



Galiot D. João VI

Museum Heritage and Witness to History

More than a vessel – the evidence of an era. Such is the Galiot D. João VI, an immeasurably valuable cultural asset, which, due to its architectonic, historical and cultural relevance, has been listed as cultural property by the INEPAC (Cultural Heritage Institute of Rio de Janeiro) on March 31st, 1978.

The Galiot was built at the old Brazilian Navy Arsenal in Bahia as a means of transport for the Portuguese Royal Family by the time of their relocation to the Colony in 1808. On December 23rd, 1817, upon completion, it was towed from Bahia to Rio de Janeiro, and later gifted to the Portuguese King D. João VI in 1818,¹ year of his coronation as King of the United Kingdoms of Portugal, Brazil and the Algarves.

During the 19th century, and part of the 20th century, the Galiot D. João VI could be seen cruising the Guanabara Bay conveying illustrious people such as the same king who lends his name to the vessel, and who had been aboard for the last time when ferried to the ship that would conduct him back to Portugal in 1821.² On April 27, 1889, it ferried the Count D'Eu, his wife Princess Isabel, and their entourage towards the Ilha Fiscal for the inauguration of its neogothic building³. In 1920, on a state visit to Brazil, King Albert I of Belgium and his wife Queen Elisabeth were transported aboard the vessel during the landing procedure.

The vessel's measurements are as follows: 24 meters in total length; a 3.6-meter breadth (i.e., its maximum width); 1.25-meter depth (that is, the vertical distance between the deck and the keel), and a 90-centimeter draught (vertical distance between the keel and the waterline). The vessel was at first designed to hold a set of 22 oars, 11 on each side, operated by 44 oarmen, 2 per bench, and a bowman responsible for the docking/undocking procedures. While the oarmen operated in the open, passengers were conveyed inside a covered, luxuriously decorated cabin on the stern of the vessel. Later on, the number of oars was raised to 30, thus increasing the crew to 60 oarmen.

The Galiot D. João VI, due to its status as one of the most relevant assets in the collection of the DPHDM (the Navy's Directorate of Historical Heritage and Documentation), went through restoration works in 1899, 1961, 1995/1996, and 2008.⁴ Since January 1996, at the outset of the inauguration of the Navy's Cultural Hall and its exhibition circuit, the Galiot stood out as one of the main resources open for visitors.

In 2014, though, visits were interrupted due to the closure of the Navy's Cultural Hall exhibits for structural reform of the hundred-year-old mole over which this Hall has been built.

Finally, in January 2023, the Galiot D. João VI — the oldest preserved vessel in Brazil and one of a kind in South America — was conveyed to its “new home” in Ilha Fiscal. The new exhibition, next to the island's main building, was inaugurated on the first semester of 2023.

¹ SARTHOU, Carlos. *Relíquias da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro*. Rio de Janeiro: Olímpica Editora, 1961.

² SCARVARDA, Levy. “O Galeão D. João VI (No sesquicentenário de sua chegada ao Rio de Janeiro).” *Revista Marítima Brasileira*, v. 88, n. 4-6, abr-jun, 1968.

³ FERNANDES, Maria Augusta Evangelista. “A Ilha Fiscal.” *Revista Marítima Brasileira*, v. 132, n. 10-12, out-dez, 2012.

⁴ COELHO, D. “Conservação e restauro de um objecto histórico: a Galeota Real de D. João VI”. *Estudos de Conservação e Restauro*, n. 1, jan, 2009.