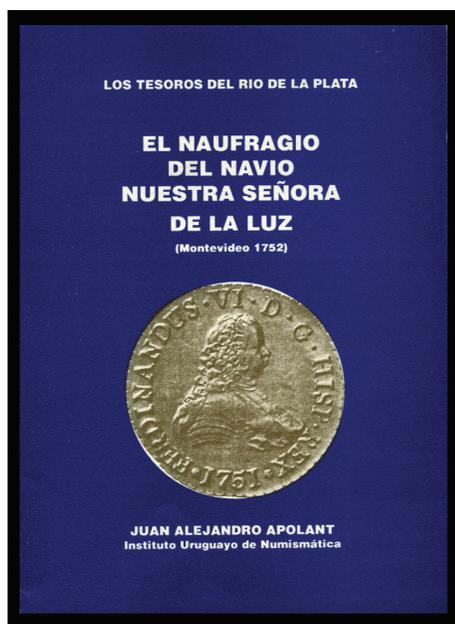


## A Study of the 1752 Sinking of *Nuestra Señora de la Luz* and its Gold Ingots by Daniel Frank Sedwick

The gold ingots from the *Luz*, recovered in 1992 by a team led by Rubén Collado, have proven to be a fascinating part of the history of the Río de la Plata area of South America where the ship was found. The *Luz* was not a Spanish “treasure fleet” vessel, and the circumstances behind its cargo, sinking and salvage are well outside the norm. Similarly, the gold ingots it yielded are also unusual, with no tax or fineness markings, but still marked by owners’ or shippers’ ciphers, and they have been marginalized by researchers as a result, despite their possible geopolitical significance.



Most of what we know about the ship and cargo comes from the work of Dr. Juan Alejandro Apolant, who published *Crónica del naufragio del navio Nuestra Señora de la Luz* in 1968, an opus that was reprinted in 1992 under the title *El naufragio del navio Nuestra Señora de la Luz*. This book provides many pages of contemporaneous documentation, including manifests, salvage reports and even listings of recovered items sold at auction in the mid-1700s. But before we can understand the meaning behind these data, first we must examine the political situation in the area at the time.

The region around the Río de la Plata in the 1700s was Spain’s version of the “Wild West,” largely governed by corrupt or even murderous officials and merchants competing with Portuguese colonists just to the north. The indigenous Guaraní, already decimated by European diseases, were stuck in the middle. Filling the role of protecting and educating these unfortunate natives were Spanish Jesuit missions. The Jesuits were and always have been rather adaptable, and in this corner of South America they were able to use their semi-autonomy to become wealthy and powerful, typically (and ironically) through the fruits of the natives’ labors. Eventually Spain and Portugal became intolerant of the Jesuits and expelled them from the New World entirely in 1767.

The Spanish Jesuit missions in this area were effectively city-states known as “reductions” in which the Guaraní were educated and indoctrinated in European culture and religion. The natives served the *Compañía de Jesús* (as the Jesuit society was known) in return for protection from virtual enslavement (*encomienda*) by the Spanish and Portuguese. As a part of the Catholic Church, the Jesuits were exempt from the 20% tax (*quinto*) imposed by the crown on silver and gold mined from the ground. To avoid a shipping tax (*avería*) as well, the Jesuit missions sometimes transported their wealth back to their headquarters in Spain in the form of contraband ingots. One particularly noteworthy anecdote from 1701 reports that a crate of chocolate from the New World en route to the Jesuit General in Spain was opened and examined due to a higher weight than declared; nestled inside the chocolate were gold ingots, and after they were confiscated the Jesuit General never claimed his chocolate!<sup>1</sup> Keep this idea in mind—boxes marked for one thing but containing something else and later disavowed—as it could come into play with the *Luz*.

