

Demystifying La Buse's Cryptogram and the Fiery Cross of Goa

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Abstract

The field of cryptology alone offers a multitude of exciting exhibits and stories for a museum of science and technology. But when secret ciphers meet seaborne piracy and rich treasures, it sounds like a perfect mix for a successful storytelling. However, an extensive study of an eyewitness account and contemporary reports on the legend of la Buse led to sobering contexts related to colonialism, inquisition and, apart from a small kernel of truth, to a large spool full of seaman's yarn.

1 Storytelling between Legend and Truth

A museum cannot assume that all visitors will be equally enthusiastic when it comes to complicated topics, i.e. in the field of cryptology. So in order to offer an attractive exhibition as well to non-experts, or to groups and families with different interests and prior knowledge, an additional range of simpler and more playful ways of presenting information is needed. Good storytelling brings an exhibition to life, and cryptology naturally offers wonderful opportunities here. The legend of the pirate la Buse's cryptogram combines everything that a lot of visitors' hearts desire: the golden age of piracy, rich treasure, and a mystic cryptogram. Nevertheless, as a scientific museum, curators want to make a clear distinction between truth and legend before exhibiting a story like this. For this purpose, this small study was carried out to sufficiently substantiate la Buse's tale with original documents - as much as possible.

2 The Legend of the Pirate La Buse

This is how the story is passed on: In the waters of the Indian Ocean, a ruthless French pirate known as la Bouche, the Mouth or la Buse, the buzzard, attacked a rich Portuguese cargo ship in 1721. He

robbed the ship and the entire cargo, consisting of diamonds, jewelry, gold and silver bars as well as pearls, fine fabrics, spices, furniture and precious stones, estimated by historians to be worth up to 5 billion euros today. Religious articles from Goa Cathedral, located in India, had been on board, including the Golden Cross of Goa, which is said to have weighed more than a hundred kilograms, so that three men were needed to reload it. As well, it was said that he took the Viceroy of Goa hostage, and released him for ransom. After this successful raid, the pirate went into hiding for several years and was only discovered and executed in 1730. Shortly before his death, according to legend, he threw a cryptogram into the crowd - supposedly with the description of where to find his share of the pirate treasure. For centuries, the whereabouts of the cryptogram and the treasure were unknown.

2.1 The Mysterious Buccaneers of a Hidden Treasure

In 1934, the honourable French historian Charles de la Roncière (1870-1941), who worked at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, wrote a short paperback novel.¹ In the beginning of his novel, de la Roncière explained why he wrote the story: One day, a customer from a distant African country had come to the National Library and had asked for a book on the Keys of Solomon, because her neighbour from a small island in the Indian Ocean had made strange discoveries on her property: stone sculptures, rock carvings, and finally she had also unearthed three bodies that were identified as slaughtered buccaneers. Following de la Roncière's novel (p. 5), the notary on the island then handed over a cryptogram to the lady with the words: "It is your property, where the pirate's treasure must lie. Here is everything you need to

¹It was rather cheaply published at Le Masque in Paris, a publisher for small inexpensive fiction, i.e. a sort of literature known as dime novel in US-American context.

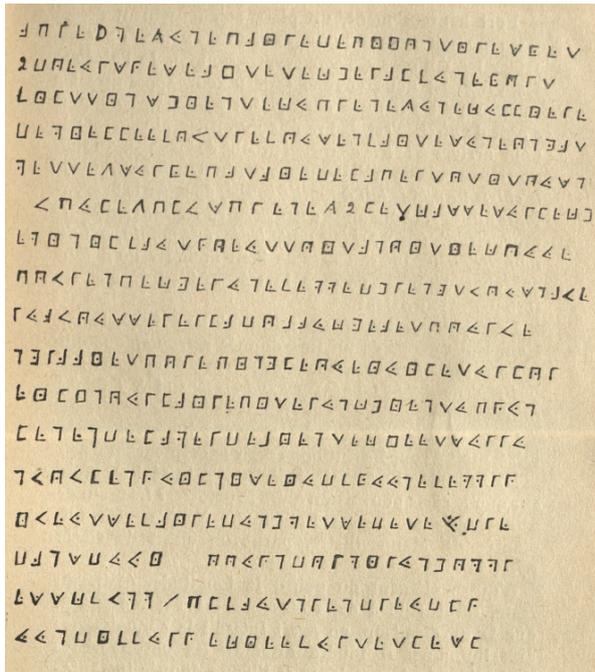


Figure 1: The alleged cryptogram of la Buse, taken from de la Roncière, p. 9 (1934)

find it.” De la Roncière, upon the lady’s request for assistance, deciphered the cryptogram for her, by promising not to give away any details on the whereabouts of the alleged treasure.

