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Identification of Anse à la Barque's Shipwrecks (Guadeloupe FWI): Historical Research in the Service of Underwater Archaeology

Jean-Sébastien Guibert

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Foreword

Coastal Connections: Integrating Terrestrial and Underwater Archaeology

For over 40 years, the Advisory Council on Underwater Archaeology (ACUA) has provided guidance and facilitated scientific dissemination of information and data related to maritime, nautical, and underwater archaeological research during the annual Society for Historical and Underwater Archaeology Conference. Each January, archaeologists from across North America and around the world come together to discuss the latest methodologies and techniques, research, and best management practices related to both terrestrial and underwater historic archaeology. The 2010 conference continued the tradition by embodying the philosophical integration of both fields in the conference program and theme “Coastal Connections: Integrating Terrestrial and Underwater Archaeology.”

The ACUA and the PAST Foundation are pleased to present this volume of selected papers from the 43rd Annual Conference on Historical and Underwater Archaeology held between 6 and 9 January 2010 in Amelia Island, Florida. In total, 776 abstracts were submitted; these included 31 posters, 46 organized sessions, and 10 panel/forum proposals. There were 689 individual papers many of which integrated the concepts of terrestrial and underwater archaeology. The 2010 conference also benefited from the attendance of colleagues from around the globe including Argentina, England, France, Iraq, Ireland, Mexico, and the Caribbean nations.

This volume incorporates several symposia themes that were presented during the conference including: shipwreck and foreshore research into Florida’s unique and rich maritime heritage; archaeological investigations of the American Civil War; Spanish Colonial research highlighting archaeological investigations as well as the engineering behind Colonial period vessel construction; sailing methodologies as evidenced through the historic, archaeological, and iconographic record; international archaeological research ranging from piratical activities in Ireland, research in the French Caribbean, and landscape studies in New Zealand and East Africa; shipwreck investigations in the Klondike; and finally some unique research reports involving the Maya, submerged prehistoric sites, technology and methodologies, American Naval activities, and the impacts of storms on the archaeological record.

The editors, the ACUA, and the PAST Foundation have continued to improve the manuscript preparation process, including updating the ACUA Underwater Archaeology Proceedings Manuscript Preparation and Submission Guide. Continued use of Basecamp, a web-based project management tool that streamlines file exchange between editors and authors, made the process much easier than conventional email. The editors and the ACUA are grateful to the PAST Foundation for hosting the electronic publication project on their Basecamp site. Annalies Corbin, Sheli O. Smith, and Walker Pfof of the PAST Foundation provided outstanding support throughout the project, while Toni Carrell of the ACUA assisted with updating the manuscript guidelines. Michael Pomeroy, ACUA webmaster, aided in the author registration process, posted guidance materials for the authors, and answered questions. The ACUA editors selected the postcard that graces the cover from their own personal collection. The postcard, published in 1904, illustrates the nexus of maritime and terrestrial interaction that represented this year’s conference theme. Entitled *Along the Water Front, Jacksonville, FLA.*, the illustration depicts the use of sailing, lightering, and steam vessels at the port of Jacksonville at the turn of the 20th century. The cover was designed by Sheli Smith of the PAST Foundation.

Most importantly, the editors are extremely grateful to the authors who took the time to work up their conference presentations for publication in these proceedings. Without their hard work, and the support from you, this publication would not be possible. Thank you for your continued support of this proceeding.

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Identification of Anse à la Barque's Shipwrecks (Guadeloupe FWI): Historical Research in the Service of Underwater Archaeology

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On 18 December 1809 under the pressure of an English fleet, two Napoleonic Period store-ships, corvettes de charge, were sunk in Anse à la Barque on the west coast of Guadeloupe (FWI), south of the town of Bouillante. Underwater archaeological excavations, set up by the Prépasub Association, took place between 2001 and 2008. These investigations revealed that, in addition to those two shipwrecks, hulls of four different ships were also present on the seafloor. Two of them have been identified as the French vessels Seine and Loire by comparing archival data to the archaeological record. The presence of so many shipwrecks in a secondary mooring of the west coast of Guadeloupe is explained by its topographical characteristics and its proximity to Basse-Terre.

