

THE  
SHIPS & BOATS  
*of*  
Ahoy™

It is my great pleasure to share this excerpt from Ahoy's Ship Catalogue as a taster of the full product headed to you soon. Please note that we have not intervened to clarify terminology outlined in the Introduction and have not provided our footnotes for this excerpt, as both are better and more safely contained within the full text. Despite this, I hope you enjoy learning more about our Nemesis and the mysterious French privateer-cutter behind her.

Thank you for your patience, which I hope and trust will be duly rewarded with our final product!

Your servant,

John



## VUE du COTRE 1<sup>e</sup> NEMESIS

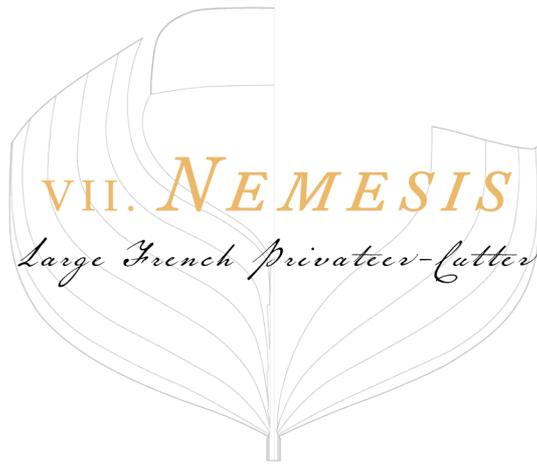
TABLE OF THE PRINCIPAL DIMENSIONS OF THE SAID VESSEL,  
BUILT IN 1778 BY MESSIEURS DENÿS.

Dimensions				Tons Burden	N <sup>o</sup>		Rig
Length of the		Breadth	Depth in Hold		of Men	& nature of guns	
Gun deck	Keel						
75	63	24	11	120	95	16 8pd.	Cutter



TABEAU GÉNÉRAL DES DIMENSIONS PRINCIPALES DU DIT  
NAVIRE, CONSTRUIT EN 1778 PAR MESSIEURS DENÿS.

Dimensions				Tonneaux	N <sup>o</sup>		Grément
Longeur du...		Largeur du bau	Creux		Hommes	& espèce des canons	
Pont principal	Quille						
75	63	24	11	120	95	16 8l.	Cotre



## VII. NEMESIS

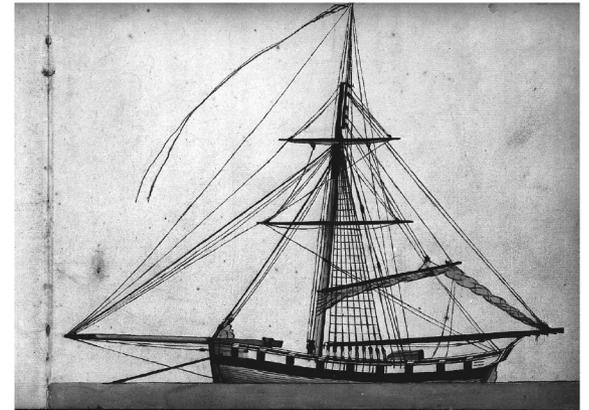
*Large French Privateer-Cutter*

*Nemesis represents the brief dominance of the fast and deadly sailing cutter among small vessels of war. Having evolved from smuggling sloops and privateers, these extremely powerful and fast single-masted cruisers terrorised shipping the world over.*