In the mid-1700s the missions got squeezed. Portuguese Brazil had expanded westward to conduct illegal trade between Spanish Peru and Portugal’s ally Great Britain (Spain’s enemy), and Spain wanted to put an end to that. Portugal, meanwhile, wanted to solidify its claim to gold-bearing regions that were technically outside the demarcation set by the 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas. The result was a new treaty between Spain and Portugal known as the Treaty of Madrid of 1750 that defined the modern borders of Brazil, which acquired the lands east of the Uruguay River where seven Spanish Jesuit missions stood. The missions were ordered to be abandoned and relocated across the river, but the Guaraní refused to either move or accept Portuguese rule, resulting in the Guaraní War of 1756, also known as the War of the Seven Reductions, which pitted the natives against the Spanish and Portuguese. The Guaraní did not prevail, and eventually about half finally relocated into the Spanish areas of modern-day Argentina and Paraguay.

It is exactly within this time frame that the story of *Nuestra Señora de la Luz* took place.

1 Ronchi, page 440.

\* \* \*

The Río de la Plata and its environs were far removed from the usual Spanish colonial trade routes in the Caribbean and Pacific, and therefore its primary cities of Buenos Aires and Montevideo mostly had to rely on contraband trade, particularly with the Portuguese (allied with English). This changed in the 1740s, after the sacking of Portobelo in Panama by the English Admiral Edward Vernon, which caused the Spanish to create a new route from Peru around the southern tip of the continent (known as Cape Horn). Buenos Aires and Montevideo, the pillars of the Río de la Plata, became regular ports of call.

During that change, the inhabitants of Buenos Aires and Montevideo needed to take special measures to ensure trade with Spain would take place. One of those measures was to hire a Portuguese warship in Spain to come to Buenos Aires with various commodities and return to Spain with coins and other specie. A special company was set up for the purpose with Juan de Vargas Masías as one-half owner; the ship was called *Nuestra Señora de la Luz*.



The *Luz* left Lisbon and came to Buenos Aires in 1748, where it offloaded its cargo of commodities bound for Peru. It was supposed to leave Buenos Aires at the end of 1749 but ended up staying there for three and a half years, finally leaving in March 1752. Rather than heading directly to Cádiz, the *Luz* instead stopped in Montevideo for three months. Exactly why is a matter of conjecture; it is possible the stop was to receive contraband.

The official *estado*<sup>2</sup> of cargo loaded in Buenos Aires calculated 1,071,000 pesos in coins (899,500 in silver *pesos fuertes* and 171,500 in gold *doblon*s, with 16 pesos of gold being a single 8 escudos, hence over 10,000 8 escudos), plus 416 + 535½ *marcos* (equating to almost 219 kg) of *plata labrada* (wrought silver) and 326 *onzas* in gold *tejos* (disks).<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that these ingots were treated separately because the purity of each was unknown (or at least unstated), an important distinction that will come into play later. It is also important to understand that the Spanish *onza* (ounce) was a unit of weight equal to 1/16 of a *libra* (pound) of 460 grams, akin to the modern avoirdupois weights and not troy weights as we are used to for precious metals today. Therefore, 326 *onzas* amounted to 9,372½ grams.

Before proceeding, it is useful to understand how weights in gold (only) were calculated in Spain and its territories at the time (the gram weights rounded to the nearest full gram):<sup>4</sup>

1 marco = 50 castellanos = 400 tomines = 4800 granos = 230.0448 grams  
1 castellano = 8 tomines = 96 granos = 4.600896 grams  
1 tomín = 12 granos = 0.575112 gram  
1 grano = 0.047926 gram

The detailed manifest of the ship's cargo, known as the *registro* (registry), consisted of a list of 267 sequentially numbered *partidas* (consignments) with their consignors and other details, each actual *partida* typically being a leather-wrapped box marked with the mark of the consignor. Many shippers consigned multiple *partidas*. Among the 267 *partidas* registered to the *Luz* were nine consignments from two Jesuits, as follows:

2 In this context *estado* means "status" and refers to a summary of the cargo as a sort of "current status."  
3 In this context *tejo* means "disk" (see Burzio, p. 392).  
4 This table is adapted from a similar tabulation on Apolant p. 99.

