

Review

by Filipe Castro

Ça Ira, Vaisseau Français de 80 Canons 1781-1796

by Pierre Villié and Martine Acerra

Stamperia Sammarcelli, Biguglia, 1998

99 pages, 7 b/w plates, 34 drawings and maps, 6 tables, bibliography, paper cover.

This very interesting book in straightforward, uncomplicated French presents a study of the archaeological data retrieved from the ship-of-the-line *Ça Ira*. The analysis is complemented by a study of some of the most important French works on naval architecture of the eighteenth century. The vessel was built at Brest in 1781 as an eighty-gun ship and first christened *Couronne*. In 1791, in the heat of the French Revolution, it was renamed *La Révolution*, and in 1793, after the proclamation of the Republic, its name changed again to *Ça Ira*, after the line of a revolutionary poem "*Ah! Ça ira, ça ira, ça ira, les aristocrates on les pendra*" ("All the aristocrats will hang").

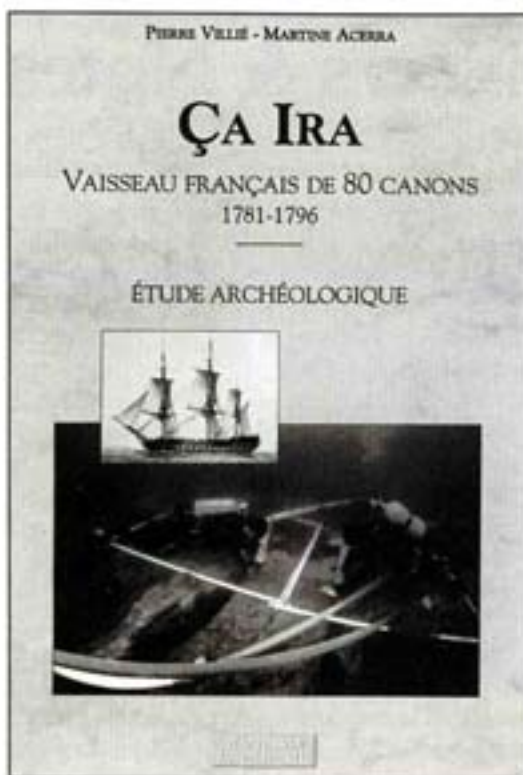
On the third of March, 1795, *Ça Ira* left Toulon in the fleet of Admiral Martin. The ships sought to land six thousand French troops on Corsica and storm the strong British positions on the island. As the victim of unfortunate circumstances—and Captain Horatio Nelson in H.M.S. *Agamemnon*—*Ça Ira* was lost to the British fleet of Admiral Hotham only a few days later, during the Battle of Cape Noli. Transformed into a hospital ship and stationed in Saint-Florent on the northern coast of Corsica, *Ça Ira* burned by accident in April 1796. Pierre Villié's team found it in 1989 and spent the next five years excavating the site. This book is the result of that work.

Ça Ira was excavated in the Gulf of Saint-Florent during five field seasons of four weeks each. The authors compare construction details observed on the wreck with theories of naval architecture propounded by Blaise Ollivier (*Traité de construction*, 1736), Henri Louis Duhamel du Monceau (*Éléments de l'architecture navale ou pratique de la construction des vaisseaux*, 1752), M. de Duranti de Lironcourt (*Instruction élémentaire et raisonnée sur la construction pratique des vaisseaux, en forme de dictionnaire*, 1771), and Vial du Clairbois (*Encyclopédie méthodique de la Marine*, 1783-87).

The book is divided into five chapters. The first chapter gives a cursory glimpse of the first anniversary of the storming of the Bastille in 1789 and the general revolutionary euphoria that led to the adoption of the song *Ça Ira* as the name of a war vessel. The second chapter is a short but comprehensive account of the loss of the *Ça Ira*. The third chapter, written by Martine Acerra, tells the story of the appearance and development of the 80-gun French ship-of-the-line, and presents the context in which the *Couronne* was designed and built. In the fourth chapter, an analysis of the archaeological data is presented. Sections of this chapter discuss the keel and false keel (p. 32), the frames (p. 40), the keelson and maststep (p. 44), the planking (p. 48), the copper sheathing (p. 52), the drainage system (p. 54), the main mast step (p. 67), the ballast (p. 71), the archaeological finds, including the barrels for fresh water and the ammunition (p. 73), the kitchen (p. 78), and the marks of the British presence (p. 79). A short fifth chapter with conclusions and a table summarizing the archaeological analysis finishes the book. There is no index.

Very easy to read and presenting good illustrations—although the captions can sometimes be mistaken as titles and text—this book provides an interesting look at the eighteenth-century evolution of French ship design and construction. I believe that it merits reading, both by scholars and avocational archaeologists.

For many reasons, Pierre Villié and his *Tech Sub Association* are a very good example of what an independent non-profit organization can achieve. It has trained avocational divers to perform scientifically informed work—the publication of the Calvi I wreck by this author in the *Cahiers d'Archéologie Subaquatique* requires mention here. The association has performed excellent work in the study and dissemination of information concerning underwater cultural heritage and deserves credit for those accomplishments. ♣



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