The Mariner's Mirror

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rmir20>

JAL VERSUS RABELAIS

A. B. Wood

Published online: 22 Mar 2013.

To cite this article: A. B. Wood (1919) JAL VERSUS RABELAIS, *The Mariner's Mirror*, 5:3, 81-88, DOI: [10.1080/00253359.1919.10654862](https://doi.org/10.1080/00253359.1919.10654862)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00253359.1919.10654862>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is

expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

The *Royale* (No. 901), a model of the time of Louis XIV. on a scale of 1-17 (about), is a Galeass 148 ft. 10 in. long. Galeasses were large three-masted galleys with poop, forecastle and a covered battery. This contemporary model was restored and finished in the Museum.

The sailing fleet shows us first a superb relic, a contemporary model on a scale of 1-36 (No. 910) of the *Royal Louis*, a ship of 108 guns of the year 1692, there is also another model (No. 906) of a ship of 120 guns of 1700, unrigged and incomplete.

Other exhibits of this epoch that must be mentioned are a number of models on a scale of 1-40 made in the Museum before 1850 from contemporary plans. These are the *Soleil Royal* (No. 905), a ship of 104 guns that was in Tourville's fleet in 1690 and 1692—a model noteworthy for the carving with which it is ornamented—three models (907-9) of ships of 82, 60 and 34 guns, and six others (475-480) of ships under construction. All these belong to the period 1690-1700.

(*To be continued.*)

JAL VERSUS RABELAIS.

By A. B. Wood.

The greater part of "Memoire No. 9" of Auguste Jal's "Archéologie Navale" is devoted to the consideration of certain passages in Book IV. of Rabelais' "Vie de Pantagruel." He mentions that some of the most learned admirers of Rabelais consider his work as "not only a bold and striking political satire . . . but also a real encyclopædia into which he put all the knowledge of his time, all the words in the French dictionary and even all technical terms." He then asks: "Can this fourth book of Pantagruel . . . be considered as the nautical chapter of the Encyclopædia? Did Rabelais intend to portray shipping of the time of Francis I. and Henri II.? Did he know anything about nautical matters and can one feel confidence in him?" He concludes "that Rabelais had very superficial ideas of naval affairs; that he knew hardly anything of nautical nomenclature, and nothing of tactics or the use of technical terms; that he had consulted no one on the handling

of a vessel ; that he could not distinguish between a ship and a galley . . . and that in pouring out on to his paper nautical words which were bound sometimes to fit in appropriately he was not acting seriously."

Of course, Rabelais was no seaman. After all, though, he was writing a sort of fairy story and was therefore not bound down by considerations of space and time. What did it matter to the story if he mixed up words belonging to ships and galleys, to the Mediterranean and the Channel, to his own century, and those before it ? Besides, he must have been writing from memory ; using many words which he can never have seen in print or even manuscript, and which must have varied in pronunciation almost as much as they would have varied in spelling if they were ever written down. In such conditions we have no right to demand a very high standard of accuracy.

Jal finds fault chiefly with the description of the gale in chapters 18-23 of Book IV. I propose to quote certain parts of this, to try to interpret and explain them and to consider Jal's objections as they arise. To begin :—" Le pilot . . . (expecting bad weather) . . . fait mettre voile bas, Meiane, Contremeiane, Triou, Maistralle, Epagon, Civadiere : fait caller les Boulingues, trinquet de proue et Trinquet de gabie, descendre le grand Artemon et de toutes les antennes ne rester que les grizelles et coustieres." The difficulties begin with this list of sails. *Meiane* is the Spanish or Italian *Mesana* or *Mezana* and means *Mizzen*. *Contremeiane* is either the *Mizzen topsail*, or else the second of the two mizzens, *Main-Mizzen* or *Bonaventure Mizzen* according to which is meant by the simple *Meiane*. Evidence can be found for either interpretation. Jal insists that the *Triou* was a square stormsail set in place of a galley's mainsail, and that it would thus have been impossible for *Triou* and *Mais-tralle* to be set at the same time. Personally, I take *Triou Mais-tralle* as a equivalent of *Main Course*. Jal tries to prove that *Tref* or *Trief* (which he acknowledges corresponds to *Triou*) never meant *sail* in general, but to my mind he fails. He has to admit that many writers use *Voiles* and *Trefs* as equivalents, while a glance through the " English " inventories of 1410 (M.M. IV., 168-170) shows us *Trie'* used continually for the main part of a sail without its bonnets. *Maistralle* is an adjective formed from *Maestra*, the mainsail of a galley.