In his novel, de la Roncière published the cryptogram, the key he himself had found out, and the deciphered cleartext (see the Figures 1-3). He was of the opinion that some of the expressions used in the cryptogram could have originated from a Frenchman who must have come from the North-East of France, because of an obvious hard pronunciation of consonants. He cited the following words as examples of this: kort for corde, piter instead of bitter.² As well, he hinted that he already had exact knowledge as where to find the treasure. After the short cryptologic work in the beginning of the novel, a couple of chapters on East Indian piracy followed mainly based on the historical works of Johnson (1726), Hamilton (1727), and Grandidier and Grandidier (1907). In the end

²See de la Roncière (1934, p. 8): “Si l’on peut émettre une hypothèse sur l’auteur de ces lignes bizarres, c’est que certaines prononciations dures semblent révéler un homme du Nord-Est de la France: *k’unne*, kort (pour corde), piter (pour bitter, qui consiste à enrouler un cordage autour de la bitte d’un navire)” (English translation: “If we can speculate on the author of these bizarre lines, it’s that certain harsh pronunciations seem to reveal a man from the North-East of France: *k’unne*, kort (for rope), piter (for bitter, which means winding a rope around the bitt of a ship)”)

of the novel, de la Roncière related the supposed treasure to the great pirate’s raid of 1721. He suggested that the cryptogram might have been written by the French pirate la Buse because la Buse had been part of the raid, and he had been from Calais (North-East of France). In the very end of the novel, de la Roncière delivered clear hints in the form of names printed in italic font that referred to locations on the Seychelle island Mahé.³

Concerning la Buse’s execution, there is archival material in the National Archives d’Outre-mer that document his execution. Several accounts have already analysed the relevant sources, e.g. the books by Guët (1886, p. 219f), de Kerdéland (1961, p. 162), and Briseul (2019), who devotes a whole chapter on the death of la Buse. De la Roncière also based his story on the relevant documents, and quoted from a letter from December 1730 that Gouverneur of Bourbon island Pierre-Benoît Dumas wrote to the Count de Maurepas: “In 1728, the *La Méduse*, commanded by d’Hermitte and sent to ensure navigation between Bourbon and Madagascar, caught la Buse in the vicinity of Fort-Dauphin, where he had made his retreat, and brought him in chains to Bourbon. Although la Buse claimed amnesty, a ruling on 17 July 1730 proved that since he had continued his life as a pirate, he was excluded, and he was immediately hanged on

³See de la Roncière (1934), p. 112f: “...Vous êtes curieuse, cousine Thérèse, et vous, Marianne, et vous, Félicité, de connaître la silhouette de l’archipel où gît le trésor? Mystère et discrétion. Pour que vous ne preniez pas la mouche, je vous convie à une promenade dans la belle ombre d’un beau vallon, comme dans un port de consolation. ...Peut-être y trouverez-vous, amis lecteurs, le mot de l’énigme. Tous ces noms en italique, *cousine*, *curieuse*, *silhouette*, *mouche*, *Thérèse*, *Félicité*, n’ont rien d’imaginaire. Ce sont des vocables géographiques. Tous appartiennent à l’archipel que je veux pas autrement nommer. S’il est doté d’une anse la Blague, il a aussi, - et les mots seuls suffisent à attester la véracité de cette histoire, - une anse des Forbans. La découverte de leur trésor me servira, un jour, d’épilogue. Derrière le glacis de falaises qui masquent son gîte, les fouilles ont commencé...” (English translation: “...Are you curious, cousin Thérèse, and you, Marianne, and you, Félicité, to know the silhouette of the archipelago where the treasure lies? Mystery and discretion. So that you don’t catch the fly, I invite you to take a walk in the beautiful shade of a beautiful valley, as if in a harbour of consolation. ...Perhaps you, dear readers, will find the answer to the riddle. All these names in italics - *cousin*, *curious*, *silhouette*, *fly*, *Thérèse*, *Félicité* - are not imaginary. They are geographical terms. They all belong to the archipelago that I don’t want to reveal. If it has a Joke cove, it also has - and the words alone are enough to attest to the veracity of this story - a Forbans’ cove. The discovery of their treasure will one day serve as my epilogue. Excavations have begun behind the brink of cliffs that conceal its hideaway...”

