. It begins with an analysis of the urban conditions of the port area, highlighting the conditions of accessibility, infrastructure, and integration with the city. The discussion then expands to the cultural networks of Little Africa, exploring the Afro-Brazilian legacy that surrounds the site. The chapter also addresses the archaeological site itself, analyzing the state of conservation of the archaeological remains and the limitations of its current interpretation. Finally, the role of the Docas D. Pedro II building is explored, emphasizing its historical value, the transformations that have diminished its architectural integrity, and its potential reuse as an interpretive center to connect narratives of Valongo with broader memory strategies.

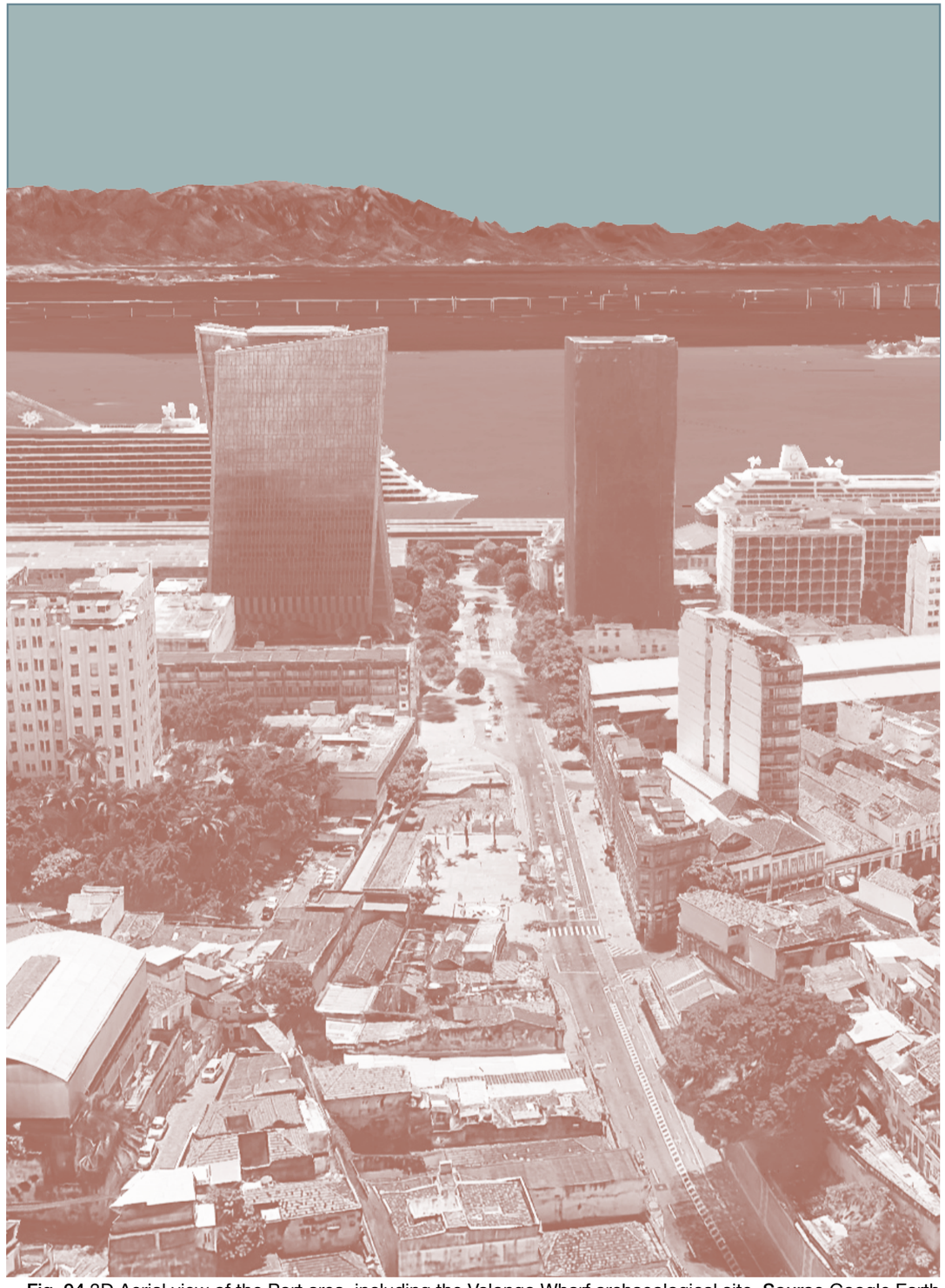


Fig. 94 3D Aerial view of the Port area, including the Valongo Wharf archaeological site. **Source** Google Earth

4.1 CURRENT URBAN CONTEXT AND POTENTIALS

As it can be seen on the map analysis made in the following pages (Fig. 96, 97 and 98), the Valongo Wharf is located in a central area of the city, well served by public transport and positioned between key neighborhoods such as Gamboa, Saúde, and Santo Cristo. The site is near bus stops, VLT (Light Rail Vehicle) stops and also includes a bike lane infrastructure that passes by the road paralel to the archaeological site. However, this geographical centrality contrasts with the spatial disconnection that characterizes its current state. A lack of urban furniture, interpretive signage, and meaningful pedestrian infrastructure undermines the site's accessibility and intelligibility. While the VLT passes nearby and connects the area with the city center and airport, the immediate surroundings of the site lack the amenities and visual indications necessary to establish it as a place of civic significance and public encounter.

The surrounding built environment reflects the transformations brought by the Porto Maravilha redevelopment initiative. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this large-scale intervention, launched in 2009, aimed to revitalize Rio's waterfront through infrastructure upgrades, real estate investment, and the rebranding of the port zone as a cultural and tourist destination. The port area is now very popular and it has some well know attractions such as the Museu do Amanhã (Museum of Tomorrow), Museu de Arte do Rio (Rio's Museum of Art) and the Olympic Boulevard, a wide promenade lined with massive street art that stretches from Praça Mauá to AquaRio (Rio's Aquarium). However, much of this development occurred without sufficient attention to the region's layered Afro-Brazilian heritage. The archaeological discovery of the wharf during construction in 2011 reconfigured these narratives and revealed the deep tension between heritage preservation and urban speculation.

The buildings bordering the Valongo Wharf are mostly of medium height, ranging from three to six stories, though the area next to the port has some isolated high-rise buildings, due to the increase of height allowed by the new sectorization of the area, seeking economic development rather than preserving the historical landscape of the area. The prevailing typology includes former warehouses, adapted commercial units, and old townhouses, many of which are in varying states of occupation or abandonment. A number of these buildings, especially in the Gamboa and Saúde areas, were part of the 19th-century port infrastructure and have been partially reused as offices, museums, and cultural spaces, but many others remain underutilized. The relatively low density and scale of the architecture around the wharf would allow for greater pedestrian permeability and urban activation, yet these possibilities have not been fully realized.

Today, the site itself is presented as an "open-air museum," but it is a minimalist display, consisting primarily of exposed stones, devoid of contextualizing structures such as signage, covered pathways, shade, seating, or digital interpretation tools. The absence of a formal memorial space, originally required by UNESCO as a condition of inscription, further contributes to this sense of underdevelopment and abandonment.

Despite the importance of the site, the local environment offers few material clues to its past. The archaeological remains are difficult to interpret without prior knowledge, and the historical context remains largely invisible in the urban landscape. There is a palpable lack of public investment in conservation, cultural programming, and educational initiatives. Initiatives such as the Circuito Histórico e Arqueológico de Celebração da Herança Africana (Historical and Archaeological Circuit for the Celebration of African Heritage), created in 2011, attempted to bridge this gap by connecting the Valongo Wharf with other memory sites, such as Pedra do Sal, the Pretos Novos Cemetery, and the Hanging Gardens of Valongo. Yet, the circuit lacks clear visual communication, coherent signage, and a sense of continuity in the public space, reducing its impact as an integrated urban and memorial experience.

Urban policies have often failed to address the symbolic depth of the site, and its memorial potential remains constrained by a planning approach that prioritizes surface-level beautification over historical justice and community inclusion.

Fig. 95 3D Aerial view of the Port area, including the Valongo Wharf archaeological site. **Source** Google Earth

CONTEXT MAP

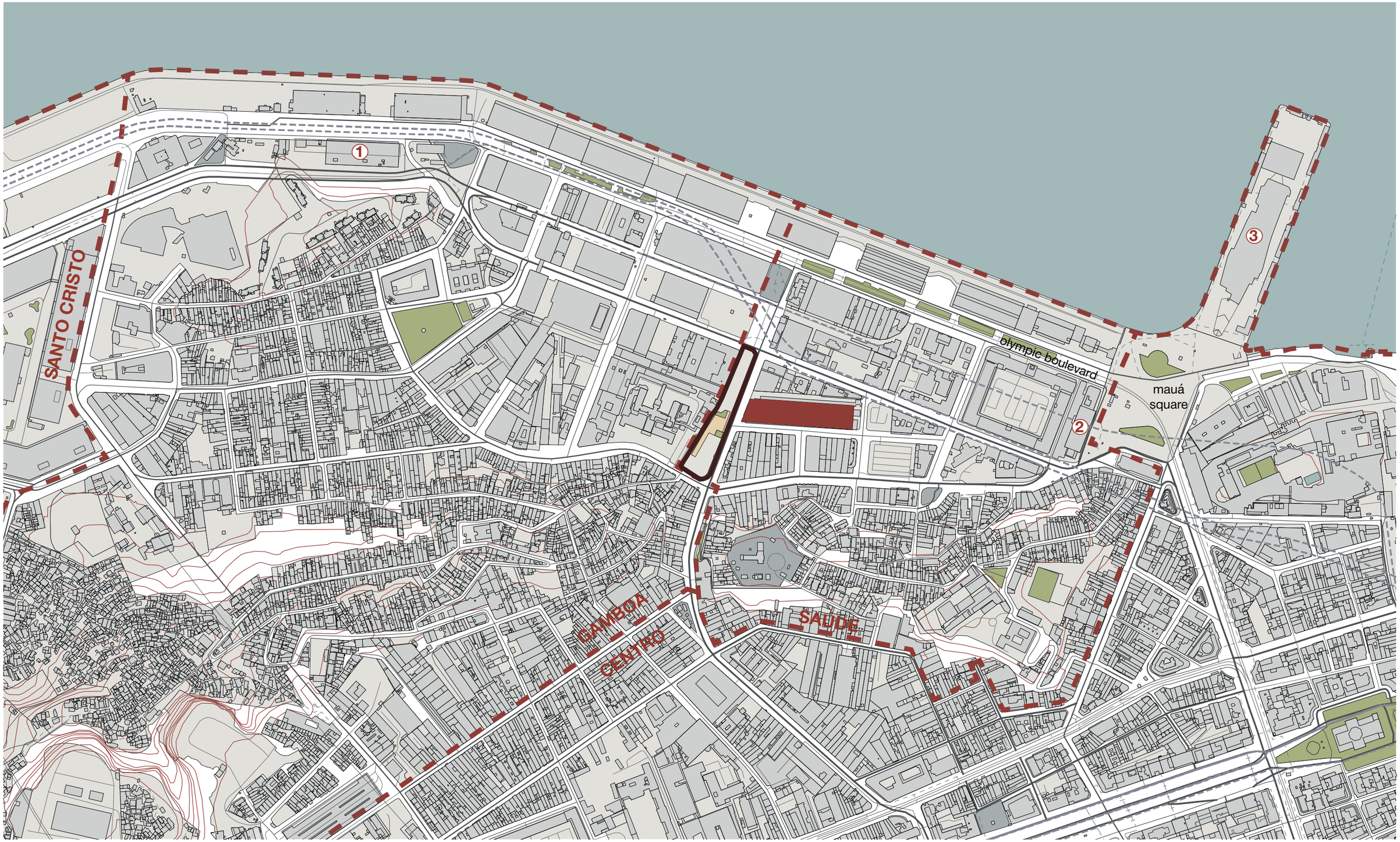


Fig. 96 Map of the Valongo Wharf surrounding area. **Source** Created by the author based on data from DATA.RIO

LEGEND valongo wharf · docas d. pedro II · neighbourhood divisions · underground tunnel · ① aquario · ② museu de arte do rio · ③ museu do amanhã

MOBILITY MAP

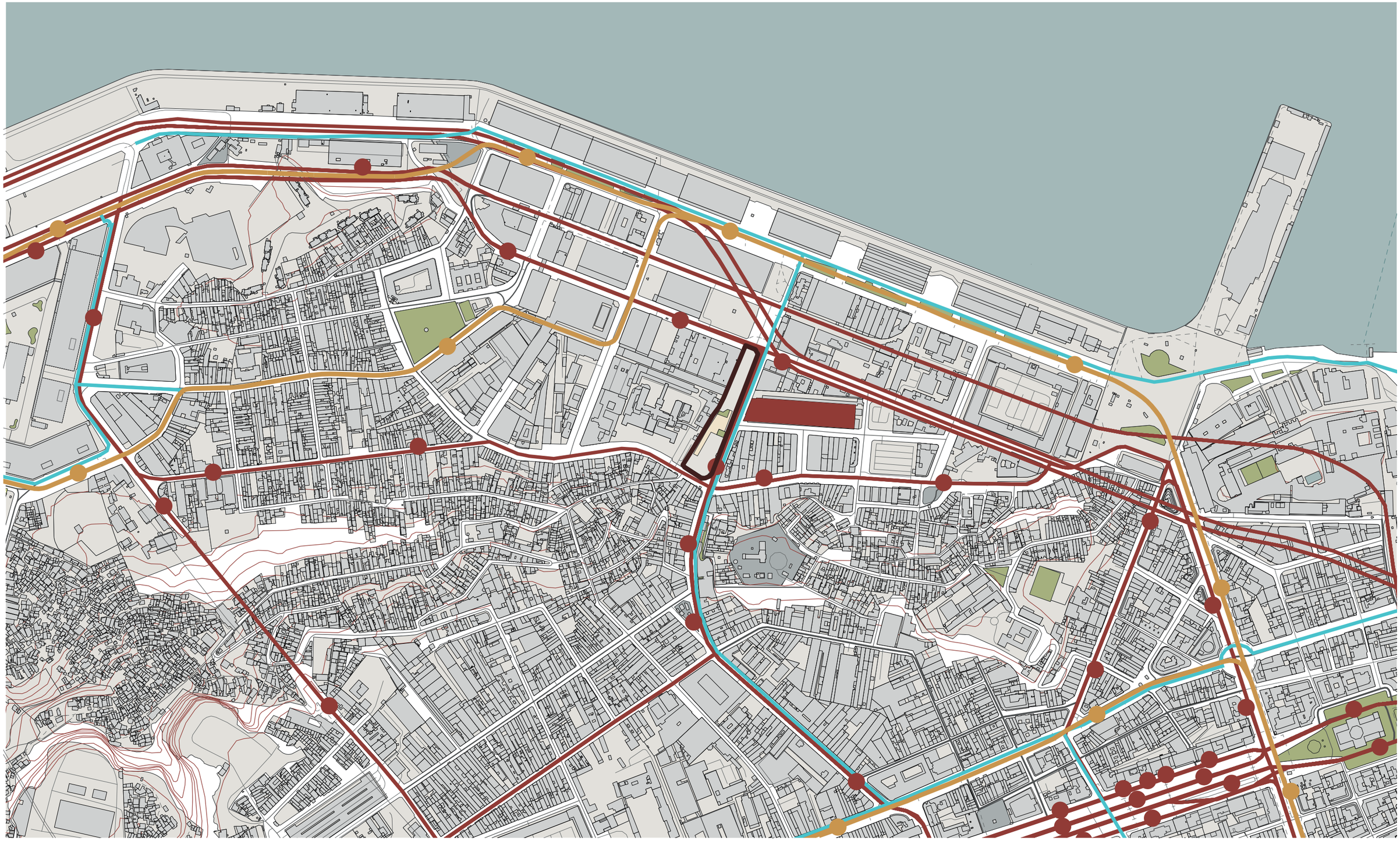


Fig. 97 Map of the mobility of the Valongo Wharf surrounding area. **Source** Created by the author based on data from DATA.RIO

LEGEND valongo wharf · docas d. pedro II · bus routes · bus stops · vlt routes · vlt stops · bike lanes

LAND USE MAP

Fig. 98 Map of the land use of the Valongo Wharf surrounding area. **Source** Created by the author based on data from DATA.RIO

LEGEND valongo wharf · docas d. pedro II · commercial and services · residential and mixed · leisure · institutional · favela · mining area · transportation · archaeological sites · heritage assets

4.2 LITTLE AFRICA AND THE AFRO-BRAZILIAN CULTURAL LEGACY

The rediscovery of the Valongo Wharf during the Porto Maravilha urban intervention catalyzed not only a reassessment of Brazilian history but also the spatial and symbolic reconnection of the Afro-Brazilian population with a territory long marked by violence, resistance, and cultural richness. This rediscovery served as the basis for the formal recognition and consolidation of a broader Afro-diasporic landscape known as Pequena África, Little Africa. This territory, centered around the Port Zone of Rio de Janeiro, materializes and embodies the historical presence and cultural agency of African-descendant communities from slavery to the present day.

The designation “Little Africa” was popularized in the 1980s by the cultural historian Roberto Moura, who attributed the expression to the early twentieth-century composer and painter Heitor dos Prazeres. It referred to a vibrant area extending from the port to Cidade Nova, having Praça Onze as its symbolic core, a zone inhabited predominantly by Black communities and seen as the birthplace of samba and Afro-Brazilian cultural expressions. This zone included communities of formerly enslaved Africans, freed persons, and their descendants, forming dense networks of solidarity, religiosity, and creativity, evident in practices such as candomblé, afoxé, and carnival performance groups.

The rediscovery of Valongo Wharf in 2011 and the successive archaeological and heritage processes gave new visibility to the spatial and historical layers of Black memory in Rio de Janeiro. This process helped consolidate Little Africa as a symbolic and political space of memory, struggle, and cultural affirmation. As argued by Santos (2022), the territory articulates three central themes in the Black experience: suffering and trauma (from enslavement and racial violence), resistance (to domination and silencing), and cultural and political agency.

In 2011, recognizing the significance of this cultural geography, the municipality of Rio de Janeiro created the Circuito Histórico e Arqueológico de Celebração da Herança Africana (Historical and Archaeological Circuit for the Celebration of African Heritage) through Municipal Decree nº 34.803. The circuit was intended not merely as a tourist route but as an educational and memorial initiative aimed at acknowledging, preserving, and disseminating the African contributions to the city’s history. The initiative was developed in close collaboration with representatives from the Black community, religious leaders, and academic researchers, ensuring participatory governance of heritage.

