The pirate life revealed 18th century

The Golden Age of Piracy

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With stately biographies and a complete debunking of the pirate myth

Gaëtan Algoet

Colophon

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Author Bio & Bibliography

Gaëtan Algoet is a Belgian researcher, writer, and publisher specializing in microhistory, maritime reconstruction, and the rediscovery of forgotten worlds. He published his first books in 2009 and 2010 and resumed his historical work starting in 2025, refining earlier manuscripts and expanding them into an international series. His research received regional attention through an interview on ROBtv, which was later included in their 2025 annual review.

As the founder of **Algoet Publishing,** he strives for historically accurate publications that achieve a high standard in both content and aesthetics. His work appears in Dutch, German, and English and is distinguished by meticulous source research, respect for context, and a clear, accessible narrative style.

Summary

The Pirate Life Revealed - 18th Century. The Reality behind the Myth reconstructs the rise, flourishing, and fall of Atlantic piracy during its most explosive phase: the period between circa 1680 and 1726.

The work opens with the transition from the seventeenth-century buccaneers to the organized pirate captains of the eighteenth century. Based on the eyewitness account of Basil Ringrose, the Caribbean pirate war is placed in its original context: a border conflict between empires, waged by maritime opportunists operating between letters of marque and rebellion.

This is followed by stately biographies of the most influential figures of the Golden Age of Piracy. Among them are:

William Kidd

Edward Thatch

Charles Vane

Jack Rackham

Mary Read

Anne Bonny

Howel Davis

Bartholomew Roberts

Stede Bonnet

Their lives are not romanticized but historically dissected: their ships, tactics, internal ship codes, economic motives, practices of violence, and their relationship to slavery, colonial trade, and Atlantic power structures are carefully reconstructed.

A separate section covers the maritime technology of the pirates, from sloop to frigate, as well as iconic vessels such as the Royal Fortune and the Whydah Galley, and analyzes the flags and symbolism that would later evolve into universal pirate iconography.

The final part systematically dismantles the pirate myth. The eyepatch, the wooden leg, the buried treasure, the eternal bottle of rum, and the theatrical voice turn out to be products of nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature and film. Figures like Long John Silver and Jack Sparrow are juxtaposed with their historical counterparts, making it clear how fiction has overwritten the memory of reality.

This book thus constitutes not only a biographical collection, but a comprehensive reference work on early modern piracy in the Atlantic world.

Preface

The pirate literature of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is not a homogeneous corpus, but a layered tradition of chronicles, pamphlets, trial reports, and later additions. Eyewitnesses such as Alexandre Exquemelin and maritime observers like William Dampier provided descriptions that were later supplemented by publishers with new biographies and sensational elements.

Through reprints and translations, a growing body of work emerged in which original testimonies and later interpretations mingled. This edition attempts to reorganize that complex material. The original core texts are respected but placed within a modern historiographical context.

Where the early modern author describes, this edition analyzes. Where the chronicle moralizes, this reconstruction contextualizes.

The goal is neither romanticization nor debasement for the sake of sensationalism, but historical clarity.

Gaëtan Algoet

Introduction

The eighteenth century marks the moment when piracy grew from a fringe phenomenon into a geopolitical crisis. What began as private warfare against the Spanish Empire evolved into a transnational network of independent captains who defied all flags.

The men, and exceptionally also women, who sailed under the black flag during this period were not folklore figures but maritime professionals. Many had served in war fleets or merchant ships during the War of Spanish Succession. When peace took away their work, some chose autonomy at sea.

Their world was harsh and rationally organized. Crews entered into contracts, divided loot according to fixed shares, elected their captain, and could depose him. Piracy was not chaos, but an alternative order within the violent Atlantic economy.

This book restores their world to its historical proportions. It separates archive from legend and restores the pirates to what they truly were: actors in an imperial power struggle, shaped by trade, slavery, war, and survival.

Acknowledgements

This work could only have come into being thanks to the foundations laid by early modern observers. My gratitude goes in the first place to Basil Ringrose and Alexandre Exquemelin, whose descriptions, espite their time-bound perspective, open a rare window onto daily life under the black flag.

In addition, later researchers also deserve recognition, including Marcus Rediker and David Cordingly, who exposed the social and economic dimensions of Atlantic piracy through critical source research.

Finally, my thanks go to the archives, maritime museums, and cartographic collections that made it possible to reconstruct ships, shipping routes, and flags with maximum historical accuracy.

History never arises from a single voice. It is the result of fragments, testimonies, contradictions, and interpretation. This book is an attempt to bring those fragments together into a coherent and responsible whole, not to feed the myth, but to make reality visible.

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- Richard Worley

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1718-1720

—

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—

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—

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—

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The Caribbean pirate war that swept the world

The history of piracy in the Caribbean does not end at the borders of the Caribbean Sea. The men who learned their trade in Port Royal, Tortuga, and the coastal waters of Nueva Granada took their war against Spain further than any empire had foreseen. The buccaneers of Jamaica and Darién formed their own war culture: a mixture of seamanship, opportunism, vindictiveness, and an unwavering hostility toward the Spanish Empire.

When they crossed the Isthmus of Darién and attacked Panamá, this Caribbean struggle moved to a new stage. The expedition that followed, led by Bartholomew Sharp, John Cox, Richard Sawkins, and Basil Ringrose, was not a break with the Caribbean world, but its direct continuation. The men who sailed into the Pacific were Caribbean pirates, shaped by Caribbean tactics, Caribbean alliances, and Caribbean war experience.

Their journey along the coasts of Tierra Firma, Quito, Guayaquil, Lima, and Arica was essentially an extension of the same war that had begun in Port Royal. The names of the places changed, but the enemy remained the same, the methods remained the same, and the mentality remained the same. The Caribbean pirate war was simply continued in another continent.

