

# Researchers hope some objects survived Brazil museum fire

September 5 2018, by Marcelo Silva De Sousa And Mauricio Savarese

---



This combination of two undated handout photos provided by Brazil's National Museum shows the skull of Luzia Woman, left, and a reconstruction of Luzia, right, at the National Museum of Brazil in Rio de Janeiro. Discovered during an excavation in 1975 outside of the Brazilian city of Belo Horizonte, Luzia's fossilized remains sat in storage for two decades. In the mid-1990s, tests by scientists determined it was the oldest fossil in the Americas. It was given the name "Luzia," homage to "Lucy," the famous 3.2-million-year-old remains found in Africa. (Museu Nacional Brasil via AP)

Researchers held out hope that a famed skull and other valuable objects might somehow be recovered from the ashes of a massive blaze that tore through Brazil's National Museum after firefighters found bone fragments from the collection.

Officials have said as much as 90 percent of Latin America's largest collection of treasures might have been lost in a fire that broke out Sunday. Aerial photos of the main building showed only heaps of rubble and ashes in the parts of the building where the roof collapsed.

The firefighters "found fragments of bones in a room where the museum kept many items, including skulls," Cristiana Serejo, the museum's vice director, said Tuesday. "We still have to collect them and take them to the lab to know exactly what they are."

In its collection of about 20 million items, one of the most prized possessions is a skull called Luzia, which is among the oldest fossils ever found in the Americas.

Despite the evident loss, Serejo told journalists Tuesday that staff members were "reasonably optimistic about finding some more items inside."

Parts of the collection were saved when a professor rushed into the fire, and parts were held in other buildings—though some of those were also at risk. For instance, the electricity went out in an annex on the site, causing some frozen specimens to begin to rot.



Museum security guard Felipe Farias Silva shows the page of a book he found across the street from Brazil's National Museum, which he believes belongs to the institution in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Tuesday, Sept. 4, 2018. Flames tore through the museum Sunday night, and officials have said much of Latin America's largest collection of treasures might be lost. (AP Photo/Silvia Izquierdo)

Paulo Buckup, a professor of zoology at the museum, recounted Tuesday how he and a few other people pulled out mollusks and marine specimens as the fire gathered steam, going into and out of the building several times until it became too dangerous. He said the group tried to identify in the dark the most irreplaceable objects, but said they only saved a "minuscule portion of the heritage that was lost."

Many have already said that regardless of what is salvaged, the loss will be immeasurable. Marina Silva, a candidate for president in upcoming

elections, called it a "lobotomy of Brazilian history."

The Globo newspaper wrote in an editorial published Tuesday: "The size of the catastrophe is vast: It struck the national memory, through the loss of the important historical collection; it affected the sciences, interrupting research; and it represents a cultural loss impossible to quantify. We only know that it is enormous."



The National Museum, seen from above, stands gutted after an overnight fire in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Monday, Sept. 3, 2018. A huge fire engulfed Brazil's 200-year-old museum, lighting up the night sky with towering flames as firefighters and museum workers raced to save historical relics from the blaze. (AP Photo/Mario Lobao)

With the cause still under investigation, the disaster has led to a series of recriminations amid accusations that successive governments haven't sufficiently funded the museum, and it has raised concerns that other institutions might be at risk. Officials have said it was well known that

the building was vulnerable to fire and in need of extensive repair.

The national development bank announced Tuesday that it would make \$6 million available for museums looking to upgrade their security or fire-prevention plans.

On Monday, government officials promised \$2.4 million to the National Museum shore up its gutted [building](#) and vowed to rebuild the institution.

UNESCO, the U.N.'s cultural agency, has offered financial and technical assistance, and French and Egyptian officials also have offered help. The [museum](#) was home to Egyptian artifacts, and Egypt's ministries of foreign affairs and antiquities have expressed concern over the fate of those objects.



