THE ROYAL LOUIS (1668), A SAILING MASTERPIECE

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SUMMARY

The French Navy's finest hour began in the seventeenth century when Colbert became *principal ministre d'État* (1661) – a role equivalent to main adviser to the King of France during the Ancien Régime – and later Controller-General of Finances (1665), Secretary of State of the Navy (1669) as well as Secretary of State of the Maison du Roi (1669), and decided to improve the national shipyards. Despite poor starting conditions, the results of Colbert's efforts led France to be one of the major players in the struggle for naval power. At that moment, European shipbuilding had a change in construction techniques mostly in warships. In France, this change also involved vessels aesthetics. Indeed, shipwrights' tasks were not only to build ships with great naval skills, but vessels had also to be aesthetically striking and eye-catching to show at the world the Roy Soleil's power and wealth. Many vessels were built in that style and the *Royal Louis* was one of the largest vessels and was built in 1668 in Toulon. With particular attention to the *Royal Louis*, this article aims to analyse several aspects of the world surrounding those floating masterpieces.

1. INTRODUCTION

European shipbuilding was transformed in the seventeenth century as a consequence of new ocean trade becoming increasingly important. Stronger and larger vessels were required to sail the oceans. Moreover, the arising value of commercial trade with other continents had led to a new perception of fleets' usefulness in European minds (Glete, 1999). Indeed, with the new establishment of ocean-based trade, fleets were no longer used only to defend countries' borders and support military campaigns; navies had become the main means to protect states' commercial routes and achieve economic supremacy. Having a powerful navy was essential for a state looking to excel in the Seventeenth-century world. By the eighteenth century, this new conception of the purpose of a fleet had become fully established, as shown by the words of Jean-Fréderic Phélypeaux, first Count of Maurepas (1701-1781) and Secretary of State for the Navy, who, in 1745, wrote: "*Le commerce fait la plus grande richesse et conséquemment la puissance des États … les forces maritime sont absolument nécessaire pour les soutiens du commerce*" ("Trade is the greatest source of wealth and consequently of power of states ... maritime power is absolutely necessary for the support of trade"; Filion, 1967). In the 17th century, thus, naval warfare was no longer subordinated to land operations, and thus it became the focus for captains, officers and admirals aiming to outline an efficient combat tactic that exploited all the possibilities offered by the artillery. Indeed, these weapons began to be useful in naval wars only at the beginning of the sixteenth century. This is when the introduction of gunports allowed ships to carry a greater number of guns, as seen in the case of the Henry VIII's *Henry Grace à Dieu* (1514), or *Great Harry*, which boarded more than 180 pieces of artillery (43 cannons and 141 light guns) (Cipolla, 2019). The broadside armament highlighted the inferiority of short-range weapons and led to a volume reduction of quarterdeck and forecastle, traditionally used by archers and harquebusiers. The Royal Navy undertook this paradigmatic change in naval combat, recognizing the future of sea warfare was in heavy cannons. To the point that, in 1618, the *Commission of Reform* recommended that Navy rearrange the artillery based on the supremacy of cannons: "*Experience teacheth how sea-fights in these days come seldom to boarding, or to great execution of bows, arrows, small shot and the sword, but are chiefly performed by the great artillery breaking down masts, yards, tearing, ranking and bilging the ships, wherein the great advantage of His Majesty's navy must carefully be maintained by appointing such a proportion of ordnance to each ship as the vessel will bear*" (Robertson, 1921).

A different way of fighting was the outcome of this new perspective, and the so-called *battle line* was written down for the first time on 29 March 1653 by the English *Generals at Sea* Robert Blake (1598-1657), George Monk (1608-1670) and Richard Dean (1610-1653), who drafted several norms contained in the *Sailing and Fighting Instructions* (Corbett, 1905). The biggest problem in naval battle planning was the heterogeneity of ships. Thus, what fleets needed was standardization in shipbuilding in order to increase the efficiency of naval operations and simplify the organisation depending on the dimensions and the number of cannons each ship carries. For this purpose, a specific classification was created which divided ships into different rates. All vessels which were built under that classification were called ships of the line (Dull, 2009). *First rate* vessels were the biggest and most heavily armed ones with a fire power of 70 to 100 cannons or more; these were usually flagships and leaders in naval conflicts. Second rate vessels had fewer cannons (generally 50-70) and even fewer on vessels of lower rates.

These changes in shipbuilding influenced almost all of the European fleets and perhaps saw the greatest results in England and the Netherlands. Nevertheless, France developed a peculiar aspect more than other states; in here concern was for aesthetic ostentation.

2. WHY DID AESTHETIC CONCERNS PREVAIL IN FRANCE?

It is questionable as to why aesthetic had a stronger influence in the French Navy than others. Considering that navies had become state-owned tools, the European political situation should be taken into account. The consolidation of states' power and the creation of state navies led to conflicts that were increasingly linked with a growing sensibility of identity by citizens. It is in this sense that the desire for supremacy was no longer just meant as a territorial conquest but also as an ideological phenomenon. The sovereign's power, which metonymically was that of the state, was becoming an aspect more and more symbolic and significant that had to be transmitted to the rest of the world in every possible way.