- #90. From R.P. [Reverend Father] Alonso Fernández to Padre Pedro Arroyo, Procurador General<sup>5</sup> of the province of Paraguay: 35,550 *pesos y 4 reales en plata doble*<sup>6</sup>
- #91. From R.P. Alonso Fernández to Padre Pedro Ignacio Altamirano, Procurador of the Indies in Madrid: 12,000 *pesos en 750 doblones de a 16 pesos del nuevo cordoncillo de Chile*<sup>7</sup>
- #92. From R.P. Alonso Fernández to Padre Francisco de Castañeda, Procurador of the Indies in the port of Santa María: 12,000 *pesos en 750 doblones de a 16 pesos del nuevo cordoncillo de Chile*
- #103. From Padre Jayme Passino, Procurador General of the missions, to Sebastián de Larraondo y Villamonte: 10,000 *pesos en plata doble del cuño perulero en 4 zurrone de a 2500 pesos cada uno, marcados a fuego con la marca de enfrente*<sup>8</sup>
- #104. From Padre Jayme Passino to Andrés de Loyo of Cádiz: 4780 *pesos y 1 real en plata doble*
- #155. From R.P. Jayme Passino to Andrés de Loyo of Cádiz: 952 *pesos y 3 reales en plata doble*
- #156. From R.P. Jayme Passino to Andrés de Loyo of Cádiz: 463 *pesos y 3 reales en plata doble*
- #198. From R.P. Jaime [sic] Passino to Padre Pedro de Logu: 1000 *pesos plata doble*
- #223. From R.P. Alonso Fernández to Juan Andino of Cádiz: 9000 *pesos en plata doble y 3000 pesos en doblones del nuevo cordoncillo*

This equates to about 97,297 silver 8 reales coins and 1687½ gold 8 escudos coins, for a total of 124,297 pesos of value. That's a lot of money for Jesuit missions! But no gold *tejos* are mentioned in these Jesuit *partidas*... could some have been hidden inside the boxes of coins?

The non-coin gold listed in the 267 *partidas* on the *registro* is as follows:

- #31. Juan de Vargas Masías [half owner of the venture, as mentioned]: *un tejo de oro quintado con peso de 71 onzas y 2 adarmes*<sup>9</sup> *y según su quilca*<sup>10</sup> 444 *castellanos y 5 tomines*<sup>11</sup> [note this is the only *tejo* listed as being *quintado* (taxed)]
- #130. Juan de Eguía: *un tejo de oro con 8 onzas y una adarme*
- #162. Juan de Lezica: *un cajoncito forrado en crudo y marcado con la marca de enfrente que contiene 11 cajetas de oro con peso de 55 onzas y 12 adarmes*
- #173. Ventura Ferrer: 7 *onzas, 12 adarmes de oro*
- #209. Juan Francisco de Bazurco: 2 *tejos de oro con 125¼ onzas*
- #243. Marcos Joseph de Riglos: 54 *onzas y 6 adarmes de oro*
- #255. Francisco de Sagardia y Palencia: *una cajeta de oro con peso de 3 onzas y 14 adarmes*

The total weight in *onzas* of all this gold indeed adds up to the 326 *onzas* listed as a sum in the *estado*. Even though not all the *partidas* listed above say that the gold is in *tejos*, and in fact #162 and #255 only mention *cajetas*, which in this context should mean gold boxes (i.e., snuff boxes, of which several were found later), the fact is that the total weight agrees with what the *estado* lists as *tejos*. In any case, from this we can see that any amount of gold ingots recovered from the shipwreck beyond this amount had to be contraband, and the gold ingots in the Sotheby's 1993 auction *alone* consisted of over 1,330 *onzas*!

5 The term *procurador general* is usually translated as “attorney general,” but according to *Léxico Jurídico Español-Inglés* ([www.rebeccajowers.com](http://www.rebeccajowers.com)), a *procurador* is not really an attorney in the sense that we use today; in this context, probably the best translation for *procurador* is “legal agent.”

6 The term *plata doble* (literally “double silver”) or *plata fuerte* (“strong silver”) denotes 8 and 4 reales coins (in this case probably cobs), with a peso being equal to 8 reales. The other term that occurs is *plata sencilla* (or *pesos sencillos*), a designation for the smaller denominations of ½, 1, and 2 reales. The reason for this distinction is that Spain had devalued their smaller coins (known by the English as “pistareens”) in both fineness and weight, but the 4 and 8 reales remained “strong.” (See Burzio, p. 206.)