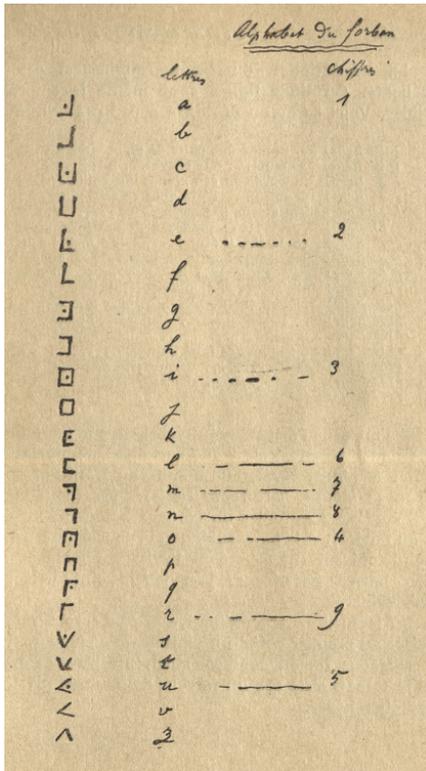


Figure 2: The masonic key, deciphered by de la Roncière, p. 7 (1934)

the beach at Saint-Denis to the applause of the populace”⁴. At the end of the letter, Dumas also mentioned that the rhubarb was starting to grow again on Bourbon island. De la Roncière referred to this rather unspectacular remark and added a personal note, declaring that he would have preferred another ending of the story: "Tradition has it that the forban, who hid his treasure, would hand the crowd his cryptogram before marching to his death, and that his last words would be like a testament: 'For whoever discovers this.'"⁵

Shortly after its publication, a detailed summary of the novel appeared in the daily French newspaper *Le Temps* on the 5th of May 1934 by G. Lenotre alias Louis Léon Théodore Gosselin, and an American version was published in July 1934 in the *Milwaukee Journal* (R.S. Fendrick, 1934).

⁴See Dumas (1730): "Le sieur d'Hermitte, dans le dernier voyage qu'il a fait à Madagascar, ayant arrêté et amené ici le nommé Oliver Le Vasseur, dit la Buze, fameux capitaine forban, son procès lui a été fait à la requête du Procureur Général, et il a été pendu par arrest du Conseil..."

⁵See de la Roncière (1934, p. 108f) "La rhubarbe commence à multiplier ... J'aurais préféré une autre phrase finale. La tradition veut que le forban, qui cacha son trésor, tendît à la foule son cryptogramme avant de marcher au supplice et que ses dernières paroles fussent comme un testament: 'Pour celui qui le découvrira.'"

1. Prenez une paire de pigeon virez les
2 cœurs... fête cheval... une kort
fil winshient écu prenez une cullière
de mielle .. outre vous en faites une ongat
mettez sur le passage de la
..... prenez 2 liv cassé sur le ch-
(ch)emin, il faut toit à moitié couvé
pour empecher une femme vous n'avé
qu'à vous serer la pour ve-
nir épingle ... juillet
..... faire piter un chien turq un
..... de la mer.. bien sèche et sur ..
..... k'unne femme q-
(qu)i veut se faire d'un
dans dormir un homm(e) r
..... faut rendre ... q
(q)u'un diffur (?)