This undated handout photo provided by Brazil's National Museum shows a mummified head produced by the Jivaro of the Ecuadorian Amazon, at the National Museum of Brazil in Rio de Janeiro. The famous heads shrunk by the so-called "people of the waterfall" were prepared in complex rituals and had a deep spiritual significance. (Museu Nacional Brasil via AP)



This undated handout photo provided by Brazil's National Museum shows a representation of the Egyptian dwarf god Bes, circa 350 A.C., at the National Museum of Brazil in Rio de Janeiro. Bes the patron of childbirth was present in Egyptian homes, both rich and poor. (Museu Nacional Brasil via AP)



This undated handout photo provided by Brazil's National Museum shows wooden armor originating from Vancouver, British Columbia, at the National Museum of Brazil in Rio de Janeiro. (Museu Nacional Brasil via AP)





This undated handout photo provided by Brazil's National Museum shows an a speciman of the *Macrodonia cervicornis* beetle, at the National Museum of Brazil in Rio de Janeiro. The long-horned beetle, an endangered species, can exceed 6 inches in length. (Museu Nacional Brasil via AP)



This undated handout photo provided by Brazil's National Museum shows a miniature Inca tunic worn by a silver or gold idol that served as an offering in sacrificial events, at the National Museum of Brazil in Rio de Janeiro. This type of garment was used exclusively in festivities known as *capacochas*, in which children were sacrificed. (Museu Nacional Brasil via AP)



This undated handout photo provided by Brazil's National Museum shows a green stone frog pendant originating from Obidos, at the National Museum of Brazil in Rio de Janeiro. These common frogs have long been considered powerful amulets against all kinds of evil. (Museu Nacional Brasil via AP)



This undated handout photo provided by Brazil's National Museum shows a nocturnal bird known as the giant potoo, at the National Museum of Brazil in Rio de Janeiro. These birds choose a trunk that resembles their body and spend the whole day absolutely still so that they go unnoticed by the daytime predators. (Museu Nacional Brasil via AP)



This undated handout photo provided by Brazil's National Museum shows a priestess/princess Takushit statue dating to 730 B.C., at the National Museum of Brazil in Rio de Janeiro. Flames tore through the museum Sunday night, Sept. 2, 2018, and officials have said much of Latin America's largest collection of treasures might be lost. (Museu Nacional Brasil via AP)



This undated handout photo provided by Brazil's National Museum shows an ancient Egyptian gold leaf funeral mask dating to 304 B.C., at the National Museum of Brazil in Rio de Janeiro. Flames tore through the museum Sunday night, Sept. 2, 2018, and officials have said much of Latin America's largest collection of treasures might be lost. (Museu Nacional Brasil via AP)



This undated handout photo provided by Brazil's National Museum shows an Egyptian mummified cat, at the National Museum of Brazil in Rio de Janeiro. Flames tore through the museum Sunday night, Sept. 2, 2018, and officials have said much of Latin America's largest collection of treasures might be lost. (Museu Nacional Brasil via AP)