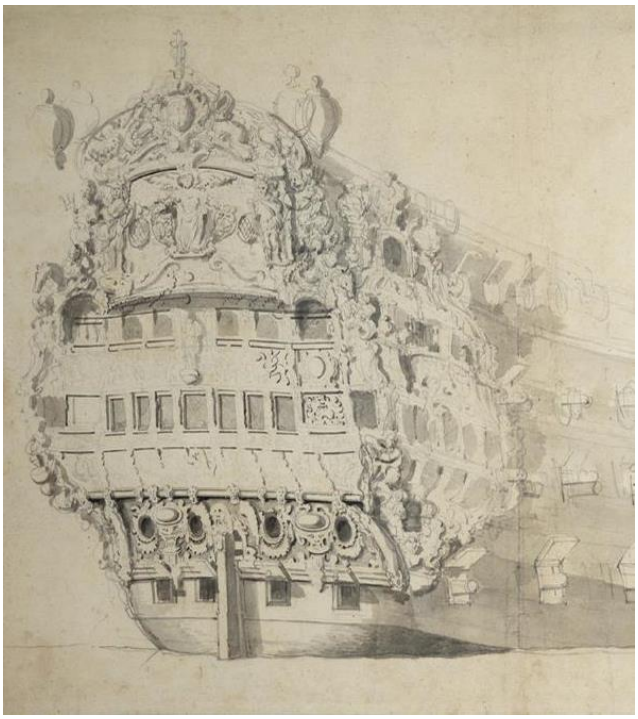

Figure 1: Detail. Portrait of the *Royal Sovereign*. 1661 (?). By Willem van de Velde. Source: National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London, Caird Collection.

The seduction of aesthetics influenced all the main European Navies. The Swedish *Vasa* (1627) and the English *Sovereign of the Seas* (1637) (Winfield, 2010a) are two of the main examples. However, these magnificent vessels mainly had to do with size and gun-power rather than aesthetics. When in 1634 Charles I Stuart (1600-1649) decided to proceed with the construction of the *Sovereign of the Seas* (or *Royal Sovereign*), which can be admired in Figure 1, Europe was experiencing a particular time characterised by the increase of tonnage as a common trend. Almost all the navies were working on the construction of *three-decker* vessels. The reason for this trend can be explained quite easily since bigger and sturdier vessels were able to carry more cannons, and thus increase the chances of winning in *battle line* conflict. Even the Dutch Navy, which traditionally had adopted small and fast ships, was building bigger ships to compensate for their small fleet and to be highly competitive on ocean trade (Bruijn, 1993). France started to build the *Couronne* in 1629. It was one of the biggest vessels of its time, 165 feet long (50.3 metres) and boarding 20 heavy guns and others light ones (Paine, 2000). In this context, Charles I was almost forced by the tough competition to order the construction of a large vessel. The task was entrusted to the *master of the shipwrights* Phineas Pett (1570-1647), who had previously built the *Prince Royal* (1610). That project encountered some opposition. The Corporation of Trinity House of Deptford argued that such a vessel would have been unusable and even dangerous due to its size. The *Sovereign of the Seas* was launched in 1637 despite the protests; she was 232 feet long overall (70.7 metres), her structure was lavishly decorated, and she became the King's pride. The vessel also performed well in some military campaigns during the Anglo-Dutch Wars. She was particularly appreciated for her success during the battle of La Hougue (1692). But bulky superstructures immediately showed their problems, increasing the weight and causing issues with the manoeuvrability and stability of vessels. Therefore, in 1651 the *Sovereign* was taken to Chatham Dockyard, and her superstructure was cut down (Winfield, 2010b). Thus, England had followed the Dutch example of decreasing the volume of decorations.

2.1 THE POWER OF DECORATIONS

Among the European States, France was where the artistic character took a central and crucial role in the shipbuilding process. Here, decoration excelled and exceeded that of others navies with ornaments, wooden statues and gold, as never seen before. Since the greatest vessels were used by monarchs as propaganda tools, the main thrust to use ornaments in abundance was bound to come from them. The seventeenth century coincided with a particular king in France's history, that is Louis XIV (1638-1715). After he ascended to the throne in 1643, he strove to concentrate power in his own hands strengthening his political identity through a programme that is best exemplified by his well-known motto "*l'État, c'est moi*" ("I am the State"). The implications of this plan were not marginal. In this context, France was no longer only a territory to be governed, and the King did not have to act *on behalf of* the State because he *was* the State. By means of this ideological overlap of state and King, every display of France's power was directly a glorification of the King. Similarly, promoting the monarchy's magnificence and wealth meant glorifying the state.

This propagandistic action was extended to all fields. Fashion, hairstyle, furniture, and architecture were also influenced by this approach. Indeed, Louis XIV created his own style known as "style Louis XIV", which created a visual aesthetic throughout his kingdom. The inner decoration and furniture of state palaces such as Versailles and Fontainebleau Castle can be compared, for example, with the stern of a ship from Louis XIV's fleet, with striking similarities in colours, ornaments, and style (Figure 2). Using an anachronistic term, it could be said that Louis XIV

was one of the first to create a "corporate identity" of his own company, which, of course, was the French state.

Figure 2: On the left, an armchair from Versailles; on the right, a painting of the stern decorations of the *Soleil Royal* by Jean Bérain (preserved at the Louvre Museum, Paris).