Introduction

“What is your point of view about Anse à la Barque [...]? — The governor knew the weaknesses of Anse à la Barque that he told the minister, this cove was only frequented by costal ships and was used as refuge during the rainy season by small trading boats which could not stay at Basse-Terre [...] a ship after two or three weeks usually lost all its crew because of insalubrious air.” (ADG, 1J6, fol. 7-8, [1813]).

This inlet on the west coast of Guadeloupe (Figure 1a) was the location of two store-ships *Seine* and *Loire* on 18 December 1809. Both ships were lost after a naval engagement that took place against the English fleet stationed in the Lesser Antilles. After presenting this site and the different excavation campaigns, archival research is analyzed in order to present Anse à la Barque as a secondary mooring site in the area of Basse-Terre. The context in which these two store-ships were lost is also studied. Finally this paper is a case study comparing underwater archaeological data with textual archival evidence.

A Complex Archaeological Site

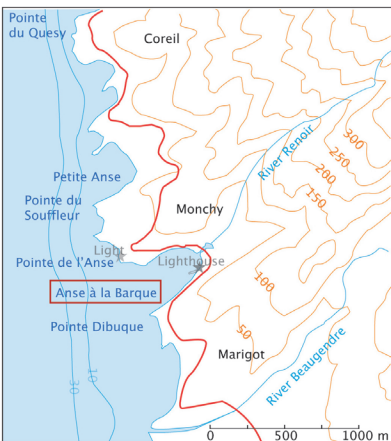
Anse à la Barque is located on the West coast of Guadeloupe FWI, between the towns of Bouillante and Vieux-Habitants (Figure 1b). Its abrupt topography is due to its proximity to the most mountainous part of Guadeloupe (Lasserre 1961:723-724). This cove, forming a horseshoe 250 meters wide by 325 meters long, is

oriented North-East South-West. A rocky seabed close to the shore changes to sand and silt further offshore. Before Hurricane Lenny (1999), a coral reef protected part of the archaeological site. The cove is composed of two shipwreck sites. The first one, located near a pontoon, has not been excavated. The second one is located in the northern part of the cove and is very close to the actual shore. Five shipwrecks are located here at a depth of 4 to 5 meters (Figure 1c). This area has been excavated several times between 2001 and 2008.

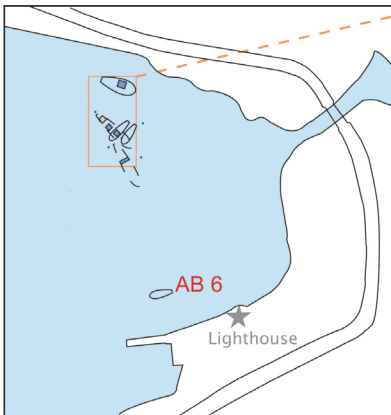
The first underwater excavations took place in 2001 and 2003. These investigations focused on the location of both *Seine* and *Loire* the two vessels mentioned to have sunk in this cove by Jean-Pierre Moreau (Moreau 1988:136-137) and to understand the archaeological sites organization. Their presence was attested to by First Empire artifacts (Figure 2) and structures (Figure 3); but the sites' complexity, due to the spread of archaeological features had not been clarified (Bilan Scientifique DRASSM [BSD] 2001:88). Despite a survey completed by the DRASSM in 2002 pointing out the double axial nature of these structures (BSD 2002:82), the shipwreck's identification had not been established (Vicens 2004). In 2003 two areas were excavated: the stern of wreck names AB 1 which was initially thought to be the prow, and the main mast-step of wreck named AB 2. Both were originally considered as part of the same shipwreck (BSD 2003:104). Underwater research took place in 2006 and 2007 focusing on both store-ships: on the stern and along the keelson of AB 1; on the main mast-step and on the side of AB 2. During these