Civadiere means *Spritsail* ; there is no doubt of that. Jal's objection that the spritsail " se serrait mais ne se rentrait pas dans le navire " (was furled, but was not taken into the ship),

and, therefore, should not be said to be *lowered*, seems to me to show ignorance, and to be childish even if it had been strictly true. *Epagon* is certainly a difficulty. The only contemporary words to which Jal could refer it were the Provençal *Pigon* or Italian *Spigone*, a sort of stunsail boom which spread the peak of a galley's largest mainsail. He quotes a Neapolitan lawyer as stating that *Epagonta* in Greek meant a *Block* (pulley) and asks: "Rabelais confondit il la poulie avec une voile?" (Did Rabelais confuse the block with a sail?) I don't think he did. I fancy *Epagon* is a Hellenism for *Bonnet*, since *Epagein* in Greek meant *Add*. Whether Greek seamen of any age ever called a bonnet *Epagon* I do not know, but I feel pretty sure that *Bonnet* is what Rabelais meant.

After this the pilot took in the *Boulingues*, *Trinquet de prore* and *Trinquet de gabie* and lowered the *Grand Artemon*. *Boulingues* are *Topsails* as Jal says, though his derivation from *Bowl* and *Linen*—canvas which was lowered into the bowl-shaped top—is merely ludicrous. Unusually *Trinquet de prore* would mean *Foresail* and *Trinquet de gabie*, *Main Topsail*, but I think in this case the meaning is *Fore Topsail* and *Main Topsail*. This is the meaning given in Littré's French Dictionary under *Boulingue*. The question whether the *Boulingues* and *Trinquets* were the same or not will be considered later. *Grand Artemon* is *Fore Course*; *Artemon* in mediæval Romance languages was always *Foresail*. So far, therefore, the pilot has "shortened sail. Mizzen, Main Mizzen, Main Course (and) Bonnet, Spritsail; taken in the Topsails, Fore-Topsail and Main-Topsail, lowered the Fore Course.

"Et de toutes les antennes ne rester que les grizelles et cous-tieres." Literally this reads: "and of all the yards left only the ratlines and shrouds." Jal accuses Rabelais of counting the shrouds and ratlines among the yards, but repents of this and paraphrases the sentence thus: "so that no yards were left aloft and that with them all lowered on deck there was nothing to be seen save the masts, shrouds and ratlines." In other words: "of all the yards (and rigging) left nothing save the ratlines and shrouds." A very slight emendation—the omission of *de*—would give us: "lowered the fore course and all the yards, leaving only the shrouds and ratlines. After all, this would be very mild compared with what has to be done to the text of Boteler and kindred writers. Still, if this is allowed, there is a temptation to read *Grand Antenne* (*Main Yard*) for *Grand Artemon* and once started on the path of emendation it is difficult to stop.

