It is often repeated that Leonardo da Vinci’s genius was ahead of its time. This statement is particularly and spectacularly true concerning the works of the inventor in the field of aeronautics. While the Italian master had been working on flight engines, most of his contemporaries and several generations of early modern Europeans could only imagine angels in the sky. Nevertheless, some of these people were as inventive as Leonardo when it came to imagining the subaquatic presence of man. This presence has been first studied through the lenses of science and technology as it appears in maps.\textsuperscript{1} There is also a second approach, one which is nuanced and primarily explores the subaquatic dimension in literature.\textsuperscript{2} This ‘poetic history of the oceans’ describes the symbolic conquest of the ‘deep sea’s floor’ which represented ‘the impossible fantasy of knowing the unknowable, reaching the bottom of a bottomless place’.\textsuperscript{3}

This ‘impossible fantasy’ was perhaps one of the most cherished and most challenging ambitions of Renaissance and Baroque Europe inhabited by fearless adventurers, curious scientists and mighty monarchs. This article reveals that they intended to symbolically conquer the depth of Neptune’s empire – the underwater world and its surface – by domesticating aquatic animals or by transforming themselves into one of them. These processes produced numerous texts and images which belong to two different, but interdependent, spheres of human power: the fields of military and science. Their multiple connections will appear through the combined analysis of various sources from various countries (engravings, paintings, sculptures, poems and narrations) which are examined side by side for the first time in order to highlight the European dimension of the phenomenon.

Considering the length of the chosen time period and the vast geographical scope of the European continent, our investigation focuses first on the kingdom of England and then on that of France in the 16\textsuperscript{th} and 17\textsuperscript{th} centuries and points out that subaquatic representations were subtly involved in the glorification of strong monarchs, such as Elizabeth I and James I in England, Henri IV and Louis XIV in France. All of them intentionally published and thereby perpetuated their victories in gripping images, many of which are linked to Neptune’s empire but were little studied by

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historians of political representations. In order to fully understand these elements, the third part of this article examines the world of cabinets of curiosities – through two examples located on the Italian peninsula (the cabinet of Ferrante Imperato in Naples and that of Manfredo Settala in Milan) – the spatial organisation of which supplied early modern and contemporary architects with ideas and ornamental elements. Thus, the following study of Renaissance and Baroque Europe demonstrates that, long before the 19th century, ‘the discovery of the deep ocean was as cultural as it was political and scientific’.4

The ‘ship-isle’ of Elizabeth I and of James I

Matthew Baker, the famous English shipwright of Queen Elizabeth I, gives an insight into the art of shipbuilding of his time in his *Fragments of Ancient English Shipwrighty* (1582). This manuscript contains, among other notable elements, a well-known drawing in which ‘the shipwright has linked the underwater shape’ of a ‘galleon’s hull to a fish’.5 An experienced sailor prior to becoming a shipwright,6 Baker used this natural model in order to create a vessel which could be as fast and manoeuvrable in water as the sea-creature. The great victory of the English fleet over the Spanish Armada (9 August 1588) can be interpreted as the victory not only of seamen who knew how to sail but whose ships also ‘knew’ how to ‘swim’. This special feature of the navy was all the more valuable in the stormy weather which contributed to the defeat of the so-called Invincible Armada, so well described by James Aske in his *Elizabetha Triumphans*:

Thy servant Haward through thy mightie power  
(The Generall thereof, but too-too bold  
In forwardnesse to finish dangerous actes,)  
With those his Ships (with them but Fisher-boates)  
Be battered the thicke bombasted sides  
Of their most strong and tall at fighting Ships,  
As most of them did carry messengers  
Unto King Neptune ruler of the Seas.  
The smaller part which made the grater haste,  
Did Triton meete, his thundering Trumpetter,  
Who bids them welcome towards his King’s Court,  
And asketh them where all their fellows are.7

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7 J. Aske, *Elizabetha Triumphans Conteyning the Damned practizes, that the develish Popes of Rome have used ever sithence her Highnesse first coming to the Crowne, by moving her wicked and traiterous subjects to Rebellion and conspiracies, thereby to bereave her Majestie both of her lawfull seate, and happy life. With a declaration of the manner how her excellency was entertained by her soul dyers into her Campe Royall at Tilbery in Essex: and of the overthow had against the Spanish Fleete: briefly, truly, and effectually set forth, declared and handled by I. A.* (London: printed by Thomas Orwin for Thomas Gubbins and Thomas Newman, 1588), p. 30.
These said ‘fellows’ were soon bombarded and ‘a thousand balles of wild-fire’ ordered by Charles Howard, Lord High Admiral of England, sent a ‘great store of Spanish Ships / to follow those that were to Neptune gone’. The fact that the better part of the invading fleet sank to the bottom of the sea before being able to react illustrates the superiority of the English navy. This superiority can be explained symbolically by the special nature of English vessels: the fleet of Elizabeth I was composed of ‘fish-like’ ships which would not be ‘swallowed up’ by the sea unlike the ‘bulky’ ships of the Spanish Armada. The primary and decisive difference between the nature of English and Spanish vessels was illustrated several times in images. In the so-called Armada Portrait of Elizabeth I, two windows of the queen’s palace open to a view of the two fleets which are depicted at sea in the background. The English ships appear under a sunny sky on the right-hand side of the queen and the Spanish ships are destroyed under a cloudy sky by a thunder storm on the opposite side. The right side (dexter in Latin) was seen not only as a divine side but also as the side with which dexterity is associated. On the other hand, the left side (sinister in Latin) was renowned as a cursed one. This duality is highlighted by the sharply contrasting tones: the English side is bright but the Spanish one is dark; England is blessed while Spain is damned by God.