a. Guadeloupe localization



b. Anse à la Barque localization



c. Site localization

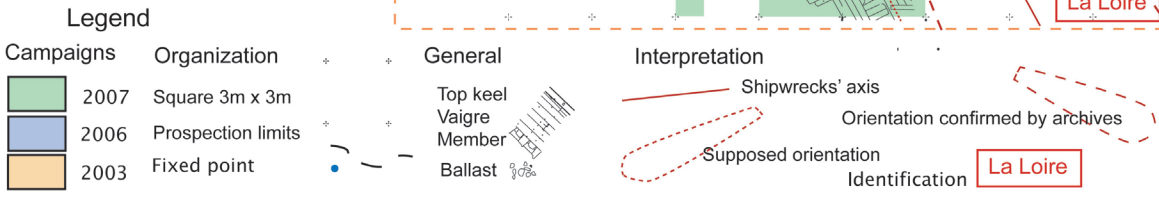
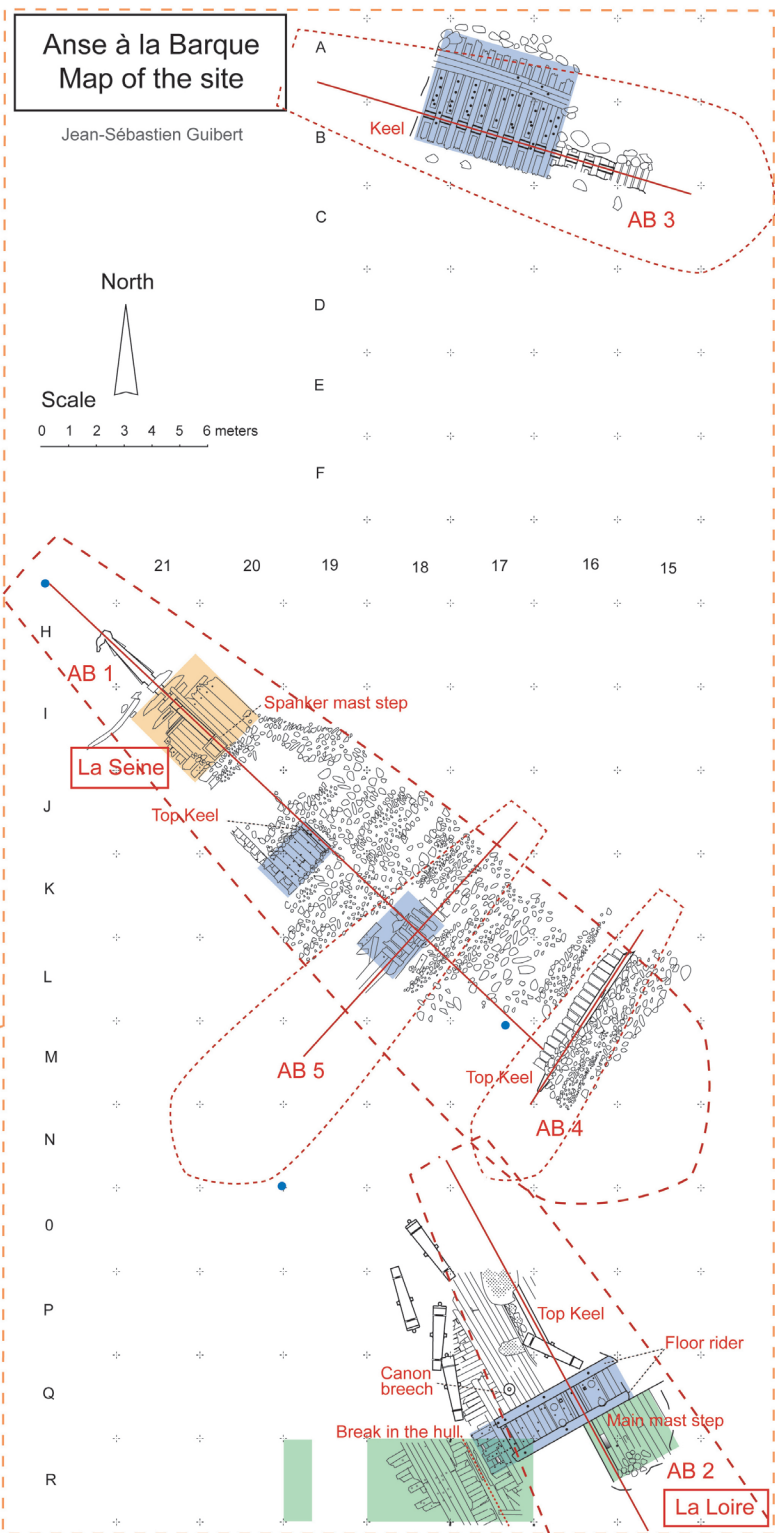