Ringrose his way of writing

Basil Ringrose wrote not as a novelist, but as a man living in the midst of the pirate world. His style is direct, matter-of-fact, and unpretentious, yet at the same time remarkably sharp in his positioning. He records courses, wind directions, latitudes, and coastlines with the precision of a sailor entrusting his life to the compass. He describes violence, cruelty, courage, and cowardice without embellishing or concealing them. He does not condemn, but neither does he conceal anything.

His account is therefore one of the most reliable and unfiltered sources on the Caribbean buccaneers. Although a large part of his story takes place in the South Seas, his perspective, his mentality, and his manner of acting remain fully rooted in the Caribbean buccaneer tradition. This account is thus not a deviation from the Caribbean theme, but rather proof of how far the Caribbean pirate war extended.

Note to the reader - About language use and historical reality

The account that follows is a document from the seventeenth century. The language Ringrose uses reflects the world in which he lived: a time of colonial domination, slavery, religious tensions, and extreme cruelty. In this edition, we preserve the originality and authenticity of his vocabulary as closely as possible, including terms that are considered offensive, problematic, or outdated today.

Words such as Negros, Indios, Mulattos, mestizos, and other ethnic or social designations appear in his text because they were common in the Spanish and English colonial world at the time. They do not reflect the values of this edition, but rather the historical reality in which Ringrose wrote. The same applies to the descriptions of violence, executions, mistreatment, and other harsh facts that were part of the buccaneers' lives.

We have deliberately chosen not to censor or soften these terms and passages, as any intervention would compromise the historical value of the document. This decision is also a matter of respect for the victims: diminishing their experiences would erase their suffering. Where necessary, we provide context so that the reader understands how these words and events functioned in their time.

This account shows the world as Ringrose saw it: unfiltered, raw, sometimes shocking, but always honest. It is precisely that honesty that makes his text one of the most valuable sources on the Caribbean buccaneers and their war against the Spanish Empire.

I. Basil Ringrose (1680–1685)

The dangerous voyage and daring attacks of Captain Bartholomew Sharp and others, carried out in the South Seas over several years.

Part 1: Departure and Darién Expeditions

Chapter I (Bocas del Toro)

Captain Coxon, Sawkins, Sharp, and others depart with a fleet toward the province of Darién on Tierra Firme. Their plans to plunder in those regions. The number of ships and the strength of their forces on land and at sea.

At a place called Bocas del Toro, the spot where they met, was the general assembly point of the fleet that had recently captured and plundered Portobelo for the second time. That wealthy place had already been plundered once before under the leadership of Sir Henry Morgan, as described in the history of the buccaneers. Two other ships were also lying at this spot: one belonging to Captain Peter Harris and one to Captain Richard Sawkins, both English privateers. Here, the fleet was informed that peace had been concluded between the Spaniards and the Indians of the land of Darién, who usually waged incessant war against one another. Since the conclusion of that peace, the Indians were said to have shown themselves reliable toward Captain Bournano, a French commander, during an attack on a place called Chepo, near the South Sea. Furthermore, the Indians had promised to lead him to a large and very

wealthy place, Tucamora. He, in turn, had promised them to return within three months with more ships and men. Thereupon, we decided collectively to go and visit the aforementioned place. We spread out over various small bays, called cuevas by the Spaniards—caves under the coast—to clean our ships and prepare them for that purpose. In Bocas del Toro, we found an abundance of fat sea turtles, the tastiest meat in the world. When we had repaired our ships, we gathered at an island which we called the Tucamora Water Cay. And this was our combined strength at the time, as follows:

	Tons	guns	men
Captain Coxon	80	8	97
Captain Harris	150	25	107
Captain Bournano	90	6	86
Captain Sawkins	16	1	35
Captain Sharp	25	2	40
Captain Cook	35	0	43
Captain Alleston	18	0	24
Captain Row	20	0	25
Captain Macket	14	0	20

We departed from there on March 23, 1679, and on the way called at the islands known as San Blas. These are islands that extend over eight nautical miles and lie fourteen nautical miles west of the Rio de Darién. While we were at anchor there, many Indians, both men and women, came to us. Some brought plantains, others fruit and game to trade with us for beads, needles, knives, or any small object they could use. What they desired most were axes and hatchets to chop wood.

The men here go naked, with only a sharp hollow tube, made of gold, silver, or bark, into which they insert their genitals. This tip is fastened around their waist with a cord. As an adornment, they wear a gold or silver plate in the shape of a crescent moon in their noses. When they drink, they hold this plate up with one hand while raising the cup with the other. Sometimes they paint their bodies with black stripes. The women do the same, but with red paint. They wear a fairly thick ring of gold or silver in their noses and cover themselves with a blanket. They are generally well-formed women. I saw several who were fairer than the fairest women of Europe, with hair as fine as the finest flax. It is said of them that they can see better in the dark than in the light.

These Indians disapproved of our plan to go to Tucamora and strongly advised against it. They claimed that the journey would take too long and that the road was so mountainous and uninhabited that it would be extremely difficult to find provisions for our men along the way. Instead, they offered to take us unseen to within a few nautical miles of the city of Panamá, if we were willing to go there. According to them, we would certainly be able to make good booty there. Based on these and other reasons they gave us, we decided to abandon the journey to Tucamora and set course for Panamá. After we had made this decision, the ships of Captain Bournano and Captain Row separated from us. They were all French and did not want to go to Panamá. They unanimously declared themselves opposed to a long march overland. Thus, we left them behind with the San Blas. From there, an Indian captain or chieftain took us to another island, called the Golden Island by the English, which lies slightly west of the mouth of the great Rio de Darién. We gathered on this island, seven ships in total, on April 3, 1680.