Figure 3: The deciphered cryptogram of la Buse, from de la Roncière, p. 8 (1934)

In the years that followed, no document could be found in which de la Roncière provided more detailed information, particularly regarding the origin and whereabouts of the cryptogram. However, de la Roncière described a small continuation of his story in a booklet that was printed in 1940 for the French army for reading and distraction in wartime. On pages 26-27, he retold a summary of his first novel on the pirate's treasure, but then added another episode to it: By accident, a version of the newspaper from the 5th of May 1934 written by G. Lenôtre (1934) had ended up in Cameroon, and had been read by an islander from the Seychelles. She sent her mother Mme D. to visit de la Roncière in Paris. De la Roncière did not reveal more than the first letters of the last names, but hinted that Mme D. owned not only a property on Coëtivy island, but as well complete Silhouette Island - which refers to the family name Dauban - the family that owned Silhouette island until 1960. Mme D. discussed with de la Roncière whether the treasure could have been on her properties. She had seen a ship anchored overnight, and on the next day a large hole in the ground would have indicated two buried urns that may have been dug up (de la Roncière, 1940, p. 27). De la Roncière then emphasized that there were usually several pirate hideouts and that more could be found. His last sentence was directed to Mme S.⁶, who could now rely on the help of the radiesthesist Abbott Mermet

⁶Author's remark: Mme S. is most probably the islander and mentioned daughter of Mme D.

to find the treasures.⁷

Although unlikely, de la Roncière's story triggered a veritable treasure hunt that continues in earnest to this day. Numerous books and filmic interpretations reproduced this story at second and third hand, and a large community is busy with deciphering and interpreting the supposed cryptogram again, and keeps hunting the pirate's treasure, describing the main artefact, the Fiery Cross of Goa, as a famous piece of art.

2.2 La Buse's alleged Cryptogram

Since its publication in 1934, the authenticity of the cryptogram was regarded with great doubt. As far as we know today, de la Roncière's paperback novel is the only source that exists. To this day, not any other publication on original sources, or other statements of de la Roncière himself on the whereabouts of the original cryptogram is known to the author. Allegedly, de la Roncière claimed that the cryptogram was kept in the Bibliotheque Nationale. However, the author was unable to find a source for this. Apparently, the newspaper article in the Milwaukee journal by R.S. Fendrick (1934) has often been cited to be an interview with de la Roncière, with deeper insights on the cryptogram's origins, but it is not. According to information circulating today, the cryptogram was attributed to the heirs of a pirate called Nageon de l'Estang. It seems that this further information comes from a book by the journalist Robert Charroux, alias Robert Grugeau, written in 1962. The author of this article has tried to retrieve any citable source Charroux based his story on, but so far without success.

Written in a simple masonic cipher, i.e. easy decipherable. It had therefore been less of a concern for scientists than for adventurers and treasure hunters. De la Roncière delivered not only the cryptogram, but as well the masonic key and the deciphered text ready for interpretation. But the content of the cryptogram sounds more like a cooking recipe than a clue to a treasure. Accordingly, there are virtually no citable peer-review publications on the subject. Some profound books on piracy can be found, see e.g. Rennie (2013) and Fox (2014), and as well a handful of critical websites. But even though it was assumed by the scientific community that the cryptogram was

⁷"Puisse Madame S. ... déceler le gîte, grâce à la radiesthésie de l'abbé Mermet!" (May Madame S. ... find the place, thanks to Abbé Mermet's dowsing!)

a hoax, there was still the big question of where the famous pirate treasure was hidden. At least, both the French pirate la Buse and the described Portuguese cargo ship, with the Viceroy of Goa on board, had existed.

But were these facts enough to include the legend of la Buse into a science museum's gallery on cryptology? After all, myths and hoaxes were also part of the history of cryptology and were therefore given a small stage in the exhibition - of course, presented with a corresponding wink of an eye. The author of this study agreed, but for a scientific presentation, all details of the legend, and of the famous Cross of Goa, were to be researched and documented as thoroughly as possible.

