

THE VOYAGE  
OF CAPTAIN  
BELLINGSHAUSEN  
TO THE ANTARCTIC  
SEAS, 1819-1821  
VOLUME I

Frank Debenham



THE HAKLUYT SOCIETY

# The Voyage of Captain Bellingshausen to the Antarctic Seas, 1819–1821

Translated from the Russian.  
Volume I

Edited by  
FRANK DEBENHAM

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TO THE ANTARCTIC SEAS 1819-1821

VOL. I

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THADDEUS BELLINGSHAUSEN

*(From a portrait painted about the time of the Expedition)*

*THE VOYAGE*  
of  
CAPTAIN BELLINGSHAUSEN  
to the  
ANTARCTIC SEAS  
1819—1821

*Translated from the Russian*

Edited by  
FRANK DEBENHAM, O.B.E., M.A.  
*Director of the Scott Polar Research Institute, Cambridge*

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## P R E F A C E

**T**HIS TRANSLATION of Captain T. Bellingshausen's account of his remarkable voyage into the Antarctic Ocean in 1819-21 has been so long heralded that a brief notice of the vicissitudes through which it has passed should accompany its appearance in print.

The idea of its publication in English first occurred to the present editor in 1920, when, by the kindness of the Hydrographer to the Admiralty, Sir John Parry, he was permitted to see a translation which had been made during the last war at the instance of Mr W. S. Bruce, leader of the *Scotia* expedition to the Antarctic (1902-1904). This translation was accordingly submitted to a Russian scholar, Mr (afterwards Professor) Edward Bullough, of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge. He found that it contained many technical faults, and very kindly undertook a fresh translation of the original, which, with the aid of grants from the Scott Mansion House Fund, he completed in 1924. This was, with Mr Bullough's consent, examined and revised by other experts, of whom the chief was a Russian student of the editor, N. Volkov, a descendant of Lazarev, who rendered valuable service. The present editor then set about harmonizing the work of the various translators, in order to produce a text which would be uniform in style. In this he was greatly helped by his assistant at the Scott Polar Research Institute, Miss W. M. Drake (now Mrs Hayes).

Some of the officers who accompanied Bellingshausen wrote independent accounts of the voyage, and these were deposited in the archives of the Russian Admiralty. The present writer thought that extracts from these, added as footnotes or appendices, would increase the interest and value of Bellingshausen's narrative, and accordingly applied to the Russian Admiralty for permission to use them. The Russian authorities replied in the most courteous spirit, but unfortunately were not able to locate the journals—if they still existed—before the invasion of Russia by Germany in 1941.

The fact that Bellingshausen's voyage was practically unknown to the general public made it no easy task to find for this translation a publisher who would bring it out in the style which it merited. One was found, however, in 1938, and the book was going through the press when the war broke out. Unfortunately the restrictions and

difficulties caused by the war seriously hampered the work of this firm, which in 1940 was forced to ask to be released from its contract. In 1942 the Council of the Hakluyt Society was approached, and almost at once accepted the proposal that this translation should be published as one of their famous series of first-hand narratives of exploration and travel.

The preparation of the book for press in the midst of manifold war obligations has only been made possible by the willing co-operation of many people, to some of whom particular acknowledgment is due. General assistance of a secretarial kind has always been available from Miss Christina Wanklyn and also from other voluntary helpers at the Scott Polar Research Institute. Thanks are also due to Dr Lynam, the Hon. Secretary, now President, of the Hakluyt Society, and to the Cambridge University Press for their advice and assistance at all stages of publication.

FRANK DEBENHAM

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Cambridge*

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## INTRODUCTION

THE HIGHEST AUTHORITY on the history of Antarctic exploration, Dr Hugh Robert Mill, says in his *Siege of the South Pole*, that the voyage of Captain Bellingshausen was "one of the greatest Antarctic expeditions on record, well worthy of being placed beside that of Cook".

The reader of these volumes will probably agree with that verdict, but he will also be curious to know how it was that so remarkable a voyage came about and why the Russian nation should enter so briefly and so honourably into the Southern Seas, a sphere which they have neglected ever since. The explanation lies chiefly in the history of Russia in the previous half century, which amounts to the same thing as ascribing it chiefly to the influence of the great Empress Catherine II.