Here on the Golden Island, the Indians told us about a place called Santa María, situated on a large river of the same name, which flows into the South Sea via the Gulf of San Miguel. A garrison of four hundred soldiers was said to be stationed there. We were also told that a great deal of gold was brought from this city to Panamá, gold mined in the surrounding mountains. Should the haul

there not be sufficient, we could sail on from there to Panamá, where, according to them, we would certainly have success.

We liked this proposal from the Indians so much that on April 5, 1680, we put three hundred and thirty-one men ashore. Captain Alleston and Captain Mackett stayed behind with some of the sailors to guard our ships during our absence. We planned to return home later on those ships.

The men who went ashore were each given three or four loaves of bread, called dough-boys by the English, as food for the journey. They did not need to worry about drink, as the rivers provided sufficient water. At the time of our landing, Captain Sharp was still very weak, as he had been seriously ill shortly before and had only just recovered.

Our various companies that were to march were arranged as follows. The first company was led by Captain Bartholomew Sharp and carried a red flag with a bundle of white and green ribbons. The second division, led by Captain Richard Sawkins, carried a red flag with yellow stripes. The third and fourth divisions, both under Captain Peter Harris, carried two green flags, because his men were divided into two groups. The fifth and sixth divisions, led by Captain John Coxon, who had some men from Alleston and Mackett with him, each carried a red flag. The seventh division was led by Captain Edmond Cook and carried red colors with yellow stripes, with a hand holding a sword as its emblem.

All, or almost all, the men were armed with a flintlock rifle, a pistol, and a pendant.

Chapter II (March to Santa María)

They march towards the city of Santa María with the plan to capture it. The indigenous king (cacique) of Darién meets them along the way. Difficulties during this march, with other events, until they reach the place.

When we had landed on the coast of Darién and divided into companies, as described in the previous chapter, we began our march towards Santa María. The Indians served as our guides in this land unknown to us. First, we passed through a narrow strip of forest and then across an inlet nearly a nautical mile long. Next, we went two nautical miles further into a wooded valley, where we saw an old plantation here and there and had a very good path to march on. There we arrived at the bank of a river that was dry in most places, and we built houses, or rather huts, to spend the night in.

At this place, another Indian commander joined us, a man of high standing and great capabilities named Captain Antonio. This Indian officer strongly encouraged us to undertake the journey to Santa María and promised to be our guide. He said that he would accompany us now, were it not that his child was very ill. However, he was certain that the child would die the next day, and then he would undoubtedly follow and overtake us. Furthermore, he requested that we not sleep in the grass, for fear of giant snakes, which are very numerous in these regions. When we broke some stones lying in the river, we saw that they glittered with sparks of gold. These stones are carried down from the neighboring mountains during floods. On this day, four of our men became exhausted and returned to the ships. Thus, we remained with a total of 327 men, with six Indians to accompany us. That night, some rain fell.

The next day of our march, we climbed a very steep hill, and on the other side, at its foot, we rested on the bank of a river which Captain Andreas told us

flowed into the South Sea. It was the same river on which the city of Santa María was situated. From there, we continued until midday and then climbed another mountain that was considerably higher than the previous one. Here we were often in great danger, for in many places the mountain face was almost vertical and the path so narrow that only one man could pass at a time. Towards nightfall, we reached the other side of the mountain and set up camp again by the same river. By our calculation, we had covered about eighteen miles that day. It rained again that night.

The following morning, it was April 7, we marched all the time along the previously mentioned river, which we had to cross almost every half mile. Sometimes the water stood up to our knees, sometimes up to our hips, and the current was very strong. Around noon we came to a place where we found several Indigenous houses. These houses were very large and neatly built. The walls were constructed from cabbage palms and the roofs from wild reed stalks, covered above with leaves of the royal palm, but much more neatly finished than the houses in Jamaica. They were divided into several rooms, although they had no upper floor or stairs to the upper level. At this spot stood four such houses together, a stone's throw from one another, each with a large avenue of plane trees in front.

About half a mile from this place lived the king or chief of the Darién Indians. He came to visit us in his royal robes, together with his wife and family. His crown was made of small white beads that were artfully woven. The crown had no upper part other than a lining of red silk. Around the center ran a thin gold plate more than two inches wide, which was fastened at the back. From this protruded two or three ostrich feathers. Around the same place also ran a row of gold beads, larger than ordinary peas, beneath which the red lining was visible. In his nose he wore a large gold plate in the shape of a crescent moon. In each ear hung a large gold ring nearly four inches in diameter, with a round, thin gold disc of the same width attached to it, with a small hole in the center through which it hung from the ring. He wore a thin white cotton robe that

reached halfway down his legs, with a fringe three inches deep along the bottom edge. Because of the length of this robe, we could not see higher than his bare ankles. In his hand he held a long, gleaming lance, as sharp as a knife.

He was accompanied by three sons, each dressed in a white robe and holding a spear, but they stood before him with bald heads. There were also eight or nine persons from his retinue present. His wife wore a red blanket bound tightly around her waist, and another that hung loosely over her head and shoulders, similar to our old striped tapestries. She carried a young child in her arms, and two daughters walked beside her, both marriageable, with their faces almost completely covered with red stripes. Around their necks and arms they wore large quantities of small beads in various colors.

On the fourth day of our march, on April 9, we continued along the banks of the previously mentioned river, encountering a house here and there. The inhabitants of those houses usually stood in the doorways and, as we passed, gave each of us a ripe sycamore or a piece of sweet cassava root. Some counted us by dropping a kernel of corn for every man who passed, for they know no greater number and cannot count beyond twenty. That night we arrived at three large Indian houses, where we took up our sleeping places; the weather was clear and calm all night.

The King of Darién and his court receive the English privateers, as described by Ringrose during the meeting at the Rio de Santa María, April 1680.