3 The Sources

In order to get to the true story, contemporary sources had to be sought whose authors had been involved as closely as possible in the raid on the Portuguese ship. The name of the galleon was *Nossa Senhora do Cabo e São Pedro de Alcantara*⁸, and since it had the Viceroy of Goa on board, it was indeed easy to find not only mentions in several books of that time, but as well one hand-written eyewitness account of the famous raid in the Indian Ocean. First of all, the books of Grandidier and Grandidier (1907) and Grey (1933) provided meticulously researched and sourced overviews. They enabled to find several very informative historical resources, of which the following were particularly important:

- The eyewitness account of the British seaman Richard Lazinby (1722), who worked as second mate on the ship *Cassandra* when it was taken by the pirates Edward England and John Taylor in 1719, and from then on sailed as their pirate ship. Lazinby was forced to serve the pirates as a prisoner, and was only released together with the Viceroy of Goa when this man was exchanged for ransom. In 1722, Lazinby described his personal experiences, which can be viewed as handwritten manuscript in the British Library.
- The report of the Viceroy of Goa, published in the Parisian newspaper *Le Mercure* (1722), authored anonymous. By and large

⁸Sources claim see e.g. de Bucquoy (1771, p. 66) that it was the former Dutch Galleon *Gelderland*

it is noticeable that the article emphasises the Portuguese-French collaboration.

- The eyewitness account of the Dutch seaman and gunner Clement Downing (1738), who worked for the East India Company, and later wrote his memoirs about his days in the Indian Ocean.
- The contemporary descriptions of Captain Charles Johnson (1726), who apparently published under a pseudonym⁹.
- The travel reports of the surveyor and cartographer in the service of the East India Company Isidore de Bucquoy (1771), who met in person John Taylor and La Buse on his travels in 1722. Although he was held prisoner for some time, he had been treated friendly and also had intensive conversations with Taylor. In his book, he quotes Taylor's account of the raid of the *Nossa Senhora*, and of the years after the raid.

4 Discussing the presumably Real Story

From the sources mentioned above, a presumably real story emerged. Of course it must be mentioned here that the sources did not depict one completely clear and uniform story, and definitely there are especially administrative archival documents that still need to be investigated. But from the knowledge that could be gathered so far, especially surprising was the fact that the different accounts did not correspond concerning the pirates in command. According to almost every report, the British pirate John Taylor was the captain and boss of the entire pirate gang. And while Taylor appeared in every report, La Buse was only sometimes mentioned. However, it can be assumed that he was involved in the raid on the Portuguese ship because in addition to the sources mentioned above, documents from the Bourbon authorities (see the letter of governor Dumas (1730)), condemned La Buse alias Oliver Levasseur to death, partly for his parting in the raid.¹⁰

On the 8th of April 1721, two pirate ships, one of them for sure the *Victory* and the other most

⁹There is no evidence that a certain Captain Charles Johnson existed, but his reports show that he must have been nearby or even an eyewitness to the events described. For many years, his works were attributed to Daniel Defoe, but today this thesis is disputed.

¹⁰In his book *Sailing East*, Baylus C. Brooks explores why La Buse was captured and ultimately executed.

certainly the *Cassandra* with eyewitness Laziney on board, arrived in the North of Bourbon island (Réunion). Laziney (1722) counted about 300 pirates on board of the two ships, Le Mercure wrote of 480 pirates. At Saint-Denis, the pirates found a large Portuguese cargo ship lying at anchor that had lost all of her masts and two thirds of her cannons (Laziney, 1722). According to the sources, there was almost no resistance when they took the ship, because the crew of the Portuguese ship thought at first sight that both pirate ships were British Company (see e.g. Downing (1738), p. 66).¹¹

On board of the Portuguese ship was the Viceroy of Goa, namely the comte d'Ericeira Luís Carlos Inácio Xavier de Meneses, first Marquis of Lourical. After some discussion among the pirates, they took 2000 Risdales respectively Dollars¹² for ransom and set the Viceroy and all the other prisoners, among them eyewitness Richard Laziney free.¹³ The pirates then made off to St. Mary with all the ships and the valuable cargo of the *Nossa Senhora do Cabo e São Pedro*.

4.1 The Cargo

In St. Mary it is said according to Johnson (1726, p. 139) that the pirates turned the booty into money, and that the rich booty was shared among 280 surviving pirates. This meant that each pirate received about 42 small diamonds, and a reasonable amount of cash (about 4000 Pounds according to Johnson). The rich cargo of the Portuguese Ship consisted on the one hand of plunder and diamonds that were estimated by the Viceroy of Goa (who told Laziney) of three to four million dollars. Later, Taylor in person told de Bucquoy (1771, p. 64) that the values were about 30 Mio Gulden¹⁴.

