

## Another Storm: Pirates in Brazil during the Golden Age of Piracy (1718-1722). Part 1 (revised).

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### Abstract:

The Golden Age of Piracy is traditionally associated with the Caribbean, yet between 1718 and 1722 Brazil faced significant threats, a dimension that modern historiography acknowledges but rarely explores in depth. This article examines the first wave of incursions into South Atlantic waters, beginning in early 1718 and intensifying after the suppression of the “Pirate Republic” at New Providence. Newly uncovered archival sources illuminate the activities of captains such as Olivier Levasseur (La Buse), Richard Butcher, and Edward Congdon, and provide detailed evidence of the wreck of the pirate ship *George* near Macaé, adding a documented wreck to the record, alongside *La Louise*. By situating Brazil within the wider Atlantic world, this study offers fresh insights into both the global reach of Caribbean raiders and the maritime history of Portugal’s South American dominion.

**Keywords:** Piracy, Brazil, Portuguese Empire, Atlantic World, Olivier Levasseur (La Buse), pirate ship *George*, Edward Congdon, transatlantic slave trade, Rio de Janeiro court proceedings, South Atlantic.

### Introduction

The Golden Age of Piracy (c. 1650–1730), though most notorious in the West Indies, extended its reach across the early modern world. Pirate sails swept along the West African coast, prowled the Indian Ocean, and eventually reached Brazil, the prized jewel of Portugal’s South American empire. Yet in Brazilian waters, the greatest threats during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries came less from freebooters than from sanctioned privateers or wartime expeditions.<sup>1</sup>

After 1716, however, a new and far more dangerous form of maritime violence emerged: large-scale, autonomous pirate operations that preyed on Atlantic shipping and established the high-water mark of transatlantic piracy.

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<sup>1</sup> Hannah 2017.

Historical studies of this period have overwhelmingly privileged the Caribbean, where the “Pirate Republic” at Nassau and individuals such as Blackbeard, Charles Vane, and Calico Jack dominate both scholarly and popular narratives. Foundational works by Marcus Rediker, David Cordingly, Colin Woodard, and Kris Lane have reinforced this focus. By contrast, Portuguese Brazil has been only briefly touched upon in Anglophone scholarship, usually mentioned in passing within broader Atlantic trade narratives.

This imbalance arises from linguistic barriers to Portuguese sources, the dominance of the Nassau story, and the relative inaccessibility of colonial records. The latter issue has also shaped Brazilian historiography, where piracy is frequently conflated with privateering.

By foregrounding Brazil, this study aims to bridge this historiographical gap. Drawing on newly analyzed archival sources, it examines the neglected freebooters’ incursions along the coast of Portuguese America starting in early 1718, most of which originated from Nassau. It positions Brazil within the transatlantic sphere of commerce and conflict and shows how piracy, often described by contemporaries as an “infestation,” disrupted the tightly integrated Portugal–Africa–Brazil triangle. It also presents original evidence concerning the wreck of the pirate ship *George* (1718), which, together with La Buse’s *La Louise*, ranks among the few historically documented pirate vessels lost in the Americas.

Because of the breadth of the material, the analysis is presented in two parts. The first instalment covers the raids from early 1718 to mid-1719 and their immediate repercussions. The second part, scheduled for publication in the coming months, will examine the continuation of the raiders’ activity in the Atlantic coast of Brazil and the imperial measures that eventually led to its suppression.



**Figure 1:** The frigate *La Louise* before its sinking at Cotinga Isle, Paranaguá.  
(Artwork by the author, © 2026. All rights reserved)

### La Buse

In January 1718, Olivier Levasseur, better known as La Buse (“the Buzzard” or “the Hawk”), launched a series of assaults on Portuguese shipping off the coast of Brazil, marking one of the earliest New Providence-linked pirate attacks in South Atlantic waters. Operating from the captured French frigate *La Louise* (originally from La Rochelle), his raids culminated in the vessel’s wreck at Cotinga Island, Paranaguá, on 9 March 1718 (see Figure 1). This event has already been examined in detail in a previous *MAHSNews* publication and in the author’s archaeological research.<sup>2 3</sup>

Originally a French privateer during the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–1714),

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<sup>2</sup> “The Identification of the Pirate and Shipwreck.” *MAHSNews* Report Fall 2021 at <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/340732038>.

<sup>3</sup> Hostin 2023:133-150.

Levasseur received a letter of marque from the French government that legalized his early activities. By 1716, however, he had turned to piracy and joined forces with the notorious English captain Benjamin Hornigold, a leading figure in the pirate enclave at New Providence in the Bahamas, which functioned as a volatile base that allowed Levasseur to extend his operations southward, eventually reaching the coasts of Brazil.

### **The Republic of Pirates**

After the War of the Spanish Succession in 1713, the collapse of organized governance on war-torn New Providence created a power vacuum that transformed Nassau into a sanctuary for unemployed seamen. Most were former English or Anglo American privateers stripped of their commissions, joined by deserters, adventurers, opportunists, hardened criminals, and other marginal individuals from the American colonies and West Indies in the years that followed.<sup>4</sup>

These individuals not only raided ships — particularly Spanish ones — but also collaborated with corrupt merchants and local officials in the colonies to sell their booty and obtain ammunition and provisions according to their directions.<sup>5</sup> Amid the British Empire's restrictive trading monopolies, colonial settlements initially relied on raiders for affordable goods and capital. These illicit networks bridged the demands of underdeveloped communities with the spoils of raided ships, transforming piracy into a shadow economy that blurred the line between criminality and colonial necessity, and exposed the fractured authority of metropolitan governance.<sup>6 7</sup>

Although modern authors often portray Nassau as a “Republic of Pirates”<sup>8</sup> sometimes with

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<sup>4</sup> Wilde-Ramsing & Carnes-McNaughton 2018:30-31.

<sup>5</sup> British History Online/V31/31.

<sup>6</sup> Hanna 2015: 365-368.

<sup>7</sup> Bialuschewski 2009:64-65.

<sup>8</sup> See Woodard 2007.

utopian overtones,<sup>9</sup> the settlement's political cohesion was fragile and the unity among their leaders quickly dissolved under outside pressure or personal interests. Some captains voiced Jacobite sympathies,<sup>10</sup> others broader anti-authoritarian views, but none formed a coherent ideology. Their egalitarian practices were, as Angus Konstam notes, "merely a pragmatic way of controlling life beyond the reach of the law."<sup>11</sup> Even symbolic gestures—such as naming ships after Stuart monarchs—were less about values than about courting disaffected Jacobites or lending legitimacy to raids<sup>12</sup> within a subculture of protest against centralized authority and mercantile exploitation.

The enclave soon came under pressure, however. In September 1717, a royal pardon was proclaimed, and in July 1718, Woodes Rogers arrived in Nassau as the first royal governor of the Bahamas, offering clemency to those who surrendered.<sup>13</sup> Several outlaws, including Hornigold, accepted the pardon and even turned against their former comrades. France issued similar offers of amnesty. As a result, Nassau—once the notorious pirate republic—was reclaimed by the British Crown.

Those who rejected the royal pardon—including Blackbeard, Charles Vane, John Rackham, Edward England, Howell Davis, and Edward Congdon—had either departed before the British arrived or abandoned Nassau as soon as they did.<sup>14</sup> Rogers largely pacified the Bahamas, yet the pardon had little immediate effect in the wider West Indies.<sup>15</sup> In fact, it later helped disperse pirates across the Atlantic, directing them toward new hunting grounds in West Africa and Brazil. These shifts transformed distant transatlantic trade routes into contested spaces, where the retreat of effective state authority enabled raiders to challenge

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<sup>9</sup> Rediker 2004:26, 30-31

<sup>10</sup> Jacobites supported the exiled Stuart kings against the Hanoverian dynasty.

<sup>11</sup> Konstam 2019:252.

<sup>12</sup> Hannah 2015:393-394.

<sup>13</sup> Woodard 2007:2-5.

<sup>14</sup> La Buse's expedition to Brazil occurred before the end of the Republic, and on the way back, he sailed to other havens.

<sup>15</sup> Woodard 2007:228-229.

imperial monopolies and disrupt shipping with relative impunity.