Continuing and expanding the general policy of Peter the Great she sought the sea to the south of Russia just as he had sought it to the west, and she added the shores of the Black Sea to her dominion just as Peter had striven for and attained a seaboard on the Baltic.

When Bellingshausen was born (1779) the Russians had only just taken from the Turks the outlets to those great Russian rivers, the Don, the Dnieper and the Bug. The sea which was to be the scene of much of his service life was not thoroughly Russian until he was a midshipman. Throughout his narrative constant references to scenes and phenomena of the Black Sea betray his abiding interest, and several of the names he selects for the new islands which he discovered in the Pacific commemorate the commanders of the Black Sea Fleet. Just as Peter the Great had laboured to make his subjects navy-conscious and Baltic-wise, the age of Catherine turned their attention to the Black Sea and to the infant navy which wrested the local sea power from the Turks. In fostering that attention the Empress and her advisers, and her grandson Alexander I, steadfastly pointed to the British Navy as a pattern for their own, a fact which produced two direct consequences, and these form a continuous background, implicit or explicit, to the narrative of this voyage. One is a great respect held by the Russians for the British Navy, its technique and its tradition, and the other is an admiration, amounting almost to worship, of Captain James Cook.

So much for Russia's new interest in the sea and in her navy; her interest in the Pacific was due to another set of circumstances, also set in train by Peter the Great, namely, the discovery and settlement of the easternmost parts of Siberia, Okhotsk and Kamchatka.

In the eighty years between the expedition of Bering and that of Bellingshausen the progress of these distant settlements had been slow, mainly on account of the great time it took to cover the distance either by land or by sea, but also, according to the Russians themselves, because of lack of support from St Petersburg. Desperately long as the journey was from the capital to Kamchatka, the voyage by sea was still more objectionable as viewed by the Russians, and though the trade in fish and furs was entirely based on the sea, all the Russian ships involved were built at Okhotsk, and the commerce was in the hands of local people with little capital.

The building of these ships was not so difficult in a land of good timber, but their outfitting was a tremendous problem since everything which could not be made locally had to be brought all the way across Siberia. Cables, for instance, made in Europe, were cut into pieces of about 50 feet in length, transported by waggon and packhorse and then spliced together again at Okhotsk; anchors too had to be carried in pieces. Upwards of 4000 horses were employed on this transport alone, and naturally the price of such goods was multiplied to a prohibitive extent.

In 1785, however, the Russo-American Company was founded with "factories" on Kamchatka and the Aleutian Islands, and the value of these distant colonies began to attract more attention in Russia itself, and alternative routes began to be considered.

There are adequate explanations of this delay in establishing a connection by sea. The Portuguese, the Dutch, the English and even the French, all had possessions along the route from Europe to the Far East and were accustomed to long sea voyages for trade, but the Russians had no such possessions, and therefore no body of seamen with experience of such ventures.

It was not uncommon at this period for young Russian nobles to take service with the British Navy, and it fell to one such, A. J. von Krusenstern, to be the means of breaking this vicious circle of no attempts to make the long voyage because no Russian had made it. After serving in the English Navy from 1793 to 1797 Krusenstern went out to India in an English frigate and on to China in a merchant-

man with the set purpose of becoming acquainted with those seas, and with the technique of the trade to the East. He returned in 1799 to Russia and set about trying to convince the Russian authorities that it would be far better to send their own ships to Kamchatka from Europe than to build them locally and entrust the valuable furs either to land transport or to carriage by the ships of other nations.

At first he failed, but when Alexander I came to the throne he gained the ear and the confidence of the new ministers and in 1802 found himself appointed to the command of an expedition of two ships to make the voyage and incidentally make the first Russian circumnavigation of the world.

Kruzenstern was a remarkable man, an excellent seaman, far sighted and firm of purpose, well fitted to become the spiritual mentor and doyen of the group of Russian explorers who date from his voyage. He sailed in the *Nadexhda*, with the *Neva* as consort, and he had with him as fifth officer Baron Bellingshausen, and as a 15-year-old cadet Otto von Kotzebue, both destined to become famous for their own voyages.