The next day, Captain Sharp, Captain Coxon, and Captain Cook, along with about seventy of our men, went up the river in fourteen canoes to drift downstream. I, too, boarded one of these canoes. Among our company were our Indian captain Andreas, of whom mention has already been made, and in each canoe, two other Indians to lead and steer us down the river. But if we had already grown weary from traveling by land, we were certainly in an even worse condition now in our canoes. For almost every stone's throw, we were forced to step out of our boats and drag them over sandbanks or rocks; in other places over trees lying across the river and obstructing the passage; indeed, several times even over protruding headlands. That night we built huts on the riverbank to shelter under and rested our weary limbs until the next morning. When this arrived, we continued our journey all day with the same fatigue and exertion as the day before. At night a tiger came and looked at us for some time, but we did not dare shoot the animal, for fear that we would be discovered by the sound of our flintlocks, for the Spaniards, we were told, were not far from that place.

But the following day, April 12, our pain and labor were doubled rather than lessened, not only by the difficulties of the road, which were unbearable, but especially by the absence of the greater part of our men, from whom we had separated the day before. Since we now received no news of them, we became extremely suspicious of the Indians and their plans, and suspected that it was a plot by those people to divide our troops and then cut us off and hand us over to our implacable enemies, the Spaniards. That night we rested again by building huts, as mentioned earlier.

On Tuesday morning, the following day, we continued our journey downstream and arrived at a sandy headland where another arm flows into the same river. Here, we understood, the Indians of Darién usually held their gatherings when they assembled in troops with the intention of fighting their old enemies, the Spaniards. We also halted here to wait for the rest of our troops and companions, for the Indians had now sent out men to search for

them, themselves no small concern about our discontent and suspicion. In the afternoon, our companions joined us and were very pleased to see us again, for they had feared us no less than we feared them at the same time. We stayed there that night as well, intending to prepare our weapons for action, which, we were told, was now near.

From there we departed early in the morning, on the ninth day of our march, which was also the last. We were now sixty-eight canoes in total, in which we had been embarked with three hundred and twenty-seven Englishmen, and fifty Indians who served as our guides. Up to the previously mentioned headland, the Indians had propelled our canoes with long sticks, but now we made oars and paddles ourselves to row with and to advance as quickly as possible. Thus we rowed with every conceivable haste and met two or three Indian canoes loaded with plane trees on the river. Around midnight we arrived and went ashore at a distance of about half a mile from the city of Santa María, the goal of our entire journey. The place where we landed was deeply muddy, so that we had to lay our paddles on the mud to walk on it, and at the same time pull ourselves up on the branches of the trees to prevent ourselves from sinking. After that, we were forced to cut our way through the forest, where we took up our sleeping places that night, for fear of being discovered by the enemy, to whom we had now approached so closely.

Chapter III (Capture of Santa María)

They take the city of Santa María without loss of men, and with only a small amount of booty of what they sought. Description of the place, the land, and the river. They decide to plunder the city of Panamá for the second time.

The following morning, Thursday, April 15, at daybreak, we heard a small firearm go off from the city, followed by a drum beating the assembly signal. This woke us from our sleep, and after taking up our arms, we made ourselves ready and marched toward the city. As soon as we emerged from the forest onto the open ground, we were spotted by the Spaniards. They had received word of our arrival in advance and were prepared to receive us, having already carried away all their gold treasures and sent them to Panamá. They immediately rushed into a large palisade fort, each post of which was twelve feet high, and began firing very fiercely at us as we approached. But our vanguard rushed toward the spot, pulled down two or three of their palisades, and immediately entered the fort and took possession of it.

During this action, fewer than fifty of our men reached the fort before it was captured, and on our side there were only two wounded and not a single dead. Nevertheless, two hundred and sixty men were found inside the fort, and in addition, another two hundred were reportedly absent, having gone inland to the mines to bring down gold, or rather to remove what was already present in the city. These gold treasures come to Santa María via another branch of this river, from the neighboring mountains, where the richest mines of the Indies are suspected to be located, or at least of this entire western world. Of the Spaniards, we killed twenty-six men and wounded sixteen during the assault. But their governor, their priest, and most of their most prominent men managed to escape by fleeing.

After we had captured the fort, we expected to find a substantial city belonging to it here. But it turned out to consist only of a few rough houses of reeds; the place was primarily a garrison intended to keep the Indians in subjection, who harbor a deadly hatred and are often inclined to rebel against the Spaniards. But however bad the place was, our spoils were even worse. For we arrived three days too late, otherwise we would have found three hundred pounds of gold, which had been brought from there to Panamá in a bark that is sent from there two or three times a year to collect the gold brought from the mountains to Santa Maria. This river, which is named after the city, is here about twice as wide as the Thames at London, and flows more than sixty miles inland, rising to a height of two and a half fathoms near the city itself. As soon as we had taken the place, the Indians who belonged to our party and had served us as guides entered the city. For as soon as they had heard the sound of the weapons, they were greatly alarmed and dared not approach the palisades, but hid themselves in a small hollow, so that, while we fought, the bullets flew over their heads.

Here we found and freed the eldest daughter of the King of Darién, of whom we have already made mention previously. She had, it seems, been carried away from her father's house by one of the men of the garrison, which rape had severely embittered him against the Spaniards, and she was pregnant by him.

After the battle, the Indians killed just as many Spaniards as we had during the assault, by taking them into the adjacent forest and stabbing them to death there with their spears. But as soon as we learned of this cruel deed, we prevented them from taking any more men out of the fort, where we held them all as prisoners.

Captain Sawkins went down the river in a canoe with a small group of ten men to stop, if possible, those who had escaped, being the leading figures of the city and the garrison.