FIGURE 1: MAP OF THE SITE. A. GUADELOUPE LOCALIZATION, B. ANSE À LA BARQUE LOCALIZATION, C. SITE LOCALIZATION (MAPS AND DRAWINGS BY AUTHOR).



FIGURE 2: ARCHAEOLOGICAL ARTIFACT. PEARL WARE BOWL WITH CHINESE PATTERN 1775-1815, UNIFORM ORNAMENT REPRESENTING THE IMPERIAL EAGLE, COLL. AB/2/67 AB/1/10 (PHOTOS BY AUTHOR).

investigations, the remains of three others ships were found. The first one, named AB 3, was located along the shoreline. Two others shipwrecks, named AB 4 and AB 5 were found overlapping AB 1 (Figure 1). Features that were tentatively identified as technical innovations were observed on both store-ships. Pierre Villié's involvement, a specialist in naval construction, had been decisive in understanding these sites overall organization. But the remains of the store-ships were identified by comparing data acquired during archaeological investigations with

historical documentation gleaned from the archives. Moreover this historical research permitted to answer the question of its maritime activity.

Anse à la Barque: a Regularly Frequented Secondary Mooring

The geographic characteristics of Anse à la Barque presented above showed that this inlet was surely an ideal mooring for all kinds of vessels. Its orientation gives it

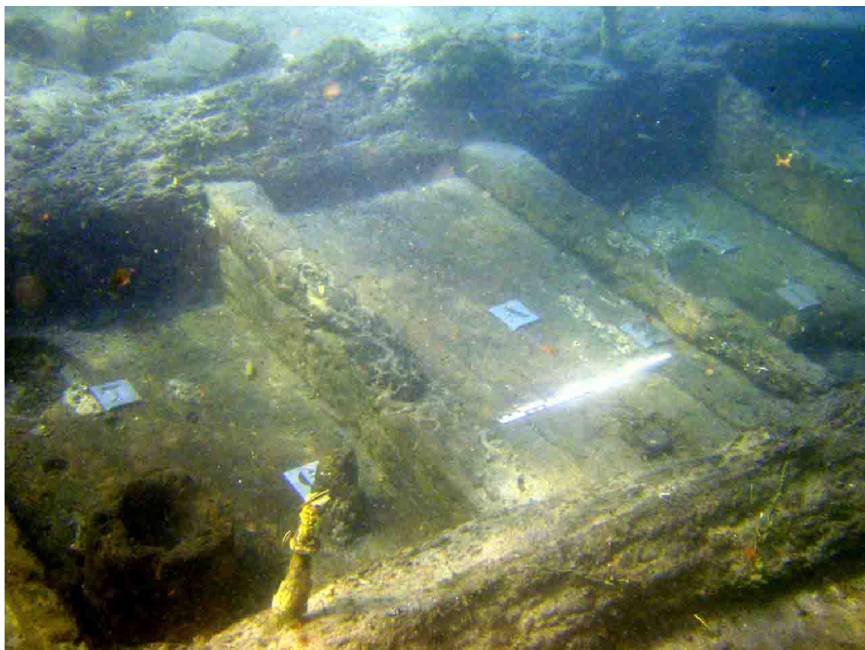


FIGURE 3: MAIN MAST-STEP OF AB 2'S SHIPWRECK (PHOTO BY P. VILLIÉ). WOODEN PUMP PIPE AND ITS STRAIN FROM THE BILGE PUMP. COLL. AB 6/2/67 ET AB 6/2/68 (PHOTO BY AUTHOR).

an effective protection against continuous winds and sea swells. Throughout the colonial period, numerous coastal sailing ships transporting local products such as cotton, coffee, cacao or wood (Lasserre 1961:725-726) would frequent inlets off the west coast of Guadeloupe including Anse à la Barque (Figure 4).