The voyage lasted for three years, from 1803, and was quite unique in Russian annals. The route taken was by way of Cape Horn, the Marquesas and Sandwich Islands to Kamchatka and thence to Japan, where the Russians attempted without success to establish friendly relations with the Japanese, having carried an ambassador and his suite especially for that purpose.

The return via the Cape of Good Hope was as full of incident but barren of accident as the outward passage, and the expedition returned to Russia without the loss of a single member of the crew, a result which was astounding in an age when losses by scurvy were accounted as inevitable as was the ordinary wear and tear of the rigging. To gain his experience under such a leader was of the greatest value to the 25-year-old Bellingshausen, and it is most interesting to see how closely he followed, in his own voyage, the precepts learned under Kruzenstern, including, unfortunately, a certain turgidity of style in his narrative, a defect which was avoided by young Kotzebue.

Bellingshausen, in his care of his ships, his passion for accuracy in his navigation and his constant preoccupation with the health of his crew, was a mirror reflection of Kruzenstern, and he obtained similar successful results. Both, it may be added, patterned themselves quite openly on Captain Cook, uniting in an admiration for their English

predecessor which was almost extravagant. Kruzenstern, for instance, was never so happy as when his position for an island or cape approached that of Captain Cook, which he invariably took to be final and accurate though made thirty years earlier.

Such was the nature of the training of our author, born of noble family and with the spirit to serve his Emperor in any capacity. Unfortunately we can give no picture of the young fifth lieutenant from the pages of Kruzenstern's narrative, for his book was characterized by its translator as having "an uncouth stile and a cold precision of expression" and no word of either praise or blame of his junior officers is ever allowed to enlighten its somewhat heavy array of incidents.

The sole reference to his future successor is in the following cautious yet commendatory terms: "The choice of Baron Bellingshausen, my fifth lieutenant, I made without being personally acquainted with him. His reputation as a skilful and well-informed officer in the different branches of navigation, which I found to be perfectly just, induced me to propose to him to sail with me."

The expedition returned in 1806 to find Europe once more ablaze with war, Russia playing an increasingly important part in the balance of power and Alexander I beginning to feel his way towards the great rôle he was to assume a few years later.

Bellingshausen returned to his naval duties, in the Black Sea for the most part, and into an obscurity which was perhaps inevitable for a young officer gradually climbing to higher rank throughout a prolonged series of great national events. At least we can trace no details of interest in his life beyond those which can be inferred from his own narrative. He was obviously devoted to his profession and especially to his navigational duties, while his genuine admiration of his senior officers and his loyalty to his Emperor grew until he became the very efficient but somewhat restrained and unemotional captain of the "second rank" who was selected, as a second choice, for the Antarctic expedition, thirteen years after his return from the Pacific.

In that period the prestige of Russia and the stature of its Emperor had increased enormously. The campaign of 1812 had awakened the national feelings of Russia's people, the prominence of Alexander in the concert of Europe had given him new reins to hold, so that in spite of the infelicities of his Holy Alliance and the uncertainty whither his growing mysticism would lead him he was the grand figure of Europe,

governing his vast dominion "from the seat of a post chaise" with vigour and restless travel. Yet her navy, still somewhat pent up in the Baltic and the Black Sea, was clearly an instrument which needed wider fields for expansion and training and there were still no overseas possessions which required voyages, except the small trading settlements on the Alaskan coast.

There had been some more official voyages to the Pacific, the most notable being that of Kotzebue from 1815 to 1818, and more exploration of those dusky seas between Siberia and America, all of which had the development of Russian trade as its partial if not its main object. This did not fully satisfy the far-seeing Russian ministers in charge of her marine affairs, in particular the Marquis de Traversey, and including Bellingshausen's own senior officer, Admiral Greig, the son of a Scotsman who had himself taken service in the Russian Navy.

These officers recognized, as did those of the British Admiralty at the same period, that for training in navigation and seamanship in time of peace there could be no better sphere than the arduous and often perilous one of the polar regions.

