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The traditional ship construction in the gulf of Lion and the Ligurian sea: the tartane case study

Hélène Botcazou

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OPEN SEA | CLOSED SEA
LOCAL AND INTER-REGIONAL TRADITIONS IN SHIPBUILDING

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ON BOAT AND SHIP ARCHAEOLOGY
MARSEILLES 2018

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MER FERMÉE | MER OUVERTE
TRADITIONS LOCALES ET INTERRÉGIONALES DANS LA CONSTRUCTION
NAVALE

ACTES DU QUINZIÈME COLLOQUE INTERNATIONAL
D'ARCHÉOLOGIE NAVALE
MARSEILLE 2018

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LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Akrivopoulou, Efthymia
Independent researcher
Greece
efthymia.akr@gmail.com

Alzaga García, Milagros
Andalusian Historical Heritage Institute (IAPH)
Underwater Archeology Center
Cadiz, Spain

Arbin von, Staffan
Department of Historical Studies University of Gothenburg
PO Box 200 SE-405 30 Gothenburg, Sweden
staffan.arbin@gu.se

Arnold, Béat
Archaeologist for the canton of Neuchâtel (retired)
The Laténium, Park and Museum of Archaeology Neuchâtel,
Switzerland
beat.arnold47@gmail.com

Auer, Jens
Landesamt für Kultur und Denkmalpflege
Mecklenburg-Vorpommern Landesarchäologie
Domhof 4/5
19055 Schwerin, Germany
j.auer@lakd-mv.de
jensauer@gmail.com

Batchvarov, Kroum
Associate Professor of Maritime Archaeology
Department of Anthropology
Maritime Studies Program
University of Connecticut, Avery Point
ACD116C, 1084 Shennecossett Road
Groton CT 06340, USA
kroum.batchvarov@uconn.edu

Batur, Katarina
University of Zadar, Department of Archaeology
Obala kralja Petra Krešimira IV. 2
23000 Zadar, Croatia
kbatur@unizd.hr

Bednarz, Tomasz
National Maritime Museum Gdańsk, Poland
t.bednarz@nmm.pl

Belasus, Mike
Saxo-Institute
University of Copenhagen
Copenhagen, Denmark
belasus@hum.ku.dk

Beltrame, Carlo
Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici
Università Ca' Foscari Venezia
Venice, Italy
beltrame@unive.it

Bennett, Kurt
Archaeology, College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences
Flinders University
Adelaide, Australia
kurt.bennett@flinders.edu.au

Bérard, Benoît
Professor Pre-Columbian Archaeology
Director research unit AIHP-GEODE Caraïbe (EA 929)
Université des Antilles
Campus de Schoelcher BP 7209
97275 Schoelcher cedex, Martinique F.W.I.
benoit.berard@univ-antilles.fr

Bettencourt, José
Department of History of NOVA FCSH
CHAM-Centro de Humanidades / CHAM-Centre
for the Humanities
NOVA FCSH – Uac
Av. de Berna, 26 C
1069-061 Lisboa, Portugal
jbettencourt.cham@gmail.com

Biar, Alexandra
Laboratoire Archéologie des Amériques (UMR 8096)
44 rue de la Clef
75005 Paris, France
alexbiar@hotmail.com

Bischoff, Vibeke
Viking Ship Museum in Roskilde
Roskilde, Denmark
vb@vikingeskibsmuseet.dk

Bloesch, Paul
Schalerstrasse, 1, 4054 Basel, Switzerland
bloesch.bs@bluewin.ch

Boetto, Giulia
CNRS, Aix Marseille University, Centre Camille Jullian
MMSH, 5 rue du Château de l'Horloge CS 90412
13097 Aix-en-Provence France cedex 2
boetto@mmsh.univ-aix.fr

Botcazou, Hélène
Ipso Facto, Marseille, France
Aix Marseille University, CNRS, LA3M, Aix-en-Provence
helene.botcazou@ipsofacto.coop

Breene, Morgan
Oriol College
OX1 4EW Oxford, UK
morgan.breene@history.ox.ac.uk
morgan_breene@my.uri.edu