The Navy was strongly influenced by this approach because vessels became ambassadors of the King and France at sea. Their names were affected, too. Indeed, until the early years of the 17th century, ships were usually named after saints; the *Saint Michel* (1621), the *Saint Jean* (1621), the *Saint François* (1625), the *Saint Charles* (1628), the *Saint Thomas d'Aquin* (1642), the *Saint Jacques de Dunkerque* (1643) are all good examples of this trend. But during the Sun King's reign, vessels' names were chosen with great attention in order to express royal identity. Depending on the vessels' class, there was a difference in meaning; at the top, there were the two flagships which, given their great importance, were named after the King himself, *Soleil Royal* (flagship in the Western fleet) and *Royal Louis* (flagship in the Eastern fleet). Further down in the pecking order, there were the *First Rate* vessels; their names had to refer to royal icons and symbols such as the *Royal Dauphin* (1671), the *Monarque* (1669), the *Couronne* (1669), the *Sceptre* (1671) and the *Lys* (1691). The vessels which were classified in the *Premier Rang Ordinaire* (boarding about 80 guns) and in the Second Rate (60-70 guns) generally had names symbolizing the Crown's virtues, as the *Superbe* (1690), the *Glorieux* (1678), the *Magnifique* (1685) and the *Invincible* (1691) (Dessert, 1996).

Knowing the great importance given to names, one can easily understand that the external design could not be overlooked. Thus, the shipwrights' task was not only to build efficient vessels but also to make sure they looked astonishing. Following this trend, aesthetics became increasingly important in shipbuilding; to the point that the overabundance of carving led in some case to a decrease in seaworthiness.

2.1 (a) Pierre Puget and *La Reine* (1647)

The concern for aesthetic appearance existed before the monarchy started using vessels as means of propaganda. In the first half of the seventeenth century, Colbert had not yet embarked on his quest to reorganise and improve the Navy. By that time, despite the efforts of Cardinal Richelieu (1585-1642) who had founded the Marine Royal in 1624, French shipbuilding was almost completely under the control of rich merchants and, in case of need, the state could rent their vessels. Those private ships were not lacking in decoration. Ornaments were used both to decorate vessels and to show off the wealth of the owner.

Also in that period, the story of the Second Rate *la Reine* is particularly interesting. She was built at Toulon arsenal between 1645 and 1647, and the Grand Admiral of the French Navy, Jean Armand de Maillé (1619-1646), who was Duke of Fronsac, as well as Marquis of Brézé, called the young artist Pierre Puget (1623-1694) to design the blueprinting of the drawings of decoration (Brun, 1861). Calling on a specific artist was already in itself a sign of the importance of aesthetics in shipbuilding. But *Reine*'s story is also interesting for the great ferment she caused. Indeed, after her launch, public opinion split into two. On one hand, there were those who praised Puget for having taken the first steps towards the evolution of the French ships' decoration and having introduced luxurious projecting galleries in the stern. On the other hand, some people complained about the excessive opulence of the carving, at the expense of seaworthiness.

The stern was the most decorated part. Here, there was a gallery surmounted by a big medallion, which was in the centre and was held by two caryatids. This medallion had inside a representation of Anne of Austria (1601-1666), who was the Grand Maitrise de la Navigation (Chack, 2001) from 1646 to 1650. However, the decoration of this vessel was not particularly excessive if compared to the style of that time, and it certainly was not on the level of the great magnificence of ornaments that the French shipbuilding achieved over a period of twenty years. Even wooden statues were not unprecedented in shipbuilding, as shown by the presence of the sculptor Nicolas Levray (Unk-1678) (Tourneux, 1897) at the Toulon's arsenal since 1639. Moreover, he was the one who made the statues of Puget's drawings for *La Reine* (Lagrange, 1868a). Nevertheless, criticism surrounding this vessel is really interesting because it shows the existence of two different schools of thought in France, and demonstrates that there was an early debate about the excessive use of decoration in warships. On the one hand, ornaments were appreciated for increasing the beauty of vessels, on the other hand, the undeniable reduction of seaworthiness could not be overlooked for much longer.

For the next twenty years, increasingly larger ships were built. On them, artists had the opportunity to display their ability. The *Royal-Louis* and the *Dauphin-Royal*, which were built simultaneously in 1667 at the Toulon's arsenal, are two of the best examples of this trend. In the late 1660s, the concern for aesthetics achieved the highest level, and that led to a stronger opposite reaction. According to this opinion, the extensive use of carving was useless and even dangerous since it overloaded both fore and aft parts causing

instability. Moreover, the bulky volume of the aft superstructure generated resistance to the motion of the hull, reducing the vessel speed. And, as important, the realisation of ornaments and decorations often caused a delay in the completion of ships. Furthermore, all those wooden statues increased the risk of fire started by enemy fireships. For these reasons, many captains of lower rate vessels, which were not under the watchful eye of the monarchy, often jettisoned many ornaments, preferring to sail a good ship than a beautiful one (Winfield & Roberts, 2017). Nevertheless, despite complaints from captains and admirals, Colbert was keen to demonstrate the perfection of French shipbuilding and the decoration of its warships.

2.2 COMPARISON WITH FOREIGN SHIPBUILDING

By the 1670s, the belief of Colbert had been shaken. Many vessels built with French traditional shipbuilding had started to show their flaws. As a consequence, the Minister sent his councillors to foreign shipyards to understand their secrets and compared the different techniques. The men choose for this task were Étienne Hubac (1648-1726), Pierre Arnoul (1651-1719) and Jean-Baptiste Antoine Colbert, Marquis de Seignelay (1651-1690) (Dessert, 1996). All reports demonstrated that differences between French, English and Dutch shipbuilding were not only about decoration. Indeed, French hulls shapes were not the same as foreign ones. The Dutch and the English built longer and narrower ship type. Instead, the French had developed larger, sturdier and thus heavier vessels. Because of that, they were also slower. To address this problem, they built hulls with rounded floor timbers and with deep draughts, so that they could slice through water more easily. However, deep draughts were combined with high castles, which generated a significant lurch. Consequently, heavier weights had to be in the lowest deck to stabilise the vessel. This meant that larger calibre guns should be collocated in lower decks. However, by adopting this solution, all those cannons could not be used with rough sea, and they were of less efficient even in good sea conditions. Vessels with deep draughts also had two more problems; they could run aground in shallow waters, and harbour approaches were more difficult.