The circuit initially linked six emblematic sites: the Valongo Wharf and Empress Wharf, the Pretos Novos Cemetery, the José Bonifácio Cultural Center, the Suspended Garden of Valongo, Praça dos Estivadores (formerly Largo do Depósito), and the Pedra do Sal. Each of these sites holds layers of memory and historical meaning, from arrival and death to resistance and cultural celebration. These points, although spatially disconnected, were conceptualized as part of a território-rede (network-territory), forming a mosaic of Afro-Brazilian history across the urban fabric.

Further developments followed at the state level. In 2018, Law Nº 8.105 created the Circuito Histórico e Arqueológico da Pequena África e Caminhos da Diáspora Africana, extending the scope beyond Rio’s port region to other locations linked to the African diaspora across the state. This reinforced the region’s symbolic role and provided institutional support for broader memory activism.

Among the most symbolic sites integrated into Little Africa and the heritage circuit is the Cemitério dos Pretos Novos (Cemetery of New Blacks), a site of mass burials of enslaved Africans who died shortly after arriving. Rediscovered in 1996 during house renovations, the cemetery revealed a brutal aspect of the Atlantic slave trade: anonymity, neglect, and dehumanization. Today, it is home to the Instituto de Pesquisa e Memória Pretos Novos (IPN), a center for research, education, and cultural resistance. IPN plays a pivotal role in reframing traumatic memory into a tool for empowerment and awareness, particularly among Black youth and educators.

The Pedra do Sal is another central site, historically a salt deposit and one of the first gathering points for enslaved Africans and later Afro-descendant workers and artists. It became a hub for cultural resistance through music, religious rituals, and political gatherings. Its designation as a Remanescente de Quilombo in 2005 and its state-level heritage protection since 1984 recognize its role in preserving African traditions and creating spaces of autonomy and collective identity. These places not only represent memory but also serve as living centers of performance, ritual, and community life. Memory tours (roteiros de memória) increasingly connect these points into cohesive narratives, contributing to what Fillipe Alves (2022) calls “resistance cartography”, an Afrocentric re-mapping of Rio’s historical landscape.

Despite the formalization of the Circuit and its symbolic significance, tensions persist regarding its appropriation, visibility, and management. Scholars such as Munanga (2004) and Guerreiro Ramos (2010) have highlighted the risk of folklorization, where sites of resistance and memory are converted into sanitized tourist attractions, disconnected from the social struggles they represent. The valonguização of Little Africa, a term used to describe the overemphasis on Valongo Wharf to the detriment of the broader network has also drawn criticism for overshadowing the diversity of Black heritage in the area.

Moreover, the removal of containers with excavated artifacts, the stalling of the memorial construction, and the lack of institutional investment in education and interpretation have all been cited as failures of the state to honor the emancipatory potential of these sites. Nonetheless, community initiatives and cultural actions continue to revitalize the legacy of Little Africa. From monthly capoeira rodas by Grupo Kabula at Valongo Wharf, to commemorative events and Black Awareness Day marches, the circuit remains a living landscape, an open-air archive of resistance, and celebration.

Today, the Pretos Novos Institute organizes free thematic historical tours covering not only the initial “Circuit for the Celebration of African Heritage” but also created new ones called “Market to Market”, a circuit connecting the two main slave markets in colonial Rio de Janeiro, the Rua Direita Market and the Valongo Market, and “Cemetery to Cemetery”, which connects two important landmarks of Afro-Brazilian memory: the Cemitério dos Pretos Novos de Santa Rita (Santa Rita New Blacks Cemetery) and the Cemitério dos Pretos Novos do Valongo (New Blacks Valongo Cemetery). They also promote workshops and educational courses regarding the slave history and African heritage.

LITTLE AFRICA MAIN POINTS

Fig. 99 Diagram of the Little Africa area
Source Created by the author based on data from Google and Instituto Pretos Novos.

harmonia square

valongo wharf

docas d. pedro II

pedra do sal

largo da prainha

MUHCAB

pretos novos cemetery

estivadores square

valongo hanging gardens

conceição hill

santa rita cemetery

HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL CIRCUIT OF CELEBRATION OF AFRICAN HERITAGE

1. MUHCAB
2. Pretos Novos Cemetery
3. Harmonia Square
4. Machado de Assis House
5. Valongo Wharf
6. Docas D. Pedro II
7. Estivadores Square
8. Valongo Hanging Gardens
9. Afoxé Filhos de Gandhi
10. Pedra do Sal
11. Largo da Prainha
12. Conceição Hill
13. Santa Rita Church
14. Santo Elesbão and Santa Ifigênia Church
15. São Jorge Church
16. Nossa Senhora da Lampadosa Church
17. Irmandade de Nossa Senhora do Rosário e São Benedito dos Homens Pretos
18. Candelária Church
19. Customs (France-Brazil House)

- Municipal Decree n. 34.803/2011
- Municipal Decree n. 7.351/1988
- Municipal Law n. 6.613/2019
- State Law n. 8.105/2018
- State Law n. 8.105/2018
  - A. Customs Street
  - B. Quitanda Street
  - C. Rosário Street

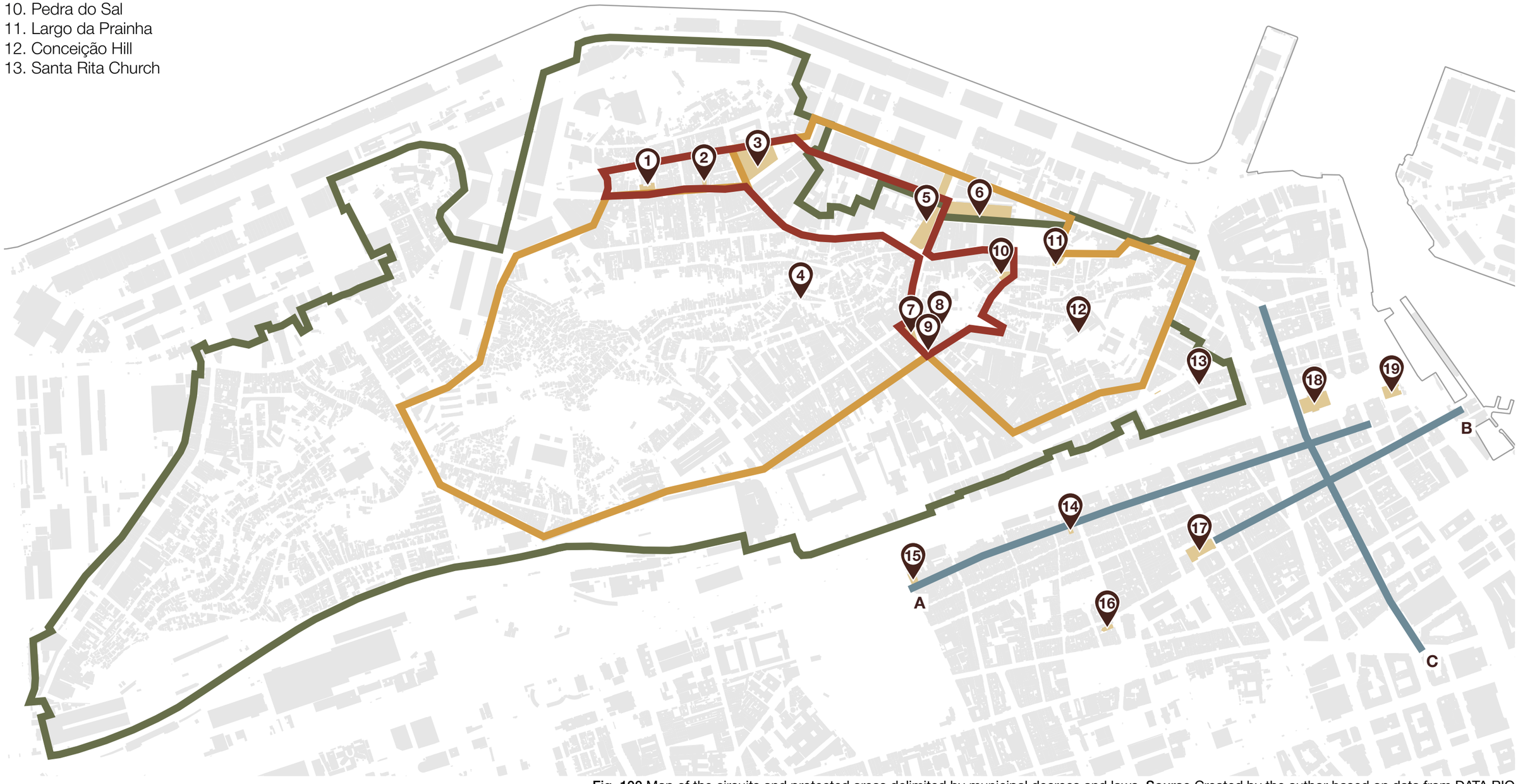


Fig. 100 Map of the circuits and protected areas delimited by municipal decrees and laws. **Source** Created by the author based on data from DATA.RIO

4.3 MANAGEMENT, LAWS AND REGULATIONS

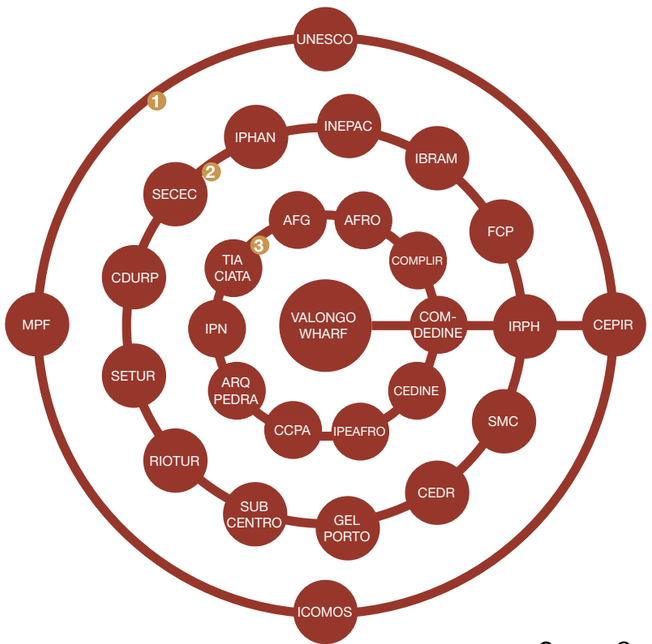
The archaeological site of Valongo Wharf is owned by the Brazilian state. The Municipality of Rio de Janeiro represents the owner for its management and cooperates with the National Institute of Historic and Artistic Heritage (IPHAN).

The site is listed as an archaeological site at the federal level following its registration on 25 April 2012, and IPHAN is mandated to coordinate its protection and management. The buffer zone is protected both by IPHAN directive 135 of 13 March 2013, which sets guidelines for the management of areas around listed federal sites as well as on the municipal level as a cultural protected area (UNESCO 2017).

The management plan covers three levels of action: normative, operational and monitoring. These impact the three dimensions of the site and its buffer zone in equal measure: the archaeological dimension, involving actions related to the site itself and its maitenance; the urbanistic dimension, related with the treatment and valuing of the urban setting of the archaeological site and its articulation with the rest of the city; the social, economic and cultural dimension, related with actions to raise the profile of the site both socially and culturally, especially in its interaction with the local population and tourism (UNESCO 2017).

Regarding the management currently in place, Decree No. 49,943, dated December 8, 2021, establishes the Valongo Circle as a permanent group of the Valongo Wharf and Little Africa. It consists of the constitution of three main circles, aiming to resume the dialogue, which must remain and be continued, between government spheres, civil society institutions linked to the black movement, and, above all, the community that lives around the Valongo Wharf (IRPH 2021). The circles are:

1. Advisory Circle: formed by Executive Branch councils and, upon invitation, civil society entities linked to Afro-Brazilian and Afro-Brazilian movements, with the task of deliberating and determining guidelines on policies and actions related to the Valongo Wharf and Little Africa;



2. Executive Circle: formed by entities from the Municipal Executive Branch and, upon invitation, from the State and Federal Executive Branch, with the attribution of promoting and implementing the deliberations of the Circle of Valongo;

3. Protective Circle: formed, upon invitation, by national and international entities, in addition to bodies of the Municipal Executive Power, with the attribution of defending the interests and guidelines established by the Consulting Circle, as well as monitoring the actions of the other bodies of the executive powers according to determinations and recommendations.

Source Created by the author based on data from IRPH

Legal guidelines

1. The Valongo Wharf Archaeological Site is protected on a federal level by the national heritage protection agency IPHAN, through federal law 3924 of 26 July 1961, known as the Archaeology Law, which covers archaeological and pre-historic monuments. This law is the main legal instrument that controls the preservation and management of all archaeological heritage in the country, namely archaeological sites and artefacts from said sites (UNESCO 2017).

2. The archaeological research at Valongo Wharf was conducted not only in observance of the federal Archaeology Law but also in compliance with Municipal Decree 22872 of 7 May 2003. It provides for protection of unknown underground archaeological remains through stipulating that prior to any urban development, archaeological research is to be undertaken.

3. It is also protected on the municipal level because it is inside a Cultural Protected Area. Provided by the municipal master plan, these protected areas are designed to protect built areas of the city. This particular Cultural Protected Area for the SAGAS area (Saúde, Gamboa and Santo Cristo), where Valongo Wharf Archaeological Site and its buffer zone are situated, was established in 1988 through municipal decree 7351/88.

4. Complementary Law No. 101 of November 23, 2009, which establishes the Consortium Urban Operation of the Port of Rio Region and provides other measures; The operations in this area aim, amongst other things, to recover buildings of importance to protect their cultural heritage, to duly identify the tangible an intangible heritage in the area, both past and present, to enable the creation of historical and cultural itineraries and to provide vocational training for local residents in the tourism and hospitality industries.

Heritage Guidelines

The territory encompasses various heritage assets that must be preserved. Compliance with the regulations governing protected areas and assets in the Little Africa Region is an essential guideline.

A particularly delicate issue regarding interventions is the need to recover the original connection between the wharf and Guanabara Bay. Due to extensive landfilling carried out in the early twentieth century, Valongo Wharf now lies 344 meters inland. At that time, a new dock was constructed, and a line of warehouses was built along the newly created waterfront. These structures, still preserved today, stand as architectural evidence of the transformations that reshaped Rio de Janeiro in the early 1900s and have themselves been officially listed as heritage. With the rediscovery of Valongo Wharf, the pressing challenge is how to re-establish its historical link with Guanabara Bay. The Brazilian government recognizes that the warehouses associated with the present-day port form part of the city's architectural heritage and are therefore subject to preservation and enhancement policies. Their position is that the connection between the Valongo Wharf Archaeological Site and the bay's shoreline can be reinterpreted through signage and informational plaques, helping visitors to grasp the historical relationship between the wharf and the sea (UNESCO 2017).

Furthermore, with regard to heritage regulations, the parameters and restrictions arising from the listing of heritage sites and the Surrounding Areas of Listed Assets (AEBT) are under the supervision of the Rio World Heritage Institute (IRPH) and the National Historical and Artistic Heritage Institute (IPHAN) (Art. 333, §4, PDRJ).

4.4 INTERVENTION AREA - ANALYSIS

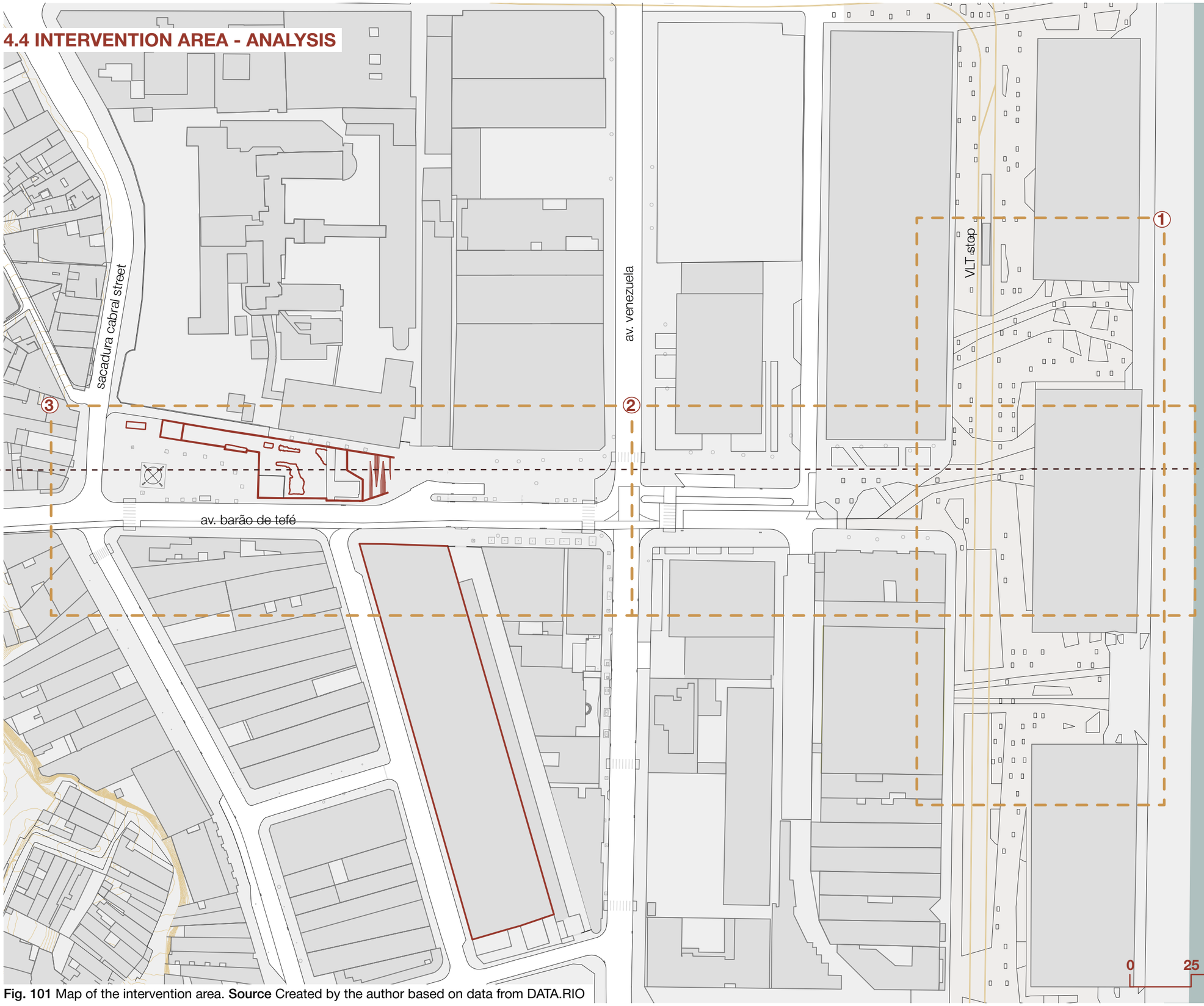


Fig. 101 Map of the intervention area. **Source** Created by the author based on data from DATA.RIO

Based on the ICOMOS reccomendation of "strengthening through landscaping measures the relation between the seafront and Valongo Wharf", I decided to focus the analysis and future intervention on this area in between the archaeological site and the path towards the sea.