But now that our great expectation of making a considerable haul of gold here had completely vanished, we were not inclined to have come this far only to

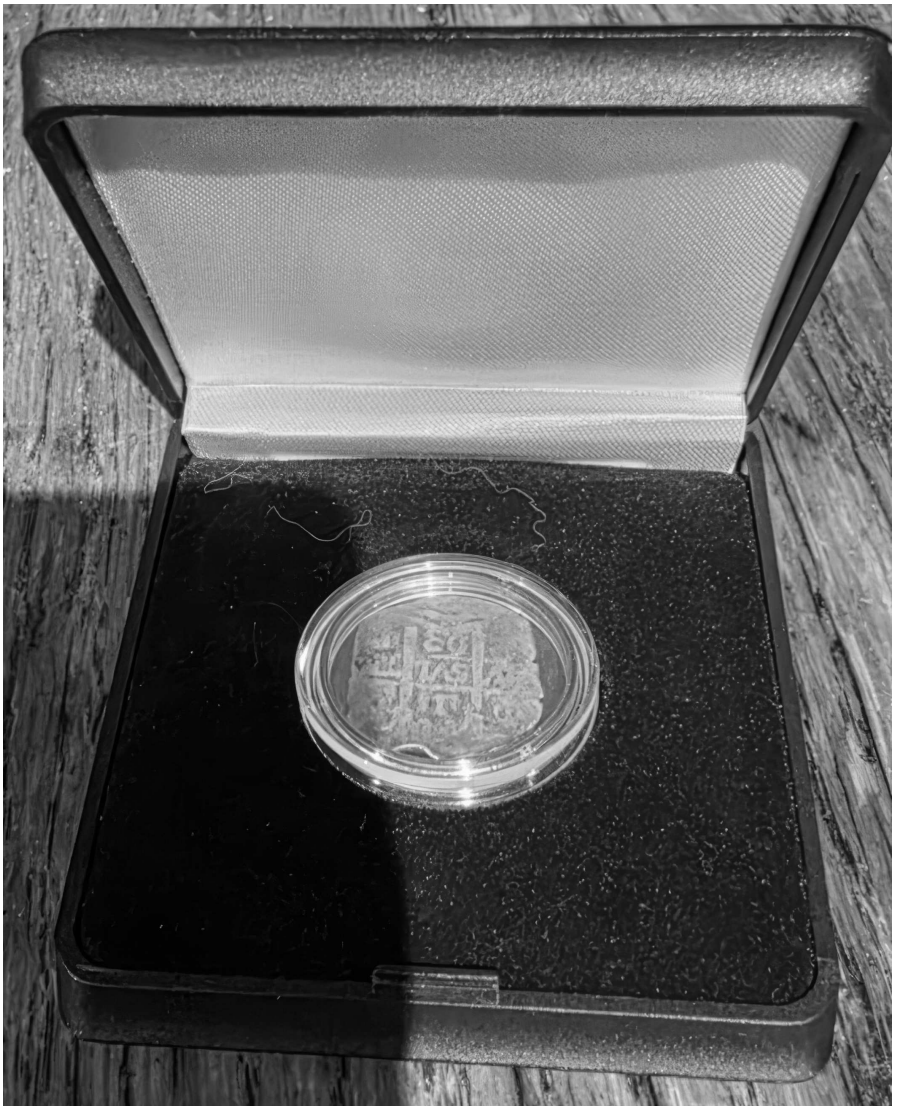
return empty-handed; especially not, since such great riches were to be obtained at a short distance from here. Thereupon we decided to go to Panamá, the place, if we could capture it, would certainly yield us enough treasures to satisfy our hunger for gold and wealth, since that city is the gathering point for all the silver, jewels, and gold extracted from the mines of all of Potosí and Peru.

To this end, and to meet the wishes of a part of our party, we chose Captain Coxon as our general, or commander-in-chief.

Before our departure, we sent back the meager booty we had taken here, under the guard of a few prisoners and under the supervision of twelve of our men, to take it to the ships.

And so we prepared to continue our journey along that dangerous undertaking towards Panamá. But the Indians who had accompanied us so far, and who had received from us all the knives, scissors, axes, needles, and beads they could get their hands on, did not want to stay any longer. All of them, or at least the majority, returned to their homes.

Nevertheless, the king himself, Captain Andreas, Captain Antonio (the king's son, called Bonete de Oro or 'King of the Golden Hat' by the Spaniards), and his relative did not abandon us.



Silver Potosí -cob (1693), identical to the coins transported to Panamá via Santa María in Ringrose's time. From the author's private collection.

Detail of the same Potosí cob (1693), with the coat of arms of Castile and León and the pillars and waves strike of the Potosí coin .

They were not persuaded by the others dropping out to leave us, but decided to go with us to Panamá, driven by their desire to see how that place would be captured and plundered. Indeed, the king even promised to add fifty men to our forces if necessary. In addition to these promises, we had another, very significant encouragement to undertake this journey.

For the Spaniard who had abducted and raped the king's daughter, as mentioned earlier, fearing that we would leave him to the mercy of the Indians. Those Indians would have little pity for him, since they had shown themselves so cruel towards the rest of his companions.

Reverse of the same Potosí cob (1693), with the Jerusalem Cross and the traditional quarters of Castile and León. The author often uses this coin as a demonstration piece during lectures and book presentations, as a tangible object from the Caribbean pirate era.

Fearing for his life, he had promised not only to lead us into the city, but even to the door of the bedroom of the Governor of Panamá. He assured us that we would be able to seize him by the hand and take possession of both him and the entire city before we were discovered by the Spaniards, either before or after our arrival.

Chapter IV (On to Panamá)

The buccaneers leave the city of Santa María and continue by boat to conquer Panamá. Great difficulties and all kinds of incidents and dangers during that journey.