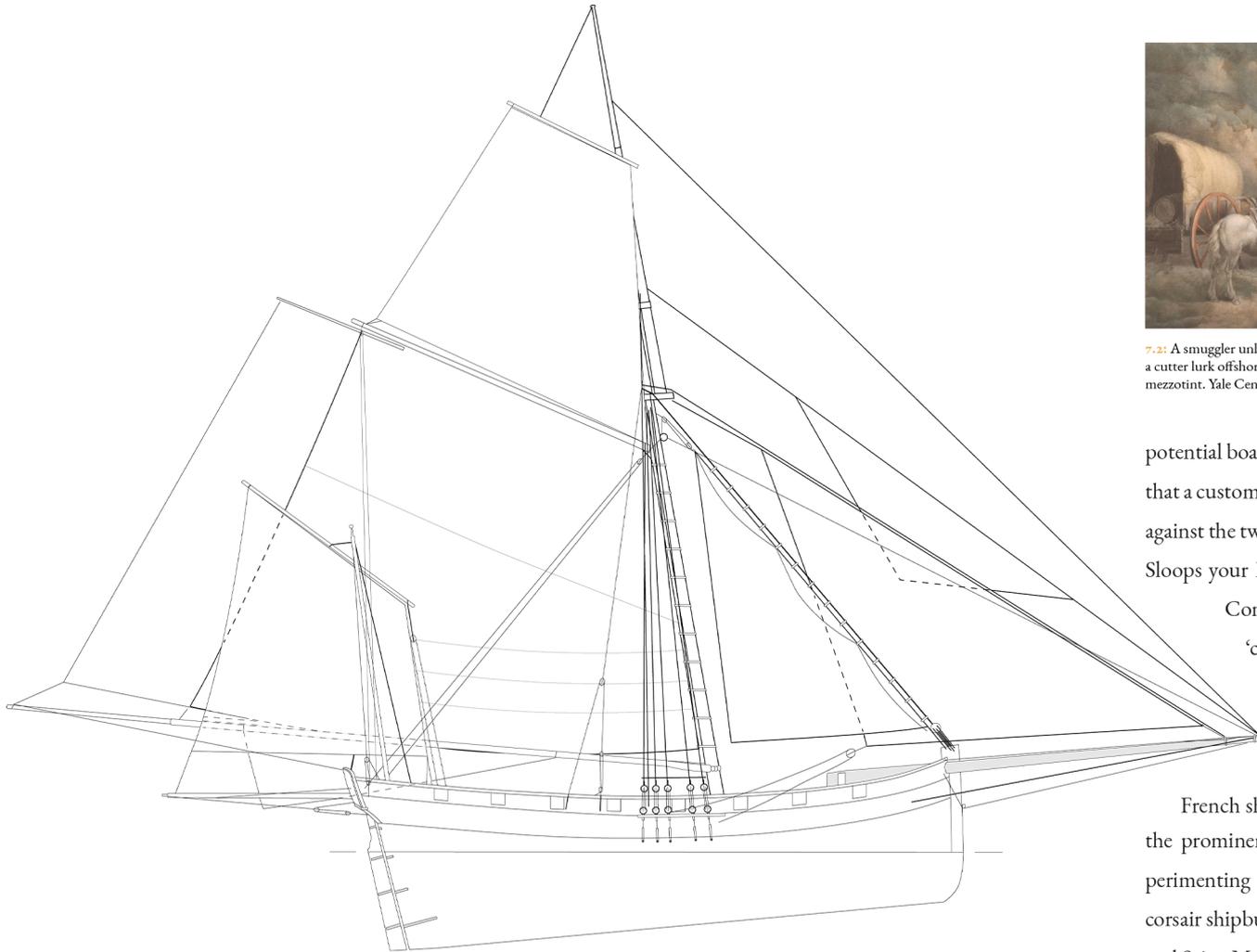
**‘A NOISY FELLOW, A BREEDER OF RIOTS’:** the eighteenth-century ‘tapageur’ was a dangerous, audacious character.<sup>103</sup> Seldom do vessels take so well to their namesake as did the French privateer-cutter *Tapageur*, the inspiration for *Aboy’s Nemesis*: bold to the point of raucousness and both over-gunned and over-rigged, *Tapageur* was built for trouble. From the high-stakes smuggling trade of the English Channel to the *guerre de course* in the Americas and beyond, cutters made an outsized mark on maritime history which continues today. *Nemesis* embodies this tradition in *Aboy*, at present the game’s only true cutter and its largest single-masted vessel.

### THE FIRST CUTTERS

English shipbuilders devised the earliest seagoing ‘cutters’ as the pinnacle of smuggling craft, different from traditional trading vessels in speed and firepower. In the first place, illicit trade incentivised speed: contraband goods were typically both high-value and low-volume, allowing builders to sacrifice hold capacity in favour of speed. If their speed was insufficient to evade the King’s vessels, however, smugglers turned to firepower. Built in secret and departing port with fishing crews, English smuggling vessels took extra crew when out of sight from land to man increasing armaments or defend against



7.1: Contemporary English cutters bear clear resemblance to their counterparts across the Channel. Edward Gwynn, *Gunboat showing rigging and two furled sails*, ca. 1780. National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London (PAG3850).



7.3: *Nemesis*'s long running bowsprit and large, raked mainmast give her a tremendous sail area compared to vessels of similar size and firepower.



7.2: A smuggler unloads goods to a waiting horse and carriage, while a coaster and, further, a cutter lurk offshore. Detail from George Morland, *Smugglers*, 1793. Hand colored mezzotint. Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection (B1985.36.1390).

potential boarding parties (FIG. 7.2).<sup>104</sup> The situation was such that a customs officer warned authorities in the late 1740s that, against the twelve known smugglers on the south coast, ‘all the Sloops your Honours have in the Service will not be able to Contend.’<sup>105</sup> By means of these improvements, the ‘cutter’, as these dangerous craft became known soon thereafter, won a widespread reputation.