The corresponding passage in the English version by Motteux may be a more or less intelligent adaptation of Captain Samuel Sturmeý or some such authority, but is certainly not a translation of Rabelais. According to Motteux the pilot "made them first settle their topsails, take in their spritsail; then he cried, 'In with your topsails, lower the foresail, tallow under the parrels, braid up close all them sails, strike your topmasts to the cap, make all sure with your sheep's feet, lash your guns fast. All this was nimbly done.'" Smith's modern translation is better, though it is spoilt, in my opinion, by a too slavish following of Jal. In this version the pilot "had the sails taken down, Mizzen-sail. Mizzen top-sail, Lug-sail, Main-sail, Pulleys, Sprit-sail; had the Top-sails hauled down, Fore-top and Main-top, lowered the Mizzen-mainsail and all the Yard-arms, leaving only the Rattlings and the Shrouds." The Dutch translation of 1682 found this passage too much for him, for his list of sails runs: "main-topsail, sprit-sail and spritsail-topsail, fore topsail, stunsail, foresail, mizzen," and ends with the lowering of the "main top-gallant mast and all other topmasts . . . so that there was nothing save the pennants to catch the wind."

The next lot of technical terms comes from the lips of Panurge, a landsman and one half mad with fright. "*Zalas les veles sont rompues, le Prodenon est en piéces, les Cosses esclatent, l'arbre du hault de la guatte plonge en mer; la carene est au Soleil, nos Gumenes sont presque tous rourpts.*" Jal considers *Veles* a misprint for *Vetes* or *Vettes*, and according to Smith, "he is supported by the best editions." He makes *Vettes* the same as the mediaeval *Betas* and tries to prove that the meaning is *Hal-yards*. (See M.M. IV., 183, 250.) It seems to me more likely that *Vetes* (if this is what Rabelais wrote) are *Bitts*; that is the meaning of *Vitas* or *Bitas* in Spanish. Of course, *Veles* may be an equivalent of *Voiles*, though all the sails had, as Jal notes, been taken in before the gale began. The *Prodenon* (Italian *Prodano*) was the big *Tackle* used on board a galley for raising the masts and for other duties.

It is with *guatte* that Jal seems to me to go most hopelessly astray. He takes it as the same as *gate*—the *Manger*, a break-water built on the main deck to keep water which entered by the hawse-holes from coming aft. The expression, "l'arbre du hault de la guatte" he dismisses without comment as, "le beauupré"—the bowsprit. It is difficult to see why Rabelais should make Panurge use such a clumsy way of expressing himself. Is it likely that a man who could talk glibly of *bitts*, *tackles* and

manger would not know what to call the bowsprit and would have to say "the spar from above the manger?" Motteux, Smith, and the Dutch translator agree in translating this expression as "the Maintop-masthead" ("het opperste van de mast.") This is obviously more likely as a contrast to the next exclamation, "the keel is in the air," if there is only some evidence for such a translation. This there is; *gata* is the Spanish for the Truck of a galley's mast. This then is what Panurge says:—"Alas, the bitts are broken, the tackle is in pieces, the timbers are splitting, the mast is dipping in the sea up to the truck: the keel is in the air, our ropes are nearly all parted."

He goes on: "Zalas Zalas, ou sont nos bolingues? Tout est frelore bigoth. Nostre trinquet est avau l'eaüe. Zalas, à qui appartiendra ce bris? Amis, prestez, moi ici derriere une de ces rambades. Enfants, vostre Landrivel est tumbé." This is fairly simple: "Alas, Alas, where are our topsails? All is lost, by God. Our topmast is under water. Alas, to whom will this wreck belong? Friends, put me here behind one of these bulkheads. Lads, your top-crane has fallen." *Avau l'eaue* means strictly *down stream*. Smith and Motteux both translate it as *run adrift*. I merely suggest *under water* as an alternative. *Rambade* is the bulkhead and platform across a galley's bows. Both English translators give *Wales* or *Bends*; why, I do not know. *Landrivel*, from *andrivellum*, is the crane and tackle used to hoist ammunition to the top in the "craklene pokis" of the "Complaynt of Scotland."

