

BOOK REVIEWS

Michael Pembroke, *Arthur Phillip: Sailor, Mercenary, Governor, Spy, Melbourne*, Hardie Grant Books, August 2013, 354 p., ISBN: 978-1-74270-508-8. E-book available.

This year marks the bicentenary of the death of Arthur Phillip, the first British Governor of New South Wales. To commemorate the event, new memorials have been unveiled in London and Bath. On 24 June the *Guardian* newspaper honoured Phillip with an editorial, declaring that he was ‘one of those men who make you understand how and why the British Empire came into being’.

Phillip was born on 11 October 1738 in the parish of All Hallows, London. His father Jacob Phillip was a language teacher originally from Frankfurt. But which Frankfurt? Michael Pembroke suggests that Phillip’s father might have been John Jacob Pfeiffer recorded on a 1709 list of Protestant refugees from the Rhineland Palatinate. But there is no proof that Pfeiffer changed his name to Phillip and that he was the language teacher who married Elizabeth Breach and begat Arthur. Indeed Justice Pembroke admits that ‘this is too slender a reed’. Regrettably, he makes no mention of Lyn Fergusson’s hypothesis (in the 2010 revised edition of her Phillip biography), that Jacob might have been a descendant of either the Jewish ‘Philip’ family or, more likely, one of the Huguenot ‘Philipe/Philippe’ families living in Frankfurt an der Oder (rather than Frankfurt am Main) in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

Jacob Phillip disappears from the historical record the year after Arthur’s birth. Given the future governor’s admission to the Charity School of the Royal Hospital for Seamen at Greenwich, restricted to ‘the Sons of disabled Seaman, or whose Fathers were slain, killed or drown’d in the Sea Service’, Pembroke infers Jacob’s ‘death or disablement in the Sea Service’. Although he is adept at exploring numerous biographical threads, he does not provide evidence of that sea service—if it existed. I am certainly not convinced that Jacob, the language teacher, was a disabled or deceased seaman. The admission rules for any institution can be bent or broken. It is possible that young Arthur gained admission to the Charity School because his mother’s first husband, John Herbert, was a sailor who died at sea around

1732. Whether Jacob came from Frankfurt, Oder or Main, neither inland German town was known as a nursery for seamen. Jacob the language teacher has to date not been discovered in naval registers. However, his contributions to the All Hallows parish poor fund between 1736 and 1739 (ranging from 19/6 to £1/19) bespeak a settled burgher, rather than an invalided sailor or one who went roving the main immediately after Arthur was born.

Although we have no record of Jacob Phillip after 1739, Justice Pembroke, already convinced that he was a sailor, speculates that he might have been taken by a press gang and intimates that he might have been one of the thousands of men who died in the naval typhus epidemic of 1740. A lack of records is an insufficient basis for an unequivocal statement that Arthur's mother 'Elizabeth Breach was again left without a husband' (page 7). However, he overlooks evidence, published fifty years later, that Arthur's father was not dead so soon. In the 'Anecdotes of Governor Phillip' which introduced *The Voyage of Governor Phillip to Botany Bay* (John Stockdale, London, 1789), the reader is told that Phillip's German father 'having settled in England, maintained his family and educated his son by teaching the languages'. Given Arthur Phillip's impressive linguistic abilities, Jacob almost certainly lived longer (and taught longer) than Pembroke suggests. The existence of a Huguenot colony in Frankfurt (Oder)—40 to 50 individuals in 1686 and 210 by 1699—also raises the possibility that Jacob Phillip might have been the son of native French speakers and that he in turn passed on to his son the gift of the French language in a manner as equally personal as his German. As we shall see, Phillip's facility in French saw him repeatedly selected to gather naval intelligence in France.

Our knowledge of Phillip's life has grown considerably since the publication of the 'heroic' First Fleet narratives of Louis Becke and Walter Jeffrey (1899) and M. Barnard Eldershaw (1938). In *The Rebello Transcripts* (1984), Kenneth Gordon McIntyre shed more light on Phillip's years in Portuguese service. Professor Alan Frost (aided by Portuguese-born Isabel Moutinho) also studied Portuguese sources for his book *Arthur Phillip 1738–1814: His Voyaging* (1987).