When many smugglers turned to privateering in the Seven Years’ War,

French shipbuilders noted their success. As early as 1756, the prominent merchant shipbuilder Daniel Denÿs was experimenting with English-style sloops of war.<sup>106</sup> Hotbeds of corsair shipbuilding such as Denÿs’s native Dunkirk (FIG. 7.4) and Saint-Malo became the centres of France’s cutter building for corsairs and French *gardes-côtes* working against them. It was not until the end of the 1760s, however, that a new wave of French naval authorities decided to adopt the English cutter for naval service.<sup>107</sup>

## SHIPS OF AHOY



7.4: Unknown, *Corsaire la Légère, lancée à Dunkerque le 16 mars 1797, 1797*, Bibliothèque nationale de France, département Estampes et photographie.

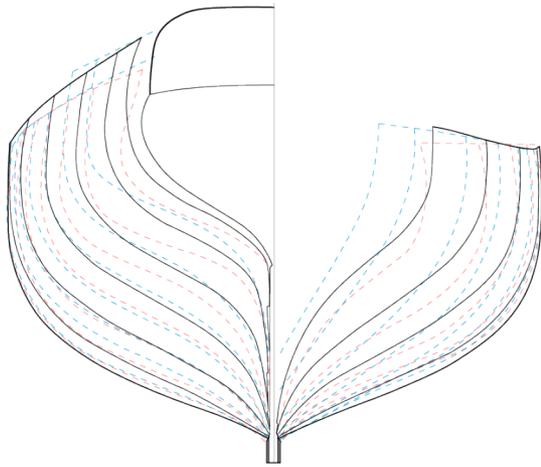
### A FRENCH WEAPON

Impressed by a model of an improved English cutter, the French Minister of Marine authorised the construction of a number of small cutters. This first batch of naval cutters adhered to three designs of cutters from 40-45 feet in length; two from the *ingénieur-constructeur* Leon Michel-Guignace (the *Lévrier* and *Sauterelle*); and one by Daniel Denÿs (the *Puce*).<sup>108</sup> Though successful—particularly Denÿs’s *Puce*, which landed him an official appointment as *sous-ingénieur-constructeur sans appointements*—the government authorised no

further building for seven years. Following France’s declaration of war against Britain in 1778, however, the Minister of Marine entrusted Daniel Denÿs with the task of constructing cutters of almost double the previous batch’s size, mounting more firepower than ever before.<sup>109</sup> The series of designs which eventually characterise this class are the backdrop for *Tapageur*’s mysterious inception.

Naval historian Rif Winfield is among the few authorities to comment on *Tapageur*’s origins, noting only that she may have been built to Denÿs’s *Mutin* design from the 1778 batch

of cutters. Upon inspection, however, it becomes clear that *Tapageur* is notably different than all known French naval cutters. Pierced for 16 cannons, *Tapageur* sits between Denÿs’s *Mutin* and *Cerf* designs of 14 and 18 ports respectively, only slightly shorter in length than the *Mutin* cutters; yet, her hull differs from both. *Tapageur*’s pronounced sheer is a stark contrast from Denÿs’s relatively flat cutters. More starkly, *Tapageur* entirely lacks the sharp floors and moderate tumble-home of Denÿs’s work; by comparison, the former’s lines are



7.5: Comparison of body plans from *Tapageur* (black), *Puce* (red dotted), and *Sprightly* (blue dotted), adjusted to *Tapageur*'s breadth. *Tapageur* appears closer to British than French underwater hulls.

duller, and the sharpness of her entry countered by breadth at her the toptimbers (FIG. 7.5). The details of her survey tell a similar story: in contrast to most English and French cutters of the period, *Tapageur* was carvel-built, and her stempost was much more upright. While clearly not a product of Denÿs's refined hand, no clearer answer has emerged in my research.

My best proposal is that *Tapageur* was the product of another Dunkerquois or Malouin cutter-builder of lesser experience than Denÿs, though it is clear her constructor was also putting France's 'English lessons' into practice. Compared to Denÿs's experiments in the early 1770s, such as the *Puce*, *Tapageur* only starkly differs in the breadth of her hull towards the bows, after accounting for size difference. Such a departure







might be attributed to an inexperienced designer seeking to augment the armament of smaller French cutters without greater increase in size.

Whoever her designer, *Tapageur* clearly embodies the trends of cutter development at the close of the eighteenth century. Tremendously powerful and with a huge spread of canvas, she would be capable of outrunning any of her few pursuers she could not overpower, allowing her to 'breed riots' at pleasure.