The victory of the English navy was not only full of heroism but it was also said to be perfectly complete. Thomas Deloney sums up his country’s triumph, writing: ‘not a Ship of ours [was] lost’. This miracle is depicted in the background of the so-called Armada Portrait of Elizabeth I in which the queen is represented at the hull of the greatest vessel of her time: the country of England. The expression of ‘ship-isle’ appearing in the description of the 1591 ‘entertainment’ that Sir Edward Seymour, earl of Hertford, organized for the queen at Elvetham, in Hampshire, shows that this kind of metaphor had already been used at the end of the 16th century. The English ‘ship-isle’ was just as unsinkable as the ships of the Royal Navy and would prevail over any menacing foreign fleet. The fact that the naval confrontation of 1588 is depicted behind the ‘ship-isle’ of Elizabeth suggests that the Captain-Queen is sailing forward on the sea of History with the certainty of her invincibility, the key to world domination symbolized by the globe that she holds in her right hand on the bright side of the portrait. Thus, Elizabeth I was acclaimed in 1591 as ‘a sea-borne Queene, worthy to governe Kings’.

The ornamented frame of a poem published by Thomas Deloney in 1588 illustrates superiority of the queen’s navy over the Spanish fleet in a more symbolic way than the Armada Portrait. A Spanish galley, situated on the left side of the small engraving, is bombarded by an English galleon sailing on the right side. In other words, Deloney opposes the dexterous English to the clumsy, sinister Spanish. The two vessels are separated by an ornament which is composed of two

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8 Ibid., p. 31.
9 The Honorable Entertainement gieven to the Queenes Majestie in Progresse, at Elvetham in Hampshire, by the right Honorable the Earle of Hertford (London: John Wolfe, 1591), sig. C3r.
10 Th. Deloney, A joyful new Ballad, declaring the happie obtaining of the great Galleazzo, wherein Don Pietro de Valdez was the chiefe, through the mightie power and providence of God, being a speciall token of his gracious and fatherly goodness towards us, to the great encouragement of all those that willingly fight in the defence of his gospel and our good Queene of England (London: printed by John Wolfe for Edward White, 1588), strophe 8.
11 A pond had been dug in the shape of a crescent in which three ‘notable grounds’ were built. The first was ‘a Ship Ile of 100. foot in length, and 40. foot broad bearing three trees orderly set for 3. masts.’ Honorable Entertainment, sig. A3r.
12 Ibid., sig. D1v.
symmetrically jumping dolphins. Considered as the ‘king of fish’ since Antiquity, the dolphin represented England in 1588 and proclaimed the victory of Elizabeth I over Philip II, king of Spain.

The renowned sea mammal appeared occasionally in the role of the animal which guaranteed the success of the English fleet. The best example is perhaps that of the galleon named the Dolphin of London. This English merchant ship was attacked by five Turkish vessels on the Mediterranean Sea in January 1616. A poem figuring at the beginning of the second account of the adventure says that ‘thirty-five men and two boyes in fight / [A]gainst fifteen hundred were sixe houres opposed’. The first published account dramatizes the heroic resistance of the Dolphin of London by describing it in the middle of a raging sea. Not only was the ship ‘fired [upon], and in great danger to bee lost and cast away’ but also the ‘wind began to blow a strong gale, and by little and little, grewe to a tirible tempest’ at the end of which the Dolphin of London was ‘rent and torn in foure severall places, one in the gun-roome, another betweene the deckes, the third in the skereridge, and the fourth in the maister’s round-house’. Despite all of these damages, the ship was not sunk and it was able to return safely to England after some repairs.