While Phillip 'the mercenary' is now more familiar, Phillip 'the spy' is less well known. During the intense colonial rivalry between Britain, France and Spain in the eighteenth century, each side sought to make effective use of sea power. Inevitably, espionage played a part as these maritime powers sought to understand changes in weaponry and ship-construction,

the configuration and strength of coastal fortifications, and the movement of rival naval units and strategic commodities. Justice Pembroke suggests that Phillip's service in the Portuguese navy between 1774 and 1778 would have been seen as 'an unparalleled opportunity to survey thousands of miles of the South American coastline, to make observations and to report on the economies and policies of the Spanish and Portuguese colonies along the coast' (60).

Even earlier, Phillip spent several periods in France almost certainly gathering naval intelligence. In 1769 he was ostensibly granted leave by his superiors for the benefit of his health, but surprisingly travelled to Flanders—a region not known for its spas or health resorts. Mercantile activities were perhaps a convenient cover for an intelligence agent. We know that Phillip somehow repaid significant financial debts to his estranged wife during this period and that her family had connections with the cloth trade. We also know, from a letter he wrote in the following decade, that he visited Toulon during this period. The French Mediterranean fleet was thus the likely object of his attention. I am not convinced by Justice Pembroke's assertion that Phillip went to Paris and made friends with the fortifications specialist Isaac Landmann while the latter was attached to the *École Militaire*. There is certainly evidence that the two became friends, but it seems much more likely that they met while Landmann taught at the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich. This was from 1777 until the end of Phillip's life. Woolwich is very close to Greenwich which has strong maritime associations and is where Phillip was educated.

Phillip would return, yet again, to France as a British agent under the orders of Evan Nepean, under-secretary of the Home Office. This was for twelve months from 14 October 1784 and for another year from 1 December 1785. In January and March 1785 he sent reports from Toulon. Some of his dispatches survive from this period. Professor Alan Frost suggested that it was because of these past clandestine activities (and because 'he might be known as a spy') that Phillip avoided meeting Lapérouse during the latter's visit to New South Wales in early 1788. Justice Pembroke agrees: 'Phillip's lengthy period under cover in the naval ports of France between 1784 and 1786 may well have made him apprehensive that he would be recognised by Lapérouse. And his high opinion of the strategic utility of Port Jackson, which had never been charted and was barely known, explains his reluctance to allow the French to appreciate its advantages' (194). We do not know

whether Phillip and Lapérouse were ever in the same place at the same time before, but perhaps it was not simply a fear of being recognised by Lapérouse. Surely Phillip was also at risk of being identified by any officer or crew member of the *Boussole* or *Astrolabe* in 1788.

It is a pity that the publishers have only graced this worthy biography with one illustration and not a single map. However that may be, Justice Pembroke gives us an engaging and well-written account of Phillip's life from his modest beginnings in London, to his death in Bath on 31 August 1814, with the rank of Admiral of the Blue and an estate valued at £25,000. Phillip's early naval career, foreign service, espionage, two marriages, agricultural pursuits, command of the First Fleet, establishment of the British colony of New South Wales and service during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars are the stuff of a remarkable life. Pembroke makes convincing sense of the sea and its winds and currents and how they affected important episodes in Phillip's career. He writes well of the often difficult conditions aboard eighteenth-century ships and gives us a portrait of Phillip as a firm but humane man. The author's personal travels and wide reading have also informed and enriched his biographical narrative. His comprehension of the strategic canvas in the eighteenth century is also impressive.

Edward Duyker

*Australian Catholic University
University of Sydney*

Edward Duyker, *Dumont d'Urville: Explorer & Polymath*, Dunedin, Otago University Press, September 2014, 671 p., ISBN 978-1-877578-70-0.

The European discovery of the Pacific world went through a number of stages, from early disbelief in its very existence to various tales of magical islands, and the eventual theory that some vast continent must exist in order to counter-balance the great mass of Europe, Asia and Africa. Early exploratory voyages later helped to construct the image of a great ocean with a multitude of islands.