7 *Doblones de a 16 pesos del nuevo cordoncillo de Chile* refers the new milled “bust type” 8 escudos gold coins that were struck at the mint of Santiago, Chile, starting in 1749; remember that one *escudo* in gold equaled two *pesos* in silver.

8 Here we have a new term, *plata doble del cuño perulero*, which means larger silver coins of the “Peru die,” hence Peruvian cobs (including those from Potosí). The rest of the entry says that the coins were packed in bags (*zurrone*) inside boxes branded with a *marca* (mark) on the outside. It is worth noting that the actual *registro* shows these *marcas*, but unfortunately Apolant did not think it was necessary to reproduce the mark in his opus.

9 An *adarme* was 1/16<sup>th</sup> of an *onza*.

10 The term *quilca* in this context (unbeknownst to Burzio or Apolant, who thought it had to do with fineness) refers to an actual marking on the ingot denoting its weight in *castellanos*, *tomines* and *granos*. We see such markings on the Sotheby's ingots that lack *marcas*, as mentioned in point 4 below. For more information about this term, see Gargurevich Regal, p. 73.

11 This is either an error in the manifest itself or more likely an error in Apolant's transcription, as the weight of the ingot is equivalent to 444 *castellanos* and 5 *granos* (not *tomines*), namely 2,045 grams. Again, the Sotheby's ingots show these markings, and in most cases we see two colons in between the numbers to show zero *tomines* in the middle (x:x:x).

Now let's examine these 40 Sotheby's gold ingots:

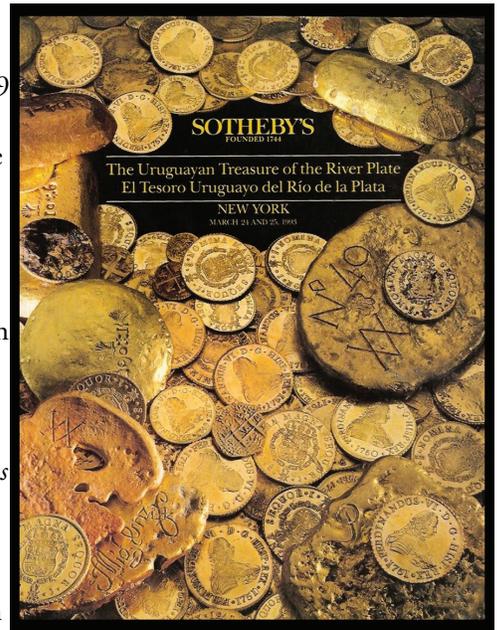
Lot #	Grams	Troy Oz	Onzas	Fineness	Marca	Serial #		Other marks/notes	Pesos**	
236	238.66	7.67	8.30	0.848	A/V	XXVI	26	three large fleurs, one with A/V over three six-point stars, RA in box  three scallops around 90::1 [weight]*	130.52	
237	601.05	19.33	20.91	0.946	Š	N-XI-	11		366.70	
238	285.98	9.20	9.95	0.926	P				170.79	
239	682.10	21.93	23.73	0.900	A/V	XXV	25		395.91	
240	690.84	22.21	24.03	0.975	A/V	XIV	14		434.40	
241	372.55	11.98	12.96	0.750	A/V	48,,	48		180.20	
242	414.17	13.32	14.41	0.878					234.52	
243	914.59	29.41	31.81	0.955	Š	XIII	13		563.30	
244	1135.24	36.50	39.49	0.928	A/V	XXXXXIII	44		679.43	
245	1126.09	36.21	39.17	0.909	A/V	XXXXXVI	46		660.16	
246	2237.10	71.93	77.81	0.962	Miguel...				1387.94	
247	732.48	23.55	25.48	0.857	A/V	XXXVI	36		404.84	
248	1442.53	46.38	50.17	0.902	P				839.15	
515	756.03	24.31	26.30	0.797					164-1 [weight]*	388.60
516	458.22	14.73	15.94	0.791	A/V	47	47		233.76	
517	596.58	19.18	20.75	0.938	Š	XVII	17		360.90	
518	494.23	15.89	17.19	0.731	A/V	XXVIII	28		233.00	
519	979.60	31.50	34.07	0.896	P				566.07	
520	919.70	29.57	31.99	0.923	A/V	XXXIII	33		[an actual bar, not rounded] MAGNA/PATER/AGIT in heart	547.47
521	1222.33	39.30	42.52	0.975					768.61	
522	1922.81	61.83	66.88	0.977	Miguel...				1211.55	
523	785.93	25.27	27.34	0.811					three scallops around 171::1 [weight]*	411.07
524	2290.50	73.65	79.67	0.962	Miguel...				1421.07	
525	620.54	19.95	21.58	0.848	A/V	XXIV	24		339.37	
526	308.89	9.93	10.74	0.969	A/V	XXXXXII	42	193.04		
527	235.20	7.56	8.18	0.935	Š	XVIII	18	[an actual bar, not rounded]	141.83	
528	675.41	21.72	23.49	0.975	Š	VIII	8	three hollow six-point stars	424.70	
529	1436.65	46.19	49.97	0.975	A/V	No 49	49	JRTo monogram in form-fitting box	903.37	
755	2024.90	65.11	70.43	0.966	Miguel...			1261.51		
756	307.03	9.87	10.68	0.927	A/V	XXVII	27	three scallops around 66::5 [weight]*	183.56	
757	645.26	20.75	22.44	0.819	A/V	XXIII	23	340.82		
758	981.37	31.56	34.13	0.888	P			562.03		
759	929.64	29.89	32.34	0.945	Š	XIII	14	566.57		
760	1144.91	36.81	39.82	0.943	A/V	XXXXXIII	43	696.30		
761	1885.48	60.63	65.58	0.884				three scallops around 410::6 [weight]*	1074.94	
762	446.96	14.37	15.55	0.800	A/V	XXIX	29	230.61		
763	320.93	10.32	11.16	0.889	A/V	XXXXX	41	184.00		
764	1340.88	43.12	46.64	0.926	P			800.78		
765	1434.03	46.11	49.88	0.926	A/V	XXXXXV	45	856.41		
766	2220.50	71.40	77.23	0.961	Miguel...			1376.21		
<b>40 lots</b>	<b>38,257.89</b>	<b>1,230.16</b>	<b>1,330.71</b>	<b>0.903</b>	<b>(average)</b>			<b>approximate total value in pesos:</b>	<b>22,726.01</b>	

\* These marks are known as *quileas*, indicating weights in castellanos and granos,  
1 castellano being 96 granos and 1 grano being 0.047926 gram.

\*\* An 8 escudos, worth 16 *pesos dobles*, was 27.06429 grams of .916666 fine gold, or 24.809 grams of pure gold;  
therefore, 16/24.809 times the pure-gold weight of each ingot equals its value in pesos.

These gold *tejos* can be summarized by their markings as follows:

1. **A/V** monogram is most prevalent (nineteen ingots), numbered sequentially 23-29 and 41-49, plus 14, 33 and 36 (all in Roman numerals except for 47-49), with the widest range of purities (0.731 to 0.975) and weights (7.67 to 46.19 oz each) in the whole group.
2. Second commonest is **Š** (six ingots), numbered 8, 11, 13, 14, 17, 18 (all in Roman numerals), all high in fineness (0.935 to 0.975) and small to medium in weight (7.56 to 29.89 oz each).
3. Tied for third (five ingots each) are **script P** and a whole signature that starts with **Migl...**, neither with any other marks, with fineness from 0.888 to 0.977, all but one being among the heaviest ingots found (script P being 31.50 to 46.38 oz each except for one small one at 9.20 oz, and Migl... being 61.83 to 73.65 oz each).
4. Four others have **no marca** but instead show weights (*quilcas*) stated in *castellanos* and *granos* (equating to 13.32 to 60.63 oz each), all but one with scallop marks around the weight, all rather low in fineness (0.797 to 0.884).
5. Just one big ingot (39.30 oz) has a **large Sacred Heart marca** containing the words MAGNA / PATER / AGIT, also high in fineness (0.975), this one more than any others believed to be connected to the Jesuits for obvious reasons.