Furthermore, France had heterogeneous shipbuilding traditions depending on geography. Arsenals placed on the Atlantic coast made narrower hulls, which often needed to be broadened, while vessels that were built following the Mediterranean shipbuilding tradition had raked bows, which meant that those ships were not adequately supported in rough seas. Since the 1670s, shipwrights had been moved from one arsenal to another to decrease these differences (Chaline, 2016). François Pomet (17th century) had worked at Toulon until 1669 when he moved to Rochefort; Jean-Pierre Brun (17th century), who had probably studied English shipbuilding in Britain (Anthiaume, 1922), moved to Brest from Rochefort; the Italian Blaise Pangolo (1650-1714 or 1719) worked at both Brest and Toulon, and the Dutch shipwright Voon (17th century) was at La Havre in 1672 and Rochefort in 1679 (Acerra, 1985). Nevertheless, the Mediterranean tradition prevailed on the western one, to the point that the Dutch shipwright Rodolphe Gédéon (Unk-1672), who had been working at Toulon's arsenal since 1645 (Boudriot, 1998), adapted to local styles of construction over time. The Flemish shipwright Hendrik Houvens (Unk-1690) (Anthiaume, 1922) and his son used a nordic construction technique. But when Hendrick died, his son was replaced by René Levasseur (1667-1727) from Toulon, and the nordic technique ceased (Dessert, 1996). Besides, northern countries did not seem particularly keen on sharing their shipbuilding secrets with the French. In the 1660s, Colbert tried to attract foreign shipwrights to French arsenals, especially from the Netherlands, so that they could teach their art to local carpenters. As successfully happened to Pomet, who was trained by Gédéon at Toulon (Acerra, 1985). At the same time, Louis XVI tried to hire Anthony Dean (1633-1721), who was one of the best English shipwrights of that time. However, both Colbert and the Sun King received negative answers. The Netherlands granted France six Second Rate vessels which were built in 1666. These were the *Conquérant*, the *Courtisan*, the *Invincible*, the *Normand*, the *Intrépide* and the *Neptune*. All ships left from Amsterdam to France on 5 May 1667 (Winfield & Roberts, 2017). English concessions were even less. The best that Louis XVI could obtain from his cousin Charles II (1630-1685) in the name of the Anglo-French alliance was that Dean built two small yachts for the pleasure of French nobility (Dessert, 1996).

In this context, the issue of decoration is no less important. The comparison with unadorned English and especially Dutch vessels pushed admirals and captains to breaking point; they were also supported by the evidence of the foreign fleets' better performance. The naval officer Guillaume d'Almeras, marquis of Mireval (1610-1676) was one of the most fervent opponents of ships decoration. He asked the elimination of galleries in a memorandum to Colbert and added a comment on Puget, in which he said that the King would do better to pay Puget to stay outside the arsenal (Brun, 1861). However, while England went further by following the Dutch example abolishing the projecting galleries and decreasing the decoration, many French naval officers did not agree with that position. Indeed, Louis de Matharel (1619-1673), the naval intendant of Toulon since 1665, wrote a letter to Colbert dated June 26, 1671 stating that: "*si M. d'Alméras a trouvé les dessins défectueux en quelque chose, la plupart des autres capitaines n'ont pas été de ce sentiment; e il est certain que le sieur Puget donne un tour à ses dessins qu'on ne voit point chez les autres nations*" ("if Mr. D'Almeras found the drawings to be faulty in anything, most of the other captains did not agree; and it is certain that Sieur Puget gives a turn to his drawings that we do not see in other nations"). This difference of opinions prompted France not to follow the radical Dutch choice and led the shipbuilding just to slightly decrease decorations, reducing both costs and weight of vessels (Brun, 1861).

Colbert could not ignore the superiority of foreign fleets, and thus, in 1671, he sent one of his councillors to investigate on English and Dutch Navies again; Jean-Louis

Girardin de Vauvré (1647-1724) who was the naval intendant from 1680 to 1716. He reported the same message of his predecessors, namely that nordic vessels were lighter and faster and thus better than French ones. Nevertheless, captains and officers ignored the critics on French shipbuilding, still convinced to follow the tradition. The strongest reaction came from shipwrights, especially from Brest and Toulon. They could not admit the superiority of another navy and took up the cudgels for French shipbuilding. Thus, there were two different ways of thinking between those who supervised and built vessels and those who tested vessels at sea. On the 13th of September 1673, Colbert enacted an Establishment about shipbuilding, which aimed to homologated French vessels with foreign ones. It also provided for a reduction of decorations and the abolition of galleries in the stern. However, given the hostility showed especially by shipwrights, shipyards did not adopt these rules quickly. Moreover, when the Establishment was issued, the French Navy was mostly composed of newly built vessels. Considering that the average life of vessels was between 15 and 20 years, France had to wait for the last decade of the seventeenth century to have a new generation of vessels built under that Establishment (Dessert, 1996). From 1694 to 1695, the financial constraints and the increase in the use of privateering stimulated the use of smaller vessels, boarding between 20 and 60 cannons. Indeed, these kinds of ships had lower construction costs and were more serviceable than the First Rates. Subsequently, from the 1720s onwards the French Navy started a renewal of its fleet involving longer hull shapes, which were thus faster and more suitable for wars on the ocean (Chaline, 2016). Whilst France started to reduce decoration at the end of the seventeenth century, English shipwrights had begun earlier to follow the Dutch way, as shown by the *Royal Sovereign* built from 1697 by Fisher Hardling (Unk-1705) at the Woolwich Dockyard and launched in 1701 (Winfield, 2010b). Actually, the sides of this vessel were almost unadorned, such as the bow. However, the stern part was still high decorated with elaborately carved ornaments; but the expensive realisation led the Admiralty to decide to limit carving and sculpture.