Sources suggest that Brazil had already captured the raiders' imagination as a distant prize well before the collapse of their Bahamian stronghold. In 1716, Jamaica Governor Peter Heywood reported that they were planning to extend their operations southward into Brazilian waters.<sup>16</sup> The following year, Blackbeard allegedly told a captive that he intended to sail there to seek his fortune.<sup>17</sup> As is well known, Blackbeard never carried out the plan—but Olivier Levasseur did. His initial raids, combined with news of the upheavals in Nassau, served as a clear warning to the Portuguese government that a major crisis was developing.<sup>18</sup>

Even before the fall of Nassau, other French freebooters had reappeared along the coast of Portuguese America. In June 1718, Captain Clairambault, commanding the Dieppe ship *La Marguerite*, reported that two pirate vessels, equipped with 14 and 16 cannons each, chased him near Cape Santo Agostinho in Pernambuco. To avoid capture, his crew deliberately grounded the ship and fled to Bahia. There, they learned that Captain Viel of Nantes commanded the 16-gun vessel.<sup>19</sup>

### Why Brazil?

French piracy in Brazil was unusual, yet far from accidental. Earlier privateering ventures—most notably René Duguay-Trouin's dramatic occupation of Rio de Janeiro in 1711—had already revealed to the French the immense opportunities for plunder. That territory, positioned at the heart of Portugal's Atlantic system, offered both wealth and strategic leverage, making it an irresistible target for freebooters.<sup>20</sup>

By the early 1700s, Lisbon had lost much of its former influence in the Indian Ocean to the Dutch and English. The government, therefore, redirected its attention and funds toward

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<sup>16</sup> British History Online/V29:411.

<sup>17</sup> Déclaration de Christopher Taylor, Fort Royal 12 January 1718 (AN-Colonies/C8/A24).

<sup>18</sup> Biblioteca Nacional/1942/055/73.

<sup>19</sup> Archives Nationales de France - MAR/B3/252.

<sup>20</sup> Portugal also had a smaller dominion at that time in the North called Maranhão.

South America and Africa. The prosperous sugar and tobacco plantations of Pernambuco, Bahia, and Rio de Janeiro generated substantial wealth.

Even more valuable, however, was gold. Mined by free prospectors and enslaved laborers since the final decades of the seventeenth century, Brazilian gold steadily surpassed sugar as the state's primary export.<sup>21 22</sup> Locally taxed gold was transported to Lisbon along with other merchandise, protected within guarded convoys known as gold fleets, which set sail from Rio de Janeiro, Salvador, and sometimes Recife.

No wonder, then, that after Nassau's collapse, Brazil's merchant shipping, together with the steady stream of slavers carrying goods to Africa and the fleets laden with precious metals and cargo, presented English raiders with both lucrative targets and predictable routes.



**Figure 2:** A pirate flag drawn by the author using a late 17th-century design

(Artwork by the author, © 2026. All rights reserved)

### Vimieiro the Pirate Hunter

It was in this context that D. Sancho de Faro e Sousa, Count of Vimieiro, assumed the governorship of Brazil in September 1718. He had departed Lisbon for Salvador in the first

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<sup>21</sup> Brazil was officially designated a 'state' within the Portuguese Empire, though in practice it functioned much like a colony.

<sup>22</sup> Hannah 2015:336-337.



half of 1718, (June or early July). While his fleet made its way across the Atlantic, a pirate ship followed closely behind, flying the classic Jolly Roger—a black flag emblazoned with a skull (Figure 2). When the Portuguese vessels showed a firm determination to fight, the enemy withdrew.<sup>23</sup> Days later, the Portuguese sighted an empty, silent vessel drifting past. Its eerie stillness left a strong impression on the crew, though it remains unclear whether the ship had been taken by raiders. Communication difficulties and delays during the voyage led officers in Salvador to assume for a time that the governor-general was missing at sea.<sup>24</sup>

Upon his arrival in Salvador, the capital, the governor found a city with inadequate coastal and naval protection.



**Figure 3:** Salvador. 17th-century map by Albernaz (Wikimedia Commons).

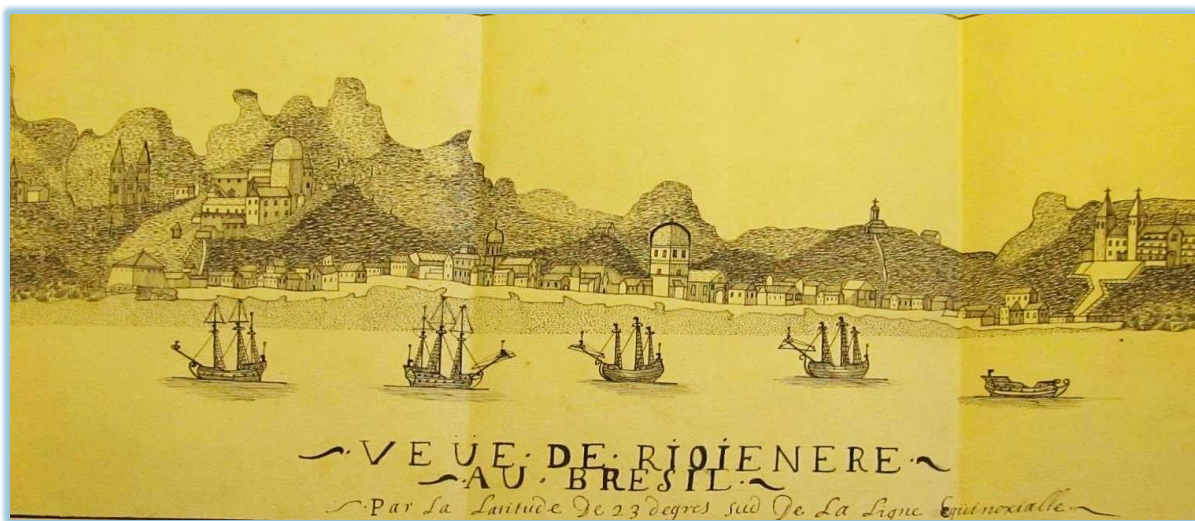
<sup>23</sup> Porcher (2019: 30) informs that freebooters sought to seize vessels while incurring the least possible risk to their own craft and men, as structural damage was expensive and time-consuming to repair at sea, and serious wounds were often fatal in an era of limited medical care. To achieve this, they favored hoisting of the black flag as a deterrent effect—tactics that almost invariably compelled merchant captains to surrender without a fight.

<sup>24</sup> Pitta 1720:306.



A single warship patrolled the vast stretch of coastline between Salvador da Bahia and Rio de Janeiro. Colonial officials described the other available vessels as “badly constructed” and “lacking officers.” The forts were in equally poor condition: their artillery needed repairs, and soldiers were frequently recruited by force.<sup>25</sup>

Salvador was not unique in its exposure. Rio de Janeiro, critical for gold exports and the slave trade, relied almost entirely on land-based fortifications (Figure 4).



**Figure 4:** Rio de Janeiro in the early 18th Century.

(Archives Nationales de France- Photo provided by Christopher Pollet).

After the first pirate raids along its shores, the local governor and municipal council debated for months before agreeing to commission a single armed vessel, financed by supplementary taxes levied on local merchants.<sup>26</sup>

Smaller coastal villages managed to raise meagre militias, but many—if not most—had no organized protection at all. Scattered like fragile outposts along Brazil’s immense shoreline, their residents often abandoned their homes and fled into the forests whenever unfamiliar