Carvalho, Patrícia
CHAM-Centro de Humanidades / CHAM-Centre
for the Humanities
NOVA FCSH – Uac
Av. de Berna, 26 C, 1069-061 Lisboa, Portugal
patriciasanchescarvalho@gmail.com

Ciarlo, Nicolás C.
National Scientific and Technical Research Council (CONICET)
Institute of Archaeology, School of Philosophy & Letters
University of Buenos Aires
Argentina
nciarlo1701@gmail.com

Cibecchini, Franca
Département des Recherches Archéologiques Subaquatiques et
Sous-Marines (DRASSM), Aix Marseille University, CNRS,
Ministère de la Culture, Centre Camille Jullian
Marseille, France
franca.cibecchini@culture.gouv.fr

Cohen, Maayan
Department of Maritime Civilizations and Leon Recanati
Institute for Maritime Studies
University of Haifa
Abba Khoushy Avenue 199 3498838 Haifa, Israel
maayancohen8@gmail.com

Corré, Xavier
Musée d'Histoire de Marseille / Musée des Docks Romains
2 Rue Henri Barbusse
13001 Marseille, France
xcorre@marseille.fr

Costa, Elisa
Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici
Università Ca' Foscari Venezia
Venice, Italy
elisa.costa@unive.it

Creisher, Michelle
Department of Maritime Civilizations and Leon Recanati
Institute for Maritime Studies
University of Haifa
Abba Khoushy Avenue 199 3498838 Haifa, Israel
m.creisher@gmail.com

Cvikel, Deborah
Department of Maritime Civilizations and Leon Recanati
Institute for Maritime Studies
University of Haifa
Abba Khoushy Avenue 199 3498838 Haifa, Israel
dcvikel@research.haifa.ac.il

Dael, Martin Rodevad
Viking Ship Museum in Roskilde
Roskilde, Denmark
md@vikingskibsmuseet.dk

Daly, Aoife
Associate Professor, Saxo Institute, University of Copenhagen
Karen Blixens Plads 8
2300 Copenhagen S, Denmark
aoife.daly@hum.ku.dk
dendro@dendro.dk

De Juan, Carlos
Dirección General de Patrimonio y Cultura
Generalitat Valenciana
Valencia, Spain
arqueologiadelmar@gmail.com

De Ruyter, Michael J.
Archaeology, College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences
Flinders University
Adelaide, Australia
mick.deruyter@flinders.edu.au

Ditta, Massimiliano
Stavanger Maritime Museum Musegata 16
4010 Stavanger, Norway
massimiliano.ditta@museumstavanger.no
massimiliano.ditta@outlook.com

Divić, Anton
Aix Marseille University, CNRS, Centre Camille Jullian
Aix-en-Provence, France
University of Zagreb, Croatia
antondivic@gmail.com

Ehanti, Eero
For Our Generation OÜ
Pikaliiva tn 90/2-32
Tallinn, harju maakond, 13516, Estonia
eero.ehanti@gmail.com

Enzmann, Jonas
Lower Saxony Institute for Historical Coastal Research
Viktoriastr. 26/28
26382 Wilhelmshaven, Germany
jonas.enzmann@nihk.de

Eriksson, Niklas
Associate Professor
Department of Archaeology and Classical Studies Stockholm
University
SE-10691 Stockholm, Sweden
niklas.eriksson@ark.su.se

Fawsitt, Sarah
Maritime archaeologist
Documentation Laboratory
Norwegian Maritime Museum
Oslo, Norway
sarah.fawsitt@marmuseum.no

Ferreira Domínguez, Alba
Aix Marseille University, CNRS, Centre Camille Jullian
MMSH, 5 rue du Château de l'Horloge CS 90412
13097 Aix-en-Provence France cedex 2
albaferreiradominguez@gmail.com

Fonseca, Cristóvão
CHAM-Centro de Humanidades / CHAM-Centre
for the Humanities
NOVA FCsH – UAc
Av. de Berna, 26 C, 1069-061 Lisboa, Portugal
cristovaofonseca@fcsh.unl.pt

Gaspari, Andrej
University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Arts, Department
of Archaeology
Aškerčeva 2
1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia
andrej.gaspari@ff.uni-lj.si