¹¹The *Victory* was said to be the former *Petersborough Galley*, and the *Cassandra* was a captured British ship of the East India Company.

¹²Johnson cited Risdales, and Laziney cited Dollars

¹³There circulated a legend about the price negotiation for the Viceroy's ransom, which Bernardin de Saint-Pierre (1800, p. 218) heard about 50 years later during his travels on Bourbon, but it did not match at all the sources examined: the governor of Bourbon island, M. Desfourges and the Viceroy were supposedly sitting at dinner when the *Nossa Senhora* was attacked. Suddenly, La Buse appeared between them and said that the Viceroy was now his prisoner. When the governor asked how much La Buse wanted for him, La Buse said, 1000 piasters. That was too little for such a worthy gentleman, said the governor, go and ask for more or nothing. La Buse then said he wanted nothing and the viceroy was free.

¹⁴"Man hat mich mehr als einmal versichert, daß der Werth laut der Factur und des Geständnisses der Privatinteressenten, über dreyssig Millionen Gulden betragen habe; welches mit

But as well, the intermediate deck of the *Nossa Senhora do Cabo* was filled with more than 200 slaves that had been taken on board at Mozambique, and had been caged in the Portuguese ship to be sold at Madagascar (Lazinby, 1722; Johnson, 1726). About 60 of them had already died in the short battle when the *Nossa Senhora* was taken. The report of the Portuguese Viceroy also mentioned the slaves in the belly of the ship (Le Mercure, 1722). It must be concluded from the sources that the valuable cargo of the ship *Nossa Senhora* included slave trade under cruel conditions. Unsurprisingly, at this time there was a slave trade around Madagascar, from which both the East India Company and the pirates profited. What is surprising, however, is the fact that this has so far been completely omitted in most renditions of the legend of the pirate La Buse.

4.2 The Whereabout of the *Nossa Senhora do Cabo*

In St. Mary, the pirates replaced the broken *Victory* with the *Nossa Senhora do Cabo*, which was repaired¹⁵, and from then on sailed under the name *Victory* (see e.g. Downing (1738, p. 67)). In the first few months after the raid, Taylor was captain of the *Victory* and La Buse commanded the ship *Cassandra* (de Bucquoy, 1771, p. 66f).¹⁶

However, during summer 1722, a major dispute arose between Taylor and La Buse and they parted ways. Once again the ships were divided. From then on, John Taylor was said to have commanded the *Cassandra* until his surrender in 1723 (Grey, 1933, p. 327f), (Johnson, 1726, p. 140f), (de Bucquoy, 1771, p. 68). Taylor and his crew surrendered their ship and most of their accumulated booty to Porto Bello¹⁷, and were subsequently granted amnesty. They were only allowed to take what they had on them - according to de Bucquoy, each of the pirates only kept some gold and the

Recht ein Schatz genennet werden kann.”

¹⁵According to Downing (1738, p. 66-67), they forced the *Cassandra*'s assistant carpenter to repair and refit the *Nossa Senhora*

¹⁶According to the sources, it is quite possible that the *Cassandra* had been renamed by the pirates into *Fancy* (as well called *la Fantasia* (Le Mercure, 1722), or *La Défense* (Grandidier and Grandidier, 1907, p. 65) and de Bucquoy (1771, p. 68)) and was therefore called both names in the accounts. Formerly, a ship called *Fancy* had been in the ownership of the pirates, but had been given to the earlier commander of the *Cassandra*, Captain Macrae, who fled 1720 with the first *Fancy* that was damaged (see e.g. the accounts of Grey (1933, p. 308f).)

¹⁷De Bucquoy speaks of 121 tons of gold

diamonds for a new start in their pockets (de Bucquoy, 1771, p. 71). John Taylor had his share of diamonds with him, and spent it living a settled life with wife and children. But his wealth did not last long. In 1744 Taylor was said to be a poor and miserable fisherman (de Bucquoy, 1771, p. 71f).