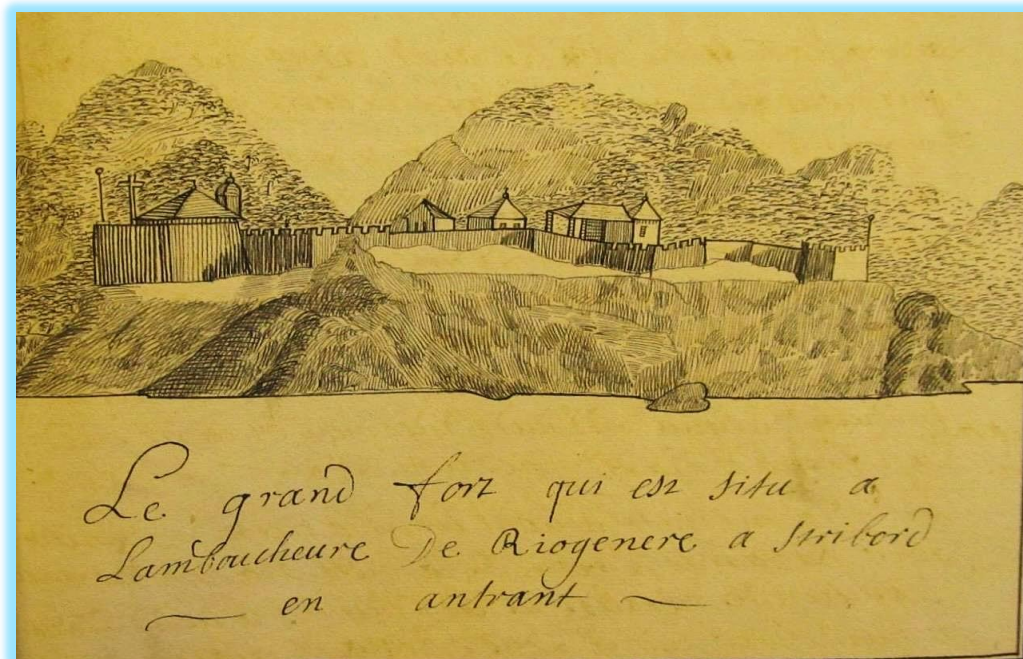
<sup>25</sup> Biblioteca Nacional/1952/97:184-185.

<sup>26</sup> Arquivo Nacional/Codice 85/Letter 27/06/1719.

ships appeared offshore.<sup>27</sup>

But these were not merely local problems of shipyards or personnel: Years of expensive involvement in the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–1714), costly campaigns in the Mediterranean, and the ongoing defence of Colônia do Sacramento on the Río de la Plata frontier had already drained the royal treasury.<sup>28</sup>

In 1718 Lisbon continued to divert much of its limited resources to metropolitan naval priorities and the escort of gold fleets, leaving Brazil's defences further undermined by incompetence, corruption, and prolonged disputes between colonial governors and officials in Lisbon over revenues originally earmarked for Brazil's protection.<sup>29</sup>



**Figure 5:** Fort in Rio in the early decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century.

(ANF- Photo provided by C. Pollet).

One might wonder why money remained so scarce in Brazil despite the land producing the

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<sup>27</sup> Boxer 1969a:326.

<sup>28</sup> Arquivo Público Nacional 1910: Correspondência ativa e passiva dos Governadores do Rio de Janeiro (1716 A 1725) Volume X:52.

<sup>29</sup> Dantas da Cruz 2015:199-200.

majority of the world's new gold supply. By 1718 vast quantities of bullion were shipped legally in the annual fleets to Lisbon and then redirected to England. The 1703 Treaty of Methuen, which exchanged Portuguese wine for English textiles, did not directly involve Brazilian gold. However, the influx of bullion from Brazil indirectly sustained Portugal's chronic trade imbalance with Britain, enabling the treaty's commercial framework to function.

The safe arrival of these fleets—protected by naval escorts against sea rovers—thus became essential not only to Lisbon but to Great Britain's strategic commercial interests. In practice, the arrangement systematically drained Brazil's wealth by tying the metropolitan economy to English commerce, while smuggling, though significant, inflicted only secondary losses.<sup>30</sup>

Therefore Brazil's coastal shortcomings reflected a deeper imperial imbalance: fiscal strain and metropolitan priorities deprived the territory of resources and undermined its security. In the empire's logic, the stability of Lisbon and its British trading partners consistently took precedence over the protection of its American dominions.

Yet the steady flow of gold from the mines of Portuguese America stimulated the commerce of slaves in Africa, particularly Angola: Portuguese traders received financial backing from English merchants who profited from the influx of bullion and expanded their role in Atlantic exchange <sup>31</sup> .

## West Africa

At the same time Count Vimieiro was assuming his post in Brazil, Anglo-American pirates began probing Portuguese shipping routes along West Africa. Their early raids were scattered and opportunistic, aimed at European vessels engaged in commerce and the transatlantic slave trade, which stretched from Senegambia in the north to West Central Africa in the south.

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<sup>30</sup> Hanna 2017:335-337.

<sup>31</sup> Menz 2023:2.

This trade relied on long-standing regional exchange networks dominated by France, Britain, Portugal, and the Netherlands. European traders even gave the coastline distinctive labels — the Pepper and Grain Coasts (modern Liberia), the Gold Coast (Ghana), the Ivory Coast (Côte d’Ivoire), and the Slave Coast (the Bight of Benin) — reflecting the extraction and predation that shaped both geography and economic opportunity for merchants and pirates alike.<sup>32 33</sup>

African slavery, in various forms, long predated European contact. Rooted in local traditions of warfare, debt, and judicial punishment, these violent practices—fundamental to many African cultures—had increased and spread widely through the trans-Saharan and Indian Ocean trade networks for centuries. By the early decades of the 18th century (1716–1726), the Islamic slave trade—already over a millennium old—continued vigorously across the same routes, supplying slaves to North Africa, the Middle East, and the Ottoman Empire, even as advanced European naval technology, combined with surging colonial demand for plantation labor, enabled European ships and maritime networks to carry the trade across the Atlantic and expand it rapidly throughout the Americas.<sup>34 35 36</sup>

African kingdoms and traders—most notably the Asante, Kongo, and Dahomey—acted as essential partners, supplying captives to European buyers at coastal posts. These prisoners were then transported to plantations in North America, Brazil, and the West Indies, where those who survived the infamous Middle Passage cultivated cash crops such as sugar and tobacco. While tobacco was an important export, sugar had by the early 1700s become the overwhelmingly dominant staple commodity, shipped to Europe in vast quantities and shaping global trade.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Biblioteca Nacional (BN)/Documentos Históricos, 1939, vol. 43, pp.130-131.

<sup>33</sup> Cordingly 1995:89.

<sup>34</sup> See The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database. n.d. Available at: [www.slavevoyages.org](http://www.slavevoyages.org)

<sup>35</sup> Richter & Carita 2020:41.

<sup>36</sup> Slavery was widespread in many continents and cultures in those days.

<sup>37</sup> Wilde-Ramsing & Carnes-McNaughton 2018:22-23.

Transactions concentrated around heavily fortified trading posts, including Cape Coast and Elmina Castles in Ghana, Whydah<sup>38</sup> on the Slave Coast (present-day Benin), Benguela and Luanda in Angola. Slaves remained at these locations before being traded for firearms, textiles, and various other goods from Europe. This system deeply embedded the Atlantic slave trade into local political structures.<sup>39 40</sup>

European demand for enslaved labor, coupled with the influx of firearms, intensified the economic and political incentives of African suppliers. The consequences were widespread destruction of communities, escalating lawlessness, and chronic political instability across affected regions. At this time, both England and Portugal stood at the forefront of the transatlantic slave trade, which had become a vital pillar of their imperial economies<sup>41</sup>. For Portugal in particular, the trade was inseparable from the prosperity of Brazil and Lisbon's global ambitions.<sup>42 43</sup>

### Portuguese Routes

Unlike other European powers, Portugal operated a distinctive South Atlantic system linking Lisbon, its American dominion, and Africa through both triangular routes and extensive direct bilateral voyages between ports such as Salvador, Recife, and Rio de Janeiro and West Africa. Merchants in Lisbon and its overseas territories acquired captives in Angola and, to a lesser extent, along the Mina Coast. Payment was usually made through barter—tobacco, spirits, and sugar—or extended on credit, since coin was scarce and gold was

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<sup>38</sup> The king of Whydah allowed the Europeans to set their own forts and was in constant negotiation with them to maximize profits.

<sup>39</sup> Kwaku 2002.

<sup>40</sup> Wilde-Ramsing & Carnes-McNaughton 2018:146.

<sup>41</sup> The transatlantic slave trade was eventually curtailed by British abolitionist policies at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Britain—which had been one of the largest carriers of the trade—suddenly withdrew and then actively suppressed it.

<sup>42</sup> Transatlantic slave trade | Britannica: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/transatlantic-slave-trade>.