Ghidoni, Alessandro
Department of Arab and Islamic studies
Exeter University, UK
alessandroghidoni@hotmail.com

Greck, Sandra
Association Arkaeos
59 Boulevard Camille Flammarion
13001 Marseille, France
sandragreck@arkaeos.fr

Guibal, Frédéric
Aix Marseille University, Avignon Université, CNRS, IRD, IMBE
Europôle Méditerranéen de l'Arbois
13545 Aix-en-Provence, France
frederic.guibal@imbe.fr

Guyon, Marc
Institut National de Recherches Archéologiques Préventives,
Aix Marseille University, CNRS, INRAP, Centre Camille Jullian
marc.guyon@inrap.fr

Hansson, Jim
Swedish National Maritime and Transport Museums
P.O. Box 27131
SE-102 52 Stockholm, Sweden
jim.hansson@maritima.se

Häyhä, Heikki
For Our Generation OÜ
Pikaliiva tn 90/2-32
Tallinn, harju maakond, 13516, Estonia
heikkih9@gmail.com

Hobberstad, Lin Cecilie
Maritime archaeologist
Documentation Laboratory
Norwegian Maritime Museum
Oslo, Norway
lin.hobberstad@marmuseum.no

Holk van, André F.L.
Batavialand Oostvaardersdijk 01-13
Postbus 119
8200 AC Lelystad, Netherlands
andre.vanholk@batavialand.nl

Izaguirre Lacoste, Manuel †
Historical-Artistic and Museum Heritage Service
Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa
Gipuzkoa, Spain

Jaouen, Marine
Département des Recherches Archéologiques Subaquatiques et
Sous-Marines (DRASSM)
Ministère de la Culture
Marseille, France
marine.jaouen@culture.gouv.fr

Jorgensen, Ida Christine
University of Portsmouth
Portsmouth, UK
idachrjorgensen@gmail.com

Jürgens, Fritz
Institute of Pre- and Protohistoric Archaeology
Christian-Albrecht University Kiel
Johanna-Mestorf-Str. 2-6
24118 Kiel, Germany
f.juergens@ufg.uni-kiel.de

Kobaliia, Dimitri
Head of Archaeology Department
National Reserve « Khortytzia »
Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine
kobalia72@gmail.com

Kocabaş, Ufuk
İstanbul University, Faculty of Letters
Division of Conservation of Marine Archaeological Objects
Ordu Caddesi
34459 Laleli-İstanbul, Turkey
ufukkocabas@gmail.com

Lätti, Priit
Estonian Maritime Museum
Vesilennuki 1, 10415 Tallinn, Estonia
priit@meremuseum.ee

Liphschitz, Nili †
Tel Aviv University

Litwinienko, Paweł
Underwater Archaeology Department
National Maritime Museum
Ołowianka 9-13
80-751 Gdańsk, Poland
p.litwinienko@nmm.pl

Lopes, Gonçalo C.
CHAM-Centro de Humanidades / CHAM-Centre
for the Humanities
NOVA FCsH – UAc
Av. de Berna, 26 C, 1069-061
Lisboa, Portugal
goncaloncl@gmail.com

McCarthy, John K.
Archaeology, College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences
Flinders University
Adelaide, Australia
john.mccarthy@flinders.edu.au

Manguin, Pierre-Yves
Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient
Paris, France
Pierre-yves.manguin@efeo.net

Martins, Adolfo Miguel
University of Wales Trinity Saint David
Lampeter, UK
adolfo.miguel.martins@gmail.com

Meunier, Laure
Conservator, independent researcher IFIRES, France
laure-ifires@ouvaton.org

Muñoz, Irene
Independent researcher
Spain
ire22714@gmail.com

Nantet, Emmanuel
Department of Maritime Civilizations and Leon Recanati
Institute for Maritime Studies
University of Haifa
Abba Khoushy Avenue 199 3498838 Haifa, Israel
enantet@univ.haifa.ac.il

Nicolaou, Constantinos
Department of History and Archaeology
University of Cyprus
Nicosia, Cyprus
lefkolla@gmail.com