Note that the 40 ingots sold in 1993 total 1,330.71 *onzas* in weight, which, when multiplied by their individual purities and converted to pesos, total about 22,726 pesos. We will come back to this figure, but for now it is enough to know that it well exceeds the 326 *onzas* on the ship's official manifest.

Mysteriously, there were also reports of 200,000 pesos that the Portuguese captain of the ship, Felicio da Fonseca, and the ship's chaplain, who was "Padre Fray Joseph de Santo Tomás del Orden de la Victoria,"<sup>12</sup> according to *partida* #195, carried in the gunpowder locker bound for Lisbon, a consignment that did not appear in the registry and therefore was considered contraband. It is not known whether this "200,000 pesos" was all coins or included *tejos* or something else. Amazingly, there was very little discussion about this mysterious consignment after the sinking, even though Fonseca was already under scrutiny for taking passage money for additional passengers without authorization.

On July 2, 1752, while the passengers and crew (including the aforementioned captain and the supercargo, Pedro de Lea) tried to board the ship, the wind picked up and blew the *Luz* away from the port. Montevideo's infantry captain, José Zumelzu, described it as the worst storm he had ever seen in that river, the kind of storm now referred to locally as a *pampero* (akin to a strong cold front in the U.S.). The ship was not heard from again.

Officially, 133 people (everyone on board) perished with the ship<sup>13</sup>, while 22 remained on shore, including the captain Fonseca and supercargo Lea. The chaplain, Fr. Joseph de Santo Tomás, sank with the ship. Over the next several weeks, dead bodies and kegs of water and wine washed up on shore, followed by trunks and boxes. Everything (supposedly) was turned in and inventoried, including all kinds of personal goods, clothing, bedding, utensils etc., but eventually also some gold and silver.

The search for the shipwreck site itself soon began, using local divers led by Captain Luis Fort. The hull was found on September 4, just one mile offshore and about five meters down, and by the end of November 1752 the ship's treasure had been located. Recoveries took place continuously through May 1753 (basically until the start of winter for the southern hemisphere). After some complicated negotiation with the consignors in Buenos Aires, who would be compensated with whatever was found, the divers were granted a 3% cut of the recoveries, and Captain Fort retained 6,000 pesos, plus the deduction of other expenses totaling 2,071¼ pesos. Eventually the total amount of coins and *tejos* recovered (valuing the gold at 16 to 1) amounted to 1,029,326 pesos, or about 96% of the registered cargo.<sup>14</sup> This included some gold *tejos* specifically mentioned in the daily recoveries in 1752, as follows:

12 I was unable to find any reference to an Order of Victoria, nor any other mention of the ship's mysterious chaplain, except that he was among those who died when the ship sank.

13 Apolant (p. 40) feels this number was too low, based on (among other things) a letter from Captain Fonseca saying that 141 lost their lives. In addition to gold and silver, it is possible people were being smuggled as well.

14 Confusingly, Apolant (p. 71) speaks of the recovery of 92½% of the registered treasure "*en cifras redondas*" (in round numbers), but that is AFTER the divers' 3% and other expenses were taken out, plus he later reduces it to 87% after other expenses; his point was simply to show how the shippers made out, not to say how much was actually recovered.