Basse-Terre's proximity as capital of the colony actively established this inlet as a secondary mooring of its port thanks in part to its quality as a refuge during the rainy season. Those inlets were also known to be a place where illicit trade usually occurred (Pérotin-Dumon 2000:148-149; Lafleur 2004:54-56). Other sources mention Anse à la Barque as privateer spot (ANOM, F3 18, fol. 567, 27/1/1746). Du Tertre, Labat and other sources also describe it as a cove where careening took place (Du Tertre 1667[2]:15; Labat 1742[1]:377; ANOM, C7B Art. 2, fol. 38, 1767). These specific features and activities were complementary to the town of Basse-Terre, making Anse à la Barque an ideal secondary mooring for merchant shipping.

Anse à la Barque was also frequented by warships. The choice of this mooring was a routine as demonstrated in 1809 when vessel captain Vincent, commanding *Seine*, arrived in Guadeloupe. In fact, this mooring was known and presented as ideal for frigates by vessel captain Lemarisquier during his mission in the West Indies in 1809: "Three leagues from Basse-Terre there is a little harbor called Anse à la Barque where frigates may anchor and be protected from all winds [...] It is by error that it has been noted on all charts that the port could only receive small ships" (ANOM, C7A 69 fol. 283-284, 28/1/1809). This description contrasts with the one presented earlier. Maritime activity during the Revolutionary period is in reality a holdover from habits developed at the beginning of the colonial period. In 1765, the agricultural chamber of Guadeloupe planned to set up a real harbor in this inlet by constructing jetties at both points in order to receive up to forty ships. This project never materialized, nevertheless Governor Nolivos considered it useful to build batteries on each point to protect it (ADG, C 5, 15/7/1765 n°58). The choice taken by Vincent's fleet in 1809 was definitely not a hazardous one; however this choice was criticized after the loss of *Seine* and *Loire*. In fact Anse à la Barque's qualities as a mooring station were reconsidered regarding the context of their loss: the English blockade and the large superiority of its fleet. The interrogation of an unknown military officer in 1813 resulted to this conclusion: "It is very important to not forget the principle that Anse à la Barque is not likely to receive a

global defense system [...] that if the mooring is good it is only during peace time or if the enemies do not have a numerous fleet [...] it may be fired on directly and by consequence the enemies can destroy all opposing ships without disembarking" (ADG, 1J6, fol. 78).

Historical research also focused on the other ships wrecked in the area of this inlet. The number of shipwrecks located in this cove reveals its maritime activity and confirms the secondary role of Anse à la Barque within the margins of Basse-Terre. At first glance, the archives indicate that there are seventeen shipwrecks ranging from the 17th to the 19th century (Table 1). Twelve of these vessels were victims of hurricanes, three were burnt during an English raid in 1744, and two were scuttled out in 1809. They are French trading ships from



FIGURE 4: MAPS OF A PART OF THE WEST COAST OF GUADELOUPE FROM POINTE DES HABITANTS TO POINTE DE L'HERMITAGE, BEGINNING OF 19TH CENTURY (EXTRACT), ADG, 1 Fi 63 (WITH PERMISSION).

the 18th century such as one ship from Nantes identified as *Saint-Bernard* lost in 1713 and a costal ships as one recorded as the Sir Gressier Létang's ship wrecked in the hurricane of 1738. During the 19th century two boats were forced aground by strong winds on 1 September 1821 and an administrative tender ship wrecked off-shore in 1832. The mention of a prize vessel wrecked in 1713 confirms that privateer frequented this inlet as well. Except for *Seine* and *Loire's* loss there is not much information concerning these ships in the administrative record. The presence of a relatively important number of shipwrecks in Anse à la Barque may be explained by its regular maritime use during the colonial period, its geographic characteristics and its proximity to Basse-Terre.