Özsait-Kocabaş, Işıl
İstanbul University, Faculty of Letters
Division of Conservation of Marine Archaeological Objects
Ordu Caddesi
34459 Laleli-İstanbul, Turkey
isilozsait@gmail.com

Palzur, Yochai
Department of Maritime Civilizations and Leon Recanati
Institute for Maritime Studies
University of Haifa
Abba Khoushy Avenue 199 3498838 Haifa, Israel
yochai22@gmail.com

Peladan, Damien
Université de Paris
Paris, France
damien.peladan@gmail.com

Pinto Coelho, Inês
CHAM-Centro de Humanidades / CHAM-Centre for the
Humanities
NOVA FCsH – UAc
Av. de Berna, 26 C, 1069-061 Lisboa, Portugal
inespintocoelho@fcsh.unl.pt

Poletto, Andrea
Independent researcher
Genova, Italy
andreapoletto504@gmail.com

Pomey, Patrice †
CNRS, Aix Marseille University, Centre Camille Jullian
MMSH, 5 rue du Château de l'Horloge CS 90412
13097 Aix-en-Provence France cedex 2

Pulak, Cemal
Texas A&M University
College Station, TX, USA
pulak@tamu.edu

Radić Rossi, Irena
University of Zadar, Department of Archaeology
Obala kralja Petra Krešimira IV. 2
23 000 Zadar, Croatia
irradic@unizd.hr

Rieth, Eric
National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS)
Laboratory of Western Medieval Research of Paris (LAMOP),
University Paris 1
National Maritime Museum Paris, France
eric.rieth.cnrs@gmail.com

Rodríguez Mariscal, Nuria E.
Andalusian Historical Heritage Institute (IAPH)
Underwater Archeology Center
Cadiz, Spain
nuria.rodriguez.mariscal@juntadeandalucia.es

Rózycki, Janusz
Underwater Archaeology Department
National Maritime Museum
Ołowianka 9-13
80-751 Gdańsk, Poland
j.rozycki@nmm.pl

Ruff, David
Texas A&M University
College Station, TX, USA
daveruff@aggienetwork.com

Sabastia, Alex
Institut National de Recherches Archéologiques Préventives,
Aix Marseille University, CNRS, INRAP, Centre Camille
Jullian
alex.sabastia@inrap.fr

Shindo, Lisa
CNRS, Aix Marseille University, Centre Camille Jullian
MMSH, 5 rue du Château de l'Horloge CS 90412
13097 Aix-en-Provence France cedex 2
shindo.lisa@gmail.com

Silva, Tiago
CHAM-Centro de Humanidades / CHAM-Centre
for the Humanities
NOVA FCsH – UAc
Av. de Berna, 26 C, 1069-061
Lisboa, Portugal
toiago@gmail.com

Sørensen, Tróna
Viking Ship Museum in Roskilde
Roskilde, Denmark
trs@vikingskibsmuseet.dk

Sorokin, Petr
Senior Researcher
The Institute of the History of Material Culture
Russian Academy of Science
Dvorzovaja nab. 18
191186 St. Petersburg, Russia
petrsorokin@yandex.ru

Springmann, Maik-Jens
Technical State Museum
Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania
Zum Festpl. 3, 23966 Wismar, Germany
springmann@phantechnikum.de

Tanner, Pat
Centre for Maritime Archaeology
University of Southampton
Southampton, UK
Pat.Tanner@soton.ac.uk

Thier, Katrin
Oxford English Dictionary
Oxford, UK
kthier@nexus.ox.ac.uk

Thomsen, Mikkel H.
Viking Ship Museum in Roskilde
Roskilde, Denmark
mht@vikingskibsmuseet.dk

Van Damme, Thomas
Ubi3D, Korte Gasthuisstraat 26
2000 Antwerp, Belgium
thomas.van.damme@outlook.com

van Duivenvoorde, Wendy
Archaeology, College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences
Flinders University
Adelaide, Australia
wendy.vanduivenvoorde@flinders.edu.au

Wilkes, Feiko
Institute of Pre- and Protohistoric Archaeology Christian-
Albrecht University Kiel
Johanna-Mestorf-Str. 2-6
24118 Kiel, Germany
feiko.wilkes@gmail.com

