

## BOOK REVIEWS

John Dunmore, trans. & ed., *The Pacific Journal of Louis-Antoine de Bougainville 1767-1768*, London, Hakluyt Society (c/o Map Library, The British Library, 96 Euston Road, London NW1 2DB), 3rd series, n° 9, 2002, 26 cm., lxxvii+322 pp., 2 colour plates, 3 illustrations, 6 maps, indexes. ISBN 0 904180786.

The explorer Louis-Antoine de Bougainville (1729–1811) was born in Paris, the son of a notary. He began his career in the army, but also attracted attention for a treatise he published in 1751 on integral calculus. In 1754 he worked as a secretary to the French embassy in London. During the Seven Years War in Europe he served as Montcalm's aide-de-camp in Canada, where he was wounded. Promoted to colonel and made a chevalier de Saint-Louis, he was present at the Heights of Abraham when both Montcalm and his British adversary Wolfe were killed in the Battle of Quebec. He was taken prisoner the following year, but was eventually allowed to return to France after giving his parole. In 1761 he saw renewed fighting in Germany and was wounded once again.

Following the declaration of peace, Bougainville gained official support for a plan to settle displaced French–Canadians on the unoccupied Malouine (later Falkland) islands. Granted the rank of captain and given command of the vessels *Aigle* and *Sphinx*, he succeeded in founding the new French outpost of Port Louis in 1764. Unfortunately, there were objections from imperial Spain, and he was ordered to return on the *Boudeuse*, accompanied by the storeship *Etoile*, and to surrender the colony.

In 1767, with the transfer of the settlement to Spain completed, Bougainville proceeded into the Pacific after an arduous passage through the Strait of Magellan, and went on to discover a number of islands in the Tuamotus group, visiting Tahiti and then sailing through the Solomons to Bougainville (which he named after himself), New Ireland, Buru, Batavia, the Ile de France (Mauritius), the Cape of Good Hope and back to France. Although Bougainville did not visit New Holland, in mid-1768 he proved that Espiritu Santo and the southern continent were not connected when he sailed into the Coral Sea and reached the fringes of the Barrier Reef. His expedition was the first French circumnavigation, and his published account, *Voyage autour du monde: par la frégate la Boudeuse et la flûte l'Etoile* (and subsequent English translation by John Reinhold Forster in 1772), made him an international celebrity and an influential figure in the planning of subsequent French voyages of exploration.

The full text of Bougainville's original journal was not accessible in French until Etienne Taillemite published it in 1977 under the title *Bougainville et ses compagnons autour du monde, 1766–1769. Journaux de navigation* (Paris, Imprimerie nationale). Scholars have had to wait another quarter of a century for the first comprehensive English translation of the original Pacific text. The wait has been worth it, for John Dunmore is the pre-eminent authority on the French in the Pacific and he has been able to make use of a great deal of additional scholarship unavailable to Taillemite. (Only recently Professor Dunmore has written a biography of Jean Baret, Philibert Commerson's mistress who travelled in male guise on Bougainville's expedition; see my review in *Explorations*, n° 32, June 2002). The translation of the Pacific journal is masterly, but so too are the scholarly annotations and the substantial introduction. Among his appendices Dunmore has included translations of the journals of Jean-Louis Caro, second-in-command of the *Etoile*; surgeon François Vivez; Charles-Félix-Pierre Fesche, volunteer on the *Boudeuse*; Prince Nassau-Siegen, a passenger; and ten pages of documents drafted by Commerson.

An enormous amount of historical, biographical, ethnographic and geographical knowledge is condensed in the footnotes on the pages of this beautifully produced Hakluyt Society publication. It is destined to be a classic English-language reference work for *the* Bougainville voyage for many years to come.

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Philippe Godard & Tugdual de Kerros, *Louis de Saint Aloüarn, Lieutenant des vaisseaux du Roy: un marin breton à la conquête des Terres Australes*, Saint-Jacques-de-la-Lande, Les Portes du Large, 2002, 362 pp., 60 euros. ISBN 2-914612-08-7.

Louis François Marie Aleno de Saint-Aloüarn (1738–1772) commanded the 16-gun *Gros Ventre* as part of Kerguelen's expedition in search of the Southland. Kerguelen commanded the 24-gun *Fortune*. Both vessels set sail from the Ile de France (now Mauritius) on 16 January 1772. Not long after discovering the island which still bears Kerguelen's name, the *Fortune* became separated from the *Gros Ventre*, and Kerguelen decided to return to the Ile de France on 16 February, expecting that Saint-Aloüarn on the *Gros*

*Ventre* would do the same. Saint-Aloüarn, however, continued to sail eastward until he reached what we now call Flinders Bay, near Cape Leeuwin, on the Western Australian south coast. The expedition then travelled north without sighting land for another seven hundred nautical miles. Finally, on the afternoon of 28 March 1772 Shark Bay was sighted. The following day the *Gros Ventre* anchored at Turtle Bay and on the morning of 30 March Ensign Mingault was despatched in a longboat to survey the north of Dirk Hartog Island. This same officer took possession of Western Australia in the name of the King of France—a form of political pantomime that was fashionable at the time. Saint-Aloüarn then sailed back to the Ile de France via Melville Island and Timor. The expedition arrived in Port Louis on 5 September 1772 in a deplorable state. Most of the men were suffering from scurvy. Saint-Aloüarn himself died on 27 October 1772. He was only thirty-five years old. The documentary record for the voyage is very limited; like the manor house of the explorer's family near Quimper, not a great deal remains. Although a number of shipboard journals have survived, they contain little ethnography or natural history.