La Buse got the *Victory*, and only little is reported about him from then on. According to Guët (1886) and Grey (1933, p. 327f), he kept on with his pirating life, but burnt the *Victory*, probably along the coast of St. Mary.¹⁸

4.3 The Golden Cross of Goa

What was not mentioned anywhere, however, was the legendary Cross of Goa. It could not be found in any source that was investigated. Nor does de la Roncière himself mention the cross in his book. It seems, most surprising, that the much-described Golden Cross of Goa had never existed, and only entered the legend after the paperback novels of de la Roncière in 1934 and 1940. So far, the authors could not define the point when this has happened. Nevertheless, the authors found mentions of golden or wooden crosses related to the events in 1721 or earlier:

- The Viceroy of Goa possessed a golden cross of the order, most probably hanging on a necklace, which was mentioned in his account. During the raid, the pirates had taken it from him, but then handed it back together with his sword made of gold (Le Mercure, 1722, 64)¹⁹ It is possible though to interpret a sword of gold as some kind of golden cross.
- In the accounts of de Bucquoy (1771, 37), he cited from a not specified second-hand source a description on the cargo that had been accumulated in the belly of the *Nossa Senhora*,

¹⁸According to de la Roncière (1940, p. 27), la Buse tried to surrender in 1724, by returning some of the sacred vases from Goa to the gouverneur of Bourbon island, but his request was dismissed. Unfortunately, no source other than de la Roncière was found to prove this event. However, there is another piece of information on this, supported by archive data cited by Guët (1886, p. 219): The amnesty granted by a decision of the Bourbon Supreme Council on 20 January 1724 included la Buse, but only on condition that no further acts of piracy would be committed. La Buse, who was suspicious, preferred not to profit from this and continued his successful piracy business.

¹⁹”Ils lui rendirent même son épée, quoique d’Or, and sa Croix de l’Ordre de Christ”. Please note that a famous oil painting from Pompeo Batoni shows Luís Carlos Inácio Xavier de Menezes with a small golden cross hanging around his neck. The painting is in the possession of the Museu Condes de Castro Guimarães.

where among raw diamonds, necklaces and silver coins as well golden crosses were mentioned.²⁰

- Lazinby (1722) described the erection of a large, wooden cross in November 1721 that should attract cargo ships to take him, and the Viceroy of Goa, and more stranded crew members home to Europe.²¹
- There was a legend from the year 1619 about the Flaming Cross of Goa (i.e. the Holy Cross of Boa Vista²²) that burned on a hill outside of a church in the night and allegedly healed sick people. This miracle was said to appear in the hardest times of the Goa Inquisition, when about 16,000 native Hindus were massacred in the name of Christianity.

5 Winding up Seaman's Yarn

Putting everything together what we know today, we must assume that the well-known and respected historian Charles de la Roncière wrote a breath-taking paperback novel, where he mixed real facts on piracy with his own ideas. After all, as a historian and librarian he had very good access to many books and archival material. The following list is intended to provide an overview of which aspects of the story came from which sources:

- The Portuguese cargo ship *Nossa Senhora* existed, and it had the viceroy of Goa on board during the pirates' raid in 1721.

²⁰"In dem Portugiesischen Kriegsschiffe wurde so viel Beute gefunden, daß die alten Seeräuber müde waren, dieses Handwerk weiter fortzusehen. Dieser Schatz machte nebst ihren zuvor geraubten Reichthümern eine ansehnliche Summe aus. Ihr Raub bestund vornehmlich in rohen Diamanten, goldenen Creutzen, und Ketten und gemünzten Silber: Nesseltuch, seidene Zeuge und andere dergleichen Dinge wurden für Lappen und Lumpen gehalten." (So much booty was found in the Portuguese warship that the old pirates were tired of continuing this trade. This treasure, in addition to their previously stolen riches, totalled a considerable sum. Their plunder consisted chiefly of rough diamonds, golden crosses, and chains and coined silver: nettle and silk clothes, and other such things were taken for rags and tatters).

²¹"On the first of November last arrived the Triton French Ship from Mocha. Last from Island Mauritius where had stayed 40 days during which time had taken possession of the said Island; by erecting a large Cross and leaving a French flag flying, the Governour of this place had some time before been in expectation of ships from France for the purpose, but none coming."