Yermolaieva, Ksenia
National Reserve «Khortytisia»
Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine
evaermola@gmail.com

Zamościński, Krzysztof
National Maritime Museum
Gdańsk, Poland
k.zamoscinski@nmm.pl

Zubčić, Krunoslav
Croatian Conservation Institute
Department of Underwater Archaeology
Zagreb, Croatia
kzubcic@h-r-z.hr

Zwick, Daniel
State Archaeology Department of Schleswig-Holstein
Archäologisches Landesamt Schleswig-Holstein
Brockdorff-Rantzau-Str. 70
24837 Schleswig, Germany
d.zwick@archaeologia-navalis.org

TRADITIONAL SHIP CONSTRUCTION IN THE GULF OF LION AND THE LIGURIAN SEA: THE *TARTANE* CASE STUDY

Hélène BOTCAZOU

Abstract

This article deals with a type of coaster from the northwest Mediterranean called *tartane*. This emblematic coaster is generally presented as the most commonly utilised boat for cargo transport from the 16th century until the end of sailing ship coastal trade in this area at the very beginning of the 20th century. Although it is often described as a wide-bottom one-masted lateen ship, we can count at least four different rigging systems in various iconographic resources portraying *tartanes*, dating from 1679 to the very first decades of the 20th century. These diverse rigging systems reveal some developments to and influences on the *tartane*-type vessel, and they add complexity to our vision of a maritime cultural landscape in a coherent sailing space that includes the Gulf of Lion and Liguria.

Keywords

Corsica, lateen rigging, naval architecture, 17th-20th century, *tartane*, western Mediterranean,

Résumé

Cet article traite d'un type de caboteur à voile de la Méditerranée nord-occidentale appelé *tartane*. Ce caboteur emblématique est généralement présenté comme le bateau le plus utilisé pour le transport de marchandises du xvi^e siècle jusqu'à la fin du commerce côtier par voiliers dans cette zone, au tout début du xx^e siècle. Bien qu'il soit souvent décrit comme un navire à voile latine à large fond, on peut compter au moins quatre systèmes de gréement différents dans diverses sources iconographiques représentant des *tartanes*, de 1679 aux toutes premières décennies du xx^e siècle. Ces divers systèmes de gréement mettent en évidence un certain nombre de développements et d'influences sur le navire de type *tartane* et ils ajoutent de la complexité à notre vision d'un paysage culturel maritime inscrit dans un espace de navigation cohérent qui comprend le golfe du Lion et la Ligurie.

Mots-clés

Corse, gréement latin, architecture navale, xvii^e - xx^e siècle, *tartane*, Méditerranée nord-occidentale

This paper presents an overview of the evolution of the *tartane*-type vessel, which was the most emblematic and widespread coaster along the southern coasts of France, from Provence to Languedoc. This case study is part of the author's PhD research focused on the architectural and functional systems of coasters sailing along Corsica's coast between the 16th and the 20th century¹. Indeed, this island is strategically situated within a specific maritime transport zone sailed by a large number of coasters coming from different regions of the northwest Mediterranean basin. Thus, alongside the coasters of Corsican origin, this research also takes into consideration the coasters of Catalonia, the south coast of France, Liguria and Sardinia.

At the core of our research is the collection of a complete 'catalogue' composed of ship representations in paintings, stamps, photographs, and archival and bibliographical descriptions, along with other information from current underwater archaeological excavations conducted on the coast of Corsica. The aim is to describe the characteristics of the different coasters and identify adaptations to their environment and to the local societies that built them. We also try to present the differences and similarities in the coasters' building traditions in the different regions covered by our research.

1. This research was supervised by Nicolas Faucherre (LA3M, AMU, CNRS, Aix-en-Provence) and Eric Rieth (LAMOP, CNRS, Paris).

1. THE *TARTANE*-TYPE VESSEL

A comparison of the various drawings of *tartane*-type vessels allows us to follow the evolution of this type of ship and possibly the diversity of its regional adaptations (fig. 1).