Finally, in spite of his terror, Panurge gives vent to several thoroughly sensible exclamations. "Helas, n'abandonnez l'orgeau, ne aussi le tirados. Je oy l'agneuillot fremir. Est-il cassé? Pour Dieu saulvons la brague, du frenel ne vous souciez."—"Alas, don't leave the tiller, nor the steering tackle. I hear the rudder pintle creaking. Is it broken? For God's sake, let us save the stopper; don't worry about the preventer-stopper." These terms are fairly clear, though Rabelais writes *orgeau* for *arjau*, *agneuillot* for *aiguillot* and *jernel* for the Italian *frenello*. Here again Motteux is not a very safe guide. "Alas! do not let go the main-tack nor the bowline. I hear the block crack; is it broke? For the Lord's sake, let us save the hull, and let all the rigging be damned." Not a single technical term is rightly translated. It is only from the context and from the general shape of the sentences that we can guess where the translator is. The Dutch version with "bowsprit" for *agneuillot* and "boat" for *brague* is not much better.

Now comes Brother John, partly repeating orders that he hears given, and partly expressing his own thoughts : " Inse. C'est bien dict. Inse, inse, inse. Vieigne esquif. Inse. Vertus Dieu, qu'est ce là ? Le cap est en pieces. . . . Orche. C'est bien dict. Guare la caveche hau mousse . . . " " Hoist. That is well said. Hoist, hoist, hoist. Mind the boat. Hoist. Good God, what is that ? the ship's head is in pieces. . . . Port. That is well said. Mind your head boy . . . " Jal makes *Cap* the rope with which the hoisting is being done—apparently out of sheer perversity, since he takes it as the ship's head when next it occurs. *Orche* is the same as *Orse* or *Orza*, a Mediterranean word for the port side of the ship (or sometimes the weather side), the opposite to *Poge*. Smith takes " C'est bien dict " as equivalent to " Ay, Ay," and is very likely right in doing so.

At last we are told directly some of the pilot's orders. " Uretacque, hau, cria le pilot, Uretacque. La main à l'insail. Amene Uretacque. Bressine. Uretacque guare la pane. Hau amure, amure bas, Hau Uretacque, Cap en houlle. Desmanchez le heaulme. Accapaye." This really does give us food for reflection and conjecture. Jal exclaims " Ouf ! Ou en veut venir le pilote ? " and gives it up as a bad job. Motteux is worse than useless. " Helm a-lee, hoh ! " cried the pilot. " Helm a-lee ; a hand or two at the helm ; about ships with her ; helm a-lee ; helm a-lee. Stand off from the leech of the sail. Hoh ! belay, here make fast below ; hoh, helm a-lee, lash sure the helm a-lee and let her drive." This has practically nothing to do with what Rabelais wrote. *Uretacque*, which Motteux translates *helm a-lee* is the *Wartack* or preventer tack. *Amene Uretacque*, far from meaning " about ships with her," probably means " slack away the wartack." As far as I can gather the pilot is heaving to, and is giving orders on two separate subjects, setting sail and steering. " Wartack ho," cried the pilot, " Wartack. Hands to the halyards. Slack away wartack. Hook on. Wartack. Look out you don't get taken aback. Ho ! tack, down tack. Ho ! Wartack. Head up into it. Unship the helm. Luff."

Of course the order " Desmanchez le heaulme " is too much for Jal. " That is another idea altogether," he exclaims. " To steer and heave to more easily he is going to pull out the tiller, take away the helm, unship it ! " How can one clever man think of another as such an idiot ? Would anyone who knew one end of a ship from the other suggest disabling the steering gear in the middle of a gale ? Whatever " unship the helm " means it is

certainly not that. Obviously something has to be disconnected, and to me it seems pretty certain that it is the whipstaff. After all, the tiller has two ends and we know that it was the custom in heavy weather to unship the whipstaff and steer with tackles. Later on we shall see that one of the first orders when the weather improves is : " Plante le heaulme." Whether a big ship of 1540, or thereabouts, would have had a whipstaff, I must leave to others to decide. To me this passage is evidence that she would.