The political condition is relevant to understanding the reason for these different behaviours. The French absolute monarchy was quite different from the English policy because, since 1689 (the Glorious Revolution), England has become a constitutional monarchy. Thus, the sovereign did not have full control of the national treasury; consequently, the proposal to build a vessel would not have been accepted if the cost of excessive decoration aimed at glorifying the monarchs had been high (Winfield, 2010a). On the contrary, Colbert managed to afford the high cost of shipbuilding thanks to his autonomy in economic management. Indeed, he held many political offices; he was superintendent *des bâtiments*, superintendent *des arts et des manufactures* and he also managed the *contrôle général des finances*. Therefore, he could work synergistically in different fields (La Roncière, 1899). In addition, Louis XVI was not an expert in naval affairs, and even if he attended the *Conseil de Marine*'s meetings he did not have the technical skills to make important decisions about that; the King thought of vessels mainly as a means of political propaganda (Dessert, 1996). Unlike his French counterpart, Charles II was aware of the importance of naval power, and so he paid particular attention to naval affairs after the restoration. James II (1633-1701) reigned after him; the new sovereign was a skilled admiral, and he engaged in the Royal Navy's development too, through the eyes of an expert of naval affairs. Later, William of Orange (1650-1702) who became joint sovereign from 1689 proved to be a brilliant strategist also in naval warfare, so much so that in 1690 he asked the Parliament to allocate annual funds to the expansion of the fleet (Fincham, 1851). The divergence with the western European shipbuilding led to a negative opinion on the French fleet in foreigners' minds. Edmund Dummer (1651-1713), for instance, was an English shipwright who visited Toulon in 1638; having observed the fleet which was there stationed, he reported: "*A good fleet, but in appearance ill built, or through some weakness in long living have generally put their wales a little straight in the midships*", and he added about the *Royal Louis*: "*a great ship and glorious in her first carving, no doubt; but to my judgment not of good proportion, nor good workmanship, her figure under water I know not, nor is that above to be admired*" (Fox, 2007). Yet in the Sun King's vessels, the 'first carving' had the same value as 'good proportion'.

3. MASTERPIECES AFLOAT, THE *ROYAL LOUIS* AND ITS CONTEMPORARIES

The *Royal Louis*, shown in Figure 3, is a perfect example of French masterpieces afloat launched during the seventeenth century. From 1669 to 1692, she had been the flagship of the Mediterranean French fleet based at Toulon. Her construction lasted from 1666 to 1668 and was directed by the aforementioned Rodolphe Gédéon. At the time this vessel was without equal throughout France. She was one of the first *full three-decker* ships; that means, she had three full decks completely armed with guns, while the so-called "three-decker" vessels usually had only two full decks, and the upper one was indeed a half-deck. The *Paris* (1669) was the last vessel of that kind built by the French Navy (Winfield & Roberts, 2017).

The *Royal Louis* was the biggest French vessel of her day; she measured 2.400 tons and 163 feet (about 49 metres), with a beam of 44 feet (about 13 metres) and a height over the waterline of 48 feet (about 14.5 metres). Originally intended to board 800 men plus 9 officers, later she embarked about 850 men. Her armament exceeded other vessels too, since she had been designed for 110 guns located in decks, forecastle and quarterdeck. And even if the effective number of guns was reduced to 104 bronze pieces of artillery, it still exceeded the average, considering that First Rates generally boarded from 70 to 100 guns. For these reasons, she was rated as a *vaisseau du premier rang extraordinaire* along with the *Soleil Royal* (1670), which was her Atlantic counterpart. Thus, they were considered as extra-rate vessels, and that perception had been

strengthened through an Establishment enacted on 4 July 1670, which imposed they had to be the only two vessels with forecastles (Lemineur, 1996). The importance of the *Royal Louis* was immediately claimed, and the very fact that she was called after the King credited to her certain supremacy over other vessels. The high regard for the *Royal Louis* was also confirmed by the motto written in gold letters at the base of the mizzenmast: "*je suis l'unique dessus l'onde*, / *et mon Roy l'est dedans le monde*" ("I am the only one [to rule] above the waves, / and my king is the only one in the world").

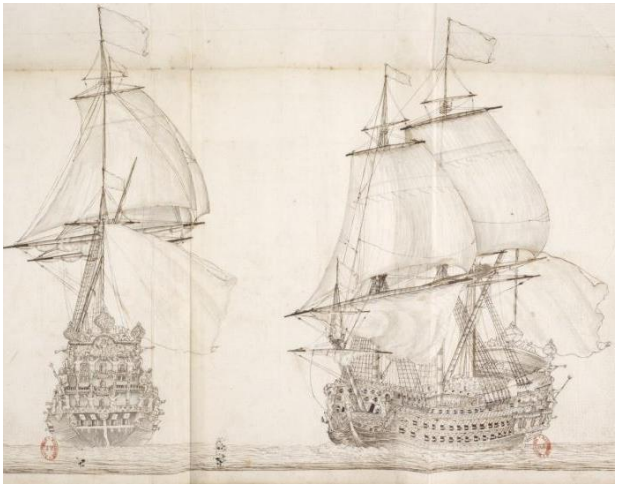

Figure 3: Drawing of the *Royal Louis*. In: Hayet. *Description du vaisseau le «*Royal Louis*»*. Marseille: Charles Brebion, 1677. Source: gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

