



# THE POPE'S LOST TREASURE

Recounting a life-changing discovery in the face of modernity, **Pascal Kainic** grants *MillionaireAsia* the first-person-point-of-view reminiscence on salvaging sunken *Abbatucci Ship* in which Pope's lost golden treasure had slept undisturbed for ages.

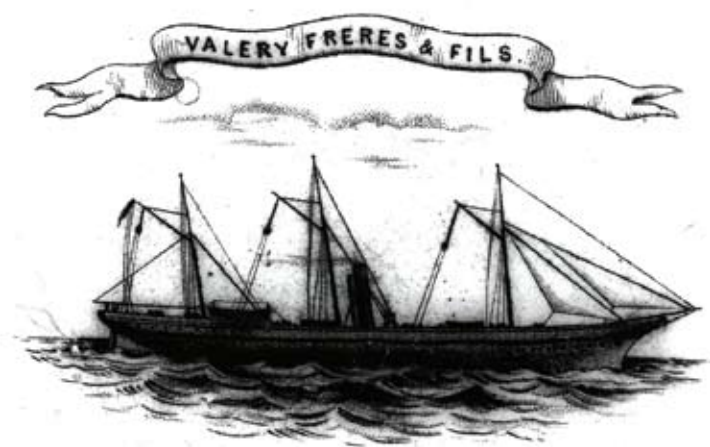


Photo Credits: Pascal Kainic

Meeting Pascal Kainic, a French-born archive researcher and wreck hunter who found the lost Abbatucci Ship 40 nautical miles of the French island of Corsica, unraveled all faded charms the blue ocean sea once boasted through stories of pirates and legendary journeys such as Sinbad. But would it not tingle your ear when you hear the words “gold coins”, “precious pocket watches”, and “abundance of pearl and golden necklaces” uttered before you, as was not only mentioned but shown by Pascal.

“At the moment, I’m writing on a book about another important discovery I did after Abbatucci. It’s about Pol-luce Ship,” he frankly revealed about his present occupation. “I’ve also been living in Indonesia for the past fifteen years. There are plenty, I assure you, untouched shipwrecks sleeping underneath the sea of this country. I’m compiling files about it, but haven’t made any exploration to scour these ships.”

Married to a Javanese lady, the enthusiastic 40-something sea researcher



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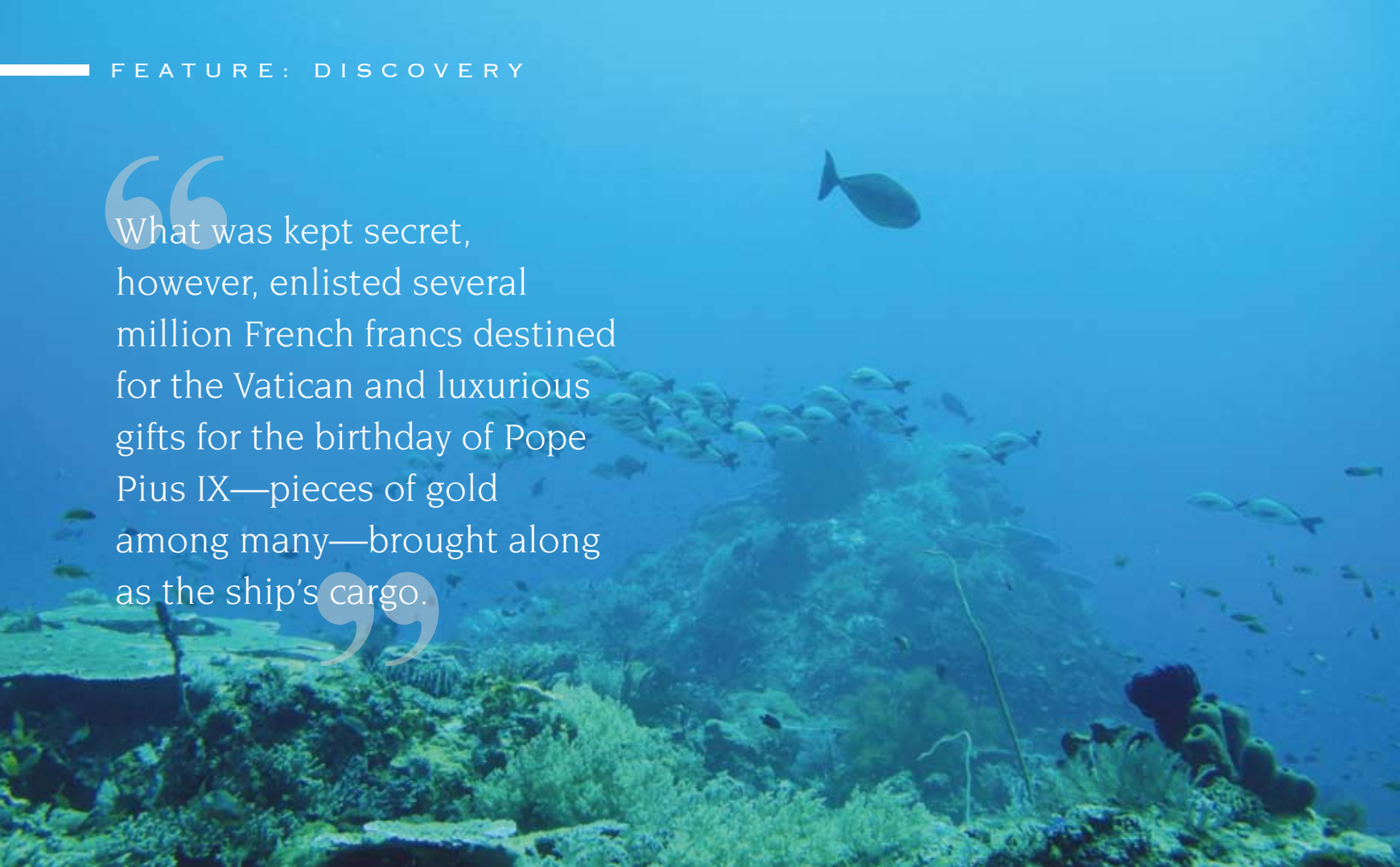
speaks Bahasa quite fluently and has been a familiar face among pirates around the world. He shared, “If you ask me if there are any valuable treasures in the shipwrecks in Indonesia, the answer is yes. But, my intention is more or less focused on recording the historical values each shipwreck contains. Plenty of misguided pirates have done wrong to the country by pilfering the sunken items without government’s legal consent, or else not obeying the rules related.” Looking perky as he always is, in a particular Tuesday morning Pascal retold it all about the Pope’s undelivered jubilee presents.