The connection with the sea is something very important that it's missing in the current situation and can help to enhance the context of the archaeological ruins.

Also, the area includes the VLT stop, one important point of arrival for visitors coming from the center of the city. The disembarkation of touristic cruises also occurs in the area.

For a better comprehension of the area and analysis, the path has been divided in 3 portions that will be shown more closely in the next pages:

1. the olympic boulevard of the port, including the VLT stop and the warehouses.

2. the second one containing two public spaces in front of commercial buildings.

3. the third one encompassing the archaeological site and the public square adjacent to it. this portion will be further analysed in detail.

TERRITORIAL SECTION

As it can be seen from the section, the wharf is mostly surrounded by medium height buildings, except for the two skyscrapers. This is a consequence of the zoning changes made by the Porto Maravilha project, which allow this area next to the port to have higher buildings. This need to be thought carefully since the existence of these skyscrapers compromise the context of the archaeological site, changing the landscape.

The direct connection to the sea is compromised by the warehouse n. 3 of the Mauá Pier. In front of the wharf we can see the place where the Rio-África center is set to be constructed and right next to it, the building Docas D. Pedro II, which will host the Interpretative Center of the Valongo Wharf.

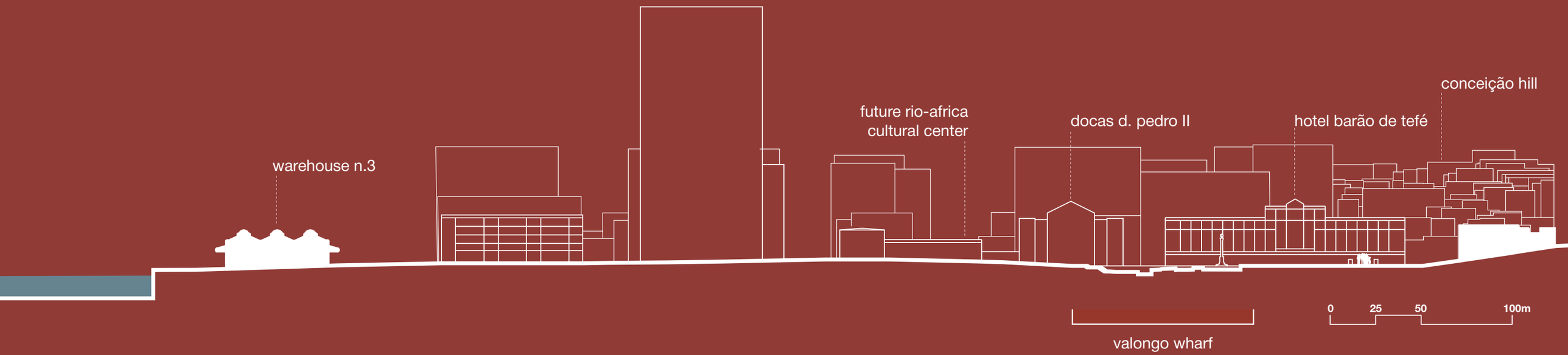
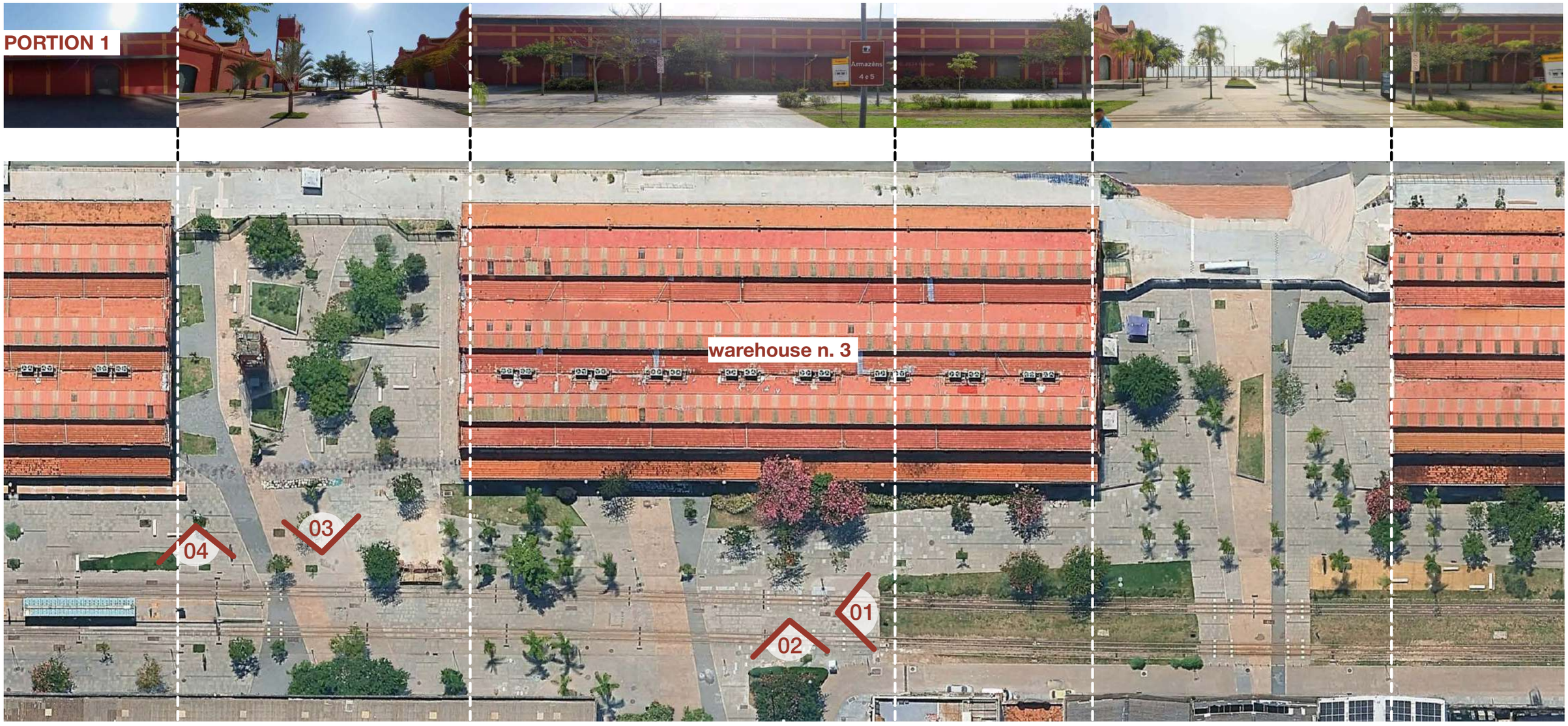


Fig. 102 Section of the intervention area. **Source** Created by the author



VIEW 01 | VIEW 02 | VIEW 03 | VIEW 04

2011

2024

Fig. 103 Visual scheme of the portion 1 of the area. **Source** Created by the author based on data from Google

VIEW 01 | VIEW 02 | VIEW 03 | VIEW 04

2009




2024



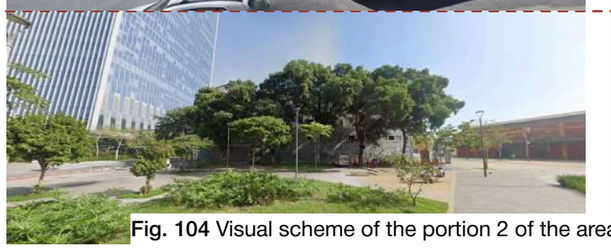
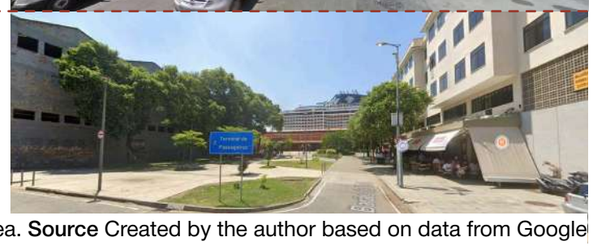
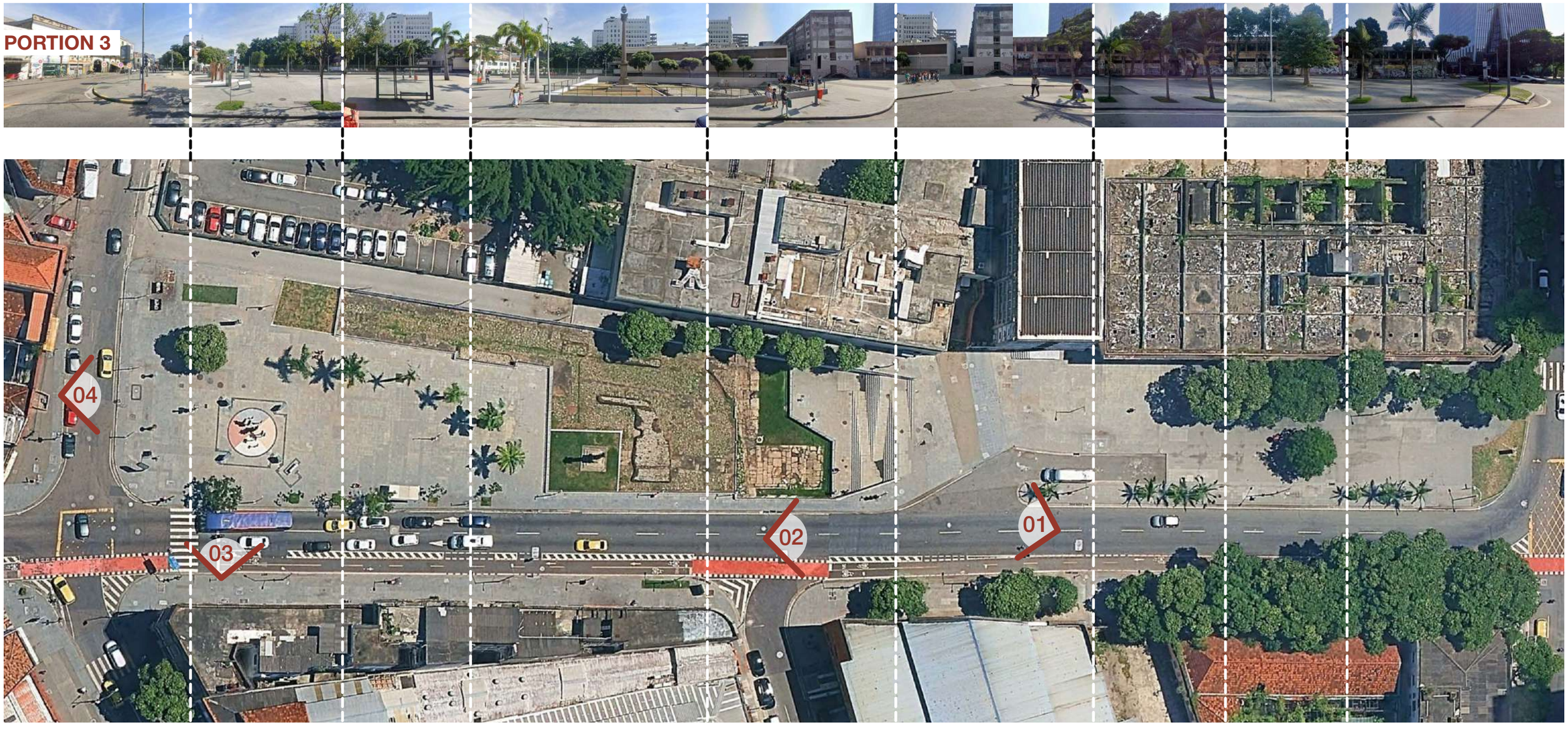
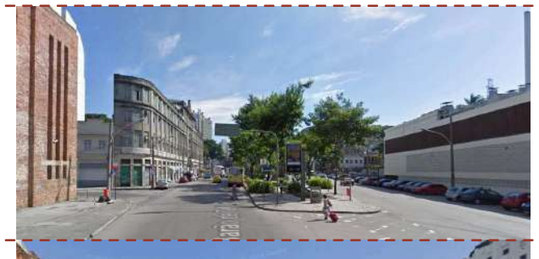
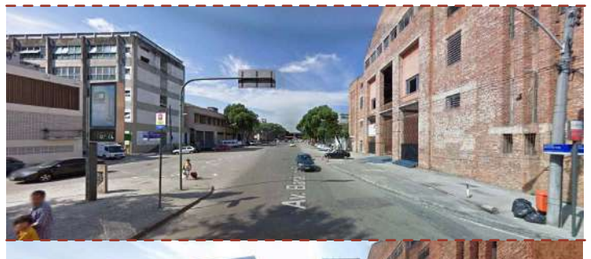



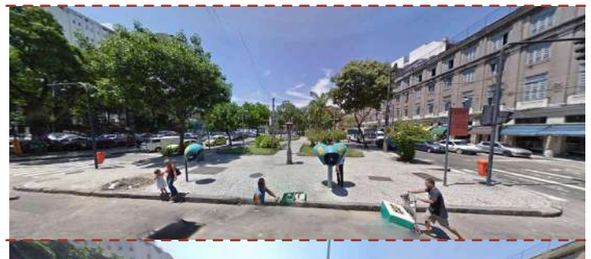
Fig. 104 Visual scheme of the portion 2 of the area. **Source** Created by the author based on data from Google



VIEW 01 | VIEW 02 | VIEW 03 | VIEW 04

2009

2024




Fig. 105 Visual scheme of the portion 3 of the area. **Source** Created by the author based on data from Google

THE PATH

Following this idea of a path from the sea towards the archaeological site, the analysis was made to understand the context and characteristics of the area. Based on the pictures and satellite images from each portion (1-3) in the previous pages, is was possible to see the surroundings, urban configurations and the activities that happen in each portion.

Portion 1 is the one connected to the sea, being part of Rio's Port. It contains warehouses that are currently being used for cultural and leisure activities, such as events and exhibitions. There is a road facing the sea with restricted access and it is where cruise ships and other vessels dock. In between the warehouses there are some public areas connected with a large pedestrian boulevard that was designed for the Olympic Games. This boulevard contains trees, seating areas and the gables of the buildings facing it feature artistic murals made by famous brazilian artists. It's also where the two lines of the VLT (Light Rail Vehicle) passes, with the steel rails placed in the middle of the boulevard. The selected area for analysis encompasses the VLT stop (Paradas dos Navios/Valongo) that is the closest that gives access to the Valongo Wharf, being an important point to place future signage directing the visitors to the archaeological site.

The portion 2 is the transitional area between the Olympic Boulevard and the city, encompassing two blocks. There is a public square continuing the landscape and pavement configurations of the boulevard and it contains a bicycle rack, seating areas and vegetation. The avenue Barão do Tefé is connected to that segment and from there it starts a bike lane. The buildings that face the public space are mostly commercial, with shops. Recently two skyscrapers were built in the area, both facing the avenue and connected to the public spaces. The block has some parking spots and a large sidewalk with some vegetation that gives access to the buildings, which are mainly composed by offices.

Going south and in direction to the Valongo Wharf we have the portion 3, consisted by the whole area that faces the archaeological site. The ruins itself will be further detailed in the next section. Regarding this portion we have some important buildings that face the site, such as Docas D. Pedro II (which will host the interpretative center of the wharf) and right next to it the area of the future Rio-África cultural center. The next block contains the Hotel Barão do Tefé and on the other side we have a hospital, whose walls faces the archaeological site. The public space where the wharf is inserted is known as Praça Jornal do Comércio and it's better illustrated and detailed in the next page.

Fig. 106 3D Overview of the intervention area. **Source** Created by the author based on data from Google

4.5 THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE

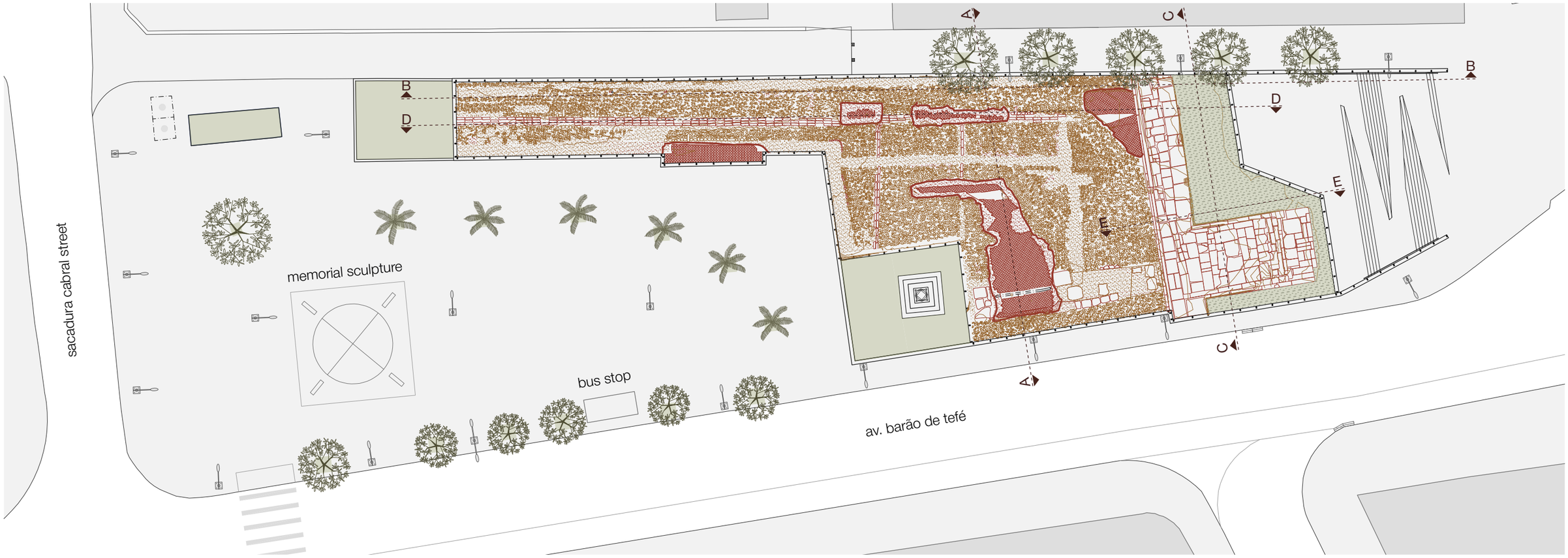


Fig. 107 Floorplan of the archaeological site **Source** Created by the author based on data from IPHAN