After having occupied the city of Santa María for two days, we departed on Saturday, April 17, 1680. We boarded thirty-five canoes and a periagua that we had captured here and which lay anchored off the city. Thus we sailed, or rather rowed, down the river, on our way to the South Seas, where Panamá lies, towards the Gulf of San Miguel, where we would flow into that ocean.

Our prisoners, the Spaniards, urgently begged us to be allowed to go with us and not be left behind at the mercy of the Indians, who would show them no pity whatsoever and whose cruelty they so greatly feared. But we already had enough trouble finding sufficient boats for ourselves, for the Indians who had left us had taken as many canoes as they could, either with permission or by theft. Nevertheless, the Spaniards soon found hollowed-out dugout canoes or old canoes, and so they managed to save themselves and come along with us.

Before our departure, we burned down the fort, the church, and the city. This was done at the request of the king, who was deeply embittered by it.

Among the canoes we were paddling, it was my misfortune that I had one that was very heavy and therefore moved forward slowly. As a result, we lagged far behind the rest. There were only four of us in that canoe, myself included. When the tide came in, several sandbanks became exposed. Because we did not know the correct channel amidst so many different currents, we accidentally steered onto a sandbank and sailed more than two miles in the wrong direction before realizing our mistake.

As a result, we were forced to wait until the tide came in again. Rowing against the current in such heavy boats is completely impossible. As soon as the tide turned, we rowed on and did everything possible to continue our journey. But it was to no avail. We could not find our companions, nor could we catch up. Around ten o'clock at night, at low tide, we placed an oar upright in the river and took turns sleeping in the canoe. Rain showers fell all night, leaving us soaked to the skin.

The next morning, as soon as it got light, we rowed downstream again, looking for our people. After covering about two leys, we were lucky enough to catch up with them. They had spent the night at an Indian hut, at an embarcadero—that is to say, a landing place—and had been stocking up on water until that morning. When we arrived there, they told us that we absolutely had to fill our jugs, otherwise we would not find water for six days.

Thereupon we all went a quarter of a mile inland to a small pool to fill our gourds and hurried back to the canoe. But when we returned, we found no one left. They had all left and already vanished from sight. This is how these wild people act: they do not care who they lose or leave behind. We were now even more worried than before, afraid that we would fall again into the same misfortune that we had just overcome.

We rowed after them as fast as we could, but in vain. For at the mouth of the river lie such large numbers of islands, large and small, and also sandbanks, that it was easy for us, who did not know the river, to lose ourselves again. Nevertheless, with much difficulty and effort, we eventually found the mouth which the Spaniards call Boca Chica, or the Little Mouth. But by then it was rising tide, and the current was running very strongly against us.

Although we were no more than a stone's throw from the mouth and it was almost a lega wide, there was no way we could make it against the tide. Therefore, we had to go ashore, which we did, until high tide returned. We pulled our canoe close to the bushes, and when we got out, we tied the rope to a

tree that was almost entirely covered by the tide, for here the water rises nearly four fathoms.

As soon as the tide began to turn, we rowed from there to an island lying about a leg and a half from the mouth of the river, in the Gulf of San Miguel. We had a particularly hard time in that gulf. Every time a wave slammed against the side of our canoe, we were in danger. The canoe was nearly twenty feet long, but at its widest point, it was less than a foot and a half wide. We had just enough room to sit, and a little water would easily have filled us and capsized.

We spent that night on the island mentioned. But due to the loss of our companions and the great dangers we faced, it was the saddest night I had experienced in my life up to that point. It rained heavily all night, so that we were soaked from head to toe and not a thread of our bodies remained dry. Because of the force of the rain, we could not keep a fire burning to warm or dry ourselves.

The tide recedes half a mile from the high water line here, exposing high, sharply pointed rocks. We spent this heavy and long night without a minute's sleep. We were saddened because we were separated so far from our companions and because we were completely devoid of human comfort. On one side lay a vast sea; on the other, the presence of our enemies, the Spaniards. We could not discover anything anywhere that gave us any hope. All we saw was the wide sea, high mountains, and rocks. Meanwhile, we ourselves were trapped in a tiny boat, without any clothing to protect us from the weather. None of us had shoes on our feet at that moment.

We searched the entire island to see if we could find water, but we found nothing.

Part 2: Ringrose's Shipwreck and the Northern Crossing

Chapter V (shipwreck)

Shipwreck of Mr. Ringrose, the author of this account. He is captured by the Spaniards and miraculously spared by them. Several other incidents and misfortunes that befell him after the loss of his companions, until he found them again. Description of the Gulf of Panamá / Bayona.

On Monday, April 19, at daybreak, we pulled our canoe back into the water. We set off from the previously mentioned island, still wet and cold, and rowed towards Punta de San Lorenzo, on the Golfo de San Miguel. Along the way, we encountered several islands scattered there. But once again, we had a particularly hard time. Due to the small size of our boat and because we were now on the open sea, it was sometimes the work of one man, and sometimes even of two, to bail the water out of the canoe that was coming in from all sides.

After struggling with these difficulties for some time, and as we approached one of those islands, a wave crashed against us and capsized our boat. We all had to swim for our lives. Nevertheless, we soon reached the coast, and shortly thereafter our canoe came rolling along behind us through the waves. Our weapons were securely strapped to the inside of the boat, and our locks were packed and waxed shut as best we could. Our cartridge boxes and powder horns were also protected. But all our bread and all our drinking water was completely spoiled and lost.

When our canoe had been thrown onto the beach by the force of the waves, our first task was to unload and clean our weapons. We had barely finished this when we saw another canoe suffer the same misfortune a short distance to the

leeward side, amidst a large number of rocks surrounding the island. The shipwrecked men turned out to be six Spaniards from the Santa María garrison. They had stolen an old canoe and had followed us to escape the cruelty of the Indians. They came to us immediately, and we made a fire. Once it was burning, we prepared our food over the coals and all ate together peacefully.