December 13: 2 *tejos de oro con valor de 2,032 pesos*

December 14: *un tejo de oro con valor de 132 pesos*

December 23: *un tejo con valor de 1,127 pesos*

The weights of these four *tejos* are not indicated, nor do we know how their values in pesos were determined since their purities were unknown (it does not help that, by his own admission, Apolant “simplified” the list). If the divers got 3% of the full 1,029,326 pesos stated, then the remainder should have been 998,446 pesos. However, an official treasury report in July 1753 gave a total of 989,145 pesos on hand (i.e., after the 3% was paid out to the divers), but with four gold *tejos* (presumably the same ones listed above) weighing a total of “12 *libras y 12 onzas*” (204 *onzas*, equivalent to 5,865 grams<sup>15</sup>) that were not converted into pesos “*por no saber su regla*”; in other

words, the *tejos* could not be converted because their purities were unknown, but a value had to be assigned to them in order to pay the divers an accurate 3%. A further sum of 6,577½ pesos “from the final days of the salvage” were added to make the total 995,722½ pesos.

With little explanation, a final report on August 8 gave the total (after the 3% was taken out for the divers, but before 8,071¼ pesos were removed to pay Luis Fort and other expenses) as “*en las especies de plata doble, oro acuñado y tejos 998,831½ líquida y 112 marcos plata chafalonía y 22½ onzas de oro en la misma especie.*” This presents two obscure terms that are difficult to translate (even for Apolant): *líquida* and *chafalonía*. I believe the former means “net” and the latter means “unusable.” In other words, the treasure consisted of net 998,831½ pesos in silver coins, gold coins and *tejos*, plus a bunch of silver and gold that could not be converted (“unusable” for the total). The difference between 998,831½ and the previously reported 995,722½ is 3,109 pesos; the sum of the values given to the four *tejos* in December was 3,126 pesos—close enough for government work!<sup>16</sup> But is it possible the 22½ *onzas* of gold mentioned as “unusable” were also *tejos*? Even if so, that means at most only 226½ *onzas* (22½ plus the 204 *onzas* that were somehow converted) were recovered in 1752-3 from the 326 *onzas* of gold *tejos* that were registered to be on board the *Luz*. Even without considering contraband, at least 100 *onzas* were still missing.

The 1752-53 dive effort and recovery of 998,831½ pesos (however it was tallied) managed to satisfy the shippers in Buenos Aires whose registered cargo had gone down, even though it was evident there was still much more to be salvaged due to contraband.<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, the loss ended up not being so disastrous for these official shippers at the expense of the smugglers, who lost everything; as the Argentines say: *El que roba a un ladrón, tiene cien años de perdón* (literally, “a thief who steals from a thief gets 100 years of pardon,” meaning it is no thievery to steal from a thief). It is unclear how shippers of gold ingots were reimbursed when only the weights and not the purities were recorded on the manifest. Suspiciously, the Jesuit *padres* Fernández and Passino were not listed among the shippers who were to receive compensation, nor were they among the officially recorded survivors (those who were left on shore) or casualties of the sinking. The fact that they did not have an interest in compensation for their losses seems like a cover-up, just like the 1701 incident mentioned above!

Most of the official documentation following the salvage effort reflected an obsession with accounting for expenses and collecting money to pay for them, particularly sales through various merchants and local auctions (called *remates* and *almonedas* as opposed to the term *subastas* that we see today) of non-treasure items like clothing and wine recovered on the beaches. More interesting to us is the statement in late 1753 by Montevideo’s Captain General Andonáegui, while setting up a new dive effort, that once the expected finds to be made had fulfilled the remaining total of the registered cargo, any excess should be saved for the king, “*igual que todo el oro y plata en tejos y barras sin quintar*” (just like all the untaxed silver bars and gold disks)! This statement confirms that the first divers had recovered gold *tejos* like the ones we see from the 1992 salvage... and they were indeed contraband.

15 Apolant calculated this incorrectly, as he stated it totaled “5.842 kgs.” The correct calculation is: 12 *libras* @ 460 grams/libra = 5520 grams, 12 *onzas* @ 28.75 grams/onza (1/16 of a libra) = 345 grams, total: 5,865 grams.

16 Apolant says the slight difference could be due to how they converted the values of the gold *tejos* into *dobloones* and *pesos* in the daily reports. He does not address how the conversions were done in the first place, as there is no mention of any assays and it is clear from the ingots recovered in 1992 that all the *tejos* lacked fineness markings, which of course Apolant did not know in 1968.