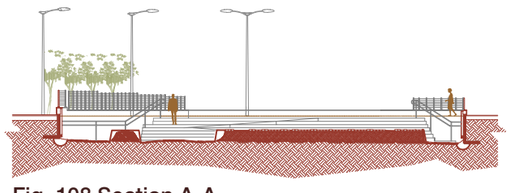


Fig. 108 Section A-A

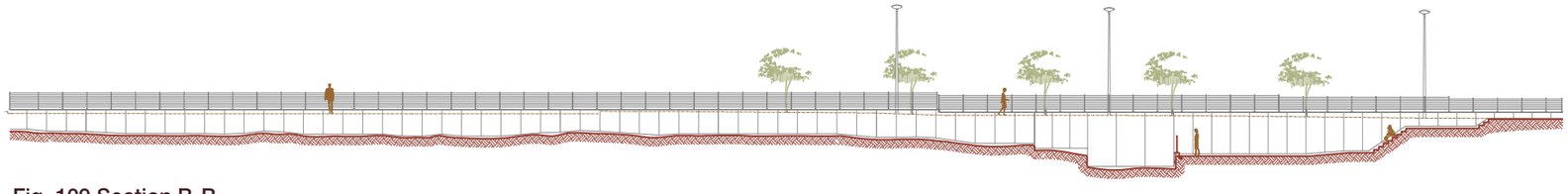


Fig. 109 Section B-B

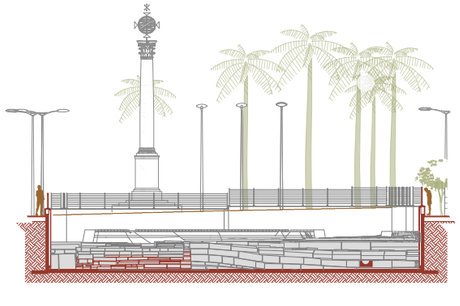


Fig. 110 Section C-C

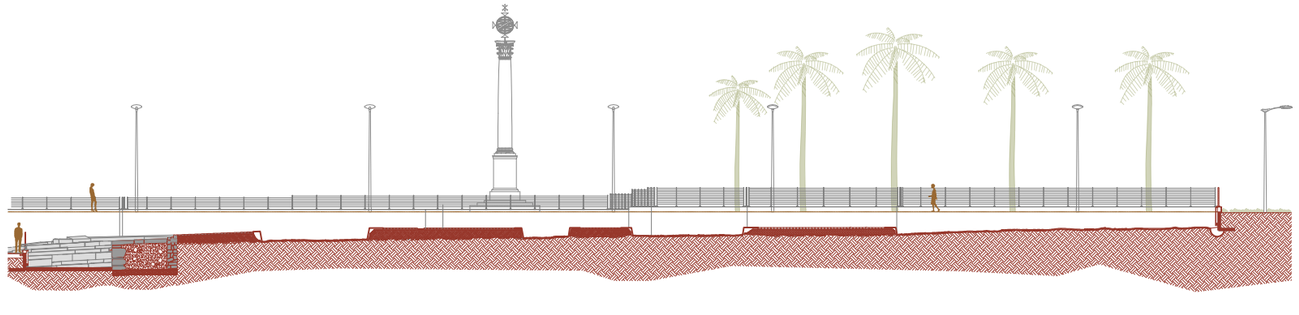


Fig. 111 Section D-D

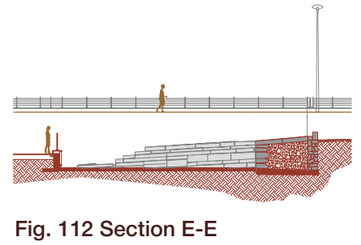


Fig. 112 Section E-E

JORNAL DO COMÉRCIO SQUARE - CURRENT STATE

As commented before, after the excavations in 2011, the square adjacent to the archaeological site was renovated and repaved, using granite slabs. Positioned in a north/south orientation, the square is surrounded by the archaeological site on the northern part, bordered by the avenue Barão do Tefé on the west, the Federal Hospital for State Employees on the east and the southern part faces the Sacadura Cabral street, with colonial houses that currently function as shops and commercial acitivities on the ground floor. The avenue Barão do Tefé has a bike lane providing access to the site.

Currently the square features a bus stop, a sculpture with exhibition modules and some palm trees and trees (Fig. 113 and 114). It doesn't have any urban furniture or places for people to sit. The square gets a lot of direct sunlight since the only source of shading are the trees, and they don't cover the whole area.

Fig. 113 Current state of the square adjacent to the archaeological site, 2024. **Source** Google streetview

Fig. 114 Current state of the square adjacent to the archaeological site, 2024. **Source** Google streetview

Fig. 115 Aerial view of Valongo Wharf. Photo by Beth Santos, 2023. **Source** Prefeitura do Rio

Fig. 116 Tactile map **Source** Mariana Leite, IPHAN

Regarding the access to the archaeological site, ramps and a staircase were made towards a viewing area, which is protected by a corten steel handrail (Fig. 115). The viewing area also has two totens, one with informations about the site and another one with a tactile map of the archaeological site (Fig. 116). The whole area is paved with the same granite slabs from the square. The contention walls are painted in a gray color.

JORNAL DO COMÉRCIO SQUARE - CURRENT STATE

In 2023, a sculpture in the shape of the African continent (Fig. 117), depending on the angle of observation, and exhibition totems with historical descriptions of the place were inaugurated in the square next to the Valongo Wharf. The artistic concept development team was composed of black people, including set designer Cachalote Mattos and designer Maria Julia Ferreira. The entire project was approved by a committee of experts, including entities linked to social projects, teachers, and professionals dedicated to preserving the region's memory.

For Cachalote Mattos, creating the sculpture for the permanent exhibition at Valongo Wharf was an extremely important experience. As a black artist, he highlights the symbolic opportunity to bring African centrality and the dimension of humanity to a place where enslaved people landed, connecting with his own ancestry. "Today we celebrate and do not let our histories be erased," emphasizes the set designer.

The exhibition is curated by Ynaê Lopes and is based on the concept of Congolese thought Bunseki Fu Kiau. Inspired by the cosmology of the Bakongo society, the exhibition uses the Diekenga mandala to represent the cycles of time, the universe, life, and all living things. The connection between the spiritual and physical worlds, separated by the waters of Kalunga, highlights the importance of African heritage in the history of Valongo Wharf and Brazil.

As mentioned by the team, the exhibition modules were designed based on central themes: Valongo as a portal that invites us to rethink the history of Rio de Janeiro and Brazil and to understand the importance of the Wharf in terms of freedom, both during the period of slavery and after it was abolished. Other themes include observing this space of Little Africa as a place of memory and struggle for the black population, reflecting on the terrible and structural nature of slavery and the weight of the transatlantic slave trade in the country's history, and showing the plurality of African peoples who were kidnapped and brought there. It is a matrix for reflection.

Fig. 117 Sculpture and exhibition modules, 2023. **Source** Folguedo

According to the company responsible for the lighting design for Valongo Wharf, the project was based on the premise of highlighting the forced "deposition" of urban layers that occurred over time. To achieve this at night, uniform lighting was proposed, with greater intensity in some areas of the archaeological site. The object to be illuminated is essentially horizontal. Therefore, it was proposed to verticalize the light sources. This factor also hinders possible vandalism of the specified materials. A cultural area was created at night that can be used safely by the municipality, creating interest and reuse for the public space in accordance with the municipality's lighting levels. The luminaires were installed at specific heights on existing poles, and it was necessary to add new poles. Two types of color temperatures were used in the project layers to highlight the different urban evolutionary phases. The general light is yellowish (3000K) and the higher layers are more bluish/neutral (4000K). Glare is avoided directly at the source with anti-glare systems and in the direction of the projectors.

Fig. 118 View of the archaeological site during the night. Photo by Pedro Teixeira, 2023. **Source** Agência O Dia

Fig. 119 Computer simulation of the lighting designed for the archaeological site by Ilumeisn. **Source** IPHAN

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE - CURRENT STATE

The current visible portion of the Valongo Wharf Archaeological Site covers 0.1058 hectares. Within this "observation window," the different historical layers of transformation in Valonguinho Bay, including the construction of the Empress's Wharf, are still evident. Most notably, Valongo Wharf itself occupies 77.47% of this exposed area. The section on display preserves key features that attest to the site's integrity, its level of conservation, and its outstanding archaeological and historical relevance. In essence, this window operates as a tangible marker and a medium for communicating the history of the forced arrival and trade of enslaved Africans in Rio de Janeiro, which constituted one of the most significant points of entry in the African diaspora. (IPHAN, 2017)

The remains revealed that the Valonguinho Bay was paved with the stones in a technique known as pé-de-moleque (hand-cut stones). Evidence was also found of a ramp and two steps, though these structural elements remain partially buried (Lima 2013). Valongo Wharf functioned as a landing point for all types of goods, including enslaved Africans. Newly arrived captives were disembarked there from small vessels, such as sumacas, patachos, and bergantins, that transported them from the Customs Post located about three kilometers away. Historical records indicate that this bay had already been used as a site for disembarking enslaved Africans since at least 1774, prior to the paving of its surface.

The paving technique employed in constructing the pé de moleque-style surface of the beach was both intricate and remarkably effective. Stones of varying sizes, shapes, and functions were carefully fitted together without the use of mortar, while preserving the natural incline of the terrain. This ensured efficient rainwater drainage, even though the paving was laid directly onto the sand. Archaeological excavations revealed the wharf at depths ranging between 1.20 and 1.80 meters, corresponding to the slope descending toward the sea.

The builders demonstrated significant technical skill, successfully combining available materials and construction methods with the site's natural gradient. Their work created an effective drainage system that resisted damage from the strong water flow, particularly from the valley that emptied into the bay. In essence, Valonguinho Bay lay at the mouth of a valley channeling runoff directly into it. As a result, Valongo Wharf can be described as a paved shoreline whose extension inland was much more substantial than the portion that reached into the sea.

The Empress's Wharf, in contrast, was constructed using large flagstones (pedras costaneiras, as Lima refers to them) of different dimensions, originally covered with evenly set cobblestones. Approximately 190 of these flagstones form part of the structure, which includes a lower ramp situated about 2.80 meters below street level, three steps, and an upper ramp.

As mentioned by IPHAN in the UNESCO Nomination File:

> "The Wharf is an architectural monument whose main attributes are as an area of beach paved with stones whose design, form, function and materials were organised in a singularly efficient manner, which allowed it to successfully fulfil an essential role in the reception system of the slave trade officially instituted by Imperial Brazil, during its two decades of existence. It is unique and exceptional both from a material point of view and in the immaterial aspects with which it is related."

Fig. 120 View of the archaeological site after renovations. Photo by Andrey Schlee, 2024. **Source** Instagram

Fig. 121 Aerial view of the archaeological site after renovations. Photo by Eduardo Anizelli, 2023. **Source** Folhapress

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE - LAYERS

Fig. 122 View of stratigraphic profile of the archaeological site. **Source** Tânia Andrade Lima

Profile clearly showing the different and successive occupations of the square now known as Praça Jornal do Commercio: in the foreground and at the lowest level, the pavement of the Valongo Wharf can be seen, followed by the landfill carried out for the construction of the Empress Wharf. Next come the cobblestones of its pavement and the new landfill made in the early 20th century, when the Empress Wharf was buried and new cobblestones were laid in the Municipal Square. Finally, over these, a thin layer of concrete was applied to install the more recent Portuguese stone paving, which has now been replaced by granite slabs as part of the reurbanization work on Praça Jornal do Commercio, following the exposure of the Valongo Wharf. (Lima, 2012)

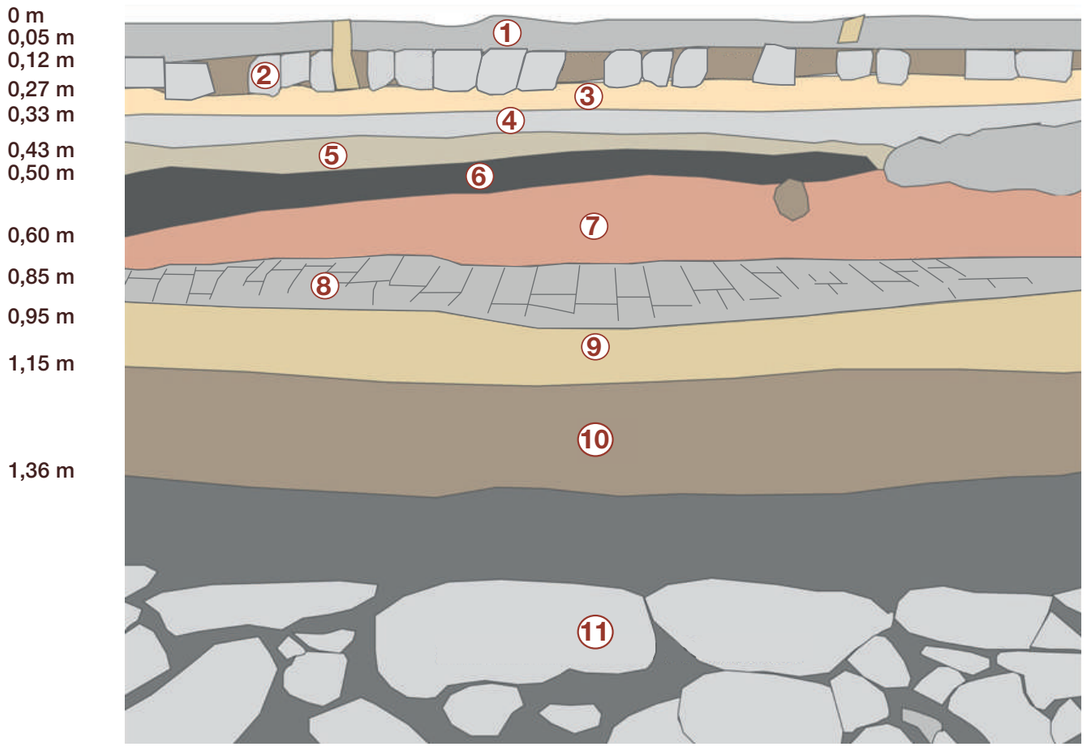


Fig. 123 View of stratigraphic profile of the archaeological site. Modified by author based on drawing by Andrea Jundi Morgado. **Source** Tânia Andrade Lima

Layer 1: concrete and asphalt
Layer 2: early 20th-century cobblestone pavement
Layer 3: grayish sand with small stones
Layer 4: medium gravel layer with sand
Layer 5: compact, grayish sandy sediment, colored by fragments of plaster and bricks
Layer 6: fine, compact, blackened sandy sediment, with slight presence of piassava fibers
Layer 7: compact, orange-colored sandy-silty sediment with small fragments of charcoal, plaster, tiles, and bricks
Layer 8: cobblestones from the Empress Wharf pavement
Layer 9: compact, brownish-gray sandy sediment with small stones and a few tile fragments
Layer 10: brownish sandy-silty sediment with some brick fragments
Layer 11: cobblestones from the Valongo Wharf pavement

4.6 STATE OF CONSERVATION OF THE REMAINS

In 2019, the revitalization project titled “Valongo Wharf: Socialization and Valorization of the Archaeological Site” was launched. The first phase was carried out in partnership with the United States Embassy and consisted of implementing procedures for the consolidation and conservation of the site’s material remains, with oversight by an archaeology team. In addition, soil cleaning and erosion control were also carried out. Since then, periodic cleanings and maintenance have been carried out to remove vegetation and other elements deposited on the surface of the site.

According to the report made by the engineering company AQ, which worked on the procedures, all materials found deposited on the surface of the site that were not part of it, were removed manually and through daily sweeping. The assessment of the relevance of the material found was carried out with the assistance of a full-time archaeologist at the site. Respecting the artistic and historical values involved, the procedures necessary for consoldation aimed at the integrity of the structure and seeked to recover the formal reading of the wharfs volume and the use of its materials as a building; assessing an unspoiled aspect of its discovery and object of study as an archaeological site, always highlighting the subtle interventions carried out so that no false history occurs.

The stonework elements that make up the pier itself, together with the staircase, had to be realigned and rebuilt using shoring where necessary and reset using mortar to ensure they were securely fastened. In addition to the misaligned stones, there were also those that had become loose, that had fall or slipped, needing to be returned to their original locations and resettled with mortar. This procedure of reassembling the pieces is called anastylosis. With regard to anastylosis, the Athens Charter recommends great caution and emphasizes the usefulness of preliminary tests. The Venice Charter, on the other hand, states in Article 15:

> “All reconstruction work should however be ruled out “a priori”. Only anastylosis, that is to say, the reassembling of existing but dismembered parts can be permitted. The material used for integration should always be recognizable and its use should be the least that will ensure the conservation of a monument and the reinstatement of its form.”

This correlation of procedures solely defends the recovery of this unity and understands that the best material for the production of these prostheses is a rock with characteristics similar to those found in the structure to be consolidated, whether in its mineralogical composition, color, or texture. The proposal emphasized the stone surface of the ensemble and, averse to a false history, suggests a contemporary cutting technique that differentiates and facilitates the dating of each one, the original stonework being wheathered stone (worn by time) and the contiguous prosthesis being sawn stone.

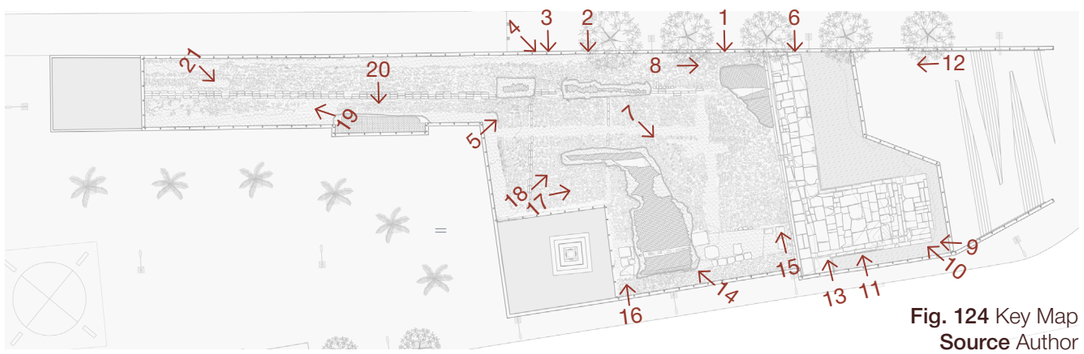


Fig. 124 Key Map
Source Author

1

Fig. 125
Source AQ ENGENHARIA

2

Fig. 126
Source AQ ENGENHARIA

3

Fig. 127
Source AQ ENGENHARIA

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Fig. 128
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Fig. 145
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Fig. 146
Source AQ ENGENHARIA

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Fig. 147
Source AQ ENGENHARIA

4.7 DOCAS D. PEDRO II - CURRENT STATE

Today, the building is not only a piece of industrial heritage but also a monument to the contributions of Afro-Brazilians to the nation's modern infrastructure and to the intellectual struggle for abolition and racial justice. The building's reuse as a cultural and interpretative center has long been envisioned as part of the broader strategy to restore and elevate Afro-Brazilian memory in the port region. The 2016 UNESCO designation of Valongo Wharf as a World Heritage Site included a recommendation for the establishment of an interpretation center and a memorial within the Docas building. This proposal was reinforced in the restoration project initiated by IPHAN in 2020, which aimed to convert the site into a Center for the Interpretation of the Valongo Wharf, an Open Laboratory of Urban Archaeology (LAAU), and the headquarters of the Fundação Cultural Palmares.