In 1677, the superintendent of Toulon Hayet described the *Royal Louis* with these words: "*On peut dire que jamais aucun Navire n'a esté si enrichy de peinture & de sculpture que cet incomparable vaisseau*" ("It could be said that never a ship has been as enriched with paintings and sculptures as this incomparable vessel"; Hayet, 1677). Considering the importance of this vessel, it is not surprising that also the decorations were at the highest level. Hayet wrote this comment in a report dedicated to Pierre Arnoul, who had been *intendant général de la Marine de Levant* from 1675 to 1678 (Dessert, 1996), describing in detail the flagship. According to this description, the interior of the vessel was richly ornamented with gold, and refined paintings were hung on the walls. The *Chambre des Volontaires* (or *Chambre du Conseil*) and the *Corps de garde* (Aubin, 1702) were two of the most decorated areas, both placed on the middle deck. The *Chambre des Volontaires* contained golden mouldings enriching the environment and surrounding three golden frames. Inside, there were displayed the *Armes du Roy* and the coat of arms of César de Bourbon Duke of Vendôme (1594-1665), who became the *Grand-maître de la navigation* after Anne of Austria until 1665, and his son François de Bourbon-Vendôme duke of Beaufort (1616-1669), who took the same office after his father until 1669; that is because the *Royal Louis* should have been served as the flagship of the latter. The floor was made of precious materials as olive and ebony wood and ivory (Hayet, 1677). Inside the room, there were also two big paintings depicting mythological scenes about "Apollo and Python" from Ovid's Metamorphoses. One painting portrayed Cupid stringing his bow towards Apollo, and the other one showed Apollo chasing the nymph Daphne. The *Corps de garde* was below the sterncastle. King's initials found their place over a golden globe above the gateway. A big table was in the middle of the room; its legs were eight columns with capitals all in red jasper. There were four gunports decorated with *cartouches* (Syracuse Ornamental Company, 1923), and landscape and seascapes paintings were hung in golden frames on the wall. These two rooms had light blue ceilings on which decorations in gold and *grisaille* (Chilvers, 2004) depicted royal symbols as lilies, suns, crowns and royal initials. Naval officers' rooms were in the stern part too and were similarly decorated. On the walls, there were paintings with mythological scenes or royal symbols, and ceilings had golden decorations on a light blue background. Finally, on the back of the upper deck, there was the *dunette* (Aubin, 1702). This was the area reserved for the rooms of high-ranking officers (such as the *maître* or the *pilote*). In the *Royal Louis*, like in the biggest warships, the *dunette* was divided into two separated areas. The first had a hallway with four doors, which were embellished with colourful floral decorations. Inside, these rooms had the same splendour and wealth as the other areas. Everything was enriched by floral decorations, which surrounded the monarchy's symbols; paintings showing seascapes and battleship scenes were enclosed in golden frames. The second area of the *dunette* was in a more elevated position and contained eight smaller rooms decorated as the other parts. Nothing on the *Royal Louis* was left unadorned; even the powder magazine was decorated by drawing of *fleurs-de-Lys* enriched by golden threads, and the staircase leading to the upper deck had balustrades, which were made by painted panels.

The exterior was no exception. The bow was fully covered by statues. A representation of The Fame was surrounding by sea creatures as mermaids and mermen. Golden floral decorations run throughout the sides of the *Royal Louis* embellishing the balustrades and the gunports. The stern was the most sumptuous area; it was the stage on which artists could display their skills. Here, mermaids, mermen and seahorses seemed nestled in the galleries for a spell. On the upper side, there was the greatest sculpted group; a wooden statue of Louis XIV was sitting on a throne of justice holding a palm leaf as a symbol of peace and a laurel branch for the victory. At the feet of the king, there were two Turkish slaves, who represented the submission of unbelievers to Christendom. On the sides of the sovereign, Thetis and Neptune were offering him the goods of the Sea.

The craftsmanship required had to be able to realised artworks capable of showing the French monarchy's magnificence. Skilled artists were thus called to work on the *Royal Louis*. The painter Jean-Baptiste de la Rose (1612-1687) was in charge of controlling the drawings, and François Girardon (1628-1715) (Lagrange, 1868b), who was an important sculptor of his day, had to oversee the work and also made the statues of greatest

importance. He was supported by Pierre Puget, who was particularly appreciated for his marble sculptures, so much so that, in 1672, Colbert offered him a commission to make two statues for the new gardens of Versailles. There were also five teams composed of lesser-known sculptors as Nicolas Levray and Rombaud Languenu (1638-1718), who had to make all the decorations. Furthermore, the drawings for the major decorations had been made by the Versailles' painter Charles Le Brun (1619-1690), a decision that showed a deliberate intention to create a unity of style and a sense of identity which should reflect Louis XIV's power and greatness.