The text does not mention an actual dolphin when it explains how the Dolphin of London remained intact despite the ‘extremity of the weather’ but the emblematic sea mammal appears between two engravings placed at the end of the booklet (Fig. 1). The first image shows the English ship sailing effortlessly on the sea. In the second image, the crew has to struggle to keep the vessel upright in the water in the middle of gigantic waves. The transition between these two contradictory representations is a dolphin appearing in the bottom right corner of the first engraving. The animal holds on its belly a miniature of the Dolphin of London and indicates to the spectator that the safety of the ship is ensured because the dolphin’s body protects the hull of the vessel against the menacing waves. This protection was interpreted as divine and the miraculous preservation of the ship during the fight and the tempest is illustrated in the two accounts’ titles as either the ‘noble Worth and brave Resolution’ or the ‘honour of the ‘English Nation’. The same kind of protection linked to the dolphin’s presence can be observed at the same time on the French side of the Channel where the sea mammal was used more widely and more frequently in royal propaganda.

Royal dolphins and fish-soldiers in 17th century France

Sculpted in limestone, a relief representing the coat of arms of the city of Nantes was installed in 1619 at the entry of the Champ-Fleuri cemetery (Fig. 2). Only the central part of the composition remains today and can be seen at the Museum of History of Nantes, in the castle of the dukes of Brittany. The relief shows a three-mast vessel navigating on the turbulent sea of History. The ship

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14 J. Taylor, A Toothlesse Satire upon him that made, or rather mard the former Booke in Edward Nichols, The Dolphins danger and Deliverance. Being a Ship of 220. Tunne having in her but 36. Men and 2. Boyes, who were on the 12. of January 1616. set upon by 6. Men of Warre of the Turkes having at least 1500. Men in Them, who fought with them 5. houres and a half yet to the glory of God and the honor of our English Nation, both Shippe and goods safely brought up the River of Thames and delivered. Truly set forth by the appointment of M. Edward Nichols, being Maister of the said Ship. With the names of all those that were slaine on the English part, the maner how, and how many were maimed, and what they are that survive (London: Henry Gosson, 1617).

15 A Fight at Sea, Famously fought by the Dolphin of London against five of the Turkes Men of Warre, and a Satty the 12. of January last 1616. being all Vessells of great Burthen, and strongly mand. Wherein is shewed the noble Worth and brave Resolution of our English Nation. Written and set forth by one of the same Voyage, that was then present and an eye witnes to all the proceedings (London: Henry Gosson, 1617), sig. B2r-B3v.
(representing the city) and its crew (the city’s inhabitants) are placed under the protection of a dolphin, whose presence is clearly evident in the midst of the waves. One could be tempted to dub this ship the *Dolphin of Nantes* as it has so much in common with the *Dolphin of London*.

The dolphin appearing in the coat of arms of Nantes was a royal one given the recent history of the city. It was in Nantes that Henri IV, King of France and of Navarre, signed the edict which ended the French Wars of Religion (1562-1598) and is referred to as the Edict of Nantes. Signing of this document in Nantes was symbolically important as this city was the last great bastion of the Catholic League, also known as the Saint Union. The League had opposed the recently crowned Bourbon king who was represented as a dolphin at a key moment of the French wars of religion.

Jean Godard wrote in 1594 that ‘the Dolphin is the crowning glory of the fish in the sea’ (*le Dauphin dans la mer est l’honneur des poissons*) and Henri, ‘due to his immortal deeds, is the glory and the honor / of the Princes and the Kings who are on Earth’ (*par ses faits immortels est la gloire et l’honneur / des Princes et des Roys qui sont dessus la terre*).\(^{16}\) The Parisian author made this comparison after Henri’s army took the French capital. Long-awaited since 1588 by the royalist party, this success signaled the beginning of the decline of the Catholic League which governed Paris and many other towns with the moral support of the Papacy and the military support of Spain. The fall of Paris was therefore represented in royalist propaganda as a failure for Philip II and his intercontinental empire. This ‘immortal deed’ is why the French king could become the incarnation of the ‘glory’ among princes and kings of the globe.

The military triumph was not the only reason for the dolphin’s presence in the propaganda of the newly-crowned king. In monarchical France, the eldest son of the king was the heir to the throne and held the title of Dolphin (*Dauphin* in French). Henri IV, who ruled as king of Navarre under the name of Henri III of Bourbon before 1589, was not the son of the late Henri III of Valois, king of France, but rather his cousin to the 22nd degree. Both were descendants of Louis IX, king of France (1214-1270). According to the Salic law – established during the reign of Clovis, king of the Franks (481-511) – which prevents the crown from being transmitted through a woman, the closest male relative of Henri III of Valois coming from a direct male line had to succeed as King of France because the said monarch did not have a son. The distant family connection between Henri III of Valois and Henri III of Bourbon combined with the fact that the latter was Protestant allowed the Catholic League to reject the King of Navarre’s claim to the throne of France.\(^{17}\) In order to suppress these pretexts of ultra-Catholic resistance backed by Spain, Henri IV found two solutions. First of all, the king abjured his Protestant faith and became Catholic in July of 1593. Then, to underline more convincingly the monarchical continuity between the last Valois king and the first Bourbon one, royal propaganda depicted Henri IV as a dolphin even if he had never held the title of *Dauphin* and had never obtained a naval victory comparable to that of Elizabeth I.