Two Store-ships in Anse à la Barque: Chronicle of a Shipwreck Foretold

In order to understand the loss of these two ships in Anse à la Barque one has to explain their historical context within the Napoleonic wars and their overall consequences in the West Indies. War between France and Britain resumed in May 1803 breaking the truce signed at Amiens. In the West Indies, the English rapidly overtook the French colonies using their naval power; this in spite of Napoleon's attempt to restore a French colonial empire in America (Humbert and Ponsonnet 2004:40-44). Martinique, Saint-Lucia, Tobago and Guadeloupe with its dependencies were reinstated to France in 1803, offering only a small respite to a stillborn project due to the French navy's insufficient means. Napoleon was unable to set up a coherent colonial policy. This is evident with the loss of Santo-Domingo which became Haiti in 1804, Martinique which was occupied from 1793 to

1801 and then again in 1809, and Louisiana which was sold to the United-States in 1803.

From 1793 to 1810, Guadeloupe was one of the only French strongholds in the West Indies. The colony was subjected to constant pressure in the form of maritime blockades forcing it into an autonomy that further increased its weakness. In 1809 the colony found itself in a critical situation: "I would not say anything to your Excellency about the moral and physical state of the colony [...] its position is awful, it may only be imagined and known by those who feel it" wrote a colonial officer (ANOM, C 7 A 70, fol. 20, 15/1/1810). Of note, in 1809 the Emperor signed a reinforcement and supply order to Guadeloupe (SHD Marine, BB 4 292, fol. 109-111, 30/9/1809). Finally, *Seine* and *Loire* were equipped to be sent to Guadeloupe although these particular vessels were not mentioned in the decree. Both *Seine* and *Loire* sailed off on 15 November 1809 protected by two frigates *Clorinde* and *Renommée* (Cossé 1993:82-83).

These two store-ships may have been solely dedicated to supplying the colonies from their conception, considering the building quotes: they both were rated at 800 tons and were equipped with twenty 8-caliber cannons (SHD Marine SH 320,C2; Démerliac 1999:1230-1231). The vessels were commissioned in October 1802, and shipyard Crucy's submission was accepted in July 1803. This private shipyard serving the Imperial Marines constructed only two store-ships out of more than 150 ships built from 1793 to 1809 (Cossé 1993:143). The Anse à la Barque shipwrecks are representative of the Imperial Marines' means: the work of private shipyards completing the arsenals (Humbert and Ponsonnet 2004:60-61).

Date	Events	Ships	Sources	Identification hypothesis
4-5/9/1713	Strong wind	- 1 ship which was a prize - 1 ship from Nantes identified as <i>Saint-Bernard</i>	- ANOM, C7A 6 - ANOM, C7A 6; DUCOIN (Jacques) T 2.	- ? AB 3, ? AB 6 - ? AB 3, ? AB 6
29/8/1738	Strong wind	- the boat of Sir Gressier Létang	ANOM, C7A 13.	- ? AB 3, ? AB 6
1/4/1744	English raid	- 3 ships were burnt	ANOM, F3 18.	- ? AB 3
5/9/1804	Strong wind	- 6 ships were cast ashore	LACOUR (Auguste), T. 4.	- ? AB 3, ? AB 6
18/12/1809	Scuttled	- 2 store-ships <i>Seine</i> and <i>Loire</i>	SHD Marine, BB4 292.	<i>Seine</i> = AB 1 ; <i>Loire</i> = AB 2
1/9/1821	Strong wind	- 2 unknown boat beached	Annales Maritimes et Coloniales, 1821, n° 14.	- ? AB 4, ? AB 5
24/8/1832	Strong wind	- The colony ship n° 1	ANOM, SG/GUA/CORR/822	None

TABLE 1: LIST OF ARCHIVAL EVIDENCES FOR ANSE À LA BARQUE'S SHIPWRECKS.

The chronology of their launching reveals the Empire's indecision about colonial policy and its troubled administrative and logistic difficulties. *Seine* was launched on 14 October 1803; *Loire* remained in the dockyards until 17 August 1806 when it was launched. Both were moored to be outfitted prior to being beached to free space for other new frigates until their departure. This chronology shows that both store-ships had been built in the same shipyard, with similar characteristics, six years separating the beginning of their construction until the end of their equipment, and they both sank after their first campaign.