The detailed instructions to the commander from various branches of the Admiralty, printed in full in the Preliminary Memoir, are most enlightening in this respect and indeed follow closely the pattern set by British official expeditions, and in some respects improve on it.

It would be possible to demonstrate this training aspect of the voyage in many ways, but perhaps the most obvious example is in the methods of navigation so assiduously practised by all the officers. The impressive array of observing instruments taken, the seizure of every opportunity for determining position, the constant use of the exacting and somewhat abstruse method of finding longitude by "lunar distances" and the high order of accuracy attained, all furnish clear proof that in the commander's view training in navigation was a prime function of his responsibility as well as an abiding interest to himself.

In the comprehensive instructions from the Imperial Admiralty Department navigation is particularly emphasized, and the only civilian scientist on the expedition was the astronomer Simanov. The results of such application are to be seen in the charts published with the "Atlas", and reproduced, greatly reduced in scale and redrawn, in these volumes. This method of reproduction was necessary since the names had to be in English, but it does less than justice to the

originals, which can hold their own with any of the contemporary work of that kind. The survey of the South Shetland group of islands indeed set a new standard for polar charts, and the field work from which the chart was produced was never surpassed until steam took the place of sail and revolutionized the methods of mapping coast lines from the sea.

This very high standard in technical matters was not confined to navigation but is evident also in the drawings reproduced in the Atlas. It is clear, therefore, that the Russian Admiralty were determined to do as good a piece of work as any other nation had done, and they succeeded in every respect except that of natural history, a shortcoming for which they were not entirely responsible.

To aid in a proper appreciation of this voyage it is necessary to sketch the background of the picture, especially the less known Antarctic part of the scene on which these two Russian ships were to cast such unexpected illumination.

When Captain James Cook set out on his second voyage in 1772 his avowed purpose was to establish the existence or otherwise of a large Antarctic continent in latitudes which had never yet been reached.

By an unkind fate neither Cook nor Bellingshausen, in spite of all their gallantry and persistence, was to prove that what had been guessed at on the slenderest grounds did in fact exist, a very large and indeed the highest of all the continents, hidden behind the barriers of ice which turned them back from their repeated assaults.

Perhaps Bellingshausen's was the unkinder cut of the two since, as we shall see, he did view the continent but did not recognize it as such; but both returned with a small bag of islands only and evidence of the "not proven" type as to whether there was a large mass of land farther south than they could push their ships.

Cook did at least explode the theory that there was a vast continent filling most of the southerly latitudes of the Pacific, a suggestion so firmly held by fairly competent persons that Alexander Dalrymple, rival to Cook for command of an earlier expedition and later Hydrographer to the Navy, could assert that it was probably larger than Asia and must contain fifty million inhabitants whose trade "would be sufficient to maintain the power, dominion and sovereignty of Britain".

Whether it was owing to the thoroughness of Cook's examination or the sober doubts he expressed as to the presence of land beyond

his route, it is a fact that no attempt to settle the question was made between his voyage and that of the Russians nearly fifty years later. Quite apart from doubts as to its existence, Cook's own summary of the matter was trenchant enough to discourage any idea of profit from discovery in those seas when he wrote: "Should anyone possess the resolution and the fortitude to elucidate this point by pushing yet further south than I have done, I shall not envy him the fame of his discovery, but I make bold to declare that the world will derive no benefit from it."

Cook's "bold" pronouncement remains true to this day as far as the land of the Antarctic is concerned, though he himself sowed the seeds of commercial development in the seas which surround it when his reports of the animal life led to the sealing ventures which were in time to provide discoveries of a piecemeal kind of many sub-Antarctic islands and one or two promontories of the mainland. Except for the region to the south of Cape Horn Bellingshausen began his voyage with the map of the Antarctic exactly as Cook had left it fifty years earlier, almost completely blank, and the Antarctic Circle as yet crossed only in three places.