The *tartane* generally corresponds to a one or two mast ship that has an average tonnage around 70 tonnes, though it can displace from 25 to 100 tonnes for the largest. Its wide bottom is easily recognisable, as well as its lateen rigging. As an example, the *Tartane Provençale from 1789*, drawn by Admiral Pâris (Pâris 1882), the first French maritime ethnographer and curator of the National Maritime Museum between 1871 and 1893, measured 12.90 m long, 3.20 m wide, with a draught of 2.30 m (fig. 1.3).

It seems that the first *tartanes* appeared in the 16th century (De Nicolò 2012) in Provence, southern France. The last of them was used in L'Estaque, Marseille, to transport tiles (Damonte 1990).

During the 17th and 18th century, *tartanes* for hauling cargo had a greater rigging, composed of a main mast (*mestre*), which was a lateen mast situated a little beyond the master frame, and a fore mast (*trinquet*) with a 25° inclination (fig. 1.1). This fore mast gradually disappeared during the 18th century. Ships like the *Tartane Provençale* of 1789 drawn by Admiral Pâris tend to adopt some of the features of the one-masted *tartane* used for fishing or transporting ballast as drawn by Jouve in 1679

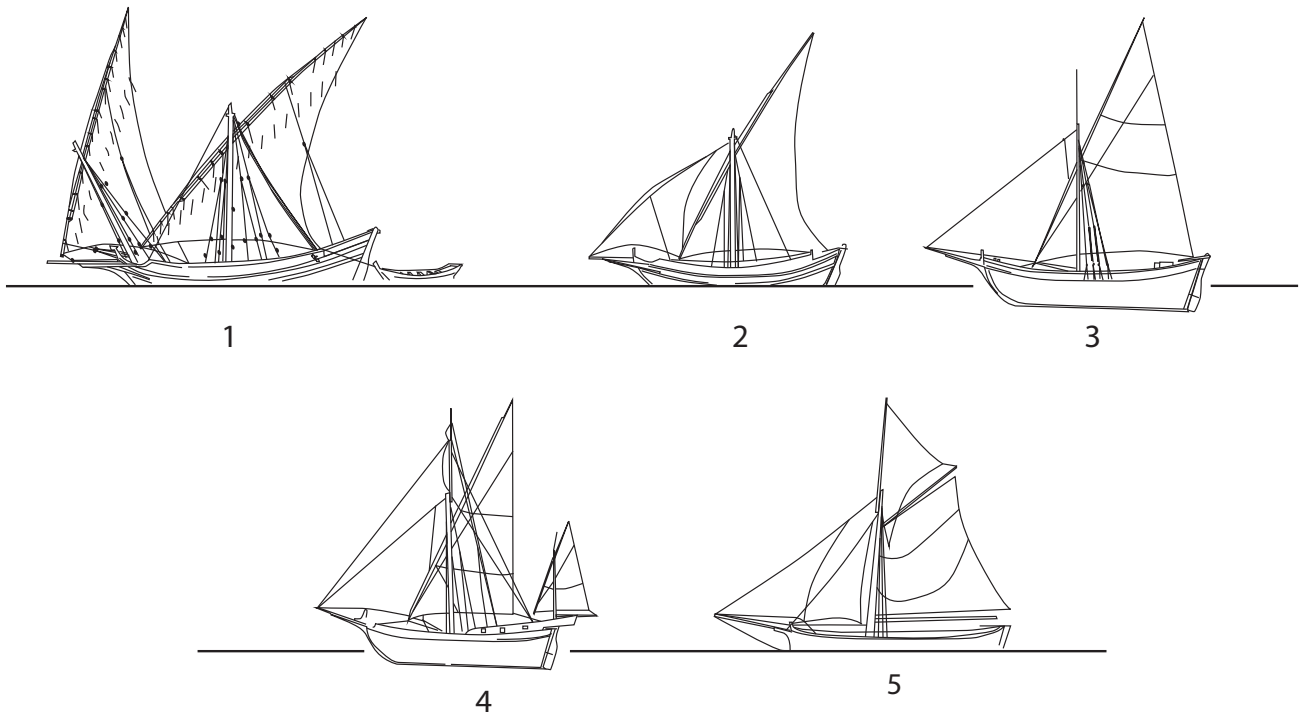


Fig. 1: Evolution of the tartane-type of vessel (drawing H. Botcazou, AMU-LA3M, *Ipsa Facto*): 1. Tartane de négoce under sail (from Jouve 1679a, pl. 19-20); 2. Tartane de pêche under sail (from Jouve 1679b, pl. 16); 3. Tartane provençale, 1789 (from Pâris 1882, pl. 4); 4. Tartane "L'Albanaise" of the 18th century (French National Maritime Museum, Paris, model inv. 5.CP.9. – PH. 32579); 5. Tartane marseillaise, beginning of the 20th century (based on a photograph by Hubert Poilroux)

