

Review

by Filipe Castro

El Astillero de Colindres (Cantabria) en la Época de los Austrias Menores, Arqueología y Construcción Naval

by Miguel Cisneros Cunchillos, Rafael Palacio Ramos, and Juan M. Castanedo Galán

Edition Universidad de Cantabria y Ayuntamiento de Colindres, 1997
ISBN: 84-8102-169-5, 206 pages, 30 color plates, 9 b/w plates, and 20 drawings and maps, references, bibliography, 5 appendices, index, hard cover.

The small village of Colindres, Spain, is situated inside the Bay of Santoña, on the Cantabrian coast, and is already mentioned at the time of the Roman conquest. Colindres de Abajo is also cited in the eleventh century as one of the possessions of the kingdom of Navarra. In the seventeenth century this small community of about 160 inhabitants saw intense activity in its shipyards, where twenty-one ships were built for Spain's *Armada del Mar Océano*. When shipbuilding was at progress more than four hundred carpenters and laborers would lodge in this small village, sometimes for several months or even years.

This book presents an interdisciplinary view of the shipyard of Colindres and its relation with the surrounding villages during the seventeenth century. Ships were also built in four other places around Colindres on the fortified Bay of Santoña. The region had good shipbuilding resources, for here iron was mined and worked, and oak timber was abundant.

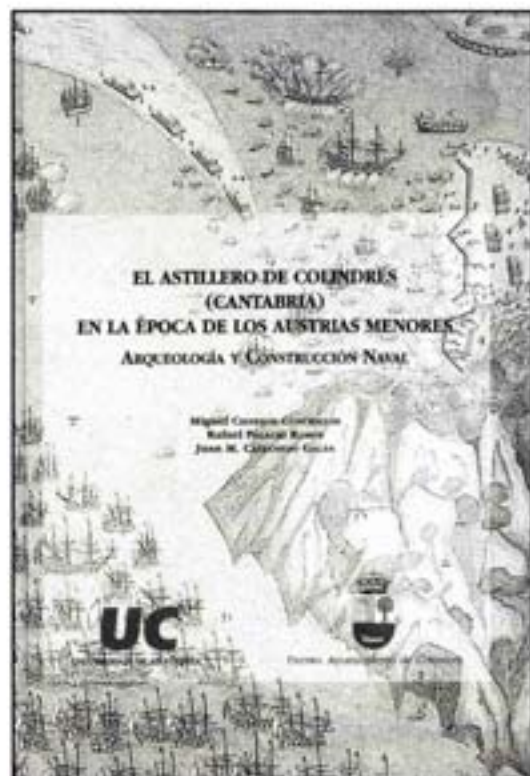
Extensive archival research, as well as the study of the local cartography and its toponyms support the study presented in this book. Following an archaeological survey of a selected area of the waterfront, excavations were performed that allowed archaeologists to identify three distinct areas. The first area was protected by a dam that has been interpreted as a storage area for wet timber. The second area had a small slope paved with clay and pebbles, which may have been used for the construction of ships, and the third area was artificially leveled with the same pavement that is thought to have held the shipbuilding stocks. Very few archaeological materials were found, mostly pot sherds—dated to a period after the activity of the shipyards and found in layers above the original pavement—tiles (dated from the late sixteenth to the early seventeenth centuries), and iron objects, mostly nails, of undetermined date.

The book generally provides accurate information. However, in the prologue João Baptista Lavanha, the Portuguese writer, mathematician, and cosmographer who is also the author of the *Livro Primeiro da Arquitectura Naval*, is mistakenly identified as being Spanish. In the first chapter a comprehensive historical introduction is given, including useful information about the geological characteristics of the area, its human occupation and economic activities.

The second chapter looks at the origins of the shipbuilding activity in and around Colindres, its characteristics and development, and its decay and eventual extinction. Following is a short overview of the history of the Spanish navy during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, particularly in the north and northwest of the Iberian peninsula. The contribution of this zone to the construction of ships is also emphasized. Information is provided on the dimension and tonnage of the first four galleons built in Colindres for the *Armada del Mar Océano*, by Martín de Araña, the man who had built Carla Rahn Phillips' *Six Galleons for the King of Spain* (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1986).

The third chapter discusses the organization of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century shipyards, supported by iconography and a bibliography. It also follows the excavation of the selected areas in the presumed area of the seventeenth-century shipyard at Colindres. Chapter Four explains how the fortifications of Santoña Bay and its surroundings were conceived and built, destroyed in 1639 by the French, and rebuilt soon after. In Chapter Five a clear and short summary is presented, followed by five appendices with historical information supporting and completing the text.

El Astillero de Colindres is a complete monograph of a site that was once important, but that has completely vanished, despite its rich history. I believe that its basic interest resides in the restitution of an almost forgotten history to the place where it belongs. It is also an important contribution for understanding the shipbuilding industry of that time. ☞



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