17 It is unclear how Vargas himself was somehow reimbursed, as he was half owner of the venture but also a shipper on record, both of coins and of gold *tejos*. He was later quoted as saying in December 1752 that he was not interested in the remaining “fragments” since the ship was insured. Two other shippers of gold *tejos* apparently also were not among the recipients of the finds: Ventura Ferrer, who died on the ship, and Francisco de Sagardia y Palencia (reason unknown).

More salvage took place in four seasons in 1753-57. While we do not have a record of those recoveries, official correspondence in August 1757 regarding how much more needed to be found to reach the original registered total of 1,071,000 implied that an additional 27,000 pesos had been recovered since that initial 1752-53 season. The next effort was not till February-April 1760, for which we do have an itemized tally of 3,153 *pesos dobles* (i.e., all large silver coins), all found within a span of less than eleven weeks. This seems to have re-energized the salvage idea and created a bit of a competition. The next two seasons (December 1760 to April 1761 and November 1761 to February 1762) produced another 994 + 2840½ *pesos dobles*. During this time, more significant personal effects were auctioned off, including several gold boxes (*cajetas*, presumably snuff boxes like the ones sold in the Sotheby's auction in 1993), gold jewelry (including a toothpick on a chain, like we see from other shipwrecks) and all kinds of silverware and other valuables. Much reporting concerned the documentation and distribution of the proceeds to the king and interested parties... but no mention of any gold *tejos*.

No more official salvage took place until 1771, and efforts from that year through 1774 yielded only a bit over 1,000 pesos, all in silver and gold coins. In September 1773 one of the divers claimed to know where the stern of the ship was located—away from the main deposit—including the gunpowder locker with its 200,000 pesos of unregistered specie. The long hoped-for contraband cache was not found, however, contributing to the growing belief that it had scattered in with the previous finds.

Of course, we know better from the finds in our time. The *Luz* was re-discovered in April 1992 by the Argentine treasure hunter Rubén Collado, whose divers recovered a total of 1658 gold coins and 320 silver coins,<sup>18</sup> along with some artifacts and of course all the gold disks in the 1993 Sotheby's auction. At some point it was determined that they had found the stern and the contents of the long-sought gunpowder locker. However, even if all the gold coins were 8 escudos (most were, but many were not), this would equate to less than 27,000 pesos, a far cry from the 200,000 pesos in contraband being smuggled to Lisbon by the captain and chaplain of the ship. As we have already seen, the gold disks auctioned in 1993 amounted to nearly 1,331 *onzas*, equating to 22,726 pesos. Since at least 100 *onzas* of *tejos* on the official manifest were still unaccounted for after salvage in the 1700s, that means that more than 1200 *onzas* in gold disks recovered in 1992 had to be contraband. As mentioned, these could have been smuggled by the Jesuits in their *partidas*, or they could have been part of the 200,000 pesos being smuggled by the captain and chaplain. If the latter, that still leaves over three quarters of the smuggled specie unaccounted for. Since a total of maybe 1,065,000 pesos of the original 1,071,000 in registered cargo was found officially, and we know of 200,000 pesos of contraband on top of that, of which only around 50,000 pesos were recovered in 1992, that leaves at least 156,000 pesos unaccounted for. Did that treasure consist of coins or ingots, and is it still down there, or was it secretly recovered sometime in the 18<sup>th</sup> century? We may never know.

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Clearly, we have created more questions than answers, but hopefully we are closer to at least a quantitative understanding of the fate of the gold *tejos*. Whether or not they were tied to the Jesuit exodus will probably remain no more than a circumstantial connection. If the original manifests summarized by Apolant can be found, perhaps we can connect some of the *marcas* shown next to their *partidas* to the *tejos* sold in 1993, or even better, maybe the markings on these gold ingots can be positively linked to specific Jesuit missions.

In any case, if you are a collector of ingots, whether as an individual or for an institution, you owe it to yourself to own one of these beautiful pieces of history if given the opportunity. Whether they represent the wealth of retreating Jesuits or of Spanish *contrabandistas*, they are a unique part of the Spanish colonial history of the Río de la Plata area of South America.

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18 Lovardo, p. 282.

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