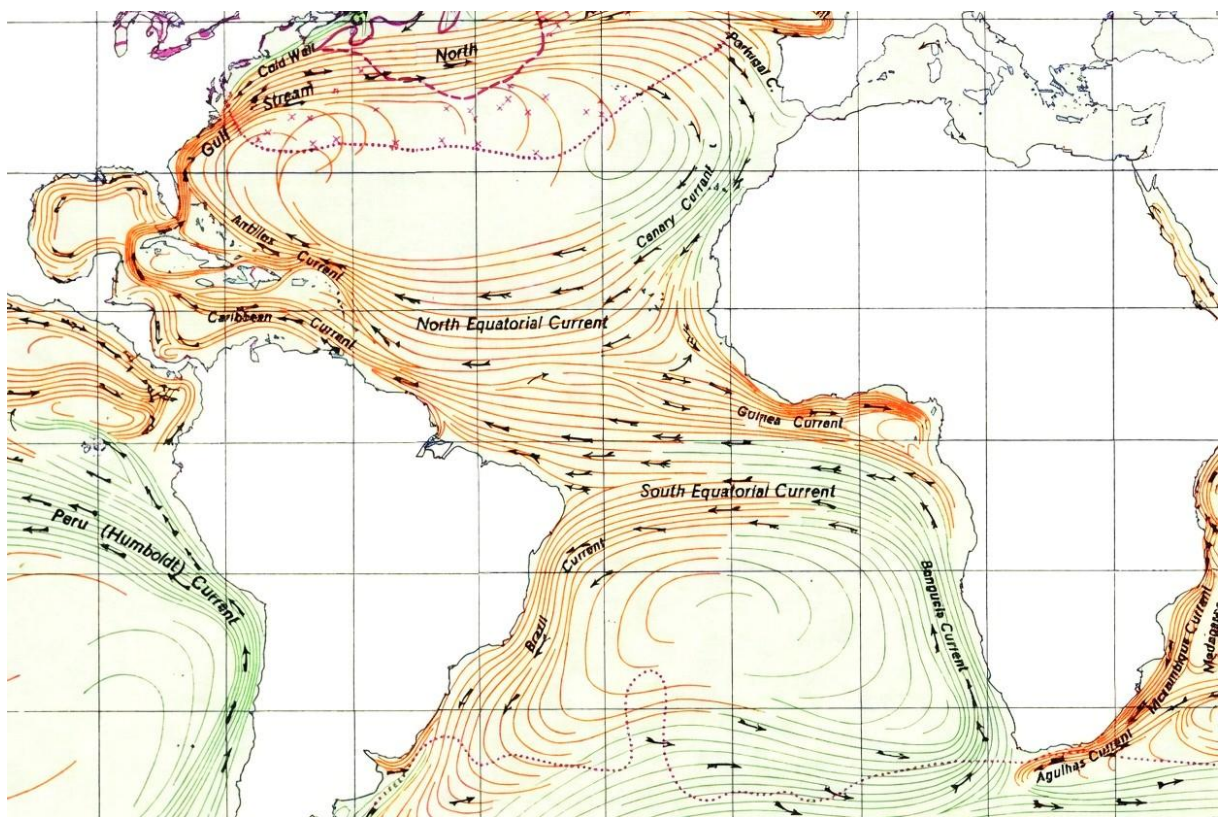
<sup>43</sup> Menz 2023:2.



prohibited as currency in Africa.<sup>44 45 46</sup>

Most disembarkations occurred at Brazil's principal ports, where enslaved Africans were distributed to plantations, households, and the gold-mining districts.<sup>47</sup> This growing demand for coerced labor tied Brazil's economic and demographic development ever more tightly to Africa. Over time, slavery became so deeply embedded in what contemporaries viewed as the natural social order that life without slaves seemed unimaginable to many.

This maritime framework underpinned Portugal's imperial system, channeling people, commodities, and capital between Lisbon and its dominions.



**Figure 6:** Sea currents in the Atlantic (U.S. Army).

Any disruption — whether to slave transports, African commerce, or the gold fleets — carried

<sup>44</sup> Alencastro, 2000:115, 323-325.

<sup>45</sup> Njoku 1997:35-37

<sup>46</sup> Eltis and Richardson 2010:37.

<sup>47</sup> [www.slavevoyages.org](http://www.slavevoyages.org).



severe economic repercussions. The predictable regularity of these routes made them especially vulnerable to predation, and pirates soon learned to exploit the same winds and currents that guided Portuguese slavers from Angola and the Mina Coast to Brazil (Figure 6).

In August 1718, one of the earliest English pirate ships arrived from Africa; another soon followed it, prompting the dispatch of an armed merchantman and a warship, both of which failed to intercept their quarry.<sup>48</sup> These marauders boldly entered South American waters, though many would later meet a tragic end.

### *George and The Dragon*

A rare glimpse into their activities survives in the 1718 Rio de Janeiro court proceedings on piracy.<sup>49</sup> The records describe two vessels: the first was under the command of Richard Butcher. In Portuguese sources, its name is incorrectly rendered as “Jorge Faga.” Because “Faga” is not identifiable<sup>50</sup>, it will hereafter be referred to simply as *George*. The second, far more formidable, was a forty-gun vessel, *The Dragon*<sup>51</sup>, crewed by about two hundred men and commanded by Edward Congdon. Portuguese sources rendered his name as ‘Duarte Condon’ and nicknamed him ‘Maneta’ for the loss of one hand. Congdon stood as Butcher’s trusted associate.

*George* was the first to arrive in Brazil. Portuguese records describe its contraband dealings near Macaé, where African captives were exchanged for cattle and provisions with the help of local intermediaries. This fragile accommodation quickly collapsed.

### *The Shipwreck*

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<sup>48</sup> Biblioteca Nacional (BN)/Documentos Históricos, 1946, volume 71, pp. 154.

<sup>49</sup> Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino (AHU)/CU017/Caixa 11/Doc. 1164.

<sup>50</sup> One possibility is *George Fagan* or *George Vaughan*.

<sup>51</sup> All Portuguese sources so far call it “O Dragão” (with an article which should be translated as “The Dragon”).

In August 1718, after stopping at Macaé for refreshments and illicit trading, *George* was driven onto the shore by a storm near the mouth of the Jogoroaba River, about nine leagues from Sant'Ana Island.<sup>52 53 54</sup> The crew determined that the vessel was unsalvageable and, after removing its bell, sixty-two Europeans and twenty Africans abandoned it, among them a Black boy who served as the vessel's drummer-trumpeter. Hoping to win the goodwill of local inhabitants, the survivors presented them with clothing and the ship's bell.

Still armed with muskets, pistols, and sabers, the group then began marching overland toward Macaé. When they arrived, the local commander, Domingos Álvares, his brother Simão Álvares, and around thirty armed men greeted them. Exhausted and unfamiliar with the terrain, the pirates offered no resistance and became prisoners without a fight. The captors immediately seized their gold, silver, weapons, and other valuables. The captain and quartermaster were initially spared harsher treatment in hopes of gaining their cooperation, while the Portuguese simply treated the Africans as property, regardless of their roles aboard the ship.

After Macaé, the prisoners were escorted to Rio de Janeiro by Portuguese official Simão Álvares. En route to Cabo Frio, Álvares deceived the captain and quartermaster, persuading them to surrender their valuables — gold coins, chains, and melted gold — under the pretence of impending official seizure, with a false promise of later return. The absence of violence and the evident trust suggest a possible prior acquaintance rooted in illicit dealings. This episode exemplifies the era's intricate interplay of authority, opportunism, and the porous boundary between legitimate trade and maritime predation.

Concurrently, Edward Congdon was already active along the Brazilian coast. On 5 October 1718 the governor of Rio de Janeiro reported that *The Dragon* had been sighted near Cape

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<sup>52</sup> Off the coast of Macaé.

<sup>53</sup> Archives Nationales de France - MAR/B7/42/363.

<sup>54</sup> Considering the reported distance and the former mouth of the Jogoroaba River, the wreck site lies near the approximate coordinates 22°09'13.78" S, 41°15'56.63" W.