This plan would enable the warehouse to serve not only as a physical shelter for the archaeological remains found at Valongo but also as a dynamic educational space. The building would house exhibitions, research infrastructure, and programming that bridges the past with the present, contextualizing the legacy of slavery within Brazil's broader historical trajectory.

The building has undergone significant alterations over time, including a devastating fire in 1919 and various adaptations for military and commercial uses throughout the 20th century, its internal typology has been heavily compromised and its architectural authenticity diminished (Rios 2015; IPHAN 2022). Nevertheless, its monumental scale, robust masonry structure, and historical association with André Rebouças's pioneering dock project grant it enduring symbolic value. The volume of the structure, even in its altered form, continues to evoke the industrial ambitions of the 19th century and reinforces the magnitude of the narratives it now aims to host. As such, the reuse of the Docas not only responds to functional needs but also represents a powerful act of symbolic reoccupation, reclaiming a space once tied to imperial economic modernization as a site of memory and historical justice for Afro-Brazilian communities.

Importantly, the symbolic weight of the building, constructed without slave labor by an Afro-Brazilian abolitionist, makes it uniquely suited to support this role. Its proximity to the Wharf, both physically and historically, strengthens its capacity to function as a place of memory and critical reflection within the African Heritage Circuit. As emphasized, the building "evokes the identity of Afro-Brazilians and symbolizes Black presence and resistance in a historically hostile urban space". By restoring and reactivating the Docas D. Pedro II as a cultural institution, the city has an opportunity to counter centuries of historical erasure, reaffirming the foundational role of Black Brazilians in the making of Rio de Janeiro's infrastructure, economy, and identity.

Fig. 148 Docas D. Pedro II. **Source** Wikimedia

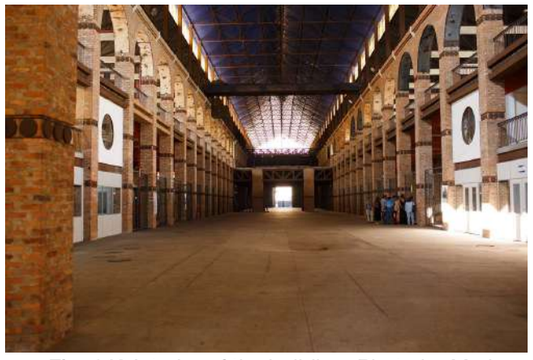


Fig. 149 Interior of the building. Photo by Mariana Leite, 2025. **Source** IPHAN

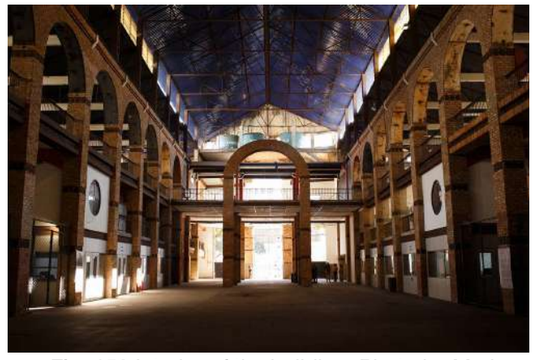


Fig. 150 Interior of the building. Photo by Mariana Leite, 2025. **Source** IPHAN

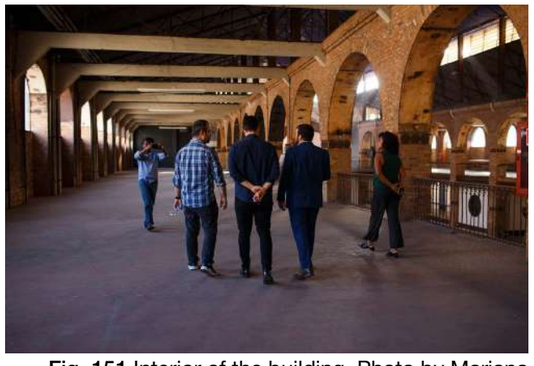


Fig. 151 Interior of the building. Photo by Mariana Leite, 2025. **Source** IPHAN

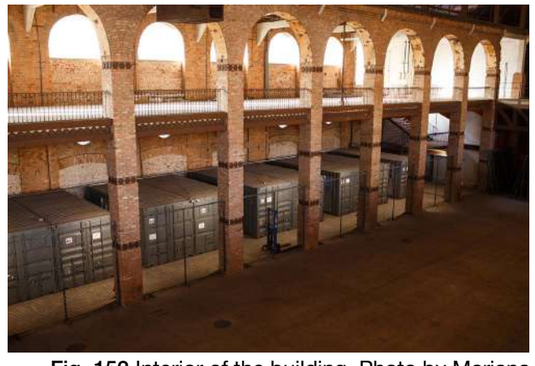


Fig. 152 Interior of the building. Photo by Mariana Leite, 2025. **Source** IPHAN

05

Valongo’s Dissonance

This chapter is focused on understanding the dissonance around Valongo. It explores the perception of the site, exploring the ways in which the site has been appropriated by Afro-Brazilian communities through religious rituals, commemorations, and acts of cultural expression, re-signifying the space as one of memory and resistance. It also examines the controversies and disputes that have marked the site since its rediscovery, focusing on political debates, funding challenges, and tensions between heritage authorities and local groups. The concept of dissonance is applied directly to Valongo, analyzing how the site embodies contested narratives and unresolved traumas. The chapter concludes by situating Valongo within broader debates about memorialization, trauma, and historical justice, emphasizing its role as a key site for confronting Brazil’s slavery past and negotiating its place in contemporary society.

Fig. 153 Steps of the Valongo Wharf. Photo by Fábio Caffé, 2021. **Source** Coordcom / UFRJ

5.1 CONTROVERSIES AND ONGOING PROPOSALS FOR THE SITE

Despite its status as a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2017, the Valongo Wharf continues to be at the center of political, institutional, and ideological disputes. While officially recognized as "the most important physical trace of the arrival of enslaved Africans in the Americas," its legacy remains contested, and proposals for its development or preservation have been shaped by conflicting visions, underfunding, and a lack of political consensus. These tensions illustrate the complex nature of dissonant heritage and raise essential questions about who gets to define and represent the past in contemporary Brazil (Vassallo & Cáceres 2019).

One of the first controversies emerged shortly after the 2011 rediscovery, when the Subsecretariat of Cultural Heritage presented an architectural project to display the exposed archaeological remains. The proposal impulsioned protests from Afro-Brazilian activists, particularly those affiliated with the Municipal Council for the Defense of Black Rights (Comdedine), who objected to the exclusion of Afro-descendant professionals from the project. Their pressure led to the withdrawal of the initial plan and the appointment of a Black architect, marking one of the earliest victories in the fight for representational equity at the site (Vassallo 2012; Comdedine 2012; Vassallo & Cáceres 2019).

This episode anticipated a broader pattern. From the outset, the process of patrimonialization has been marked by a negotiated but fragile consensus, a situation that anthropologist Daniel Fabre (2009) would describe as a "unanimité négociée," where apparent agreement conceals underlying disputes. As the site became more visible, a number of stakeholders (Afro-Brazilian activists, municipal planners, tourism officials, UNESCO, and researchers) integrated around the shared goal of recognition, yet pursued diverging objectives. While Black organizations and scholars emphasized the need for critical memory, historical justice, and community participation, municipal actors tended to frame the site as part of a broader strategy of urban renewal and symbolic branding under the Porto Maravilha project (Rocha & Eckert 2005; Santos 2015).

The 2012 inauguration of the archaeological complex by the city government exemplified this dissonance. The event, which was part of the Porto Maravilha development showcase, highlighted the arrival of Empress Teresa Cristina rather than commemorating the site's primary function in the transatlantic slave trade. The official performance featured white actors, ignored Black history, and omitted any acknowledgment of the site's trauma, prompting criticism from Black leaders who described the event as "a party for whites" (Vassallo & Cáceres 2019).

Further friction appeared around the selection and configuration of the Circuito da Herança Africana. Several points in the circuit, such as the Jardim Suspenso do Valongo, were selected by the municipality for their tourism potential, despite lacking direct links to Afro-Brazilian history. Activists contested these choices, arguing they diluted the historical specificity and symbolic power of the site. While official efforts promoted the circuit as part of a cultural economy, Afro-Brazilian voices emphasized its role in political education, resistance, and reparation (Souza & Santos 2016; Vassallo & Cáceres 2019).

A particularly polarizing proposal emerged in 2017 with the election of Mayor Marcelo Crivella. An evangelical pastor with a history of religious intolerance, Crivella appointed an Afro-Brazilian woman as Secretary of Culture who promptly announced the intention to establish a "Museum of Slavery" at the Docas Pedro II warehouse, a location previously designated by UNESCO as the ideal site for an interpretation center. The idea was met with fierce opposition.

Black intellectuals and community leaders denounced the project for reinforcing a reductive narrative of victimhood. The renaming of the project to "Museum of Slavery and Freedom" did little to resolve the conflict. As Nei Lopes argued, the focus should not be on slavery per se, but on the cultural legacy and resistance it produced: "slavery should be remembered only for having bequeathed to Brazil and the world an invaluable Afro-Brazilian cultural heritage" (Vassallo & Cáceres 2019, p. 66).

Among these conflicts, crucial obligations associated with the site's UNESCO status have remained unfulfilled. The creation of an interpretation center, one of UNESCO's central conditions, has been repeatedly postponed due to lack of funding, bureaucratic inertia, and administrative change. Between 2019 and 2022, during President Jair Bolsonaro's government, no progress was made. The participatory management committee established in 2018 was dissolved, and Bolsonaro-appointed officials, such as Sérgio Camargo of the Palmares Foundation, openly undermined the site's significance. Camargo's infamous remark that he would not allow Valongo to become a "Mecca of racial resentment" encapsulates the disdain for Afro-Brazilian memory among segments of the far-right establishment (Rios 2023).

Adding to the symbolic erasure, the physical conditions of the site had deteriorated significantly in the years following its rediscovery. In the early 2020s, the Valongo Wharf began to suffer from flooding, due in part to inadequate drainage systems and rising water levels associated with climate change and local infrastructure neglect. Rust began to eat away at the metal railings, weeds grew between the stones, and trash accumulated in the area, turning the supposed World Heritage Site into a neglected urban fragment. (Rios 2023).

In response to this stagnation, the Lula government in 2023 reinstated the participatory management group and created an interministerial working group to propose public policies for the site. Yet as of December 2024, no concrete plans have materialized. The most visible update was the November 2023 installation of eight interpretive panels and a commemorative sculpture, including works regarding the drainage system. While these installations were welcomed by some, others criticized the superficiality of the content. The panels failed to address post-abolition Black history or contemporary racial inequalities, focusing instead on sanitized narratives of cultural contributions such as samba and capoeira. The absence of figures involved in political resistance and the limited treatment of systemic racism reveal a troubling trend toward depoliticization and erasure (Araujo 2020; Vassallo & Cáceres 2019). Moreover, the 2023 ceremony itself reproduced familiar patterns of exclusion. Although the event included the traditional "Washing of the Wharf," most speakers were white male officials. Mayor Eduardo Paes's awkward comment praising two of his staff as "white folks with Black souls" was widely seen as tone-deaf and offensive.

These episodes point to the challenges of navigating dissonant heritage. Valongo Wharf is not simply a static relic; it is a living site where historical trauma, political agendas, cultural pride, and institutional neglect collide. Its significance derives not only from what it reveals about the past, but from how that past is invoked, or obscured, in the present. As Pierre Nora (1989) famously stated, lieux de mémoire (sites of memory) emerge where memory crystallizes and secretes itself. Yet the power of such sites also depends on who has the authority to narrate them.

Ultimately, the controversies surrounding Valongo Wharf reflect Brazil's unresolved racial tensions and the limitations of its heritage apparatus. Commemorating the African diaspora cannot be reduced to aesthetic representations or tourism marketing. As Cicalo (2015) and Araujo (2020) remind us, true heritage work must be dialogical, historically accountable, and grounded in the lived experiences and demands of marginalized communities.

5.2 APPROPRIATIONS OF THE SITE

Since the rediscovery of Valongo Wharf in 2011, the site has been reappropriated by Afro-Brazilian communities as a space of memory, mourning, and spiritual reverence. Far from being merely an archaeological artifact, Valongo has become an active place for cultural performances, religious rituals, and political actions. These practices are not only forms of remembrance but also acts of resistance that challenge the historical silencing of slavery and its legacies in Brazil. The symbolic occupation of Valongo represents a response to dissonant heritage, a concept that acknowledges contested meanings of historical sites and the conflicts between official narratives and those of marginalized groups (Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996; Araujo 2020).

One of the first and most meaningful acts of reappropriation came shortly after the discovery of the site, when the seventh-day funeral rites for Abdias do Nascimento, a prominent Afro-Brazilian intellectual, artist, and political leader, were held on its stones. This event, organized in May 2011 by the Institute for Afro-Brazilian Research and Studies (IPEAFRO), marked the initial sacralization of the wharf as a site of ancestry. Later commemorations, on the one-year anniversary of his death and the centennial of his birth, reinforced this symbolism, as Afro-Brazilian religious leaders and political figures, including Luiza Bairros and Wande Abimbola, gathered to honor the ancestors at the very site where enslaved Africans disembarked (Lima 2018; IPEAFRO 2014).

Among the most consistent and ritualized acts of memory is the Washing of the Valongo Wharf (Fig. 154 and 155), a purification ceremony held annually on the first Saturday of July. Initiated by iyalorixá Mãe Edelzuíta in 2012, the ritual has become an emblematic event involving processions of Afro-Brazilian religious practitioners who wear white, chant, and bathe the stones with scented water while offering flowers. The washing of the wharf was formally recognized in 2014 by Municipal Law no. 5.820, acknowledging its spiritual importance for Afro-descendant communities (Lima 2013; Santos et al. 2016). These religious ceremonies reaffirm the site as sacred ground and challenge its reduction to a neutral “museum without walls.” As noted by Mãe Celina de Xangô, the performance serves both as homage and protest, a way to “call the ancestors back into public consciousness.”

Cultural practices such as capoeira have also found renewed meaning at the site. Historically associated with Afro-Brazilian resistance and urban sociability, capoeira was often criminalized in the nineteenth century for its perceived subversive potential (Soares 1994; Assunção 2005). In recent years, however, capoeira groups such as Kabula Rio have animated Valongo with public rodas, viewing the site as an appropriate space to honor the history of African diaspora in Brazil (Fig. 159-161). These performances form part of what Carlão, a capoeira master, called the “Roda dos Saberes do Cais do Valongo”, an initiative to transform the site into a dynamic space of Afro-Brazilian knowledge and visibility (Teobaldo 2015; Cicalo 2015).

In 2014, as part of the commemorations of Abdias do Nascimento’s centennial and the 20th anniversary of UNESCO’s Slave Route Project, an expansive celebration titled “Os Ancestrais do Valongo” brought together artists, religious leaders, activists, and intellectuals at the site (Fig. 156). The event included musical performances, panel discussions, and an interfaith ritual with participation from representatives of African and diasporic communities. Organizations like the Centro Afro Carioca de Cinema, founded by filmmaker Zózimo Bulbul, played a central role in conceptualizing the cultural meaning of Valongo as a point of arrival and resistance (Cunha and Eckert 2015; Nascimento 2013).

Fig. 154 Symbolic washing of the wharf. Photo by Beth Santos. **Source** Prefeitura do Rio de Janeiro

Fig. 155 4th Washing of the Wharf. Photo by João Maurício Bragança, 2015. **Source** Valongo Wharf Nomination file

Fig. 156 Photographic exhibition to celebrate the week of African Heritage, with 130 photos of black personalities from various generations, 2014. **Source** Personal collection of Ierê Ferreira

Another important initiative was the Herança Africana – Intervenções Urbanas no Caminho do Porto, a circuit created by Bulbul to reanimate the symbolic geography of the port region. This festival featured music, dance, capoeira, gastronomy, and visual arts, and culminated in processions from sites such as Pedra do Sal to Valongo Wharf. These events highlighted how Afro-Brazilian presence is made visible through public ritual, art, and movement, challenging official attempts to depoliticize heritage through sanitized, tourist-friendly narratives (Rocha and Eckert 2005; Moura 2019). These acts of appropriation resonate deeply with the concept of dissonant heritage. As Tunbridge and Ashworth (1996) explain, dissonance emerges when groups contest the meanings and ownership of heritage sites. At Valongo, Afro-Brazilian movements actively resist state efforts to commodify memory through festivals or minimalist musealization. Instead, they reframe the site through spiritual and political presence, situating the stones of Valongo within a cosmology of ancestral reverence and a call for reparative justice (Araujo 2020; Pinheiro 2018).

Moreover, as noted by Ana Lúcia Araujo (2012) and Hanchard (1994), there is a tension between celebratory affirmations of African heritage and critical engagement with the historical and structural roots of racial inequality. While culturalist expressions such as capoeira and samba contribute to Afro-Brazilian pride and identity, they risk being detached from the site's deeper connections to systemic violence, dispossession, and ongoing marginalization. The presence of religious rituals, however, keeps the site grounded in the spiritual and ethical dimensions of memory, ensuring that the wharf is not merely a stage for spectacle, but a place of sacred history and political confrontation. In this way, the continued use of Valongo Wharf by Afro-Brazilian communities reveals a layered landscape of memory: one that simultaneously mourns the past, affirms cultural resilience, and demands recognition. These appropriations resist historical amnesia and the trivialization of Black suffering. They transform Valongo into a living monument, a site not only of commemoration but of ongoing struggle for visibility, dignity, and justice in Brazil's racialized urban space.