²²See the article by Evelyn Siqueira in the Gomantak Times, published on 22 Feb 2022, <https://www.gomantaktimes.com/my-go/art-culture/the-fascinating-story-of-the-cruz-dos-milagres-in-old-go>

- The French pirate La Buse existed, and according to the sources, he most probably was taking part in the raid on the *Nossa Senhora*.
- Concerning the treasure that is still object for treasure hunters today, contemporary sources did point out the valuable amount of diamonds and plunder, but as well the taken ships were part of the so-called treasure, and about 200 slaves that the *Nossa Senhora* contained. After making the cargo to cash the amount had been divided among some hundred pirates. When the pirates parted in 1722, from Taylor's crew it was said that they had handed over almost all of their share of the booty to Porto Bello in exchange of amnestie. Following the historical sources, a potential treasure would then only come from the share of la Buse's crew.
- La Buse throwing a cryptogram into the watching crowd shortly before his execution, was not found in any contemporary literature. For the first time, this part of the legend occurred in the novel by de la Roncière in 1934. The assumption is very likely that de la Roncière invented this part of la Buse's legend, and he even admitted to be disappointed by the - rather objective - governor's version of the execution on Burbon island, and his interest in rhubarb (see the original text in footnote No. 5).
- The cryptogram itself showed up in the novel by de la Roncière the first, and only time. All later publications referred to him. To this day, the cryptogram itself has nowhere been found as a stand-alone manuscript, which leads to the conclusion that de la Roncière made up the cryptogram and its origin. It should also not be ignored that the Parisian publishing house Le Masque, where Roncière published, was well known for light inexpensive fiction, and humorous crime novels (e.g. like the novels by Agatha Christie) - i.e. for literature that is in general not fully credible. De la Roncière was surely fully aware of that. Had he intended to write a scientific and reliable publication, he most probably had chosen another publisher. In his novel from 1934, and in his continuation from 1940, he used a very relaxed and entertaining writing style. As well, hints can be found that he himself did

not take the story very seriously (e.g. he explained the possibility of a Forbans' cove, because a Joke cove already existed on Mahé island (see de la Roncière (1934, p. 113) and footnote No. 3), and he referred to Abbott Alexis Mermet to be helpful in finding the real treasure by dowsing (see de la Roncière (1940, p. 27) and footnote No. 7).

- We cannot exclude that someone else brought a cryptogram to de la Roncière, and he then related it to la Buse. But then, the cryptogram would exist as a real artefact - which has not been found or its existence confirmed. If there are other sources for this, the author would be pleased to receive information. In his book about Treasures of the World, Robert Charroux (1962) recited in 1962 de la Roncières story, but concerning the origin of the cryptogram, he introduced a certain Madame Savy, heir of a pirate called Nageon de L'Estang, apparently for the first time. However, there is no source or indication of truth and there also seems to be no official confirmation of this story from the Savy family. So far, it remains unclear where Charroux got this information from. It has to be said that Robert Charroux's publications are very controversial in the scientific community. In many circles, his work is regarded as pseudoscience or pseudohistory, which does not necessarily support the credibility of his sources.
- The Golden Cross of Goa was nowhere to be found, neither in contemporary sources nor in any publication from de la Roncière. Therefore the author assumes that it entered the legend after 1940. However, after de la Roncières publication, the legend, and the size of the buried treasure developed into an exciting-sounding sailor's yarn and moved further and further away from the facts of the contemporary sources. If the famous Cross of Goa, which plays such an important role in nowadays interpretation of the legend of la Buse, is derived from the legend of the inquisition in Goa in 1619, as described above, it seems almost cynical that treasure hunters today are looking for this Flaming or Fiery Cross.

What can be deduced from this study - should

this story be included in a scientifically based exhibition? Still, the author is of the opinion that myths and hoaxes in cryptology can certainly be shown as easy accessible exhibits. And generally speaking, at a time when information is more accessible than ever before and is disseminated in abundance, it might be a useful message to visitors to stay critical with all kinds of statements and stories. Therefore, a two-pronged solution was developed for the exhibition: A short audio play provides the legend, discusses the cryptogram, and addresses the topic of the countless treasure hunters. In view of the clear evidence of slave trade, and a probable link to Christian inquisition, the obvious colonial context must also be included in this case. For this reason, an in-depth station next to the audio play is planned to include the recent findings from this study, i.e. to describe the historical sources, and to provide an opportunity to familiarise with contemporary documents and historical research.

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