More scientifically planned voyages of exploration resulted in a more accurate picture, with a growing need for precise navigational and scientific information. The Dutch played an early part, linked with their interest in trade, especially in the western regions, while the Spanish explored mostly the eastern side, but Great Britain and France soon took over a major role, with an underlying concept of empire building and colonisation.

James Cook became and remained for many years a dominant figure, but the important part played by French explorers and scientists has eventually become recognised. The voyages of Surville, Bougainville, La Pérouse, Baudin and Dumont d'Urville have now been studied in detail, and successful efforts made to delve into the personalities and backgrounds of the men themselves.

Dumont d'Urville has long remained a navigator who, however important his achievements in the realms of exploration and scientific research, was something of an impassive and indeed statuesque individual. He made three voyages to the Pacific, one of them as second-in-command to Louis-Isidore Duperrey. An extraordinarily hard-working man, a tireless botanist, he was a prolific writer, if rather too detailed in his work to make his journals easily publishable, a task which his tragically premature death rendered even more difficult for his successors. After the publication of various carefully annotated editions of their journals, the lives of the navigators came under study, and a number of detailed biographical works have now appeared.

Edward Duyker has supplied a most thorough portrait of Dumont d'Urville, not only drawing on numerous records and documents, but personally visiting places of significance in France and elsewhere. He has now emerged as a most complex individual struggling to establish a

career in a time of constant political and social turmoil. The circumstances surrounding his early youth would indeed fascinate a psychologist who could see how they contributed to creating his difficult character. He grew up in a semi-rural part of Normandy, the son of an ageing and sickly father and a stern royalist mother. Home-educated and lonely, he roamed the countryside, collecting plants and flowers and developing a lifelong passion for botany. Setting aside his soon-widowed mother's secret hope that he might enter the priesthood, he joined the navy, moving to Toulon on the British-blockaded Mediterranean coast.

He was fortunate enough to sail on a surveying expedition to the Greek islands, and there became involved in helping to save and forward to France a recently discovered statue which is now known as the *Vénus de Milo*. At this point, it becomes clear how Dumont d'Urville used every means to obtain the greatest credit possible for the transfer of the statue to France. His moves—one might call them manoeuvres—at self-advancement are clearly described by Edward Duyker. Dumont d'Urville was undoubtedly a man of great talent and fierce self-application, but determined to get every ounce of credit for anything he did, and somewhat jealous of the achievements of others. This is evident in his attitude towards Duperrey, whom he often criticised and with whom he fell out. His efforts to be placed in command of his own expedition to the Pacific were eventually successful, and later led to his being despatched on a second one, not merely to the Pacific but also into Antarctic waters.

His achievements were many and are carefully described by Edward Duyker. A major figure in Pacific and Antarctic exploration, he has been widely admired and honoured. His name and that of his wife Adèle have been given to a number of geographical features and even to streets and institutions. This biography depicts the world in which Dumont d'Urville grew up and worked, a valuable frame for the picture of his geographical and scientific achievements. Even a brief episode in his life such as the escorting of the overthrown Charles X into exile is described clearly and in sufficient detail for the reader to understand the problems Dumont d'Urville faced and how he tried to cope with the situation as fairly as possible, never forgetting to use it as another step in his own advancement. Dumont d'Urville's life and that of his long-suffering wife and child ended tragically in a frightful railway accident, and again Edward Duyker presents it and the problems that ensued in a meticulous manner.

This biography contains a number of illustrations, a detailed bibliography and the usual index and list of references. It has been said that there can be no such thing as a definitive biography, but this work will stand its ground for a good many years to come.

John Dunmore

Massey University

BOOK NOTES

Paul de Pierres, *Allies Forever / Alliés pour toujours: A record of war service by Frenchmen and Belgians from Australia*, Wyalkatchem, W.A., Paul de Pierres, 2014, 112 p., rrp AU\$ 45, ISBN 978-0-64691-715-3. Available from <http://pauldepierres.wordpress.com>

Allies Forever, the result of two years research by Paul de Pierres of Western Australia, lists 500 French and Belgian nationals living in Australia who served in the First World War. In some cases the author says he has used his discretion 'to include several who had connections with Australia' or 'who came to live in Australia shortly after their war service' or 'who served with the French medical services and Red Cross during the conflict'. He has also included Australians who served with the French Foreign Legion before the Great War.