Fig. 157 Washing of the Wharf, Photo by Reginaldo Pimenta. **Source** Agência O Dia

Fig. 158 Washing of the Wharf. **Source** Jornal do Brasil

Fig. 159 Capoeira at Valongo Wharf on the day of Yemanjá. **Source** Jérôme Souty

Fig. 160 Capoeira at Valongo Wharf. Photo by Maria Buzanovsky. **Source** Rio On Watch

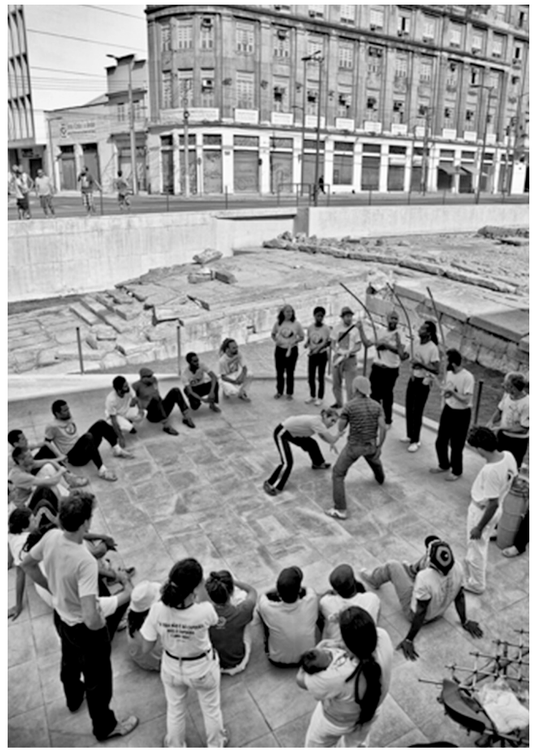


Fig. 161 Capoeira at Valongo Wharf. Photo by Maria Buzanovsky, 2012. **Source** Nomination file

5.3 DISSONANCE AT VALONGO WHARF

Valongo Wharf represents a particularly complex case of dissonant heritage. While it has been internationally recognized as a site of memory of the transatlantic slave trade and of African diaspora resistance, its local and national meanings remain filled with ambiguity, conflict, and silencing. The term “dissonant heritage,” as defined by Tunbridge and Ashworth (1996), refers to the inherent conflict in heritage narratives when the same site holds divergent meanings for different groups. Valongo Wharf exemplifies this tension, becoming a stage for overlapping and often conflicting interpretations: cultural, political, and symbolic.

As Monica Lima points out in her research, the stories that give meaning to the Valongo wharf as a heritage have the role of remembering that, like all the beauty and power of creation, the pain is part of the heritage left by our African ancestors. The pain that crosses the sensitive memory of the descendants turns the trauma of slavery into a basic cultural process in the formation of identities in the period of post-abolition. The history written by Africans and their descendants in the Valongo region is marked in the stepped stones and all over the ground. But it also crosses the ocean and relates to the Africa of the diaspora, as well with many other parts of Brazil, in which, through internal routes circulated and made it circulate these people, and with them, their ideas, knowledge, technologies and spirituality.

Interpretative Dissonance
At the core of Valongo’s dissonance is the interpretative clash between celebratory narratives of cultural legacy and the traumatic memory of slavery. The rediscovery of the Wharf in 2011 exposed what had been long buried both literally and metaphorically: Brazil’s participation in one of the most brutal forced migrations in history. Yet, the narratives constructed around the site since its reemergence have not always addressed this legacy with the depth it demands.

The interpretative dissonance is visible in the tension between efforts to valorize Afro-Brazilian culture through public celebrations such as capoeira circles, samba presentations, and religious rituals, and the reluctance of public institutions to fully confront the violence and structural racism rooted in the site’s history (Araujo 2014; Cicalo 2015). While cultural events promote pride and resilience, they also risk depoliticizing memory if detached from a critical understanding of the systems of oppression they emerge from.

Moreover, as scholars like Araujo (2020) and Moura (2019) argue, the site is often framed through a lens of racial democracy and national unity, which simplifies the past and obscures enduring inequalities. The emphasis on harmonious cultural expressions can serve to mask the brutality of slavery and the persistence of systemic racism, generating what historian Paul Ricoeur (2004) might term a “consensual memory,” devoid of the conflict and contestation that should accompany traumatic heritage.

Political Dissonance
The political dissonance surrounding Valongo Wharf is equally pronounced. The site was recognized by UNESCO in 2017 as a World Heritage Site, but this international visibility has not translated into consistent or meaningful support at the national level. In fact, the years following the inscription were marked by government neglect and overt hostility.

During the presidency of Jair Bolsonaro, institutions responsible for Black memory, such as the Palmares Foundation, were led by figures who publicly denied the value of such heritage. As reported by Rios (2023), the then-president of the Foundation claimed he would not allow the site to become “a Mecca of racial resentment.” This period also saw the dissolution of the participatory management committee that had included Black leaders, researchers, and community representatives.

The replacement of this inclusive governance structure with top-down management highlights the politicization of heritage and the marginalization of Afro-Brazilian voices. Despite UNESCO’s requirement for the creation of an interpretation center and inclusive memory policies, the failure to implement these measures underscores the discrepancy between symbolic recognition and practical commitment.

Cultural Dissonance
On a cultural level, dissonance emerges from the conflicting ways in which Valongo is remembered, used, and inhabited. While Afro-Brazilian religious leaders and community groups have sacralized the site through rituals like the annual Washing of the Wharf and tributes to ancestors, the state’s narratives often neutralize this spiritual significance in favor of heritage commodification.This tension became particularly evident during the 2012 inauguration of the site, when the city’s official ceremony emphasized imperial history and whitewashed performances, sidelining Afro-Brazilian narratives. As noted by Vassallo and Cáceres (2019), this event crystallized the exclusion of Black voices from the heritage-making process, reinforcing the impression that the site was being instrumentalized for tourism and urban branding under the Porto Maravilha program.

Moreover, as Moura (2019) points out, the incorporation of Valongo into broader narratives of Brazilian modernity through selective historical framing and spatial redevelopment tends to erase the more uncomfortable dimensions of the past. The site becomes, in her words, “a monument to forgetting as much as remembering,” reflecting a broader reluctance within Brazilian society to address the country’s racialized past and its enduring consequences.

Layers of Dissonance
These overlapping forms of dissonance, interpretative, political, and cultural, are not isolated, but mutually reinforcing. The historical silencing of slavery, the marginalization of Afro-Brazilian religious and cultural practices, and the instrumentalization of heritage for neoliberal urban development all contribute to a fragile and contested memory landscape. As emphasized by Fabre (2009), such sites are shaped not by unanimity, but by negotiated consensus, often marked by silences and exclusions. Despite the efforts of Black organizations, scholars, and religious leaders to reclaim and reinterpret Valongo Wharf as a site of resistance and ancestral connection, the site remains vulnerable to being co-opted by dominant narratives that strip it of its critical potential. The challenge is thus to avoid what Logan and Reeves (2009) warn about in cases of dissonant heritage: the pacification of memory through institutional framing that fails to confront underlying injustices.

A walk through the region of the Valongo wharf makes us remember that the Atlantic slave trade was a crime against humanity, and for which Brazil has not yet officially recognized as such. In a crime, there are victims, but this idea doesn’t imply the conception of enslaved people objects, transformed into commodities and submitted without reaction. It’s not about this quality of victim; it’s the story of those who suffered and passed us this memory. Being a victim does not mean losing the ability to act and even to transform (Lima 2018).

5.4 MEMORIALIZATION, TRAUMA AND JUSTICE

The memory of slavery is not simply a narrative of the past, it is an ongoing site of struggle, pain, and affirmation. Memorials, in their many forms, offer a way to bridge historical trauma with contemporary demands for justice. In contexts like Valongo Wharf, where the material traces of slavery are embedded in urban space, memorialization becomes an essential instrument in mediating between memory and action, recognition and reparation.

Memorials dealing with difficult heritage face the dual challenge of confronting traumatic histories while avoiding their trivialization or commodification. As emphasized by Kisić (2016), dissonant heritage, where conflict and competing narratives persist, can, when addressed through participatory processes, become a space for dialogue, healing, and reconciliation. In the case of Valongo Wharf, it is precisely the tension around its meaning, interpretation, and preservation that has activated memorial agency. Afro-Brazilian communities, recognizing the symbolic power of the site, have used it to affirm their historical presence, demand visibility, and reclaim their right to memory.

The site of Valongo, once submerged under centuries of urban neglect, has emerged as a contested terrain, not only for its physical remnants but for what it represents: the systematic erasure of Black lives and histories in the making of the Brazilian nation. Monica Lima (2018) has argued that the pain associated with the site is not just emotional, it constitutes a foundational element of Afro-Brazilian identity, a “sensitive memory” that links past trauma with present-day struggles. Recognizing this pain, without reducing Afro-descendants to perpetual victims, is one of the central challenges for any memorial project.

Memorials, when developed in inclusive and participatory ways, can serve as tools for social justice. They challenge hegemonic narratives, promote public debate, and open spaces for reparative reflection. As observed in comparative contexts like the African Burial Ground in New York or Gadsden’s Wharf in Charleston, successful memorial projects often emerge from the activism of affected communities, not from top-down initiatives. These projects integrate ritual, education, and community involvement to construct a memory that is both critical and transformative.

In contrast, in Brazil, memorialization has often been marked by ambivalence and political obstruction. For years, the Valongo site was left in a precarious state despite its designation as a World Heritage Site. Governmental failure to fulfill obligations, including the creation of an interpretation center has stalled progress, leaving the site vulnerable to degradation and symbolic erasure. The Public Defender’s Office, in 2022, explicitly denounced this neglect as a manifestation of environmental, cultural, and institutional racism.

Nevertheless, grassroots memory agents have kept the project of memorialization alive. Through performances, ceremonies, exhibitions, and public rituals, they have transformed Valongo into a living site of memory. These embodied acts of remembrance, which include capoeira circles, jongo, and the spiritual “Washing of the Wharf,” allow the site to remain relevant not as a static monument, but as a space of ongoing resistance and cultural affirmation.

This process reveals that memorialization is not only about preserving physical artifacts but about engaging with the intangible legacies of trauma, dignity, and survival. Memorials thus serve both a symbolic and political function: they allow for the processing of collective trauma while offering a platform to demand structural changes. As pointed out by the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, post-conflict memorialization must move “from memory to action” by creating opportunities for civic engagement, education, and policy influence.

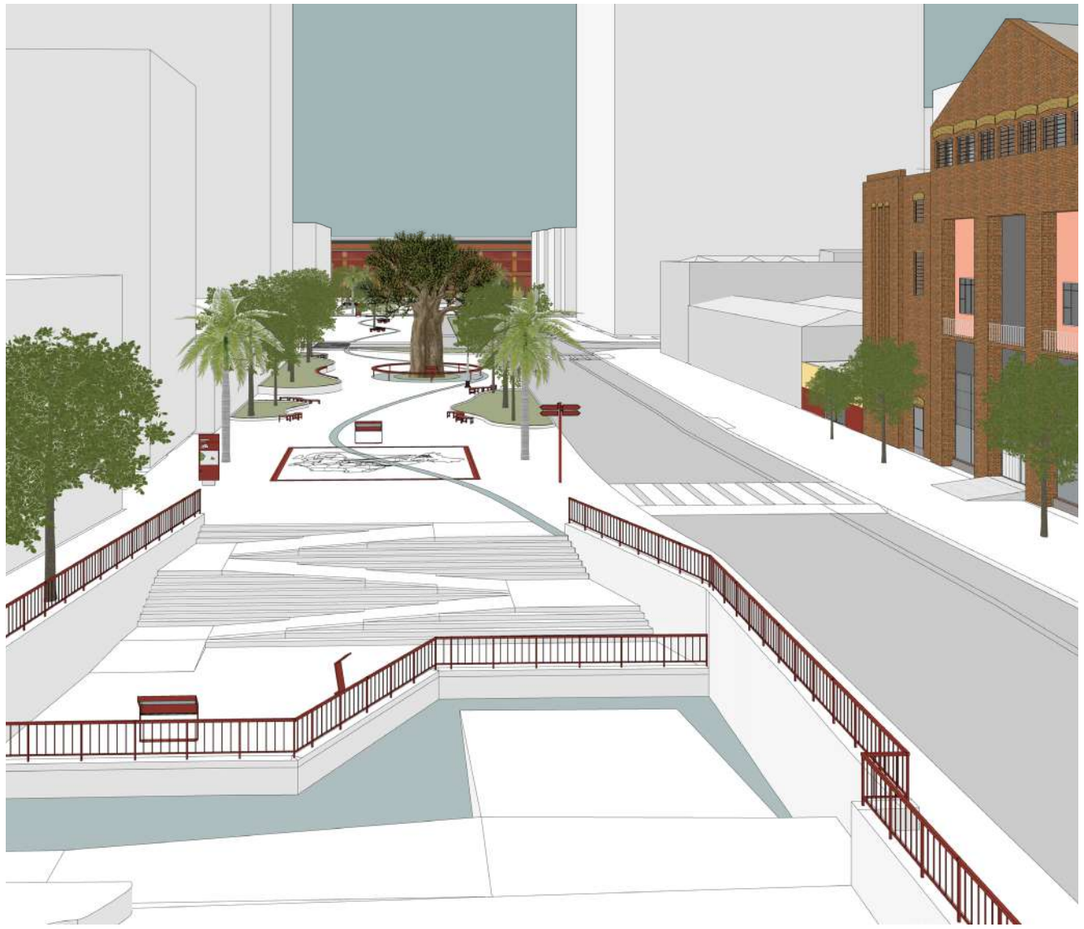
In Brazil, the discourse surrounding memorials has been evolving. While some older museums emphasized victimization and the reproduction of colonial violence through objects and imagery (as Araujo and Santos have noted), newer approaches have tried to center narratives of resistance, survival, and Afro-diasporic contributions to national culture. However, as the debate around Valongo demonstrates, these narratives must coexist. As Lima reminds us, it is not a question of choosing between pain and empowerment, but of acknowledging both as integral dimensions of a historical process that shaped modern Brazil.

In this light, memorials have the potential to become instruments of restorative justice. They can help societies reckon with past atrocities, combat historical denial, and promote inclusion. But they must be designed collaboratively, with the active participation of those whose histories have been marginalized. As Brazil struggles with its slaveholding past and its racialized present, spaces like Valongo Wharf offer an opportunity to build a more equitable memory landscape, one that honors suffering, celebrates resilience, and promotes dialogue.

06

Intervention guidelines and hypothesis

The final chapter proposes strategies for the interpretation and preservation of the Valongo Wharf. It begins by highlighting the main issues and potentials to define the intervention guidelines. The proposal is presented by portions, which together constitute a path. The intervention also includes signage proposals, aimed at improving communication, orientation and contextualization for visitors. Together, these interventions seek to strengthen Valongo's role as a place of memory while addressing its challenges as a dissonant heritage site.



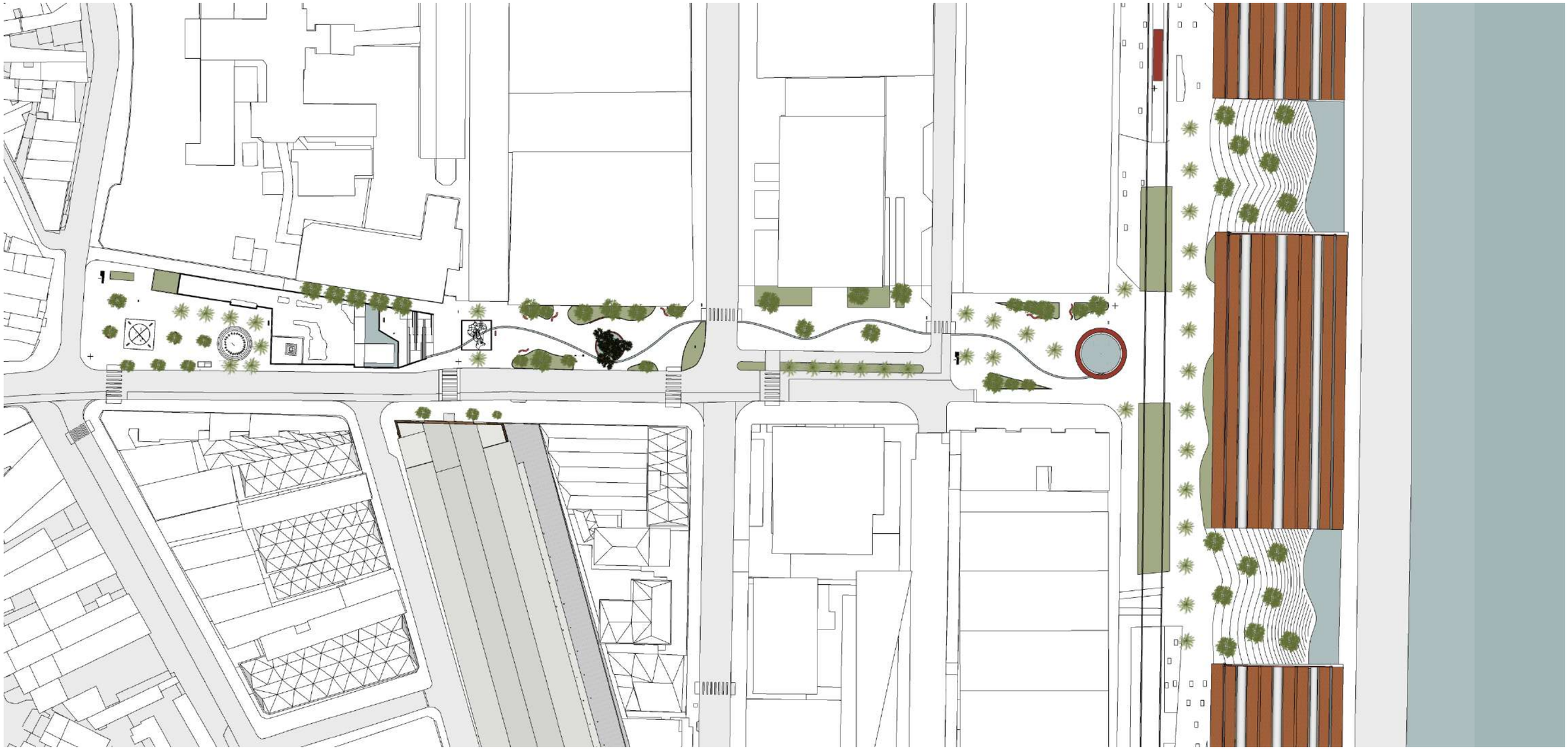
6.1 MASTERPLAN

Based on all the research and analysis conducted through this thesis, the main issues and potentials regarding the archaeological site and its interpretation were identified in order to propose strategies and solutions for the area.