The figure of the dolphin used by Jean Godard in 1594 allowed the king to incarnate monarchical continuity but also to dramatize his own emergence as a new ruler who had to overcome many obstacles. Such symbolism could have been inspired by previous representations of dolphins that writers or publishers used to show their loyalty to the ruler. The dolphin created by

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Oronce Finé (1494-1555), professor at the Collège de France, on the map of the Holy Land (1517) is a good example which Tom Conley analyzed as follows:

‘Looking up and to the left, a crowned dolphin has broken the surface of the water. Heralded is a signatory festina lente, the dolphin of the Dauphiné, Finé’s birthplace, with the figure of France marked by the fleur-de-lis on the diadem perched on the mammal’s head. The cartographer’s signature is inscribed in a rebus that visualizes both the dauphin – the recently crowned king, Francis I – and Dauphiné, the birthplace of the cartographer. Yet, as the mammal shoots out of the Mediterranean, the maritime context also beckons the spectator to see and read an implied rebus of a dauphin d’eau fine, sache that even a work “by” or “of” the author, O. Finé (d’O. Finé, Dauphiné), is a verbal identifier of the configuration. Since wit of this kind is part of an ideological program of the rebus that characterizes humanist literature, we see evidence of a humanist calligraphy designed to illuminate or explode into knowledge through combinations of aural and graphic ingenuity.’

In 1594, Jean Godard did not sign his name in Henri IV’s dolphin, but Godard’s publisher – Pierre Dauphin – did. Born to the Chastaing family around 1562, Pierre adopted the last name Dauphin during his publishing career in Lyon, between 1585 and his death in 1595. In February of 1594, Lyon drove out the Catholic League and joined Henri IV. In this context, Dauphin’s decision to publish Godard’s work about the new king who was depicted as an extraordinary dolphin corresponds to the wish of the city to celebrate Henri IV as an outstanding and exceptional prince.

Six years later, the monarch married Marie de Medici in Lyon and the city’s representative, Balthazar de Villars, emphasized that the kingdom needed a Dauphin to ensure the monarchy’s continuity by establishing a new dynasty. The union of Henri IV with Marie de Medici was a fruitful one producing a Dauphin.

Henri’s son, Louis XIII, and grand-son, Louis XIV, triumphed mostly on land, but the ‘aquatic dimension’ played a crucial role in certain of their exploits. In 1622, Louis XIII obtained his first personal victory by defeating the rebellious Protestant army on the isle of Rié after having crossed the Besse canal, not very far from the Atlantic Ocean, at midnight on 15 April. Patrick Avrillas’ well documented book describes the crossing in detail and closely analyses its glorification which used major historical events: the crossing of the Besse was compared to the crossing of the Red Sea by Moses and to that of the Granicus river by Alexander the Great in 334 B.C. A few years later, in 1627-1628, Louis XIII was able to conquer the city of La Rochelle by building a dam to close the city’s bay, preventing the besieged Huguenot fortress from receiving supplies from the English Navy. The propagandists of the king and of principal minister Cardinal Richelieu represented their patrons as

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20 Ibid., p. 71.
21 The swamps surrounding the isle of Rié have been drained so it is no longer an island, but rather a part of the town of Saint-Hilaire-de-Riez. This is not to be confused with the island of Ré (’l’île de Ré’), which still exists off the coast of La Rochelle, well south of Saint-Hilaire-de-Riez.
Argonauts, masters of Neptune or captains of the ‘ship’ of France. At the crossing of the Besse and at the siege of La Rochelle, Louis XIII and his army controlled the sea or the surface of the sea, but they never conquered its depths. The personal reign of Louis XIV brought about change in many areas, including that of aquatic representations.

The crossing of the Rhine at Tolhuys (12 June 1672) offered the first opportunity to celebrate the Sun-King’s unlimited power by describing the French victory over Nature at the beginning of the Dutch War (1672-1678). A heroic poem written by Jean Martinet, assistant to the master of ceremonies at Louis’ court, gives great insight into the aquatic representations that were used in connection with the crossing of the river:

LOUYS de qui la Mer, les Vents & les Tempestes,  
N’auront pas le pouvoir d’arrester les Conquestes  
Passant pour le Dieu Mars parut dessus son bord,  
Le Rhin saisi d’horreur fremit à son abort,  
Il tonna de colere, il écuma de rage,  
La presence de Mars inspirant le courage;  
Son exemple, sa voix, & ses grandes leçons,  
Firent que nos Guerriers devinrent des poissons;  
Chacun d’eux à l’envy se monstrant intrepide  
A l’abry des vertus du Maistre qui les guide,  
Se fait de son Bouclier une especie de Pont  
Et brave sans paslir ce nouvel Helespont.  
Comme autant d’Avirons mille bras dans le Fleuve,  
Mettent de mille morts, mille corps à l’épreuve.  
La Nature a beau faire, elle a beau resister,  
L’Honneur est ce Torrent qui doit tout emporter.  
L’excez de leur Valeur (en fut-il qui l’a vaille)  
Fait qu’il regardent l’Eau comme un Champ de Bataille.  
On voit des Escadrons dans le Fleuve engagez,  
Estre en aussi bel ordre, estre aussi bien rangez,  
Que s’ils estoient postez sur le lieu le plus ferme,  
Vaincre c’est leur objet, ou mourir, c’est leur terme.

This risky operation is depicted as heroic because the French soldiers overcame the resistance of the personified river and because they were able to cross the river in spite of the resistance of the Dutch army. As often is the case with propaganda, the natural and the military obstacles were exaggerated in order to embellish the exploit. The Rhine seems to react like a sea and this resemblance is explicitly confirmed in another verse where Martinet – who was certainly aware of

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Louis XIII’s exploit in 1622\textsuperscript{25} – writes that the waves of the river ‘imitated the waves of the sea’ (ses vagues imitèrent les vagues de la Mer).\textsuperscript{26} This comparison transforms the land combat into a virtual confrontation at sea where the water is like a battlefield (Eau comme un Champ de Bataille). In such an environment, French soldiers who were crossing the river became fish (nos Guerriers devinrent des poissons) after having been motivated by the ‘example’, ‘the voice’, and the ‘great instructions’ of the King (Son exemple, sa voix, & ses grandes leçons). Louis XIV appears as an unnamed sea-god whose will is carried out by aquatic creatures. The originality of the quoted verses is the link which is made between the depth and the surface of the water. These fish-soldiers are not only good swimmers but also good sailors, given the fact that their ‘thousand arms’ are described as ‘a thousand oars’ (Comme autant d’Aviron mille bras dans le Fleuve). This evocation of a galley metaphorically illustrates the combined effort of the whole French army (Mettent de mille morts, mille corps à l’épreuve). The symbolic fusion between the figure of the fish and the figure of the ship is at its apex. From that moment, the most fantastical plans could be conceived. When the crossing of the Rhine by Louis XIV is compared to the crossing of the Hellespont by Alexander the Great (334 B.C.), the message of Martinet is clear: the year 1672 is the beginning of a new intercontinental empire.

Such an exploit could not be accomplished without casualties. Was it possible to represent the death of a ‘fish-soldier’ during the crossing of a river? The answer is to be found in the Histoire panégyrique de Louis XIV written in 1673 by La Motte Le Noble, lawyer at the parlement of Normandy:

‘It was during this Passage that the Count of Nogent desired to go under water to look for the enemies, and see if there were not any Dutch hidden, while the army crossed to attack them in their trenches on the banks of the Rhine, but he went so far under water, and he dove in so hastily that he lost his breath and died’.\textsuperscript{27}

The deceased nobleman is described as a diver who helped to defeat the enemies under the surface of the water. However, the description of the count’s death does not conform to Martinet’s narration of the glorious crossing. By including the drowning of a ‘fish-soldier’ in his text, La Motte Le Noble implies that the other fish-soldiers were vulnerable as well, not only on, but also under the surface of the water. Therefore, the hull and the oars of the French vessel were also exposed to danger and could easily have been damaged during the crossing and the success of Louis XIV could be attributed much more to luck than to the army’s mastery of the waters. Surprisingly, the author found a way to avoid being charged for undermining the king’s glorification: La Motte Le Noble called upon the mythic origins of the French monarchy in order to justify the crossing of the river and the conquest of Holland. According to him, Louis XIV was the descendant of Pharamond, the legendary king who originally came to France with his people from the other side of the Rhine. The

\textsuperscript{25} The crossing of the Besse canal by Louis XIII in 1622 was presented and commented in several publications between the 1630s and 1660s and took on mythological proportions. P. Avrillas, Louis XIII et la bataille de l’île de Rié, pp. 96-121, 172-174.
\textsuperscript{26} J. Martinet, Passage du Rhin, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{27} La Motte Le Noble, Histoire panégyrique de Louis XIV, roi de France, sous le Nom de Héros Incomparable (Rouen: Antoine Maurry, 1673), p. 16: ‘Ce fut en ce Passage que le Comte de Nogent voulut aller sous les eaux chercher les ennemis, & voir s’il n’y avait point des Hollandois cachez, pendant que l’armée passoit pour les attaquer dans leurs retranchements sur le bord du Rhein, mais il fut si loin sous ces eaux, & il y courut si précipitamment, qu’il en perdit haleine, & y mourut.’
Bourbon king was expected to enter the water just as it was the local custom at the time of Pharamond to plunge a newly-born child into the river. Thus, Louis XIV’s crossing of the Rhine is presented as the heroic birth of a warrior-king returning to his ancestral fief.\textsuperscript{28} La Motte Le Noble contributed in this way to glorifying Louis XIV as Neptune on horseback.