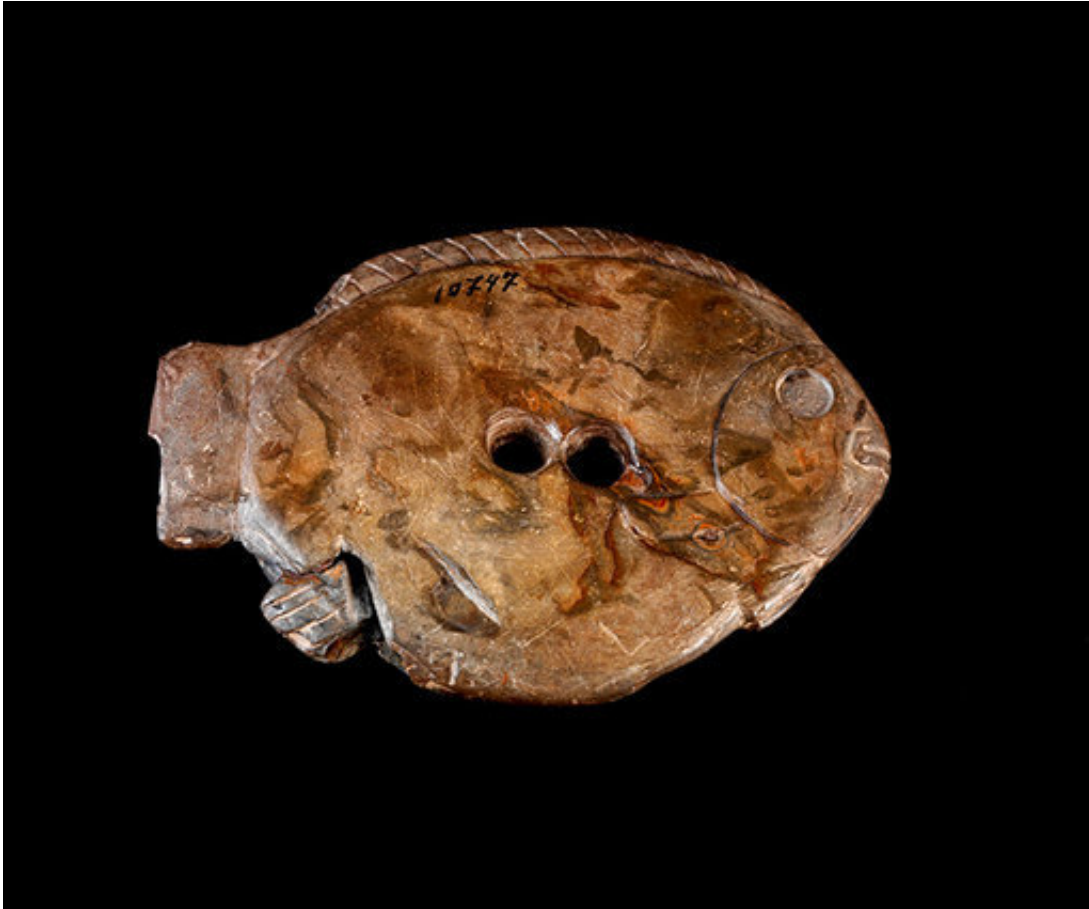


This undated handout photo provided by Brazil's National Museum shows an Owyhee cloak and necklace, at the National Museum of Brazil in Rio de Janeiro. The necklace was given to Dom Pedro I by the Sandwich Islands King Tamehameha II, in 1824, and the cloak from someone else in the traveling party. Owyhee is an early spelling of Hawaii. (Museu Nacional Brasil via AP)





This undated handout photo provided by Brazil's National Museum shows wooden masks from the Aweti, Waura and Mehinaku indigenous groups, at the National Museum of Brazil in Rio de Janeiro. Flames tore through the museum Sunday night, Sept. 2, 2018, and officials have said much of Latin America's largest collection of treasures might be lost. (Museu Nacional Brasil via AP)



This undated handout photo provided by Brazil's National Museum shows a rare zoomorphic sculpture, probably in phyllite or shale, produced by Amazonian ceramic artisans, at the National Museum of Brazil in Rio de Janeiro. The two circular and parallel holes in the center of the piece are recurrent in the stone idols found in Trombetas River region. (Museu Nacional Brasil via AP)



This undated handout photo provided by Riotur shows the Egyptian section at the National Museum of Brazil in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Flames tore through the museum Sunday night, and officials have said much of Latin America's largest collection of treasures might be lost. (Alexandre Macieira/Riotur via AP)



This undated handout photo provided by Riotur shows the main building of the National Museum of Brazil in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The palace in Quinta da Boa Vista, where the Brazilian royal family lived before the beginning of the Brazilian Republic, was the home of Latin America's biggest museum archive. Flames tore through the museum Sunday, Sept. 2, 2018, night, and officials have said much of Latin America's largest collection of treasures might be lost. (Alexandre Macieira/Riotur via AP)



This undated handout photo provided by Brazil's National Museum shows a Yoruba Gelede mask at the National Museum of Brazil in Rio de Janeiro. Gelede - a female secret society of the Yoruba-Nago community that is spread over Benin, Nigeria and Togo. This mask was added to the museum collection in an exchange with the Berlin Museum in 1928. (Museu Nacional Brasil via AP)



This undated handout photo provided by Brazil's National Museum shows one of the Tikuna masks designed by Jean-Baptiste Debret, during the French Artistic Mission (1816-1831), at the National Museum of Brazil in Rio de Janeiro. Flames tore through the museum Sunday night, Sept. 2, 2018, and officials have said much of Latin America's largest collection of treasures might be lost. (Museu Nacional Brasil via AP)

**More information:** National Museum website:  
[www.museunacional.ufrj.br/](http://www.museunacional.ufrj.br/)

© 2018 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: Researchers hope some objects survived Brazil museum fire (2018, September 5)  
retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2018-09-survived-brazil-museum.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.