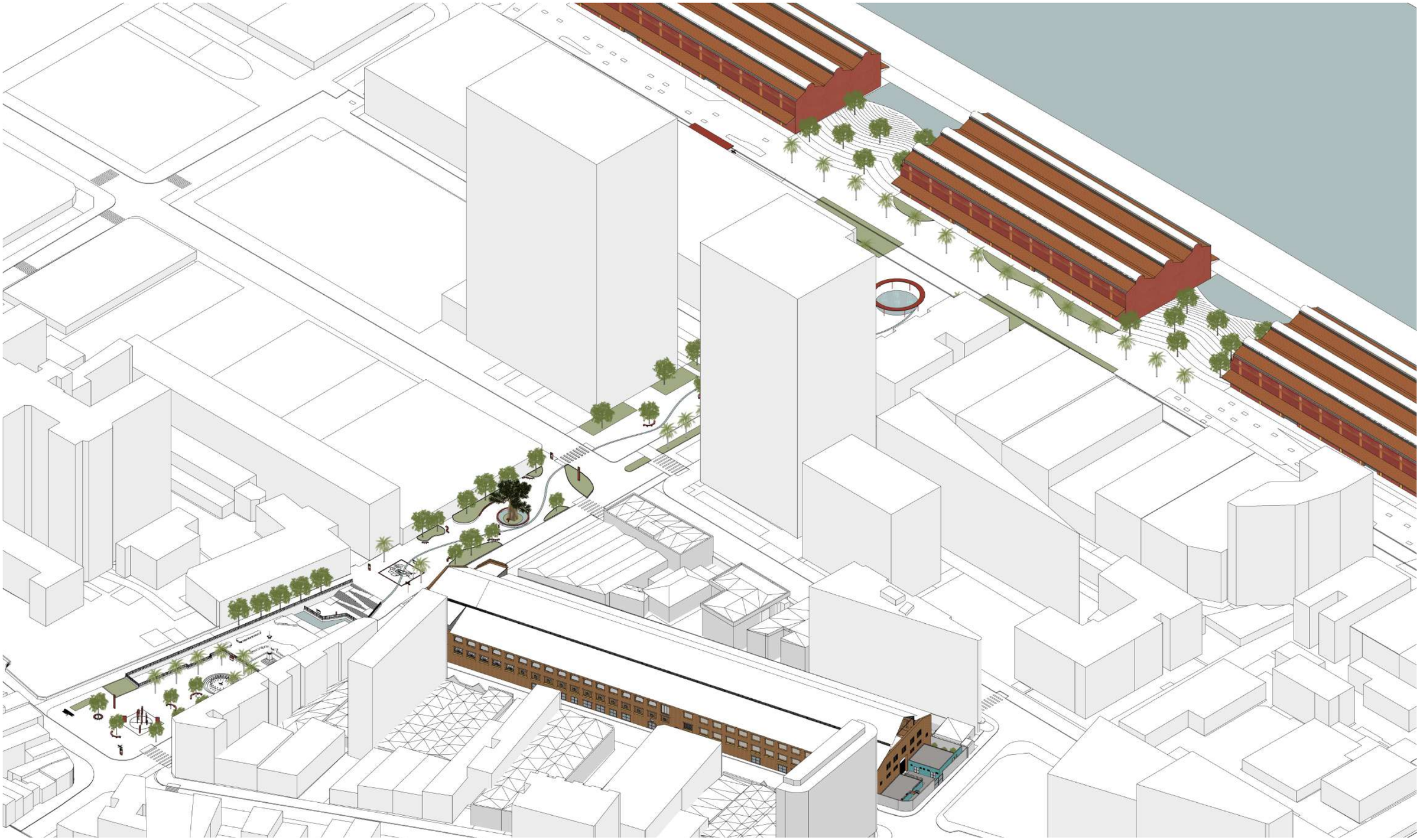
One of the main points considered for the intervention, mentioned by ICOMOS and in the UNESCO candidacy, it's the disconnection between the sea and the site, losing the original context of the area. As a recommendation they require "Strengthening through landscaping measures the relation between the seafront and Valongo Wharf, despite the fact that the warehouse at Pier Mauá, obstructs a direct sea view."

Another concern it's the small amount of information displayed about the history of Valongo and the findings, making it difficult for the visitor to fully understand the site and its attributes. There's only one plaque in the main observation point with a little summary about the wharf, and the exhibitions modules next to the sculpture, that give some background regarding a few topics but superficially. The artifacts found during the excavation and the history of the wharf are not adressed in the existing signage.

Finally, there's the necessity of creating a memorial space, dedicated to the enslaved Africans that disembarked through Valongo, seeking reflection and remembrance.

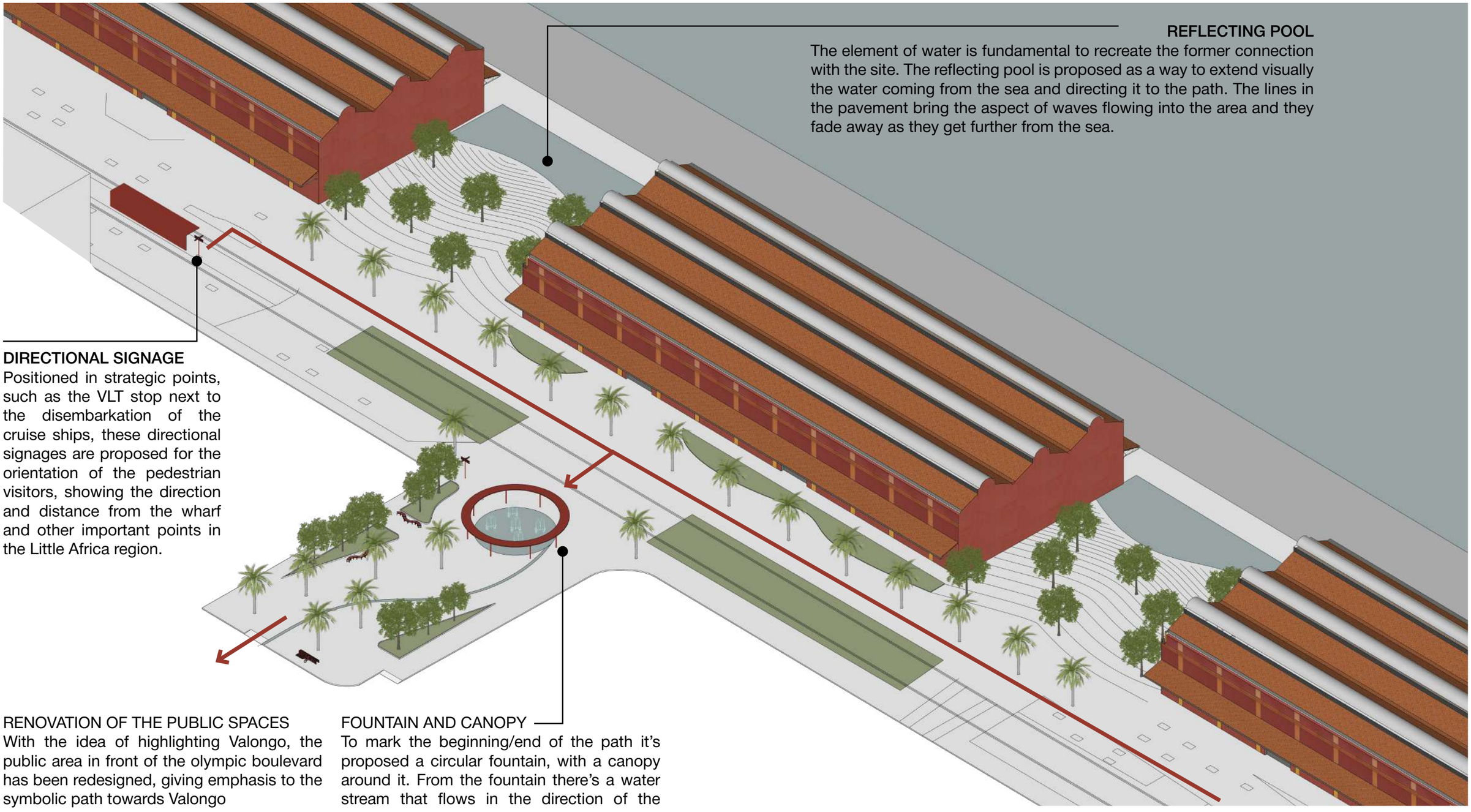


6.2 AXONOMETRIC VIEW



6.3 DESIGN PROPOSAL - PORTION 1

For this portion, the focus is create a symbolic connection with the sea and to direct the people from the Olympic Boulevard and the VLT stop to the Valongo Wharf via the proposed path through landscaping and signage measures. This area marks an important focal point towards the site.



REFLECTING POOL
The element of water is fundamental to recreate the former connection with the site. The reflecting pool is proposed as a way to extend visually the water coming from the sea and directing it to the path. The lines in the pavement bring the aspect of waves flowing into the area and they fade away as they get further from the sea.

DIRECTIONAL SIGNAGE
Positioned in strategic points, such as the VLT stop next to the disembarkation of the cruise ships, these directional signages are proposed for the orientation of the pedestrian visitors, showing the direction and distance from the wharf and other important points in the Little Africa region.

RENOVATION OF THE PUBLIC SPACES
With the idea of highlighting Valongo, the public area in front of the olympic boulevard has been redesigned, giving emphasis to the symbolic path towards Valongo

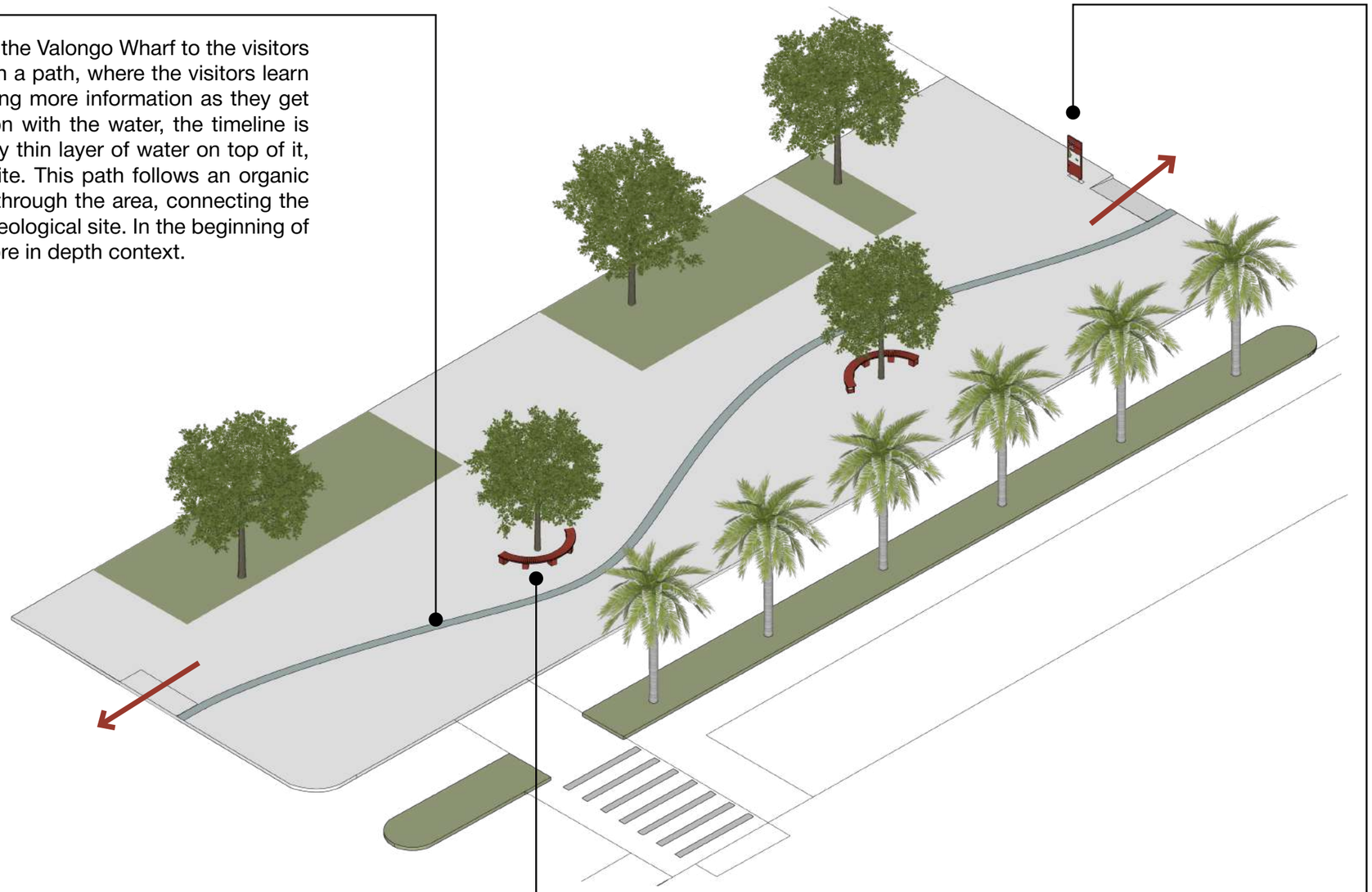
FOUNTAIN AND CANOPY
To mark the beginning/end of the path it's proposed a circular fountain, with a canopy around it. From the fountain there's a water stream that flows in the direction of the archaeological site, guiding the visitors.

6.3 DESIGN PROPOSAL - PORTION 2

This portion is designed to work as a pedestrian exhibition, with informations along the way. The idea is to follow the same landscape pattern, creating a visual identity and connecting the whole path.

WATER TIMELINE

Thinking of a way to tell the story of the Valongo Wharf to the visitors it came the idea of doing so through a path, where the visitors learn as they walk towards the site, getting more information as they get closer. To emphasize the connection with the water, the timeline is marked in the pavement, with a very thin layer of water on top of it, moving continuously towards the site. This path follows an organic shape, like a water stream flowing through the area, connecting the public spaces that lead to the archaeological site. In the beginning of each block there are panels with more in depth context.



URBAN FURNITURE AND VEGETATION

To enhance the public space and allow for longer permanence in some areas there's the placement of urban furniture, such as benches, bike deposits and also vegetation.

HISTORICAL PANELS

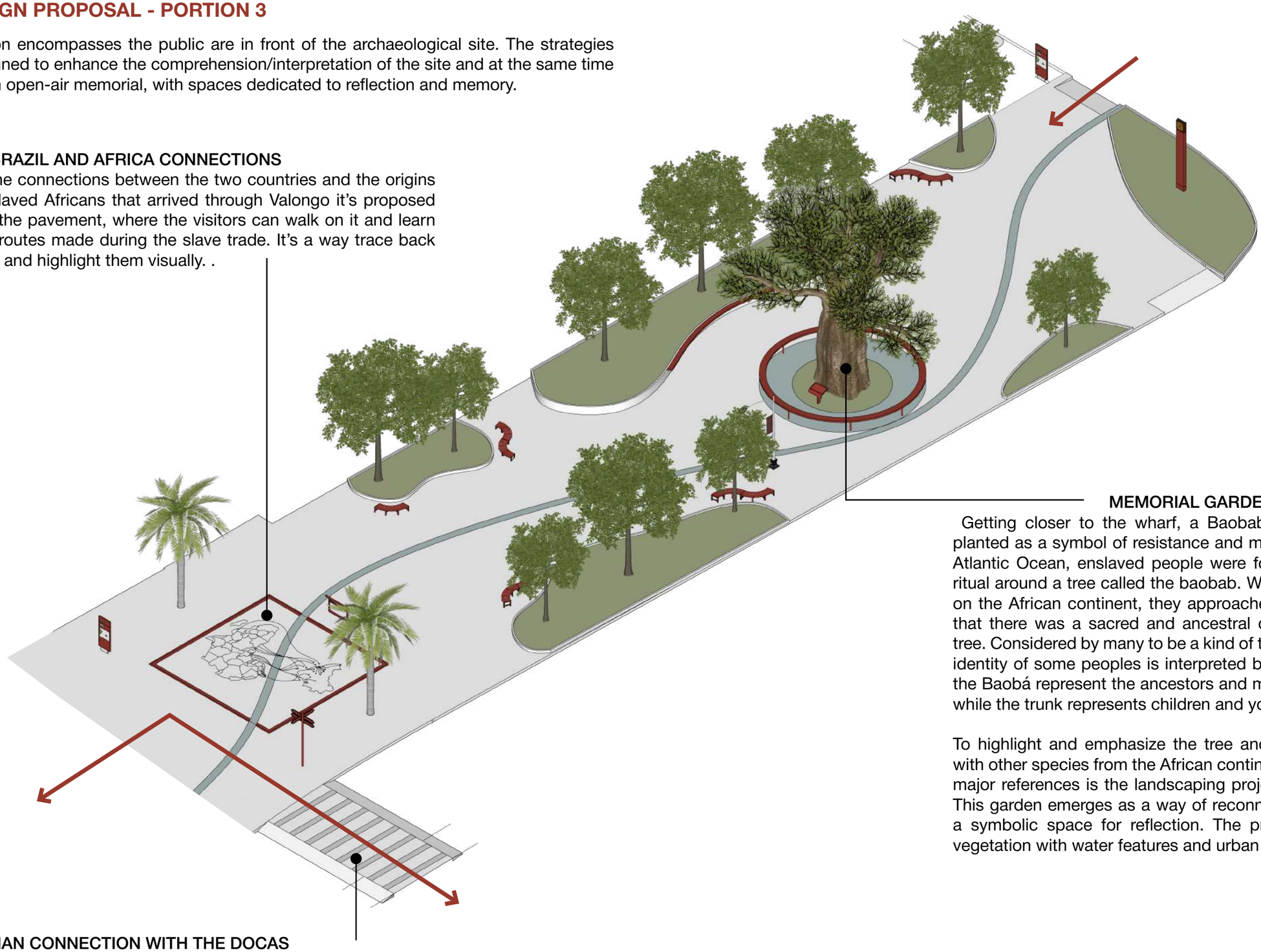
In three main points are planned panels summarizing the information from the timeline and giving more infomation about the time periods and the events related to the slave trade. They complement the timeline and provide insights that help to undersand the site. Each panel has a map of the area in the given time and a summary of the informations about that phase.

6.3 DESIGN PROPOSAL - PORTION 3

This portion encompasses the public are in front of the archaeological site. The strategies were designed to enhance the comprehension/interpretation of the site and at the same time work as an open-air memorial, with spaces dedicated to reflection and memory.

MAP OF BRAZIL AND AFRICA CONNECTIONS

To show the connections between the two countries and the origins of the enslaved Africans that arrived through Valongo it's proposed a map on the pavement, where the visitors can walk on it and learn about the routes made during the slave trade. It's a way trace back these links and highlight them visually. .



PEDESTRIAN CONNECTION WITH THE DOCAS

Considering the location of the future interpretative center in the Docas building, it's proposed an elevated pedestrian crosswalk in the same level of the sidewalk, connecting the Valongo archaeological site and the building, directing the visitors to it.