Where Cook had been able to sail over  $24^{\circ}$  of longitude within that Circle Bellingshausen was able to sail over  $42^{\circ}$ , and the latter was very careful to choose sectors not visited by Cook, despairing, as he says, of improving on his predecessor's record. As Dr Mill most aptly remarks, "the voyage was a masterly continuation of that of Cook, supplementing it in every particular, competing with it in none". Between them the two great navigators therefore covered about  $60^{\circ}$  of longitude within the Circle, one-sixth of its circumference, yet were unlucky enough to miss the mainland entirely, though one-quarter to one-third of its coast is very close to the Circle. Moreover Cook's Sandwich Land turned out to be a group of small islands, while Bellingshausen's Alexander Land, believed for a long time to be part of the mainland, has quite recently been proved to be a large island, not that there need be any real distinction between mainland and large islands hardly separated by narrow channels from the continent proper.

It would, nevertheless, be very unjust to allow such remarks as these to give the impression that these expeditions were unfruitful, and it will be as well to discuss at this point the positive gains of the Russian voyage in a more comprehensive way than is possible in the footnotes.

It will be best to consider the discoveries in their chronological order.

As will be seen from the end map, Bellingshausen sailed from the South Atlantic easterly round the world. His first valuable piece of work was his survey of the south side of South Georgia which he did because Cook had done the north side, and until at least the end of last century the Russian survey was the only one available for parts of this very inhospitable coast and was therefore incorporated into official charts.

Strictly speaking, this is a sub-Antarctic island, having a latitude about  $2^{\circ}$  more northerly than Cape Horn, and thence he steered for the capes to the east and some  $4^{\circ}$  to the south which had been discovered in misty weather by Cook and grouped hopefully by him as Sandwich Land, though he fully expected them to turn out ultimately to be islands. The Russians discovered the whole group and did a running survey of them with sketches. The highest praise which can be given for the topographic sketches made by the artist Mikhailov is the fact that they are still used in the British Admiralty publication, *The Antarctic Pilot*, published in 1930.

It is unfortunate that the Hydrographic Office in transliterating the Russian has called the northern group the "Traverse" Islands from which one would deduce quite a different origin to the true one, for the leader hastened to name his first new discovery after the real promoter of his expedition, the Marquis de Traversey, Minister of Naval Affairs at St Petersburg.

Having completed this task in a manner which was to defy competition for over a century, the ships sailed to the south-east towards a region hitherto unvisited. The commander made his first crossing of the Antarctic Circle on January 15th, 1820 (O.S.), without even mentioning the event in his narrative.

On the 16th and again on the 21st of January he was so close to the land that had the weather been clear he must have recognized it as such, but the journal of the 5th and 6th of the next month is still more tantalizing in that he describes very clearly an appearance of land without claiming it as such.

As suggested in the footnote for that date, there can be no reasonable doubt that the commander was looking at the continent, covered with ice and rising in low folds one behind the other to a great distance, yet was failing to realize that ice alone could not take that shape or

attain that thickness while afloat. No better description than his can be applied to literally hundreds of miles of this stretch of the Antarctic continent as we now know it.

Why then did he miss what in many respects must be looked upon as the greatest chance of his voyage, the recognition of the continent which he, like Cook before him, had been sent to prove or disprove? We can hardly dismiss it as due to his characteristic caution and reluctance to give rein to any suspicion that it might indeed be ice-covered land, for if that had been the case he would surely have lingered in the vicinity longer or at least have voiced some doubts as to its being ice alone.

The explanation seems to be that the great size of the Antarctic icebergs had convinced him that there was no limit to their height and area. He was much interested in the icebergs, and in places in his narrative he pauses to wonder at their origin. In each case he appears to have satisfied himself that they were the fragments of still larger and higher masses which were either afloat or resting on a bottom well below sea-level, and therefore not to be recorded as a land mass supporting ice.

The editor, having seen for himself such massive ice hiding the continent, to be described in precisely the same terms as "a surface sloping upwards . . . to a distance so far that its end was out of sight . . .," was far from satisfied that some of the many keen pairs of eyes had not interpreted the discovery more correctly. He therefore instituted an inquiry for the journals of the other officers of the expedition which, as recorded in the narrative, were all handed in on their return and deposited in the archives of the Russian Admiralty. To his infinite regret he was unable to trace them and the hope of finding that Captain Lazarev or Commander Zavodovski had at least expressed polite doubts as to their commanding officer's verdict must continue to be unsatisfied.