In Toulon's arsenal, there were many vessels under construction while the *Royal Louis* was being built. The largest of those were the *Monarque* (80 guns), which was built from 1666 to 1669, the *Royal Dauphin* (100 guns), built between 1666 and 1671, the *Paris* (80 guns) and the *Ile-de-France* (80 guns) (Lagrange, 1868b), both built from 1667 to 1671. They were also richly decorated, and so their realisation required a large number of artists. The increasing presence of artists inside French dockyards led to tense situations between them and other craftsmen. The superintendent of the artwork of Toulon Louis Le Roux d'Infreville (1642-1712) complained to Colbert about the artists behaviour in a letter of 21 April 1668 saying that "(…) *je feray bien mon possible pour les tenir en leur devoir, mais il est absolument nécessaire d'avoir un commandant comme le sieur Girardon ou une personne de sa suffisance pour conduire un sy bel ouvrage et assujettir les gens de ce mestier* (…)" ("I will all I can to keep them focused on their duty, but it is absolutely necessary to have a commander like Mr Girardon or a person with his self-importance to carry out such a beautiful work and to keep the people of this craft in their place"; Lagrange, 1868a). Even the judgment about the artwork was not always positive, as showed in a letter of 1670 from the superintendent Matharel to Colbert: "*les sculpteurs de la marine s'attachaient plus aux règles de leur art et à la démangeaison de faire de belles figures qu'au besoing, commodité et service du navire*" ("marine sculptors are more attached to the rules of their art and to the itch to make a good impression than to the needs, convenience and service of the ship"; Couffon, 1951). However, real *ateliers* were created inside the Toulon's arsenal, which turned out to be appealing to many others artists. Some of them were foreigners, especially coming from Italy and Flanders. This caused a migration phenomenon, and "*entre 1670 et 1680 plus de quatre-vingts sculpteurs et cinquante-cinq peintres se côtoyèrent ainsi à l'arsenal de Toulon, faisant de la ville l'une des plus peuplées de France en nombre de peintres et sculpteurs par habitant*" ("between 1670 and 1680 more than eighty sculptors and fifty-five painters gathered in the Toulon arsenal, making the city one of the most densely populated in France in terms of the number of painters and sculptors per inhabitant"; Théron, 2018). The other important French dockyards were experiencing a similar situation; the monarchy hired artists to secure the exclusive of their work, and that led to a sort of artistic patronage (Lacroix-Lintner, 2016). The importance of artworks was quickly increasing. So much that, in 1672, Girardon sent to the dockyards of Brest, Marseille and Toulon, 948 books of "*modèles de plâtre, dessins et estampes*" ("plaster models, drawings and prints"; Théron, 2003), which were useful for a refinement of the artistic technique. The advantage of training artists appropriately in the workplace was becoming evident, and it led to the creation of dedicated structures. In 1752, The *Académie de Marseille* was founded, and two years later a training programme started for artists bound to work in French arsenals. The other two schools for artistic training were located in Paris; they were the *École des Beaux-Arts*, which was founded in 1648 at the behest of Cardinal Mazarin (1602-1661) and the *Académie royale d'architecture*, which was established in 1671 thanks to Colbert.

The choice to adorn vessels so greatly led inevitably to high shipbuilding costs. Before talking about costs it is important to specify some differences in the coins used at that time. The *livre* was a coin created from a piece of metal and giving the weight of that piece, there was a specific number of coins that could be mint. The value of the coins was thus dependent on the weight/number of coins ratio. Frequently, weights and measures did not coincide between different places and thus there were *livres* with different values. To distinguish them, people added the places of origin to the common prefix. Among those coins, the most used were the *livre parisis* (lp) and the *livre tournois* (₶). The lp/lt ratio was 1,25. Since 1667 the *livre parisis* has been officially abolished and being disappeared every ambiguity, the coin could be called just *livre*.

In a letter to Colbert dated 4 November 1667, d'Infreville reported the estimated costs for the realization of "*sculptures, dorures et peintures*" ("sculptures, gilding, and paintings") of the stern of the *Royal Louis.* For De la Rose's project, the cost was about 37.060 *livres tournois*, 21.300 *livres* of which for the realization of sculptures and 15.760 *livres* "pour la despense de l'or, peinture et ouvriers qu'il faut pour decorer et peindre" ("for the expense of gold, paint and workers needed to decorate and paint") the sculptures. The cost estimated for Languenu's labour was 25.850 *livres*, and 23.800 *livres* were necessary for paying the Levray's team. The total amounted to almost 89.000 *livres* (De Montaiglon, 1855-6). Ten years later, considering the change in the currency's value, Hayet wrote in his report that the cost of the *Royal Louis* was 65.800 *livres*, whose 20.000 *livres* for the decoration and 27.000 *livres* for the carpentry (Hayet, 1677). Thus, artwork cost just a little less than the carpentry work. Hence, the monarchy was willing to spend the same amount of money for ornamentation and structural parts. That means aesthetics and seaworthiness had the same level of importance.

3.1 THE FLAGSHIPS' INACTIVITY

The *Royal Louis* was launched on the 1st of February 1668; she entered service in August 1669. Despite her great fame, her life had not been characterized by great enterprises. On the contrary, it was almost without military events. She was

built to be the flagship of the duke of Beaufort, an illegitimate grandson of King Henry IV of France (1553-1610) and cousin of Louis XIV. She should have left for a Mediterranean campaign immediately after her launch, instead, she remained anchored at Toulon's port for further work. On 11 May 1677, she left for her first and last military campaign, leading a naval squadron under Admiral Abraham Duquesne marquis of Bouchet (c. 1610-1688), headed for Messina (Sicily) to support rebels against Spanish dominance of the island. After that, no other war actions are reported for the next 14 years, until she was disarmed in 1691. In 1692, a homonymous vessel was launched, and therefore, the old *Royal Louis* was renamed *Royal Louis Vieux*. After almost 20 years of inactivity, she was finally broken up in 1697 (Winfield & Roberts, 2017).