MEMORIAL GARDEN OF AFRICAN HERITAGE

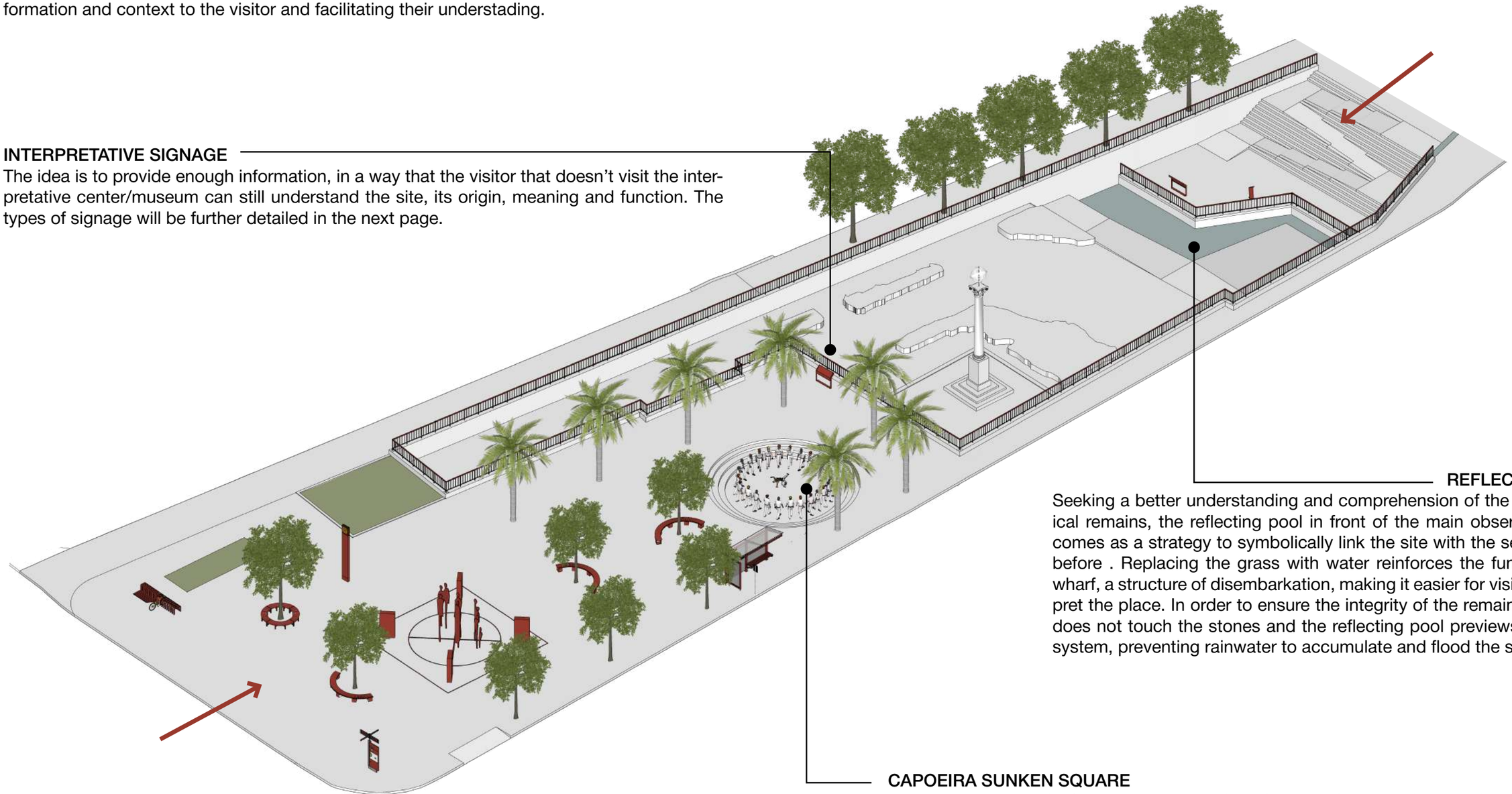
Getting closer to the wharf, a Baobab brought from Africa was planted as a symbol of resistance and memory. Before crossing the Atlantic Ocean, enslaved people were forced to perform a kind of ritual around a tree called the baobab. When the Portuguese arrived on the African continent, they approached the natives and realized that there was a sacred and ancestral dimension surrounding this tree. Considered by many to be a kind of tree of life, the African social identity of some peoples is interpreted by the idea that the roots of the Baobá represent the ancestors and memories of the community, while the trunk represents children and young people growing up.

To highlight and emphasize the tree and its importance, a garden with other species from the African continent is proposed. One of the major references is the landscaping project designed for the IAAM. This garden emerges as a way of reconnecting with Africa, creating a symbolic space for reflection. The proposal seeks to integrate vegetation with water features and urban furniture.

6.3 DESIGN PROPOSAL - PORTION 4

This portion encompasses the archaeological site and the jornal do comércio square. The strategies were designed to enhance the comprehension/interpretation of the site, giving information and context to the visitor and facilitating their understading.

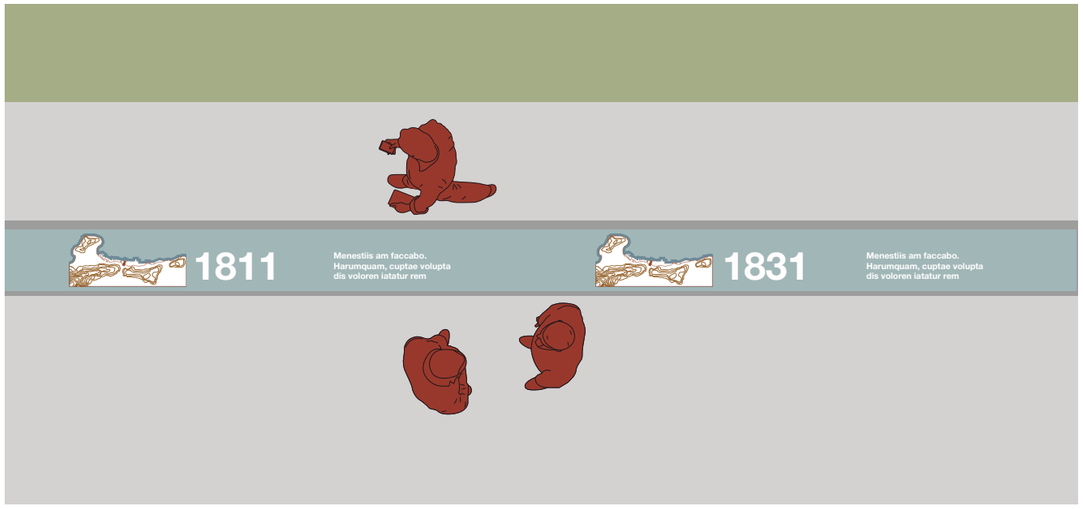
INTERPRETATIVE SIGNAGE
The idea is to provide enough information, in a way that the visitor that doesn't visit the interpretative center/museum can still understand the site, its origin, meaning and function. The types of signage will be further detailed in the next page.



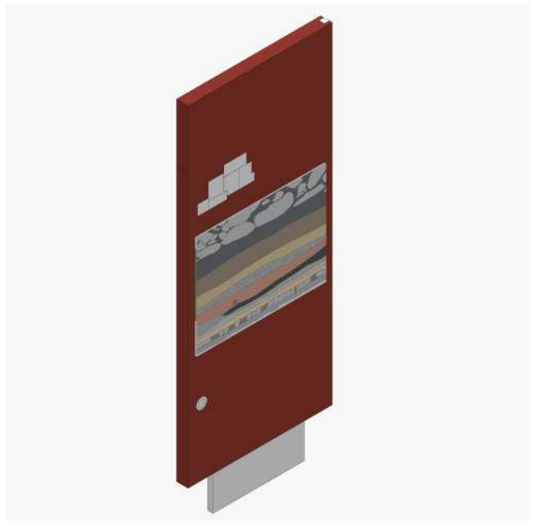
REFLECTING POOL
Seeking a better understanding and comprehension of the archaeological remains, the reflecting pool in front of the main observation point comes as a strategy to symbolically link the site with the sea, as it was before . Replacing the grass with water reinforces the function of the wharf, a structure of disembarkation, making it easier for visitors to interpret the place. In order to ensure the integrity of the remains, the water does not touch the stones and the reflecting pool previews a drainage system, preventing rainwater to accumulate and flood the site.

CAPOEIRA SUNKEN SQUARE
The capoeira circles that already happen in the site raised the idea of celebrating this practice through a circular sunken square, with steps where people can sit and participate/watch. This seeks to mark the importance of this cultural manifestation that was once proihibited during the slavery regime.

6.4 SIGNAGE PROPOSAL



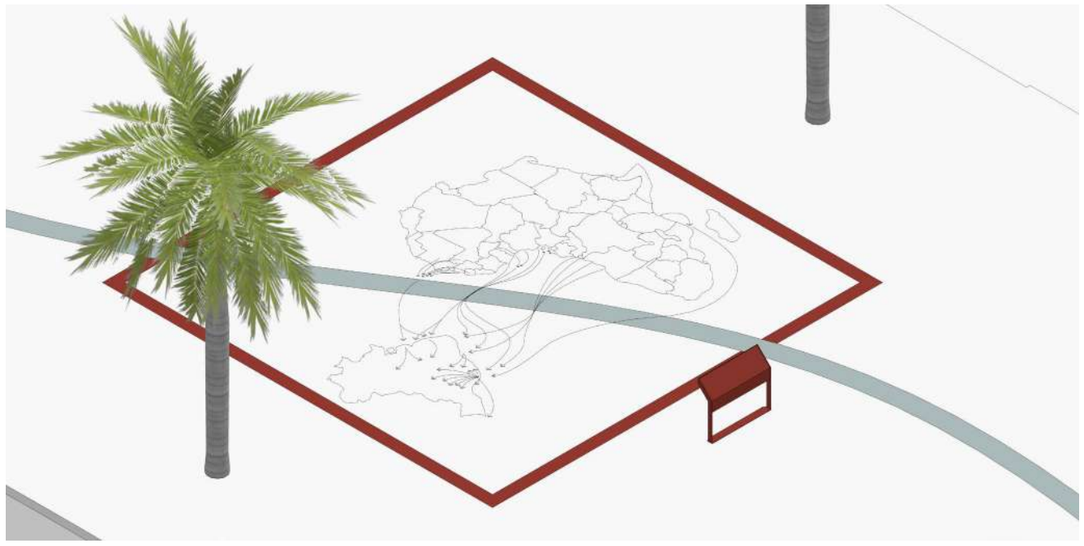
TIMELINE
The timeline provides informations about the main events in the Valongo history. It works in the pavement, with a very thin layer of water running on top, without interrupting the flow of people. It's an invitation to go through all the changes while walking to the site. In some points it's proposed benches and urban furniture where the visitor can sit and read the informations.



STRATIGRAPHY
This panel is proposed to highlight and explain the layers of the archaeological remains, expliciting the materials and techniques used in the different phases of history. The idea is to understand the layers as this succession of events that led to the current configuration of the site.

HISTORICAL EVOLUTION
This panel is proposed to be placed in one of the three points where the timeline is developed in the pavement. It contains a map of the period and a summary text, to complement the information presented in the timeline. Each point where the panel is placed represents a turning point in the Valongo history.

OVERLAPPING MAP OF VALONGO
Considering the importance of understanding the context where the wharf was inserted and all the changes made in the area through the years, it's proposed a sliding panel with a map of the area. The panel contains a historical map from the 1800s, when the wharf was still active, locating all the structures that composed the complex of Valongo. By sliding the panel there's an overlapping map of the current area, in order for the visitors to comprehend where everything used to be and what remains visible today.



ORIGINS
This panel is placed near the Baobab garden and the pavement map, going towards the archaeological site. It's dedicated to the memory of all the people that disembarked in Valongo. It has information about their origins and the main connections between the two countries, inviting the visitors to reflect about the topic.

“Resido na memória dos meus descendentes
No silêncio dos céus e na vibração das ondas.
Resido no ventre do mar e no azul do horizonte.”

“I reside in the memory of my descendants
In the silence of the skies and in the vibration of the waves.
I live in the womb of the sea and in the blue of the horizon”

Chiziane, Paulina. Canção de amor. O canto dos escravos, Matiko e Arte, 2017, p. 28.

07

Conclusion

This thesis has investigated the Valongo Wharf archaeological site as a profound and challenging case of dissonant heritage, tracing its trajectory from a central node in the transatlantic slave trade to a site of systematic erasure and, finally, one of contested recognition. Through a detailed analysis of its history, the political dynamics of its rediscovery, and a comparative look at global precedents, this research has argued that architecture and urban design are not passive backdrops to history, but active tools that can either perpetuate silence or foster a decolonial, reparative memory.

The study has demonstrated how successive layers of urban and ideological projects, from the imperial beautification that created the Empress Wharf to the republican modernization that buried it completely, functioned as deliberate acts of historical amnesia. This physical erasure was mirrored by the pervasive national myth of racial democracy, which for decades allowed Brazil to celebrate its cultural mixture while ignoring the foundational violence of slavery and its enduring legacy of structural inequality. The 2011 rediscovery of Valongo did not resolve this silence; rather, it transformed the site into a public arena where the dissonances of Brazilian memory are now openly contested. We see this in the tension between state-led, often sanitized, heritage initiatives geared toward tourism, and the powerful grassroots appropriations of the site by Afro-Brazilian communities, who have reclaimed Valongo as a sacred space for ancestral reverence, spiritual healing, and political resistance.

The design interventions proposed in this work are a direct response to these complex historical and contemporary dynamics. By seeking to re-establish the wharf's lost connection to the sea, create a memorial landscape that holds space for both solemn reflection and cultural celebration, and embed clear, critical narratives into the urban fabric, the project aims not to resolve Valongo's inherent dissonance, but to give it a coherent, respectful, and accessible physical form. The goal is to create a space that can accommodate multiple, often conflicting, truths: pain and resilience, shame and pride.

Ultimately, the Valongo Wharf is more than a historical ruin; it serves as a microcosm of Brazil's larger, incomplete reckoning with its past. The future of the site, and its ability to function as a true place of conscience, depends on a move away from top-down, institutionalized memory toward a genuinely collaborative process grounded in the demands and knowledge of Afro-descendant communities. While this proposal is speculative, it is offered as a call to action. In confronting the difficult legacy of slavery, architecture has a unique capacity to build not only structures, but also spaces of dialogue, healing, and justice, transforming a site of historical trauma into a landscape of enduring remembrance and resilience for the future.

It must be acknowledged that this thesis presents a speculative vision. Its realization would depend not on a single authorial design, but on a sustained and deeply collaborative process with the communities that are the true custodians of Valongo's memory. Therefore, the proposals should be understood not as a final blueprint, but as an invitation to dialogue. Future work must prioritize participatory design methodologies, further archaeological investigation, and the development of educational programs that can activate the site for generations to come. By embracing this complexity, we can ensure that Valongo Wharf evolves from a symbol of a painful past into a sign of a more just and inclusive future.

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Appendix A

Sources for images in the timelines:

Timeline Slave Trade in Brazil

Fig. 21 Cabral's landing in Porto Seguro, oil on canvas by Oscar Pereira da Silva, 1922 **Source** Collection of the National Historical Museum
Fig. 22 Zumbi dos Palmares **Source** UOL
Fig. 23 Malês revolt **Source** Harper's Weekly Archive
Fig. 24 Treaty for the abolition of the slave trade (1815) **Source** Museu de Arte do Rio
Fig. 25 Enslaved woman and her baby during the Second Empire **Source** Agência Senado
Fig. 26 Itamaracá Mill. Painting by Frans Post, 1647 **Source** Ricardo Brennand Institute
Fig. 27 Quilombo dos Palmares. Painting by Rugendas, 1827 **Source** Public Domain
Fig. 28 The arrival of the royal family **Source** Museu histórico da cidade do Rio de Janeiro
Fig. 29 Eusébio de Queirós **Source** Biblioteca Brasiliana
Fig. 30 Symbolic Burial of Afonso Arinos Law, Organized by the Unified Black Movement, 1978 **Source** Enciclopédia Itaú Cultural
Fig. 31 Racial equality statute **Source** Prefeitura de Curitiba
Fig. 32 Reproduction of the Golden Law of 1888. **Source** Arquivo Nacional
Fig. 33 Ulysses Guimarães holds up the Constitution he drafted during the promulgation session **Source** Câmara dos Deputados

Timeline Valongo Wharf

Fig. 44 Rio de Janeiro map, 1774 **Source** Created by author based on data from ImagineRio
Fig. 45 Rio de Janeiro map, 1811 **Source** Created by author based on data from ImagineRio
Fig. 46 Cais da Imperatriz by J Friedrich Pustkow, c. 1844. **Source** Biblioteca Estadual do Rio de Janeiro
Fig. 47 Empress Square. Photo by Augusto Malta, 1904. **Source** Arquivo Geral da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro
Fig. 48 Disembarkation of enslaved people at the customs. Painting by Johann Moritz Rugendas, 1835. **Source** Enciclopédia Itaú Cultural
Fig. 49 Rio de Janeiro map, 1843 **Source** Created by author based on data from ImagineRio
Fig. 50 Rio de Janeiro map, 1875 **Source** Created by author based on data from ImagineRio
Fig. 51 Remains of an enslaved African. Photo by Marco Antonio Teobaldo **Source** IPN
Fig. 52 Valongo Wharf receives commemorative plaque for its significance in the memory of the African diaspora. Photo by J.P. Engelbrecht **Source** Prefeitura do Rio
Fig. 53 Aerial view of Valongo Wharf. Photo by Beth Santos, 2023. **Source** Prefeitura do Rio
Fig. 54 Rio de Janeiro map, 1911 **Source** Created by author based on data from ImagineRio
Fig. 55 Rio de Janeiro map, 2011 **Source** Created by author based on data from ImagineRio
Fig. 56 Z Carioca Cultural Heritage Plaque **Source** IRPH
Fig. 57 UNESCO grants Valongo Wharf the title of World Heritage Site **Source** G1

Timeline Docas D. Pedro II

Fig. 87 Portrait of André Rebouças by Rodolfo Bernardelli **Source** Museu Histórico Nacional
Fig. 88 Landfill in front of the Old D. Pedro II Docks, between 1904 and 1911 **Source** Emydio Ribeiro
Fig. 89 Completion of the renovation of the Old Docks of D. Pedro II, in 1922. **Source** Unknow author
Fig. 90 Event happening inside the Docas D. Pedro II **Source** Ação da Cidadania
Fig. 91 Docks of the Dom Pedro II Company in Rio de Janeiro **Source** GOV.BR
Fig. 92 Ruins of the Old D. Pedro II Docks in 1922, after the fire **Source** Unknown author
Fig. 93 Docas D. Pedro II, 2023 **Source** Chico Ferreira

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