But we urgently needed water, or any other liquid for that matter, for we did not know where to find any. Our canoe had been thrown up to the waterline by the waves, and we had no need to fear that it would split, for the sides were at least six inches thick. But the Spaniards' canoe, old and weak, smashed to pieces against the rocks. Although we were shipwrecked in this way and washed ashore, as I have described, the Gulf of San Miguel is at other times as flat as a pond.

My companions now wanted to turn back completely and not go any further. They preferred to live among the Indians if we could no longer reach the ships we had left behind on the North Sea. But with great difficulty, I managed to persuade them to continue for at least one more day. If we did not find our people the next day, I would agree to whatever they deemed necessary. Thus, we spent two or three hours of the day discussing our situation, while at the same time keeping a man on lookout, for fear of an attack by Indians or other enemies.

When we were almost at a decision, our guard happened to spot an Indian. As soon as he saw us, he fled into the forest. I immediately sent two of my men after him. They caught up with him and discovered that he was one of our Indian friends. He took them to a place not far from there, where seven more of his men were, in a large canoe they had brought along. They came to the place where I was with the rest of my party and seemed happy to meet us on that island.

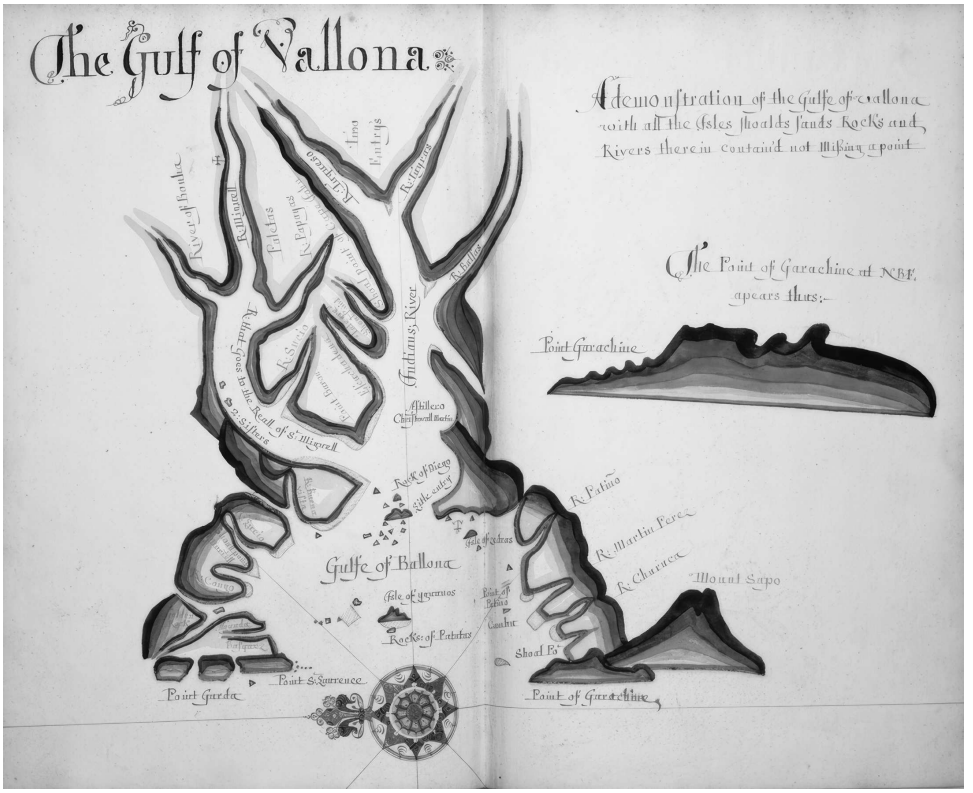
I asked them by gesture where the main body of our company was. They made it clear to us that if we went with them in their canoe, which was much larger

than ours, we would catch up with the group the next morning. This news delighted us, as one can easily imagine.

Shortly after this friendly invitation, they asked who the other six men were that they saw with us, for they immediately noticed that we did not all have the same clothing and hair color. We told them that they were Wankes, the name they give to the Spaniards in their own language. Their next question was whether they should kill those Spaniards. I answered that this was not to happen under any circumstances. For the moment, they seemed satisfied with that answer.

But a moment later, when I had turned around, my men signaled to the Indians that they should kill the Spaniards, hoping to appease them. The poor people saw the danger threatening them and began to scream loudly. I arrived just in time to save their lives. However, I had to allow the Indians to take one of them.

Thereupon I gave the canoe in which I had arrived to the five remaining Spaniards and told them to flee and get out of there, so that the cruel Indians would not break their promise and they would fall again into the same danger they had just escaped. After I had sent them away, I rested for a while. In the meantime, I made a sketch of this bay and the mouth of the river, which I completed that same day and present here to the reader.



Map of the Gulf of Panamá / Bayona and the mouth of the Rio de Santa María, drawn by Basil Ringrose in April 1680.

Description of the Gulf of Panamá / Bayona

But now, thank God, because we had joined those Indians, we were in a very large canoe. It was so spacious that it could carry twenty men rather than the five for which our own canoe was intended. The Indians had also put a good sail on it. With a fresh and strong wind, we sailed away from there and made good progress, to our great joy and relief. We were finally well accommodated and delivered from the misery we had endured shortly before.

We now had a calm and easy crossing, after the long and arduous efforts we had endured since our departure from Santa María. Below Punta San Lorenzo, which was mentioned earlier, there is a strong surf caused by a powerful current running there. This often nearly filled our boat while we were sailing. That

evening, after our departure from the island where we had been shipwrecked, it rained heavily for hours and the night was very dark. Around nine o'clock, we saw two fires on the mainland coast opposite us. As soon as the Indians in our canoe saw those fires, they began to cheer and called out the names of their captains, Antonio and Andreas. They were convinced that those fires had been lit by their own people. Therefore, they steered towards the coast as quickly as possible.

