

BOOK REVIEWS

Marc Serge Rivière & Thuy Huynh Einam, editors and translators, *Any Port in a Storm: From Provence to Australia: Rolland's Journal of the Voyage of La Coquille (1822–1825)*, Townsville, James Cook University of North Queensland, 1993, 228 pp., bibliography, map, appendices, illustrations. RRP Aust. \$15, ISBN 0 86443 482 0.

This book offers scholars a fairly concise and previously unknown account of Duperrey's voyage. Even the New Zealand scholar Isabel Ollivier who has done the most exhaustive surveys, transcriptions and translations of surviving journals from Duperrey's voyage appears to have been unaware of Thomas Pierre Rolland's (1776–1847) account now in the possession of the National Library in Canberra (MS 7545). Duperrey's expedition crossed the Pacific and visited many of our regional neighbours. With the exception of Leslie Marchant in his *France Australe*, it has received scant attention from Australian scholars.

Unfortunately, Duperrey did not survey Western Australia as planned, mainly because of lack of provisions, disease and the difficulty of sailing south along the W.A. coast against prevailing winds. The use of diurnal and convectional coastal winds, close to the rugged shore, was a hazardous option. Indeed, Rolland's account contains barely two pages on Australia without any ethnographic, botanical or zoological content. And although it was Rolland's second voyage to this continent, he was moved to record little of Port Jackson other than how much it had grown since his last visit! He has much more to say about New Zealand which may offer some insights to Maori scholars. Anne Salmond, in her recent work *Two Worlds*, has shown how such journals can offer gems of ethnographic detail when closely scrutinized.

The editors have abstracted some useful references to Rolland from other journal accounts, and made good use of biographical information preserved in the Archives Nationales, Paris. Although Rolland was not an officer, he was awarded the *Légion d'honneur* in September 1825, and a more detailed service dossier has therefore survived. In his journal Rolland specifically mentions depositing his service dossier with "La Grande Chancellerie" of the order. Rarely do historians get such tantalizing leads! Born near Toulon on 21 December 1776, the son of a carrier, he joined the navy at the age of fifteen and served throughout the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. In 1802, on

the *Banel*, he was shipwrecked off the North African coast and in November 1811 he was badly wounded while serving on *La Pomone*. At the war's end he had reached the rank of master gunner, but was soon demobilized. Languishing ashore as a watchman, his luck changed when he was selected to serve under Freycinet on the *Uranie*. This took him around the world on his first scientific expedition. Enduring yet another shipwreck, this time in the Falklands, he returned to Toulon in December 1820. A year after a brief three-month stint on *Le Gènois*, he at last joined *La Coquille* under Duperrey.

Although the Cataloguing-in-Publication data refers to an index, there is none at the end of the book. There are, however, 229 very useful endnotes which I found myself using as an unsatisfactory substitute.

Rivière's and Einam's translation is competent and engaging. The reader is also blessed with a corresponding French transcription opposite each page of English, but this appears to have been heavily edited to deal with Rolland's grammatical problems. Despite its limitations, *Any Port in a Storm* is a charming, unpretentious narrative which can be read and enjoyed for its own sake. It is complemented with a number of attractive illustrations and a useful bibliography.

Edward Duyker

Sylvania, New South Wales

Margaret de Mestre, in collaboration with Neville de Mestre, *Prosper de Mestre in Australia*, with a Genealogical Appendix by Neville de Mestre and Mark de Mestre, Kensington, French-Australian Research Centre, The University of New South Wales, 1989, (Occasional Monograph n° 2), 57 pp. ISBN 0 85823 856 X.

We have been culpably slow in noticing the publications of our sister organization, the French-Australian Research Centre of the University of New South Wales. As a first step towards making amends for this omission, I am happy to draw attention to the de Mestres' monograph on one of the most notable Australian families of French background.

The book is short and businesslike. Its main section (pp. 9-41) sets out soberly and carefully what is known of Prosper de Mestre's antecedents and career, especially during his residence in New South Wales, from his arrival in 1818 to his death in 1844. The Genealogical

Appendix "Who's who in the de Mestre descendants?" (pp. 45-57) lists all the people who at one stage or another bore the surname of de Mestre and who could claim Prosper as an ancestor.

The notion, sometimes put about, that de Mestre was an illegitimate son of Queen Victoria's father, is quite decisively rejected in favour of French *émigré* origins. Effective use of early printed and archival records, including the catalogue by Mort of his sale of de Mestre's effects (Ferguson 3870), enables the authors to present a rounded picture of entrepreneurial activities that were brought to a halt in the depression of the 1840s.

The one disappointing feature of the volume is its selective approach to the descendants. If one looks at the female lines, which the authors do not detail, one can grasp even more clearly the family's contribution. Having in childhood known Gertrude Blacket (née Lovegrove), widow of Wilfred Blacket K.C. (1859-1937) and Prosper's granddaughter, I was aware that at least two other families of de Mestre descendants lived in the same street (Tryon Road, Lindfield). Apart from what this says about secure respectability and gentility—no surprises given Prosper's own social position—, it is a reminder of the easily overlooked networks and patterns of affinity that are part of the Australian suburbia commentators are too inclined to see as amorphous and anonymous. That that same street fifty years ago in the WASP heartland of Sydney was far more multicultural than the mere presence of a few well-assimilated de Mestres suggests ought to make us think a little harder about the diversity of our origins.

Wallace Kirsop

Monash University

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