Santo Agostinho in Pernambuco. Having raided along the West African coast, Congdon and his crew had sailed to South America in the hope of rendezvousing with Butcher, unaware that he had already been captured.<sup>55</sup>

Along the way, the freebooters seized merchant vessels and treated their crews harshly. They imprisoned impoverished fishermen from Pernambuco in the ship's hold and forced a captured pilot from a vessel near Cabo Verde to guide him through Brazilian waters. With a cargo of slaves and stolen goods, Congdon headed toward Macaé expecting to replenish supplies. Instead, the stop turned hostile. Emboldened by the earlier events involving *George*, a group of residents confronted the visitors almost immediately. A skirmish broke out, and six marauders were captured by a group led by one Manuel Nunes. Two coerced crewmen also deserted with the help of townspeople.

What surprised the marauders most was the locals' refusal to exchange the captured men for prisoners of their own nationality. Congdon exclaimed in astonishment: "What caste of people are these who will not exchange person for person?" Only after prolonged negotiations — and under the captain's threats to behead his captives — the kidnapped members of the crew were finally ransomed with a large quantity of gold coins. Disillusioned, Congdon and his remaining crew sailed away, possibly unaware of the grim fate that had already befallen those aboard *George*.

### The Official Inquiry

When the prisoners from *George* reached Rio de Janeiro, colonial authorities immediately detained them pending a formal inquiry<sup>56</sup>. Interrogations, however, did not begin until November 1718. Bartolomeu de Siqueira Cordovil, treasurer and accountant of the Royal Exchequer, presided over the proceedings with the assistance of English translators.

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<sup>55</sup> Arquivo Nacional (NA)/Codice 84/ fólios 24-25.

<sup>56</sup> Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino (AHU)/CU017/Caixa 11/Doc.1164.

*Termos de perguntas*

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**Figure 7:** Butcher's statement and the name of his ship  
(Lisboa: Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino).

The authorities treated the case with marked seriousness, investigating not only crimes committed at sea but also the vast quantities of gold, silver, weapons, and other goods seized from the freebooters. Equally troubling was the involvement of local inhabitants, whose participation in plundering the wreck, holding the pirates' valuables, and smuggling highlighted the depth of illicit activity in the region.

The documents contain English names written phonetically, making it difficult to accurately identify the prisoners. Among those questioned were Captain Ricardo Boucher (Richard Butcher, Figure 7 above), quartermaster Spenser Hore (Spencer Hoare), master of arms João

Curnau (possibly John Cornwall), and boatswain Ruberto Actinson (Robert Atkinson).<sup>57</sup>

The authorities also interrogated deserters from *The Dragon* who had reached Macaé afterwards. One of them was Guilherme Dique (William Dick), the ship's surgeon, who managed to escape after tending to an ill woman on land, and Diogo Panketh (possibly James or Jacob Penketh), a captured sailor sent out for refreshments who also fled with help from residents.

The officers summoned witnesses from Macaé and the nearby Campos region. Together with testimony from the captured enemies, they helped identify individuals involved in dealings with both ships and in the plundering of the stranded ship. One local suspect was initially described only as “a man who spoke in a nasal voice,”<sup>58</sup> later identified as Salvador da Costa. He had served as an intermediary in the illicit trade with *George* and in the confrontation involving *The Dragon*'s crew.

Another man was foolish enough to openly exhibit his newly acquired wealth, appearing in a black coat and silver-buckled hat while accompanied by a slave, all items purchased from the pirates. Justice eventually caught up with the local culprits; orders were issued for their arrest and confiscation of their property.

The governor of Rio de Janeiro later wrote to the garrison commander in Santos, explaining that most pirate prisoners were eventually transferred to Salvador in Bahia, though a few remained in Rio under the governor's watch. As a warning against future incursions, the ruthless governor wanted the severed heads of the enemies to be displayed on Sant'Ana Island

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<sup>57</sup> Pirate hierarchy was less rigid than naval tradition but still defined by crucial roles. The captain, chosen for courage and skill, commanded in battle. The quartermaster managed loot, discipline, and the crew's democratic voice. Navigation fell to the sailing master (often called the pilot), while the boatswain oversaw deck work, rigging, and supplies. The gunner controlled cannons and gunpowder, the carpenter maintained the hull, and the surgeon treated wounds and disease. The master-at-arms supervised small weapons — swords, cutlasses, pistols, muskets, and boarding pikes — and often enforced discipline and combat training. Finally, the ordinary pirates, though lower in rank, wielded surprising influence, frequently voting on major decisions that shaped the crew's fate.

<sup>58</sup> “Fanhoso” in the original text.

as well.<sup>59 60</sup>

## The Prisoners

By early 1719, Portuguese authorities had detained fifty-two pirates in Salvador. The great majority were English and Irish crewmen from Richard Butcher's wrecked ship *George*; the sources state that the prisoners came from two pirate ships that had sunk in Brazilian waters. The group also included men from France, the Netherlands, Genoa, and Portugal. Thirty-eight were confined in the dungeons of Fort Santo Antônio Além do Carmo, while the remaining fourteen stayed in a local jail. Clergy members visited the prisoners, some of whom became Catholic, although this did not ensure reduced punishment.<sup>61</sup>

Those held in the fort soon faced severe conditions, including near-starvation due to neglect. The governor general intervened, ordering adequate provisions to keep them alive until trial. He also supplied fish oil for the guards' lamps. These measures, however, did not stem from pure mercy. Count Vimieiro's goal was strictly pragmatic: to preserve the captives as living examples for public discipline and deterrence.<sup>62 63</sup>

Yet, Edward Congdon had not abandoned Brazilian waters. In early 1719, the governor of Santos informed the count that his ship was at Ilha Grande, near Rio de Janeiro, where he was selling goods stolen from a vessel out of Porto. In his February 1719 reply, the count identified that same vessel as the same forty-gun ship he had damaged months earlier near six degrees north latitude during his voyage from Lisbon.<sup>64</sup>

Confident of success in a renewed engagement, he dispatched the frigate *Nossa Senhora da Palma e São Pedro* to patrol the coast off Salvador. The orders emphasized protecting

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<sup>59</sup> Arquivo Nacional/Codice 84: folio28.

<sup>60</sup> The same island adjacent to Macaé, where La Buse had previously abandoned 240 slaves.

<sup>61</sup> Biblioteca Nacional/1942/55:34.

<sup>62</sup> Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino (AHU)/CU005/Caixa 15/Doc.1248 (1).

<sup>63</sup> Biblioteca Nacional (BN)/Documentos Históricos, 1939, vol.43:173.

<sup>64</sup> Biblioteca Nacional (BN)/Documentos Históricos, 1946, vol.71:51-52.



Portuguese shipping from the metropole, India, and the Mina Coast, with clear instructions to sink the enemy vessel by cannon fire. He also instructed the officers to remain near Salvador “in case of leaks” or other problems.<sup>65</sup>

The Portuguese never located Congdon, and his name disappears from their official records thereafter. Later in 1719, now commanding two ships armed with thirty-six guns each, he sought an official pardon from Governor Woodes Rogers in New Providence. Rogers hesitated to grant clemency, noting that considerable time had passed since the King’s Pardon of 1718.<sup>66</sup>

### **A Daring Escape and Its Aftermath**

On the night of 24 February 1719, nine or ten prisoners held in the dungeons of Fort Santo Antônio Além do Carmo in Salvador, refused to wait for the Portuguese authorities to decide their fate. They escaped by stabbing the sleeping guards, seized a small broken boat nearby, and later exchanged it for a larger sailing vessel.<sup>67</sup>

Upon learning of the jailbreak, Count Vimieiro immediately ordered a pursuit with armed vessels. He knew the second boat the escapees had taken was laden only with tiles and bricks, meaning they lacked powder, shot, water, and adequate provisions. With the gallows in mind, he expressed the hope “to abbreviate their suffering.”<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, he could not recapture them. After escaping from prison, the fugitives disappeared completely, with no further contact or sightings reported by the authorities.

The fate of those men who remained in Salvador’s prisons was grim. Following formal condemnation on 17 August 1719,<sup>69</sup> the court executed twenty-seven convicts on two consecutive days. Public torture preceded the executions in a macabre spectacle, brutal in

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<sup>65</sup> Biblioteca Nacional (BN)/Documentos Históricos, 1942, vol.55:198.

<sup>66</sup> British History Online (BHO)/ Vol. 31/pp1-21.

<sup>67</sup> Biblioteca Nacional (BN)/Documentos Históricos, 1939, vol.43:216-217.

<sup>68</sup> Biblioteca Nacional (BN)/Documentos Históricos, 1939, vol.43:218.