A little bit earlier and in a much lesser distributed volume than that of La Motte Le Noble, other talented propagandists presented the king as a dolphin. Between 1664 and 1668, the copyist Nicolas Jarry (ca. 1615-1666) and the illuminator Jacques Bailly (1629-1679) collected mottos to the glory of Louis XIV in a bound, illustrated manuscript intended to inspire royal tapestries. A motto describing the bravery of the King crests the image of a giant dolphin (Fig. 3). The mammal is swimming on the surface of a wavy sea facing the reader under a cloudy sky. The text that Nicolas Jarry wrote above this composition explains the comparison:

‘A Dolphin, with these words HUNC ET MONSTRA TIMENT. This Fish is the legitimate Master of the Sea, and even if there are bigger fishes than him, the Naturalists ensure that there are none so frightening that he can not fight and overcome them. The same could be said of his Majesty who frightens every great and monstrous power which could possibly exist.’\textsuperscript{29}

Six verses by Charles Perrault, ‘eternal herald of the regime’,\textsuperscript{30} are included below the emblem in order to reiterate the same message of the omnipresence of the royal dolphin in his realm. The representation of Louis XIV as a dolphin in the 1660s reminds us of that of Henri IV in 1594. In both cases, the use of the dolphin in its natural environment symbolizes the recently installed king’s power.

The sea-shells constituting the frame of the emblem dedicated to the bravery of Louis XIV are especially noteworthy. This frame integrates two dolphins – one on each side – supporting two water-spitting dragons which seem to be alive. They are filling up a basin which is also receiving water from a third source just below the emblem, suggesting continuity between the picture and the fountain. The juxtaposition of painted and sculpted dolphins, the organized display of sea-shells, the presence of small dragons and the link between the idea and the materiality of the sea-world indicates how cabinets of curiosities impacted the representation of power.

The cabinet of curiosities as inspiration for architecture

In the 16\textsuperscript{th} and 17\textsuperscript{th} centuries, the cabinet of curiosities was a room in the home of a wealthy noble or bourgeois family where exotic articles, including preserved taxidermies, animal bones, plants, minerals and human artefacts were displayed. Such a collection represented the variety of Creation and allowed not only the proprietor of the house but also his guests to admire, contemplate, and study uncommon items of the known world.\textsuperscript{31} Inventories of certain cabinets were published along

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{28} Ibid., pp. 9-13.
  \item \textsuperscript{29} ‘Un Dauphin, avec ce mot HUNC ET MONSTRA TIMENT. Ce Poisson est le Maistre légitime de la Mer, et bien qu’il s’en trouve de plus grands que luy, les Naturalistes assuerent qu’il n’y en a point de si terribles qu’il ne combatte et ne surmonte. On peut dire la mesme chose de sa Majesté et qu’il n’y a point de puissance quelque grande et monstrueuse qu’elle soit qui ne le craigne.’
  \item \textsuperscript{31} P. Findlen, \textit{Possessing Nature: Museums, Collecting, and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy}, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).
\end{itemize}
with an engraving showing the general aspect of the collection. This allowed a greater public to “visit” the cabinet and to be amazed by the incredible spectacle wherein human power symbolically took control of Neptune’s empire. Two collections of the Italian peninsula provide particularly good illustrations of this phenomenon.

Manfredo Settala (1600-1680), canon of Santa Maria della Pace, probably possessed one of the finest and largest cabinets of his time in Milan. An engraving published in 1666 shows his impressive collection which is well-organized and symmetrical from the ground to the ceiling (Fig. 4). The latter catches the spectator’s eye due to the great number of stuffed aquatic animals, among which we can easily distinguish several sharks and crocodiles. Ferrante Imperato (1550-1625) furnished a smaller cabinet of curiosities in Naples where he similarly displayed mostly aquatic animals on the ceiling and on the walls. This gave visitors the impression that they were walking underwater as they observed from below the spectacle of animals seemingly traipsing across the sky (Fig. 5).

This inverted presentation of creatures can perhaps be explained by practical considerations: the owners of the cabinets of curiosities practiced economy of space, using every available square inch to organize their collections. Displaying aquatic animals on the ceiling had the added benefit of coinciding with astronomical representations in the sky. During antiquity, more than one constellation was named after an aquatic animal, including the dolphin, the whale and the fish. In Imperato’s cabinet of curiosities, the impression of being under a watery sky was reinforced by the window and the series of birds which decorated the walls near the ceiling. These normally air-borne animals emphasized the curious effect of an upside-down world, situated as they were below the ceiling, where aquatic animals seemed to fly.