In Figure 4 we can see the *Soleil Royal*, which was the western fleet's flagship, and she had a similar story. She was built at Brest by the shipwright Laurent Hubac (1607-1682) at the same time as the *Royal Louis*. She was launched in 1671 and participated in her first campaign only in 1690, during a mission aiming to land troops on the English coast. She was opposed by the English flagship *Sovereign of the Seas* during the battle of La Hougue. The *Soleil Royal* was overpowered by the enemy and had to withdraw. After that, in 1692, she sank off the coast of Cherbourg in the battle of Barfleur (Dessert, 1996). The correspondence of the marquise Marie de Rabutin-Chantal (1626-1696), known as Madame de Sévigné, with her daughter Françoise-Marguerite de Sévigné, countess of Grignan (1646-1705), has became famous for the many indiscretions about the coeval social life reported. In a letter of 1672, there is a piece of interesting news; indeed, she wrote: "*Rien n'est plus romanesque que vos fêtes sur la mer, et vos festins dans le Royal-Louis, ce vaisseau d'une si grande reputation*" ("Nothing is more fanciful than your parties at sea and your feasts in the *Royal-Louis*, this vessel of such great reputation"; Rabutin-Chantal, 1862). This suggests us that French aristocracy could find entertainment for its social life on board these wonders of the sea, not used for naval combats.

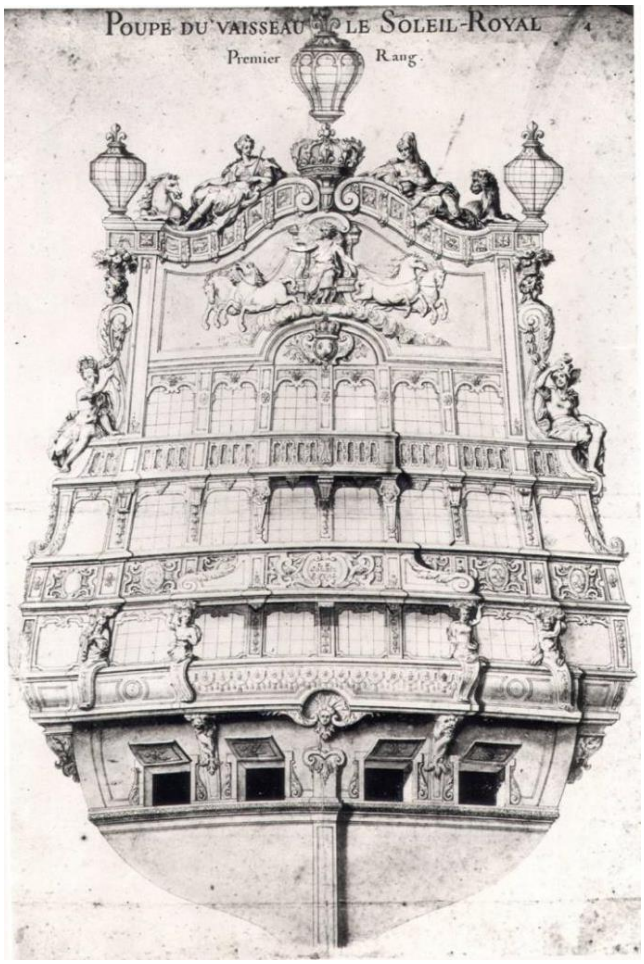

Figure 4: Poupe du Soleil Royal. 1669. By: Jean Bérain. Musée du Louvre, D.A.G. Paris. Credit: © Musée du Louvre, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais / Martine Beck-Coppola.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The common destiny of the two French flagships can perhaps make them appear as untapped potential considering the economic effort required and the many resources – including time – spent for their construction. But the truth is that these enormous and astonishing three-deckers, which had been built for a seventeenth-century European Navy, had high costs of maintenance. The huge crews needed to sail them, some eight hundred men for the biggest vessels, also substantially increased the operating costs. Moreover, also the repair costs of any damage to the wooden and golden decorations could be exorbitant. The cumbersome decoration of the topside adversely affected aerodynamics, making these vessels less manoeuvrable and slower than less decorated vessels. Sir Walter Raleigh (1552 or 1554-1618), who was one of the sea dogs of Elisabeth I (1533-1603), said on the matter: "*We find by experience that the greatest ships are least serviceable, go very deep to water, and of marvellous charge and fearful cumber. ... besides they are less nimble, less mainable, and very seldom employed*" (Oldys, 1829).

What was the purpose and what were the advantages of building such impressive vessels, despite the high costs, if

they were not useful for naval operations? It is clear that their value did not lie in their practicality but it was related to the symbolic character of power that a Navy took having that kind of ships in its fleet. For instance, when Charles I ordered the construction of the *Sovereign of the Seas*, he was pushed by a sort of competition with other sovereigns. And it was especially a reaction to the launch of the *Couronne*. First Rates had an institutional role that went beyond the mere use in military actions because they were mainly used for purpose of representation. Flagships were symbols of power and an ostentatious display of strength. In this sense, they were *cultural icons* with a specific identity, which tried to find its continuity by reusing the same names in the following flagships (Winfield, 2010a). This is the reason for the success of the name "*Royal-Louis*", which was used for the eighth time in the homonymous three-decker launched in 1811. And equally, many vessels were named *Sovereign* in the Royal Navy. They were such navies' pride which was shown as a warning to the other European powers.

And hence, appearance – the same appearance that is suggested by architecture, fashion, and generally by Louis XIV's style. Today, the word "appearance" has taken on a negative meaning, as it has become synonymous with superficiality. Nevertheless, the ostentation of power still has a place in the world and on the seas. It is a consequence of the constant arms race that has always put states in competition with each other. It has certainly changed in the means, but maybe not the essence.

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