<sup>69</sup> Gazeta de Lisboa Ocidental, 23/11/1719:249-250.

nature and poorly administered. The remaining prisoners received sentences that condemned them to labor in the galleys.

British records show that one of the executed men was a seaman called **Delapp**. They also reveal that the English government later submitted diplomatic petitions seeking clemency for six others, arguing that these men had been coerced into piracy. The petitions named **T. Thomas, John Barnes, Charles Wynn, Hugh Sall, Ezekiel Fowler, and James Maggroy** (sic).<sup>70</sup>

On the French side, a petition possibly involving sailors from La Buse's *La Louise* was submitted too. In a report dated 23 September 1721, the French consul in Lisbon, Monsieur de Montagnac, forwarded to the Regent a list of seven French sailors who had arrived with the gold fleet from the Bay of All Saints. Condemned to the galleys for crimes at sea, these men told how they had been torn from their ships and forced into pirate service. When the first chance to escape appeared, they seized it without hesitation, fleeing their captor and surrendering themselves to the Portuguese authorities in Brazil.

The consul considered the story plausible and formally petitioned for their release, noting that despite their surrender, the Portuguese had grouped them with English survivors of another pirate shipwrecked by a storm—men who, in his view, should have been executed.<sup>71 72</sup>

## A Royal Decree

Although the freebooters' raids in 1718 caused disruptions in West Africa, they did not significantly weaken Portuguese slave-trading operations along the Mina Coast or in Angola. The far greater challenge came from sustained Dutch competition and aggression in the

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<sup>70</sup> National Archives-UK (NA) SP/89/30-46.

<sup>71</sup> One sailor that stayed longer in the galleys was Pierre Sicard according to historian Jacques Gasser (*pers.comm.*, 2019).

<sup>72</sup> The ship was *George*.

region.

In response, merchants actively sought safer and more cost-effective sources of enslaved labor in less disputed areas. On 24 January 1719, King Dom João V issued a royal decree authorizing ships sailing from Brazilian ports to purchase captives on the Island of São Lourenço (Madagascar).<sup>73</sup> Acting on the recommendation of the former Viceroy of Brazil, the Marquis of Angeja, the measure sought to curb the inflated prices and frequent violence that plagued the Dutch-contested Costa da Mina, long a source of difficulty for Portuguese slavers. Yet shifting operations to the Indian Ocean brought its own challenges: sailing those turbulent waters required longer voyages and complex logistics, conditions far from straightforward.

To safeguard Portuguese trade routes in India and Mozambique, the decree forbade these vessels from transporting gold or ivory and prohibited them from calling at Sofala, Climane, or the islands of Angoxa, all located in present-day Mozambique. The directive sent to the governor general was to be disseminated across the Brazilian captaincies and formally inscribed in government registers. Yet Portuguese anxieties soon extended beyond Dutch rivalry, as a new wave of pirate incursions emerged to compound their concerns.

### New Raiders in Brazil

The ruthlessness of the Portuguese justice against the 1718 pirates did not deter others from testing their luck in Brazilian waters. In April 1719, reports of robberies and hostilities prompted Governor Vimieiro to dispatch the ageing frigate *Nossa Senhora do Rosário e São Gonçalo* on patrol, although the mission yielded no results. At the same time, residents near the coastal village of Boipeba in Bahia reported six suspicious vessels. Officers later confirmed two as pirate ships after they stole a brigantine in Camamu. The governor responded quickly by supplying arms and ammunition to the local militia there to bolster

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<sup>73</sup> [https://historialuso.an.gov.br/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=3037:ataques-](https://historialuso.an.gov.br/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3037:ataques-)

defenses against further incursions.<sup>74</sup>

In that month, Captain Domingos dos Santos Cardoso, who was responsible for patrolling the coastline, received a strongly worded letter from the governor-general. He expressed outrage at the audacity of a freebooter who was seizing ships “under our noses” along the coast.

He ordered Cardoso to take the small frigate *Nossa Senhora do Rosário e São Gonçalo* and patrol the waters around Salvador, extending the watch as far as thirty to forty leagues offshore. The instructions were clear: To monitor vessels coming from both north and south while avoiding dangerous close-to-shore navigation, plus capture the enemy that, in Vimieiro’s words, had “caused us so much annoyance that we would be pleased with the news of its sinking,” and thereby set an example to deter the other criminals who “infest that coast.”<sup>75</sup>

The precise identity of these raiders remains uncertain. They may have been Edward Congdon and his associates, or part of a second wave of marauders whose trajectories can be traced from the West Indies to New Providence, illustrating the broader diffusion of pirate networks following the British suppression of piracy in the Caribbean.

## New Pirates in Africa

In April 1719, Olivier Levasseur (La Buse) and his companions from New Providence reappeared in the historical record. They established concealed bases in the estuaries of Sierra Leone and Gambia. These hidden anchorages served as launch points for fresh attacks, made possible by the near-total absence of European naval patrols in the region.

In later testimony, the French captain recalled that the group had departed New Providence with twenty-nine sails, boats, or brigantines. He joined forces with notorious captains, such as

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<sup>74</sup> Biblioteca Nacional (BN)/Documentos Históricos, 1942, vol.55:227-228.

<sup>75</sup> Biblioteca Nacional (BN)/Documentos Históricos, 1946, vol.73:80-81.

Thomas Cocklyn, Paulsgrave Williams, Richard Taylor (a former Royal Navy officer), and Howell Davis. His account offers a rare glimpse into the scale of pirate mobilization after the collapse of the Bahamian stronghold.<sup>76 77</sup>

In April 1719, the captains' coalition assembled a formidable flotilla along the West African coast. In addition to several smaller vessels, it included three major ships (Figure 8):

- *King James*, commanded by Howell Davis (32 guns, 130 men);
- *Duke of Ormond*, commanded by Olivier Levasseur (La Buse) (22 guns, 95 men);
- *Speakwell*, commanded by Thomas Cocklyn (34 guns, 90 men).

This force captured at least twelve prizes—mostly British vessels from London and Bristol—off Sierra Leone, burning two of them. Their operations then pushed southward, where they seized another twenty-four ships along the Gold Coast, Whydah, and Calabar, leaving a trail of destruction across the region's trading routes.<sup>78</sup>

### Eyewitness Account: William Snelgrave

Captain William Snelgrave's book: *A New Account of Some Parts of Guinea and the Slave Trade* (1734) provides one of the most vivid contemporary descriptions of piracy in West Africa in 1719. A prominent slave trader employed by London merchant Humphry Morice, Snelgrave was captured in April at the mouth of the Sierra Leone River by Jeremiah Cocklyn's crew, operating in concert with Howell Davis and Olivier Levasseur.

According to Snelgrave, Cocklyn physically assaulted him for resisting capture. In contrast, Davis treated him more courteously, expressing shame at the rough treatment while explaining that their motivation was "to revenge themselves on corrupt Merchants, and cruel Commanders of Ships." On another occasion, Levasseur intervened to prevent the torture and

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<sup>76</sup> Archives Nationales d'outre-mer (ANOM), C8A27, fol. 96, 17 décembre 1719.

<sup>77</sup> Brooks 2018:64-65.

<sup>78</sup> Morice papers Bank of England: Snelgrave to Morice, 30 April 1719. 20A67/4/1/1.

killing of a French captain by a group of raiders, later declaring that he would “remain no longer in partnership with such barbarous villains.”