The connection between aquatic animals and the sky that Imperato’s cabinet of curiosities most perfectly expresses perhaps was not completely new in architecture and can be found, for example, at the castle of Blois. The so-called Louis XII wing of this French royal residence, built between 1498 and 1508 during the first decade of Louis XII’s reign (1498-1515), possesses dormers – projecting vertical openings on the slope of the roof used to illuminate the attic – which are surmounted by ornamental gables, a decorative triangular-shaped architectural element. In its lapidary, the museum of the castle of Blois displays three ornamental dormer gables which belonged to the forecourt façade: the first is decorated with the initial of Louis XII, the second is decorated with angels bearing the coat of arms of France and the third is decorated with two dolphins, one on each side of the triangle above the window (Fig. 6).

The symmetrical layout of these dolphins reminds us of that of the dolphins encountered in the ornament of the poem that Thomas Deloney published in 1588 after the visit of Elizabeth I at Tilbury. However, their function is different because they unite spaces instead of separating them: just like the angels on the other dormer gable, they are mediators between Heaven and Earth, between God and the king who ruled ‘by the grace of God’ (Dei gratia). Louis XII decided to put

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34 Gio. Maria Ferro, Historia naturale di Ferrante Imperato (Venice: Combi e La Noù, 1672).
these dolphins on the dormer gables of his castle at the beginning of the 16th century in order to obtain from God the birth of a Dauphin, an heir to the throne of France, after a series of unsuccessful pregnancies and stillborn children. Even if the sculpted dolphins did not bring about the long-desired royal birth, they were at the highest point of the façade and the visitors of the castle of Blois could admire that the junction between the earth and the sky was marked by the figure of an aquatic animal which seemed to swim in the air above their heads.

The architecture of certain contemporary aquariums is – consciously or unconsciously – influenced by the spatial display and decoration used in Milan, Naples, and Blois. The aquariums imagined inside early modern cabinets of curiosities remained dry until 1985 when sea-adventurer Kelly Tarlton opened an aquarium in Orakei, Auckland, New Zealand. The establishment which is now called Kelly Tarlton’s Antarctic Encounter and Underwater World was the first in the world to use a transparent acrylic tunnel. Kelly Tarlton imported ‘flat sheets of acrylic from Germany’ which were ‘formed into the correct dimensions and then the one ton sheets were oven heated and curved to the required tunnel shape.’ Then, the sections of the 110 meter long tunnel ‘were carefully lowered into the site in special order, through a hole in the footpath of Auckland’s waterfront.’ This was a ‘world first’ because of the ‘transparent, underwater tunnel from which the public could be face to face with Sharks, Stingrays and other marine creatures’. Kelly Tarlton’s use of acrylic tunnel ‘is now copied by aquariums around the world’. Many of them are located in the United States of America where they consciously or unconsciously play the role of modern cabinets of curiosities. A very good example of this phenomenon can be found at the Oregon Coast Aquarium in Newport, Oregon, USA. Opened to the public in 1992, this aquatic and marine educational facility has a spacious lobby, featuring models of sharks and smaller fish suspended from the ceiling (Fig. 7). They seem to fly through the air just as easily as their stuffed relatives did on the ceiling of the Italian cabinet of curiosities, centuries before them. These animals are not part of the exhibit but rather decorations which introduce and lead the way to the exhibits. In other words, this decoration gives the visitor the impression that he or she is walking in an imaginary tunnel before entering the real one, featured in the exhibit entitled Passages of the Deep. The web site of the aquarium presents this exhibit as follows:

‘In an underwater adventure, visitors are immersed in Keiko’s former home through acrylic tunnels surrounded by several feet of sea water. [...] As though they were taking a walk into the open ocean, visitors are able to come face to face with large sharks, rockfish and bat rays swimming above and below. Waves surging against the tunnel give visitors the impression they are beneath the ocean. And the Oregon shipwreck resting on the bottom increases the feeling of being early undersea explorers.’

Here, the goal of the visit is more than simple observation: the tunnel allows visitors to have the impression of entering the environment of the animals. Such a promise considerably increases the appeal of the aquarium, providing an altogether different experience from that of the dry sea

37 http://www.kellytarltons.co.nz/VisitorInfo/AboutUs/History.htm (consulted on 7 January 2011).
ceiling of the cabinets of curiosities. Indeed, the visitor to a cabinet of curiosities and the visitor to an aquarium enjoy two different spectacles. Whilst the first observes dead, stuffed and immobile creatures, the second observes real living aquatic animals almost in their natural environment (Fig. 8). Nevertheless, both visitors are exposed to adventure and discovery. The gestures of visitors in the engraving show the same amazement and questions that modern-day visitors express when visiting *Passages of the Deep*. Thus, the aquarium equipped with an acrylic tunnel can be considered as a special kind of modern cabinet of curiosities, thereby fulfilling one of the most ambitious Renaissance dreams: the conquest of the subaquatic world by human spirit and power.