It is on the basis of this sparse canvas that I must judge this book. I am impressed that the authors have discovered a portrait of the explorer, hitherto unknown, and also an important letter written a week before Saint-Aloüarn died. One of the most engaging parts of the book is the account of the 1998 expedition to Dirk Hartog Island, led by Philippe Godard, during which a silver Louis XV coin, dated 1766, was discovered in a lead capsule on top of a French wine bottle. Two months later Myra Stanbury of the Western Australian Museum discovered a second bottle containing another coin, dated 1767. As a tangible link to the past, the discovery of these coins captured the public imagination. President Jacques Chirac sent a personal message of congratulation to Godard and he has since been made a Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur.<sup>1</sup>

As an historian, however, I consider Saint-Aloüarn's final letter far more significant than the coins. To be fair, the coins give veracity to the letter and confirm a landing place, but they do not tell us much more. (If one ignores indigenous rights and accepts the very questionable logic of such acts of possession, the Dutch—in the wake of Tasman's voyage—had already pre-empted Saint-Aloüarn's claim by 130 years and named the entire continent "Nova Hollandia"!)

This book is richly illustrated, beautifully produced and very similar in style to Godard's earlier book on the *Batavia*. It contains a useful geopolitical and historical orientation for the French navy in the eighteenth

century and tells us a great deal about the history of the explorer's family. Louis's father, for example, was killed in the Battle of Quiberon Bay (Combat des Cardinaux). There are substantial narrative sections about the voyage; however, these are made up by and large of vignettes which are sometimes quite superfluous in character. Do we really need so much heraldic content (regardless of how beautiful such coats-of-arms are) and extraneous detail such as the "Brief History of the House of Orange-Nassau" on pages 286–287? While there will be many readers who will enjoy some of these tangents, others may be disappointed that the book is not more coherently integrated. It is, nonetheless, the result of a great deal of meticulous research—both documentary and pictorial—and remains a welcome contribution to the history of the French in Australia and the Indian Ocean.

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#### Note

1. M. Godard was also honoured as a former engineering corps officer, physics teacher, author of twenty titles and a technical expert who has given fifteen years' service to the Tribunal and Court of Appeal in New Caledonia.

*Voyage of Discovery to the Southern Lands: Second Edition, 1824. Book IV, comprising chapters XXII to XXXIX by François Péron; continued by Louis Freycinet, translated into English by Christine Cornell, with a Foreword by John Ling and Introduction by Anthony J. Brown, Adelaide, The Friends of the State Library of South Australia, 2003, xxxviii+278 pp., frontispiece, 10 colour plates, 3 maps (including one large folding map in pocket), index. Limited Deluxe Edition of 400 copies with the first 99 numbered and hand-bound in quarter leather, gilt, with cloth boards and raised bands; Standard Edition blind-stamped cloth boards; Deluxe Edition, \$165, ISBN 1 876 154 37 3; Standard Edition, \$115. ISBN 1 876 154 38 1.*

Christine Cornell is already well-known and respected for her translation of Nicolas Baudin's "Journal de Mer", published by the South Australian Libraries Board in 1974. (The original French remains unpublished, although Jacqueline Bonnemains has recently published Baudin's private journal.) The present work is the first English translation of the second

historical volume of *Voyage de découvertes aux terres australes* [ . . . ]. Like the first volume of the official history of the Baudin expedition, it was written by François Péron. However, the second volume was unfinished at the time of the naturalist's death in 1810: chapter XXX was completed by Louis de Freycinet and the subsequent four historical chapters were written by Freycinet using Péron's notes. Unlike the first volume, which was published in 1807 during Napoleon's rule and translated into English in 1809, the second volume was released in 1816 and, until now, has not appeared in English except in the form of extracts.

Louis de Freycinet's footnotes suggest he probably revised Péron's chapters, and Anthony Brown (in the introduction to Cornell's translation) suggests that Freycinet may have toned down some of the criticisms of Baudin. Personally, I have no doubt of the hatred that Louis and Henri de Freycinet felt for Baudin as evidenced by their correspondence. Indeed, I believe their antagonism towards Baudin may have been far more intense than Péron's. It has been asserted by Klaus Toft and others that class antagonism was the root cause of this hatred. Unlike Baudin, the Freycinets were from the nobility; but if they were so governed by class prejudices and resentment of Baudin's rising star in the wake of the Revolution, how can we explain their close friendship with François Péron, the son of a humble tailor? Human relations have a complex chemistry. Baudin, like William Bligh, had an abrasive side that made him enemies, and, just like Bligh, his extraordinary navigational achievements are often overlooked. But unlike Bligh, who had the good fortune to publish his own version of events, Baudin died before he had the chance. Ultimately Péron made few worthy references to the expedition's commander.