An acc<sup>t</sup> of Shipp<sup>s</sup> taken by Pirates at Serreleone  
on the Coast of Africa in April 1719

1. . . . Society Cap<sup>t</sup> Shannoe of London
2. . . . Robert & James Cap<sup>t</sup> Rennett D<sup>e</sup> . . . burnt
3. . . . Nightingall Cap<sup>t</sup> James Chrichton of Bristol
4. . . . Jacob & Jell Cap<sup>t</sup> John Thompson of London. burnt
5. . . . Carnall Cap<sup>t</sup> Henry Morris of Bristol
6. . . . Two Friends of Barbados Cap<sup>t</sup> Elliot carried w<sup>th</sup> a Tender
7. . . . Queen Elizabeth Cap<sup>t</sup> David Chrichton of London
8. . . . Edward & Head Cap<sup>t</sup> James Wisbitt of Barbados
9. . . . Sarah gally Cap<sup>t</sup> Jonatha Lambe of London
10. . . . Bird Gally Cap<sup>t</sup> W<sup>m</sup> Snelgrave. D<sup>e</sup>
11. . . . Victory Cap<sup>t</sup> Anthony . . .
12. . . . Dispatch Cap<sup>t</sup> Wilson

Pirates Names

The King James Cap<sup>t</sup> Davis 32 Guns 130 Men  
Duke of Ormondo Cap<sup>t</sup> Leboe 22 Guns . . 95 Men  
Speakwell Cap<sup>t</sup> Cocklin . . . 34 Guns . . 90 Men

This appears of Cap<sup>t</sup> W<sup>m</sup> Snelgrave's Letter dated 30 April 1719  
Memorandum what ships were taken at Gambia before to be  
put down

Taken of said Pirates on the Gold Coast Whidah &  
Celabar

13	Royall Hind Cap <sup>t</sup> Hall	20	Susanna Cap <sup>t</sup> Wood
14	Princeps Cap <sup>t</sup> Plum	21	Sarah Caschall
15	a Barbados Sloop Cap <sup>t</sup> Henry	22	Henry Smith
16	Conrade Cap <sup>t</sup> Simpson	23	Leopard Maxwell
17	Loyalty Cap <sup>t</sup> Graham	24	Heroine Blincoe
18			
19	Cap <sup>t</sup> Ridge		
	Cap <sup>t</sup> Mortyn		

**Figure 8:** The pirates in Africa and their prizes in April 1719, described by Snelgrave in a letter to Morice (Bank of England, Morice letters10A61/3).



Snelgrave's narrative also highlights the thriving illicit trade network that existed in these lawless enclaves. Complicit merchants openly did business with the criminals, while disaffected seamen deserted to join their crews. Africans, former captives from slave ships, also appeared in the pirate's companies. He also depicted the raiders' unruly behaviour—marked by violence, profanity, and habitual drunkenness—and reserved his harshest criticism for the crews of Levasseur and Cocklyn, who plundered not only prizes and cargoes but even his personal possessions and furniture in the great cabin.<sup>79</sup>

### Edward England's Operations

In the meantime, the pirate Edward England seems to have operated independently for a time. A deposition given to British authorities records that John Bois, a carpenter aboard the merchant ship *Wade*, was seized on 24 February 1719 off Samana Bay by England's 24-gun vessel.<sup>80</sup> Having left New Providence, England sought a stronger ship and targeted prizes along the coasts of Guinea and Brazil.

By April 1719, he and his associates had launched raids along the African coast aboard the *Royal James*, a powerful vessel armed with thirty guns and manned by 160 men. They captured nine ships off Gambia.<sup>81</sup> Among the prizes (Figure 9 above), were the *Mercury*, which they refitted with fourteen guns and thirty men and renamed *Queen Anne's Revenge*, and the *Elizabeth and Catherine*, rechristened the *Flying King* and placed under the command of Robert Sample with eight guns and fourteen crew.<sup>82</sup> England's group also burned the *Dove*

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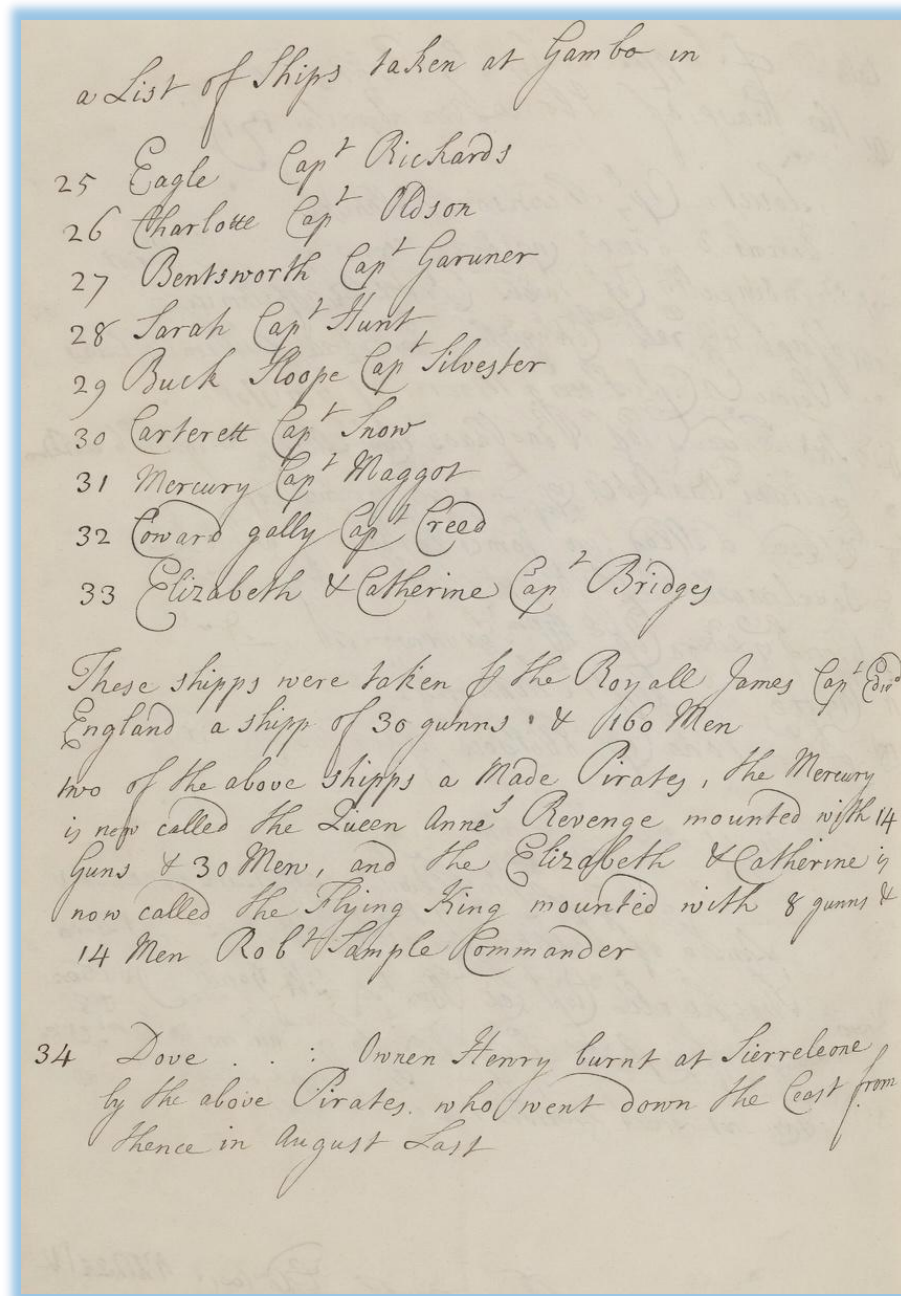
<sup>79</sup> Snelgrave notes that even his books did not escape the criminal's vandalism. Upon discovering them, one thief sneered that "there was jaw-work enough...to serve a nation" and suggested throwing them overboard. His proposal was met with enthusiasm: the rogues seized and hurled them out of the great cabin windows into the river.

<sup>80</sup> Dominican Republic, Samana Bay was a place of rendezvous for marauders.

<sup>81</sup> The Gambia-Senegal region had key hubs connected with the slave trade—Gorée Island and Saint-Louis (French), and James Island (British)—during the 1716–1726 period.

<sup>82</sup> Seitz (2002) account noted that they subsequently sailed to Brazil, where some were captured by the Portuguese. Yet this narrative—bearing striking similarities to the story of the pirates from the *George*—should be approached with caution; the sources are not reliable.

off Sierra Leone before continuing their campaign southward in August.<sup>83</sup>



**Figure 9:** Ships attacked by Edward England.  
(Bank of England, Morice letters 10A61/3)

<sup>83</sup> Morice papers Bank of England: 10A61/3. "An account of ships taken by Pirates at Sierraleone on the Coast of Africa, in April 1719".