(Jouve 1679). Here, a large jib called *polacre* replaces the fore mast (fig. 1.2).

Another type of *tartane* is represented by the *Albanaise*, a model from the 18th century held in the French National Maritime Museum in Paris (fig. 1.4). It is a lateen-rigged boat with a main mast and a mizzen (*méjane*) situated at the stern of the boat. The mizzen is balanced at the bow by a *polacre* (Pâris 1882). This type of rig can be related to both the Italian *bovo* and *pareggia* vessels that were in use in the 19th century, especially between Corsica and Liguria, and to the Spanish *balancelles* from Catalonia.

During the transition from the 19th to 20th century, the surviving *tartanes* are of the one-masted type. The yard of the lateen sail (*antenne*) becomes more rigid and is topped up so that the triangle of sail situated in front of the mast is reduced. We often see a triangular topsail rigged to a topmast attached above the lateen one. The front part of the yard will slowly disappear to look like a fore and aft rig, and a large jib is used beyond the main mast (fig. 1.5). This system demands less effort and people for handling. It allows the division of the sails, which are as a result lighter to use. This organisation is cleverly complemented by a curtain sail (*voile à rideau*), which allows easy furling of the main sail without lowering the gaff (Burlet 1988).

The one-masted *tartane* with a lateen rig was related to fishing activities from at least the 17th century (fig. 1.2). The term *tartane* is also the name of a specific net. These boats were involved in pair-trawling (*pêche aux boeufs*). The last versions of these vessels were still in use in the first half of the 20th century in the harbour of Sète in Languedoc. André Aversa, a local

traditional boat builder, witnessed the changes in technology during his life, and testified that he adapted the original shape of the *bateaux boeufs*, a *tartane*-like fishing boat, to the engine and to the new nets that are now hauled in from the rear of the boat. Little by little the sail disappeared and, with the engine, a transom appeared (Vigne 2003).

2. CONCLUSION

This ongoing research has led us to understand that the *tartane*-type vessel, which seemed at first sight to correspond to a very distinctive type of coaster, effectively reflects a varied range of successive adaptations over time. The rigging of the *tartane* has been successively modified to answer the needs of the local populations: it has influenced other types of coasters (e.g. the *bateaux boeufs* of Sète); and it has itself been influenced by external practices. The fore-and-aft coaster from the first decades of the 20th century, for example, sheds light on this last case. The successive adaptation of the rigging of the *tartane* corresponds to the global evolution of the lateen rig. The big two-masted *tartane* from the 17th century abandons the fore mast in the subsequent century, and then follows two different paths. The first is inherited from the one-masted fishing or ballast ship, and will later be influenced by the Atlantic fore-and-aft rigging. The second corresponds to a widespread rigging from Catalonia to Liguria, composed of two masts (a main and a mizzen) and a jib. This efficient balanced rigging was also used to fit the *bovi* and *paregge*,

both types abandoned at the end of the 19th century in Liguria, Corsica and Provence.

Although iconographic and archival research provides information on the rigs and superstructures of ships that have now disappeared, it does not offer much data on architectural building details. However, this research opens new perspectives for the study of the structural and technical systems of the often forgotten small to medium size Mediterranean merchant

vessels, and brings fresh insight to the archaeological data gathered from past and ongoing archaeological research².

2. In particular to the current project led by Franca Cibecchini (Drassm) at Paragan (southern Corsica) where a coaster has been under excavation since 2016 (see Rieth, Cibecchini in this volume). This fieldwork is part of a larger research programme led by Eric Rieth (CNRS) on the architectural signatures of traditional Mediterranean shipbuilding.

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