The classical cargo designated for the West Indies included food, weapons and munitions. This convoy was also to supply Guadeloupe with more than 300 soldiers of the 66th infantry regiment. Finally the convoy was also given the responsibility of bringing to the colony money that was supposed to have accompanied Governor Ernouf six years earlier. The archival records are evasive regarding that fact. A note from Lieutenant Le Normand de Kergué commanding *Loire* indicates that the convoy transported a "sum of 160 000 francs that had been taken on *Renommée*. [...] a similar sum had been entrusted to *Clorinde's* officers" (SHD Marine, BB 4 292, fol. 185-188, 19/5/1810). These sums were transferred with 800 shotguns and 347 soldiers on both store-ships on 8 December 1809 when the convoy was off Antigua.

On 15 December 1809 both frigates ran aground. Roquebert, commander of the convoy, ordered the store-ships to go on their way. On the day after, they arrived in view of Guadeloupe of which they ran alongside the coast hoping to reach Basse-Terre. But facing the English fleet blocking the Basse-Terre mooring and the canal of the Saints, the vessel captain decided to go to Anse à la Barque: "On 17 December, at eight o'clock in the morning I made them moor with a spring presenting starboard to the shore, the keel showing on the seabed, *Seine* in the middle of the inlet, bowsprit on *Loire's* stern". Le Normand de Kergué's report echoing: "On 17 December I moored with a spring ahead of *Seine* presenting starboard to the shore" (SHD Marine, BB4 292, fol. 133-135, 20/12/1809; BB4 292, fol. 182-184, 19/12/1809). By comparing this information extracted from captains' shipwreck reports to the data collected during archeological investigations, it is possible to identify those wrecks. To date, it is thought that wreck AB 1 is *Seine* and wreck AB 2 is *Loire* (Figure 1).

During their unloading, both store-ships were preparing to fight to the end. Seventeen English ships

were blocking the inlet. On shore, batteries short of munitions were defenseless. After the first attack both captains scuttled the store-ships. Finally *Seine* caught fire and exploded, whereby *Loire* caught fire (ANOM, C7A 69 fol. 148-151, 24/12/1809). This scenario explains the little quantity of archaeological features: all valuables on board were discharged and all that is left of each ship is the hull structure. Moreover, different sources indicate an extensive salvage operation of all that could be re-used: wood, copper sheathing but also aiming to lift canons (ANOM, C7A 70, fol. 4-5, 2/1/1810). Only five of the forty cannons taken on board have been discovered close to the AB 2's main mast, unless those cannons were ballast.

Conclusion

Of the nine ships sent to supply Guadeloupe in 1809 three were taken as prizes by the enemy, two arrived in Martinique, and three managed to deliver their cargo. This is the case of both *Seine* and *Loire*. In spite of their success the colony was battered, and ultimately capitulated in February 1810.

In Anse à la Barque's seabed, six wrecks have been discovered. Two of them have been identified as *Seine* and *Loire*, two store-ships dating from the Napoleonic period that were scuttled in 1809. In order to understand and provide context to the loss of these two vessels, the last part of what Jean Meyer justly called the second war of a Hundred Years, it is important to refer to historic record. Four other wrecks have yet to be identified. Artifacts and analysis of the hull structures do not distinguish a specific candidate among the ships that sank in Anse à la Barque's area. Methodological study of archival sources suggests that they are the remains of merchant or coastal ships that may have been lost because climatic hazards.

This paper aims to show a linked approach toward historical archaeology. In Anse à la Barque's case this historical point of view had not been acknowledged until now. This paper also aims to question the investigation's methodology in underwater archaeology: in this case should historical research have been done before conducting the excavation? This linked approach should at least have permitted the researchers to avoid some error—the wrecks' orientation—or misunderstanding the wide spread and tangled vessel remains. This approach of historical archaeology seems to be essential in order to set up underwater archaeological projects in Guadeloupe or anywhere else.

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Série C Correspondance à l'arrivée, Sous série C 7A Guadeloupe 1649-1816.
- SHD SERVICE HISTORIQUE DE LA DÉFENSE (VINCENNES)
Série BB Service général, Sous série BB4 Campagnes.
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