The polar historian can divert himself with postulates as to what the effect would have been had the Russians returned with news of continental land in that quarter. We dare not follow such interesting but fruitless imaginings beyond stating that almost certainly Dumont D'Urville, Wilkes and Ross would, some twenty years later, have made that their first area of search, instead of the Australian sector.

It is interesting to note here two of the reasons why Bellingshausen and others after him had such difficulty in recognizing the coast when they were near it. One is the effect of the winds and their weather,

particularly upon sailing ships. When the wind comes from the north in those latitudes, while helping the ship to sail south it invariably brings thick and snowy weather so that the land cannot be seen. When, on the other hand, the south and east winds bring clear weather they hinder the sailing ship in getting south, and bring out the loose ice from the coast, fending the ships off from a close approach. The other reason for failure to recognize the proximity of land comes from the peculiar soundings. Off nearly every continental coast in temperate and tropical regions there is a fairly well-defined change of slope, the soundings increasing gradually to the "continental shelf" at about 100 fathoms, beyond which the gradient is much steeper. Round the Antarctic continent, however, the depth of the continental shelf is nearer 200 fathoms than 100. On the two occasions now under review, for instance, Bellingshausen failed to get soundings at 100 fathoms in the first case and 200 in the second. Had he let out a little more line he might have found bottom and been more hopeful of land but still would not have considered he was definitely over the shelf, a term which in point of fact was not then in use.

Lest it be taken as mysterious that the Antarctic should be unique in this way it should be added that there is a perfectly adequate explanation. A continental shelf has a natural termination or edge at 100 fathoms because it is made up of debris which is distributed down to that depth and not beyond it by waves and currents. In the Antarctic Ocean, however, there is another disturbing agency in the form of countless icebergs whose bases are rarely less than 100 fathoms deep and often up to 200 fathoms or over, so that the shelf is literally "scraped" to a greater depth than elsewhere.

We may end this comment on Bellingshausen's failure to recognize a new continent by inviting readers to consider whether such a remarkable voyage did not deserve a better fate, all the more so since later explorers by exercising too much imagination have recorded continents which were afterwards sailed over.

The long voyage from this region to Port Jackson was full of minor incidents of the type inseparable from polar exploration in a sailing ship, but it was barren of result as far as discovery is concerned. Bellingshausen himself was a conscientious observer of all that was seen, but the expedition was sadly handicapped throughout by having no naturalists with it, a lack which calls for almost the only bitter criticism he permits himself to make of his organizing committee.

The two visits to Sydney occupied altogether some months, and the narrative devotes a good deal of space to them. Bellingshausen himself had no English and though Lazarev, having served in the British Navy, could make up for this in the ceremonial visits, it meant that the captain's impressions, as far as verbal contact was concerned, were coloured by the constant need for an interpreter. While we miss the personal element in his description of the people he meets we gain from the fact that his observations of the infant colony were his own.

He was there at the end of the long reign of Governor Macquarie, who, for all his faults and pomposities, was chiefly responsible for pulling the settlement out of a state of misrule. The Russians were clearly impressed by what they saw, if only in contrast with what they had expected from a penal settlement.

Contemporary reports of what the British thought of the Russians are rather meagre, but here too surprise was evident at the efficiency and equipment of the Russian ships. The contacts were in fact not very close, partly because the crews were kept very busy at refitting the ships, partly because they were somewhat isolated both by the language difficulty and by their land headquarters being on the northern, uninhabited shore of the harbour. Nevertheless, the long account of what they saw and heard in New Holland is a useful addition to the historical record of the early days there and will be welcomed by those who have laboured to collect such evidence.

In the true spirit of Captain Cook, Bellingshausen grudged every day spent at anchor in known waters and his pleasure at departing for fresh exploration is obvious enough.