**Conclusion: the recurrence of efficacious nomenclature**

Neptune’s empire was effectively conquered in the 19th and 20th centuries after many different experiments. The conquest of the deep was accomplished almost simultaneously in Europe and in the United States of America. Benoît Rouquayrol and Auguste Denayrouze, French engineers working for Napoleon III’s navy, copyrighted the first modern diving gear in 1864. Their work obtained the gold medal of the World’s Fair organized in Paris in 1867 and inspired Jules Verne in one of his most famous novels, *20,000 Leagues under the Sea* (*Vingt mille lieues sous les mers*), published in 1870. Almost at the same time, between 1861 and 1864, the Union and the Confederacy built and operated the first efficient submarines during the American Civil War. Since then, divers and submariners have been able to accomplish missions that the fish-like boats of the Elizabethan era and the ‘fish-soldiers’ of Louis XIV could accomplish only symbolically.

Nevertheless, the symbols that we have encountered in 16th and 17th centuries reappeared during the mapping of the ocean: the first trans-Atlantic deep-sea sounding survey was carried out in 1852 by the USS Dolphin! The ship’s name was perfectly adapted to such an important mission which also paved the way for the installation of the Atlantic submarine telegraph cable. In a day when most other United States Ships were named after locations or persons, and few were named after animals, perhaps it was no accident that the famous oceanographer Matthew Fontaine Maury (1806-1873) chose this brig for his mission. What could be better than a dolphin to help explore the ocean’s tides and currents?

Even in the middle of the 19th century, this association was profoundly early modern. It reminds us of Renaissance and Baroque representations that we have examined in this study and which served a political purpose in England and in France under the reign of powerful monarchs. In England, the ships of Queen Elizabeth and King James were designed and sometimes even named after the model of sea-animals like fish or dolphins, in order to be able to control the sea and build an empire. In France, Henri IV and Louis XIV were depicted as dolphins in order to assert control over the coasts and waterways of France. Thus, sea-creatures and their environments provided many symbols for political representations.

Renaissance and Baroque naturalists and their cabinets of curiosities inspired the royal propaganda and gave ideas of spatial organization and decoration to architects whose work was intended to send different messages. The dolphin on the dormer gable of the castle of Blois was destined to reach God or his angels to send an heir to the throne while the sea-animals suspended from the ceiling of the Oregon Coast Aquarium are destined to attract visitors and lead them to the

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39 H. M. Rozwadowski, *Fathoming the Ocean*, pp. 23-24. The USS Dolphin was a brig which served between 1836 and 1860.
Passages of the Deep. In both cases, the underwater world has been transposed to the air, transforming the sky into a watery ceiling and the land into the floor of Neptune’s empire in order to fulfil ‘the impossible fantasy of knowing the unknowable, reaching the bottom of a bottomless place.’
Figure 1: The *Dolphin of London* navigates on calm and stormy waters, 1617. *A Fight at Sea...*, f°16. © British Library, London, 9135 aaaa 31.
Figure 2: The central part of the coat of arms of the city of Nantes (1619), h: 97.5cm, l: 84cm, d: 36cm. © Château des ducs de Bretagnes – Musée d’histoire de Nantes, Alain Guillard.
Figure 3: Jacques Bailly and Nicolas Jarry, *Devises pour les tapisseries du roi* (1664-1668), Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF), Manuscrit Français, 7819, fol. 17. © Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, France.
Figure 4: Manfredo Settala’s cabinet of curiosities in Milan (detail). *Museo o galleria...* (Tortona: Eliseo Viola, 1666), © Biblioteca Pública del Estado en Córdoba / Biblioteca Virtual del Patrimonio Bibliográfico. Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte: Subdirección General de Coordinación Bibliotecaria, Spain.
**Figure 5:** Ferrante Imperato’s cabinet of curiosities in Naples. Gio. Maria Ferro, *Historia naturale...*, Venice: Combi e La Noù, 1672. © Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, France.
Figure 6: Decorated dormer gables (the gable decorated with dolphins is in the foreground) from the 16th century, Château royal de Blois, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lapidary. Photo: © Claire Harai, used with permission.
Figure 7: The lobby of Oregon Coast Aquarium (OCA), Newport, Oregon, USA, August 19, 2010. Photo: © Dénes Harai.

Figure 8: The exhibit ‘Passages of the Deep’, OCA, Newport, Oregon, USA, August 19, 2010. Photo: © Claire Harai, used with permission.
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Books and articles