De Pierres's own family was a major inspiration for his work as was Jacqueline Dwyer's book, *Flanders in Australia* (Kangaroo Press, 1998), a history of the Belgian and French wool-buying community in Australia and their contributions in two world wars. De Pierres pays special tribute to the Playoust family, seven of whom served in World War 1, three of them giving their lives. He also expresses his admiration for the work done by Georges and Joseph Playoust and their wives Marie-Thérèse and Blanche, whose outstanding contribution to the French-Australian League of Help is documented in *The French Australian Review* (n° 56).

Paul de Pierres writes that his grandfather, Guy de Pierres, faced death many times during the four years he served and 'one of his brothers, Charley, lost an eye in shelling on the Somme and the other, Stéphane, won the Légion d'Honneur while laying down his life for France in bitter fighting in the Vosges Mountains'.

Presented in full colour on quality paper, many of the entries are accompanied by photographs and documents and, where possible, a short biography is included. Each entry is followed by small coloured photographs of flags, emblems and war decorations relating to the soldier.

A letter home by René Tournœr of the 2^e Zouaves, who received the Légion d'Honneur just before his death, eloquently describes not only the horrors of war and the suffering of its combatants, but also something of

their courage and endurance. *Allies Forever* is a timely contribution to the history of French-Australian connections during and after the First World War.

Elaine Lewis

Melbourne

Ben McCann, *Ripping Open the Set: French Film Design, 1930–1939 (New Studies in European Cinema)*, Berne, Peter Lang, May 2013, 250 p., rrp US\$ 68.95, ISBN 978-3-03910-311-9.

A while ago I remember reading an analysis of a scene in Hitchcock's *Rebecca* by Raymond Bellour. He was discussing the scene where Mrs Danvers was trying to talk Mrs de Winter into jumping from an upstairs window, but he was demonstrating the way Hitchcock used each and every element of the set to amplify the dramatic impact of the scene. I don't think I ever looked at curtains the same way again.

In *Ripping Open the Set* Ben McCann opens his readers' eyes wide to the core role of the set in cinema. Popular film reviews almost ignore it—talking mainly about the plot, the stars and the directors—and scholarly studies get bogged down with themes and characters.

This scholarly yet highly readable study focuses on the role of the set in French films of the 1930s. McCann chose this period because the arrival of sound in 1929 forced filmmakers indoors where they found it easier to record voices clearly. Thus they also needed to build believable sets. Around the same time the economic disaster of the Great Depression cut budgets and they needed to find inventive ways of building them.

In France gifted set designers very quickly created a new benchmark for studio sets, going beyond backdrops to what they considered authentic for the dramatic needs of the film. Films such as *Sous les toits de Paris*, *Le Jour se lève*, *Pépé le Moko*, *Le Crime de Monsieur Lange* and *Hôtel du Nord* produced a whole new cinematic vision that connected with French audiences and attracted the attention of Hollywood.

Directors such as Jean Renoir, Marcel Carné and René Clair became well known along with actors such as Jean Gabin, all of them soon achieving

stardom. But as Ben McCann argues so finely, these films were also an artistic collaboration with *décorateurs*, such as Lazare Meerson, Alexander Trauner or Eugène Lourié:

Meerson's rooftops, squares, staircases and shop façades in *Sous les toits de Paris* 'move us with their striking authenticity': such scene-setting trace elements became organizing images of an entire film, as well as the aspects of the film most audience members recalled.

Moreover, we learn how the sets reveal character traits, motivations, moods, 'architecturally reflecting the emotions and mental states of the individuals inhabiting them'.

Ben McCann does a thorough exploration of the stages of production, the incredible transformation of scarce and precious real space in the bare-boned studios and the day-to-day professional relationships between the directors and their production designers.

John Emerson

The University of Adelaide