Presently the weather moderates, and the pilot makes sail again. At the moment the ship is lying to under her main course. " Au trinquet de gabie Inse, inse Aulx boulingues de contremeiane Le cable au capestan, Vire, vire, vire. La main à l'insail. Inse inse." " To the main topsail. Hoist, hoist. To the main-mizzen topsail. The rope to the capstan. Heave, heave, heave. Hands to the halyards. Hoist, hoist." Jal disapproves of the " boulingues de contremeiane," and says : " The main-mizzen had no topsail, and even if it had, it would have been at the most one and not several. I agree that the plural is an error, but I see no objection to a single main-mizzen topsail. There is plenty of evidence that such a sail existed in the middle of the sixteenth century. I fancy it was always a lateen, though there may have been cases of a small square topsail sheeted in the top, for there was certainly no crojack yard. This suggests that " boulingues " may have been a name for lateen topsails only, and that the *boulingues* which were taken in before the storm may have been distinct from the square *trinquets* on the fore and main topmasts. Another possibility is to read *et* for *de* before *contremeiane*, and thus set both mizzen topsails *and* the main-mizzen sail. This, however, involves emendation, and is therefore undesirable.

" Plante le heaulme. Tiens fort à garant. Pare les couets. Pare les escoutes. Pare les Bolines. Amure babord. Le heaulme soubz le vent. Casse escoute de tribord. Vien du lo. Pres du plain. Hault la barre. (Hault est, respondoient les matelots). Taille vie. Le cap au seuil." " Ship the helm (the whipstaff ?) Hold hard on the tackle. Clear away the tacks. Clear away the sheets. Clear away the bowlines. Port tack. Down helm. Haul taut starboard sheet. Luff. Full and by. Up helm. (Up it is, replied the seamen.) Keep her going. Head for the harbour-mouth." As I understand this, the pilot has the whipstaff refitted, but takes care to keep the steering tackles manned until this is done. He then keeps close-hauled on the port tack, while getting ready to set more sail. The

helmsman gets a little too near the wind, and has to bear away again. Finally, he is given a mark ashore to steer by.

"Malettes hau. Que l'ou coue bonnette. Inse Inse. C'est bien dict et advisé disoit frere Jean. Sus, sus, sus, enfans diligemment. Bon. Inse, inse. A poge. C'est bien dict et advisé. . . . Mole. C'est bien et doctement parlé. Mole, mole. . . . Au trinquet de prore. Inse, inse." All this is fairly simple. *Malettes* are *Eyelets* through which went the lacing which attached a bonnet to its course. *Mole* is *Slacken*. Jal applies it to the wind without much reason. The pilot's orders and brother John's remarks seem to run much as follows:—"Pass the lacing (*literally* Eyelets ho). Shift the tack to the bonnet. Hoist, hoist. It is well said and considered, said brother John. Up, up, up, lads, roundly. Good! Hoist, hoist. Star-board. It is well said and considered. . . . Slack away. It is well and wisely spoken. Slack away, slack away. . . . To the fore topsail (or foresail). Hoist, hoist." According to Jal *A poge* must be a misprint for *appoge*, an Italianism for *appuye*, meaning *haul*. Why, it is impossible to say. The fact that the pilot is busy making sail is no reason why he should no longer attend to the conning of the ship.

Throughout his examination of these passages in Rabelais, Jal seems to me to be deliberately unjust. When the ship is gathering way, and before the helmsman is told to head for the harbour the orders given are exactly the same as those in "The Complaynt of Scotland" and yet Jal holds the one passage up to ridicule and the other to admiration. "Luff. Full and by. Up helm." ("Vien du lo. Pres du plain. Hault la barre") is practically identical with "A luf. Come no near. Holabar" and shows the same mistake on the part of the helmsman. The fancied superiority of the Scottish writer is based simply on a ridiculous misreading and a worse misinterpretation of "Come no near" which does little to justify Jal's depreciation of his own countryman. I do not wish to exalt Rabelais as an authority on nautical matters. Still less do I wish to sneer at Jal, whose works are still the indispensable authority on nautical archæology. I do however wish to urge very strongly that in the case of his attack on Rabelais Jal's judgment was somehow at fault and that Rabelais though a landsman was far from being the ignorant lubber that Jal would make him.