In his introduction, Anthony Brown suggests that tensions between Péron and Baudin began early. This may be so, but bitter resentment may have taken far longer to develop. Brown himself acknowledges that Péron must have read Baudin's many disparaging references to him in the expedition commander's manuscripts during the preparation of the official account. Could this have re-opened old wounds which might otherwise have healed with the passage of time? We cannot be certain, but Péron's vengeful excision of Baudin's name from the historical record may have been a belated decision.

Cornell's translation of Péron's *Voyage* is both careful and elegant. Although I would have liked many more biographical and other explanatory notes, this would certainly have made for a bulkier and more expensive tome. Readers will be grateful for the geographical annotations and linguistic

clarifications that appear at the bottom of many pages. However, I was disappointed that while there is an index of place names, there is none for people referred to in the text. Christine Cornell is now working on a much-needed new translation of volume one of Péron's account. The first English translation of volume I of the *Voyage*, published in 1809, was very flawed. It has long been known that much of the scientific content was abridged or excluded. More recently Margaret Sankey has argued that it appears to have been aimed at selling an adventure yarn to English-language readers. And after a meticulous comparison with the original French,<sup>1</sup> she has also drawn attention to its specific translation errors and oversights.

All narratives are to some extent self-serving. Péron's is clearly no exception, but as a participant-observer his account is a very important document of Baudin's expedition—despite its prejudices. This volume contains much valuable material on King Island, Kangaroo Island, mainland Aborigines and even Macassan visitors to the north coast in search of *bêche de mer* (pp. 166–167). Of particular interest, from a zoological perspective, is Péron's landmark division of the marine mammal sub-order Pinnipedia into the seal family (Phocidae) and the eared-seal or sea-lion family (Otariidae).<sup>2</sup> Péron's botanical observations, however, are more confusing. His use of generic names such as “embothrium” and “metrosideros” in an Australian context (p. 62), suggests that he remained essentially grounded in J. R. and J. G. A. Forster's *Characteres Generum Plantarum* (1776) and Joseph Gaertner's *De Fructibus et Seminibus Plantarum* (1788), and made no revisions after the publication of Labillardière's *Novae Hollandiae plantarum specimen* (1804–1806), let alone Robert Brown's *Prodromus florae Novae Hollandiae et Insulae Van Diemen*, which appeared in the year of his death from tuberculosis at the age of thirty-five, 1810.

It is well known that many of the geographical names that appeared in Péron's *Voyage* later fell into disuse or were changed for political reasons. While Freycinet ensured that Volume II—published in the wake of Waterloo—was not marked by the imperial sycophancy of Volume I, even seemingly innocuous names like Cape Jeanne d'Arc (p. 72), Voltaire Bay and Cape Molière (p. 75) did not survive British toponymic revision. Where Matthew Flinders had precedence, this is understandable; yet Flinders himself refused to blame Péron personally: “I believe”, declared Flinders, “that what he wrote was from over-ruling authority, and smote him to the heart”. While Péron was aware of Flinders' prior rights, he died in the year Flinders was released from internment in Mauritius and four years before Flinders published his account; thus he could not have employed Flinders'

toponyms even if had wanted to. Where there are no names on modern maps and indigenous names cannot be found, there appears to be a case for reinstating names from Baudin's expedition, such as Caroline Bay (p. 72), Cape Racine (p. 75), Descartes Cove (p. 77), Point Lacaille (p. 77), Degérando Channel (p. 78), Montmorency, Valbelle, Villars and D'Assas (for the individual Neptune Islands, p. 80), Cape Montgolfier (p. 82) and Cape Van Spaendonck (p. 99), to list just a few.

Had Péron deserted at the Ile de France like so many of the other *savants*, the glory of the expedition would have been greatly diminished. In his observations and collections, Péron laid the foundations for major contributions to the natural sciences, in particular marine biology. With the aid of the artist Charles-Alexandre Lesueur (1778–1846), he was responsible for gathering thousands of zoological specimens during the voyage—at the time the most comprehensive Australian natural history collection ever made. His *Voyage*, written with an extraordinary breadth of knowledge for someone so young (he was 25 years old in 1800), remains one of the principal sources of information about the expedition. This landmark translation is beautifully produced, with exquisite colour reproductions of natural history and ethnographic engravings from the original *Atlas*. Given the very limited print-run, it is bound to become a valuable collector's item.

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#### Notes

- 1: In a paper presented at the "Baudin–Flinders: Travels, Discoveries, Encounter" Conference, University of Mauritius, October 2003.
- 2: Péron's pioneering work on seals was the subject of a doctoral dissertation by Françoise Debard at the Ecole nationale vétérinaire de Nantes in 1999.