Portuguese colonial records confirm these escalations, noting that the criminals operated with little effective interference from European navies. In a dispatch dated 15 September 1719 to King João V, Governor-General Count Vimieiro reported raids along the Mina Coast near São Jorge da Mina Castle. A captured merchant captain described the seizure and looting of three Portuguese vessels, whose cargoes and hulls amounted to an estimate loss of 400,000–500,000 cruzados (equivalent to more than \$31 million today).

The criminals released one of the Portuguese ships in exchange for a considerable sum of gold, but afterwards, its captain and owner faced penalties from officials for bringing forbidden gold into Africa—clearly an act of smuggling.<sup>84</sup>

They showed greater interest in ordnance, provisions, and replacement ships than in captives, often discarding non-compliant cargo. Other accounts mention the bombardment of the English Gambia Fort and major seizures at Whydah, where twelve vessels were taken and four more outfitted to expand the fleet.

This growing armada planned to resupply at Príncipe Island before launching raids on Brazil. Although the raiders did not explicitly declare an intention to attack the gold fleets, the timing and scale of their operations made such convoys an obvious target. Vimieiro estimated their largest ships at 44, 36, and 28 guns, and his descriptions of the marauders align closely with La Buse's group.

### New Ships and Plans

A petition of the United East India Company for the British Admiralty to protect its merchantmen from the ravages of piracy,<sup>85</sup> reveals that by June 1719, the raiders' fleet had undergone a major reorganization and had sailed from Whydah. They now had:

- The *Comrade*, a 40-gun vessel, 130 men;

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<sup>84</sup> As an indication of the scale of the losses involved, the treasure aboard the sunken *La Louise* was worth 200,000 cruzados—equivalent to 230–250 kilograms of gold.

<sup>85</sup> National Archives – UK, SP42/17/9.

- The *Bird* (former Snelgrave's command), mounting thirty-six guns, 110 men;
- The 40-gun *Heroine*, with a notably smaller group of just fifty onboard.

The same letter notes their plan to sail first to Brazil and then onward to Mauritius in the Indian Ocean.

The notably smaller company aboard *Heroine* may reflect the recent defection of Howell Davis and his followers, who had split off after an acrimonious dispute and taken the *Royal Rover* to Príncipe Island—then a major Portuguese slave-trading center. There, pretending to be a Royal Navy captain, Davis's ruse was discovered, and Portuguese forces killed him, prompting his men to elect Bartholomew Roberts as their new captain.<sup>86</sup> Under Roberts's command, they soon realized Davis's original ambitions by steering southward toward the Portuguese dominions in South America.

By the time the governor general and the United East India Company dispatched letters to their respective governments, they remained unaware of the internal fissures already emerging within the coalition. In September, Levasseur, Cocklyn, and Taylor briefly reconsidered their ambitions in South America, mindful that Roberts's newly consolidated company had announced its intention to advance in that direction.

It remains an open question how events might have unfolded had these pirates reached Brazil. Nevertheless, the broader strategic objective of relocating operations from Africa persisted, underscoring both the adaptability and the enduring determination characteristic of pirate expansionist schemes.

### The Capture of *La Solide*

On 24 September 1719, near Cape Lopez on the Guinea coast, the French slaving vessel *Le Solide* of Dunkirk, commanded by Captain Alexandre Patreson,<sup>87</sup> was captured by *La*

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<sup>86</sup> National Archives of Scotland AC16-1:321-322.

<sup>87</sup> Archives Nationales d'outre mer, C8A27, fol. 96, 17 décembre 1719.

*Défiance* (“*Defiance*”), a 40-gun vessel under the English captain “Jeremie Coquelin”, with a multinational crew of 250 men (French, English, and Dutch), and by *La Royale Rangere* (“*Royal Ranger*”), similarly armed and crewed, commanded by Le Bar (or Bor), as he informed: “a nom de guerre, and whose family name was Olivier Le Vasseur of Calais.”<sup>88 89</sup>

Patreson was held hostage for fifteen days together with his seamen, endured severe mistreatment and was repeatedly threatened with death. He reported the seizure of the substantial cargo he had been transporting for the slave trade, including 600 trade muskets, 30 fine muskets, one hundred pieces of Indian cloth, approximately 3,000 pounds of powder, 125 containers of spirits, and other merchandise.

The captors also retained about 150 enslaved individuals he had already acquired, and revealed their plans to continue operations along the Guinea coast before rendezvousing at Saint Helens (likely Île Sainte-Hélène or a pirate base in the region) to rearm for raids, one squadron targeting the Indies and the other the South Sea, with no quarter to be given.

Patreson further noted that his capture marked the raiders’ thirty-ninth prize, and that during his captivity they seized four additional vessels: two Dutch interlopers of roughly 100-120 tons each, both thoroughly plundered, their masts cut and left adrift with crews aboard, and two Portuguese ships, one reportedly ruined after pillage and the other stripped of its masts amid severe violence to its crew.

He observed that these criminals treated French captives less harshly than others and alluded to “a French captain who spared no nation”. Additionally, they claimed responsibility for capturing and razing the forts at Gambia and Sierra Leone. It appears that during this period, the freebooters’ actions were primarily driven by convenience and the potential for quick financial gain, achievable through the theft of valuable cargo and items or the ransoming of vessels.

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<sup>88</sup> This French identification confirms that the alias family Dubourg / de Boure / Le Bour / L. Bur belonged to Levasseur.

<sup>89</sup> National Archives – UK, SP 42/17/9.

Although they did not entirely give up the practice of trading slaves, the enterprise proved problematic and was less straightforward than in the West Indies and the Americas in the past, for it demanded meticulous logistical planning, particularly the identification of appropriate markets for their eventual sale. Sometimes they simply discarded the human cargo of the ships they seized.<sup>90</sup>

As an example, in November, near the coast of Angola, La Buse seized the slave ship *Indian Queen* under the command of Captain Hill. The Frenchman later exchanged this vessel for Hill's ship. At Cape Lopez, he and Cocklyn, having captured ships carrying between 540 and 640 slaves in total, gave approximately 140 captives to Hill as a reparation for the loss of his vessel, while the remainder were disembarked along the coast of Gabon. La Buse then proceeded on his way to Mayotte in the Indian Ocean.<sup>91</sup>

## Conclusion

In the closing months of 1719, the captains operating off West Africa, Olivier Levasseur (La Buse), Thomas Cocklyn, Edward England, Edward Congdon, and Richard Taylor, were already considering a decisive move toward the Indian Ocean. The promise of richer prizes, combined with the prospect of a secure base in Madagascar, a legendary pirate haven from earlier generations, relatively healthier and free from imperial interference, made the shift strategically compelling.

Their prolonged raids in West Africa, combined with the near-total absence of European naval protection for most of the year 1719, forced slave traders and merchants to adapt. Transatlantic commerce underwent a significant reconfiguration. In this context, for example, the São Tomé merchant Adrião Moreira da Costa petitioned the Portuguese crown for permission to source captives from Madagascar instead of the increasingly dangerous Mina

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<sup>90</sup> La Buse once abandoned 240 enslaved people on Santa Island, Brazil. This may have been prompted by the sudden approach of a Portuguese armed vessel or by the cramped conditions aboard *La Louise*, a small frigate originally built for privateering.

<sup>91</sup> Brooks 2018:88.



Coast, citing existing dispensations granted in Bahia and Lisbon.<sup>92</sup> The timing proved unfortunate: unbeknownst to him, many of the sea rovers were themselves preparing to abandon West African waters and head toward the Indian Ocean. In seeking relief by turning to Mozambique, he was in fact moving into the very path of the threat he hoped to escape.

Meanwhile, across the Atlantic, Brazil entered a period of governance change. The ailing Governor, Count Vimieiro, already strained by mounting pressures, died in October 1719. In his absence, authority passed to a provisional Governing Council until King João V could appoint a new viceroy.

By coincidence, it was precisely during this interregnum, when a person of the count's resolve was most needed, Bartholomew Roberts and his marauders turned their gaze toward that Portuguese state, exploiting its defensive weaknesses and carrying out one of the most spectacular raids against its merchant fleets.

While the first part of this study traced how Brazil shifted from a distant prize in the piratical imagination to a concrete target, the second part will situate Bartholomew Roberts's campaign within the wider pattern of Atlantic raids and examine the measures that eventually curtailed piracy in the Portuguese dominions.

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<sup>92</sup> Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino (AHU)/CU070/Caixa 0005/Doc.00502.

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