### The History

It was precisely May 6, 1869, when General Abbatucci sailed off from the port of Marseilles along with the Pontifical Consul at Marseilles, 16 French soldiers, and 15 Papal recruits on their way to Civitavecchia, Italy. What was kept secret, however, enlisted several million French



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francs destined for the Vatican, a sum of pay for the French army in Italy, and luxurious gifts for the birthday of Pope Pius IX from Church officials in France—pieces of gold among many—brought along as the ship’s cargo.

The general was entrusted to bear this honorable duty to safely guard the Pontifical Consul who represented the Holy See in Marseilles since he had routinely traversed the routes for quite some time. Yet the unexpected occurred, the ship failed to reach its destination, and the city Civitavecchia fell morose upon this fact. The Times newspaper of London noted on May 13, 1869, that Abbatucci Ship with all her valuable cargo mysteriously sank on the northern coast of Corsica, France.

“We perfectly know that she sank in a terrible collision with a ship named the ‘Edward Hewit’, a 500-ton Norwegian barquentine. No one really bothered to orchestrate a research mission to scrutinize Corsica. And, luckily, I was interested in the story so that I traced back all the data I could gain about the ship,” said Pascal on how his mission

began. He showed clippings of outdated newspaper and personal notes which had resulted in a very much lauded sea discovery in the last decade.

#### Finding Abbatucci

To do the exploration, Pascal associated himself with the Blue Water Recoveries, a British salvage company, in May, 1996—127 years post the tragic end of Abbatucci. “It’s really hard to find her. Corsica is quite vast, for one thing. It took years for me to get all necessary information of the ship location, and still we needed weeks of scouring, combing the sea bottom before finally found her,” explained Pascal.

Another reason why locating such a huge artifact was not easy relates to the fact of sleeping on the seabed for more than a century might have taken its toll. “When we saw her, she looked nothing like a ship; it was just a huge pile of skeletal wrecks blanketed in verdant algae, and it was a home to various fish,” he recounted his first encounter with Abbatucci on the 32nd day of exploration.



The first thing he did when penetrating the ship with sophisticated video equipment was to look for any signs that claimed the identity of the rusted wrecks. Somewhere scattered in the skeletal remains were porcelains that bore the ship’s company crest of Valery, Freres & Fils, but none was found during the first 24-hour. The survey continued on the next day although it was effort-less to struggle against the undesirable



weather condition at that time. Not until few days later Pascal and the whole crew immersed themselves in ecstatic joy the minute they spotted the ship’s compass binnacle, rinsed the body of it, and discovered the sought-after crest as the authentic proof of who she was. The next best thing to do then was to salvage whatever treasure buried inside, to witness what Pope Pius IX was actually waiting for all these years.

#### Gold, Gold, Gold

Salvaging treasure from the depth of over 8,000 feet apparently presented much trouble than expected. Despite the crew’s positive cheers and all that, they still aimed high in retrieving precious gold pieces that were said to be in the cargo. Initially, the first few treasure taken from Abbatucci included abundant original jewelries from 1860s—brooches, earrings, bangles, rings, and even guard chains. Authentic pocket watches came next, as well as a box of gold coins. Fortune was easily to make out of these, and there were plenty other items discovered too such as European porcelains, pressed glasses, and bottles.

“We took all the jewelry to Christie’s to be auctioned afterwards. They cleaned each artifact and the transformation was unbelievable. The jewelry looked mesmerizing, although few of them were kept in the recovered condition to accentuate the ‘treasure’ look,” Pascal’s eyes were glimmering as he recalled his past glory. What about the gold pieces said to be available within the ship?



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“The problem was we spent much of resources in searching for the ship and getting all those jewelries. We had to put an end to the salvage mission due to the budget and, besides, we couldn’t locate where the gold pieces were,” he continued, “maybe it’s there somewhere, but we didn’t find it at that time.”

#### Future Ambition

If you inquire further of Pascal’s work, be ready to welcome his upcom-



ing book and documentary film on TV5. “Pacífico Island Productions—Régis Michel—agreed to make a film production related to my last exploration of Polluce Ship. It will be aired first in France on *Thalassa* in mid of January 2010 and in Indonesia few days later,” he spoke prior to leaving the country for Paris until January. “I need to finish up this project first and I’ll be back in Indonesia next year,” Pascal kindly as well sent his greetings to all readers who would like to get in touch with him through his personal website.

On which next project he shall be working on, this friendly gentleman promised to keep *MillionaireAsia* posted for the latest updates. Yet, if in any case you heartily desire to seek more treasures out of the deep blue sea, Pascal Kainic will certainly be the right companion to tag along during your cruise. Bon Voyage! ■

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