But as soon as our canoe entered the surf, close to the coast, more than sixty Spaniards stormed out of the forest, armed with clubs and other weapons. They seized our canoe on both sides and dragged it all the way onto the beach. Thus we were suddenly taken prisoner. I grabbed my rifle to defend myself, but it was in vain. Four or five of them grabbed me at once and prevented me from doing anything. Meanwhile, our Indians jumped overboard and nimbly fled into the forest. My companions stood frozen with amazement at what had happened and how unexpectedly we had been ambushed.

I immediately asked if any of them spoke French or English, but they answered that no one could. Therefore, I spoke Latin as best I could to a few of them who seemed smarter than the rest. In this way, I understood little by little who they were. They were Spaniards who had been put ashore here by our English party. They had been left behind on this coast so that they would not get closer to Panamá and escape to betray our advance on that city.

As soon as they had captured me, they brought me to a small hut they had built and covered with branches. There they shouted loudly, because they had captured us. They were determined to punish us severely for our presence in this region, and especially for taking and plundering their city of Santa María. But while their captain was questioning me, the Spaniard who had come with us entered. He told how good I had been to him and his companions, by saving their lives from the hands of the cruel Indians.

When the captain had heard him, he immediately stood up and embraced me. He said that we English were very friendly enemies and good people, but that the Indians were great villains and a treacherous people. He asked me to come sit with him and eat of the food that our men had left behind when they had put them ashore here. Then he told me that, because of the kindness I had shown his countrymen, he granted us all our lives and our freedom. Otherwise, he would certainly have taken them from us.

Although he could hardly bring himself to spare the Indians, he did so for my sake. He said that I could take them with me if I could find them again. Then he told me to take my canoe and leave in God's name, and he wished us as much luck as we had shown generosity. I took my leave of him after a short time, although he invited me to spend the night with him.

I sought out my Indians and eventually found them. Out of fear, they had hidden themselves in the bushes at the edge of the forest. When I had found them, the captain politely led me to the canoe. He told my companions and the Indians to get in. Just as they had dragged us ashore earlier, so they now pushed us back out to sea, through a sudden and strange reversal of our fate.

It rained heavily all night, as mentioned earlier. We no longer dared to go ashore anywhere, because the entire coast was what sailors called the Iron Coast.

The following morning we sailed and paddled until about ten o'clock. Then we saw a canoe approaching us at great speed. As it got closer, it turned out to be a canoe belonging to our own English company. They had mistaken our canoe for a Spanish periagua and had come in great haste to attack us. We were extremely happy to see them. They immediately took us to the rest of our group, who were at that moment emerging from the Bahía de San Miguel behind a high rocky headland, where they had been anchored all night and morning. We were all very pleased to see each other again, for they had already considered me and my companions lost.

Chapter VI (continue to Panamá)

The buccaneers continue their journey until they sight Panamá. Along the way, they take various barks and prisoners. The Spaniards discover them before their arrival. The buccaneers order the Indians to kill the prisoners.

From the place where we had rejoined our English troops, we set course for a high ridge that we saw in the distance. But it turned out to be nothing but an island, seven leagues away from the bay I mentioned earlier. At the highest point of this island, the Spaniards keep a watchpost, or lookout, as the sailors call it, for fear of pirates or other enemies.

That evening we reached the island. After we had landed, we climbed a very steep slope until we came to a small hut where the watchman stayed. We surprised the old man who was keeping watch there, for he had not seen us until we were already standing in his banana plantation. During his interrogation, he told us that we had not yet been noticed by the Spaniards from Panamá or by others. That message from the old man strongly encouraged us to proceed with our plan to raid that rich city. If I remember the name correctly, this place is called Farol de Plátanos, or in English, Banana Watchtower.

Just before dark, a bark came to anchor on the outskirts of the island. We saw her immediately. Therefore, we quickly sent out two canoes, which sailed along the coast and surprised the ship. When we questioned the people on board, we discovered that they had been away from Panamá for eight days. They had dropped off soldiers on a headland not far from this island, with the intention of fighting certain Indians and Negroes who had caused much damage in that region.

When the bark had been captured, most of our men tried to get on board, especially those in the smaller canoes. Thus, one hundred and thirty-seven of our group eventually went aboard, together with that experienced sailor and brave commander, Captain Bartholomew Sharp. Captain Cook, whom we mentioned at the beginning of this story, also went with him. We remained lying at the island for the rest of the night, awaiting the continuation of our journey the following day.

The next morning, when it got light, I switched canoes and boarded another one. It was slightly smaller than the previous one, but it had better company. After we had left the island, we rowed all day over shallow water, about one lagoon from the coast. Sometimes we had no more than four feet of water beneath us, with a light sandy bottom.

In the afternoon we saw a bark at sea and immediately gave chase. The canoe in which Captain Harris was sitting reached the ship first. After a short but fierce battle, he took it. Once the ship had been captured, we put thirty men on board. But the wind was blowing in such a way that the other bark pursuing us could not reach us. This pursuit delayed our journey so much and scattered us so far that we lost each other as night fell and could no longer stay together as a group. Therefore, we pulled our canoe onto the beach to spend the night there, about two miles from the high tide line and four lagoons from the sheltered side of Chepillo Island, towards which we were headed.

The following morning, as soon as the water carried us again, we rowed to the aforementioned island of Chepillo, where our agreed meeting point was. On the way, we saw another bark under sail, just like the day before. Captain Coxon's canoe reached this ship first. But just at that moment, a young breeze sprang up, allowing the ship to escape from him after the initial attack. In the process, a certain Mr. Bull was killed in his canoe and two others wounded.