The cruise of the ships in New Zealand waters was very much after the pattern of Cook's, and to the same locality. While it added nothing important to the charts it gives a clear account of the natives, who were still little influenced by occasional contact with whites since the earliest visits.

Sailing out into the southern Pacific the Russian ships set about their second self-imposed task, the thorough examination of the most dangerous archipelago of low islands, now known as the Paumotu or Tuamotu group. From the point of view of the hydrographic surveyor this was a highly technical and difficult piece of work from sailing ships; to the ordinary reader it has less appeal, not least because there were no mishaps. Nevertheless the account, from a more facile pen

than that of Bellingshausen, would be very readable, as was the narrative of Otto von Kotzebue's voyages in the same seas both before and after this time. Our author, however, rarely feels at home with his pen except when detailing his surveys or his details of welfare for his ships and crew.

At Tahiti, however, that lotus isle of the late eighteenth-century Pacific explorer, he is stirred out of his log-book style and sets out his feelings in a way which for him is almost lyrical. His attitude to the natives is as correct as ever but he does permit himself reflections on their character with some freedom. He has little of the abandon of Kotzebue yet he improves considerably on the laconic manner of Kruzenstern. One feels that here too his lack of English hampered him, for his interpreters spoke English, and it is clear that some of this information, particularly that concerning the natural products, was written up afterwards from other sources. In the return voyage to Port Jackson he finds more new islands, for he assiduously avoids following the tracks of former ships and is thereby rewarded. Like Captain Cook he is particularly attracted by the Friendly Islanders, but his stay is so short that he is able to add little beyond local surveys to our knowledge of the group at that early period.

His journal of their second stay in Port Jackson is most disappointingly brief, but it is clear that the Russians felt much more at home with their hosts, and it is even possible that the social events and entertainments were the cause of the slender entries in his journal. As far as space is concerned he makes amends to some extent by including a long account of "the colonies of New South Wales". In places this is not much more than a gazetteer, but interspersed amongst the statistics are observations and opinions, always rather guarded but betraying real interest in this great experiment of a community removed twelve thousand miles from its homeland, and gradually working out its own salvation.

Soon after setting out on the second half of his circumnavigation of the Antarctic regions certain rather serious defects in his own ship became apparent, notably a persistent leak which was a constant cause of anxiety. Yet never in the course of the narrative do these anxieties cause the commander to abandon his purpose of sailing as far south as he can at every opportunity. We need not review in advance the tedium and danger of the first two months of this voyage, but pass on to his first real reward in the discovery of new land, the island which

he named after Peter the Great. It may seem a small reward for so much toil and hardship, yet it may be pointed out that it was the first time that land had ever been seen within the Antarctic Circle. More precisely, it was 250 nautical miles farther south than any other land yet discovered. Such sentiments carried but little weight with Bellingshausen, who was probably still worried because he had not by 100 miles got as far south as Captain Cook had reached.

It was to be ninety years before this small high ice-covered island was seen again, or indeed his next and larger discovery, but it may be taken as the world's tribute to the Russians that both appeared on every reputable map without question until they were confirmed, and this in spite of the fact that no translation of the narrative in any language appeared until the end of the century. The same tribute in more belated form is now perpetuated by naming the sea to the north of these discoveries and west of the Graham Land peninsula after the Russian captain.

Sailing eastward again and as far south as the pack ice would permit, he at last found land extensive enough to allow his cautious temperament to name it as a "Land", after his reigning emperor.

He saw it clearly on a beautiful day and his artist's drawing is innocent of the cloud and haze which are the too frequent concomitants of Antarctic views. This is the one occasion on which the editor can find any fault with Bellingshausen's leadership, for the following reasons.

It was the last chance he had of making good southing and he had made his largest and most nearly continental discovery, yet he spent only one day in that vicinity, and then sailed north again.

On the other hand, his next objective was a more definite mission, to visit the islands discovered two years before and reported to him by the ambassador in Brazil in a letter sent to Port Jackson. He had made his last new discovery and was about to merely confirm and survey those of others. Normally it would be sufficient to allow the narrative to tell its own story, but it so happens that of recent years a fierce controversy has raged round these very discoveries, and Bellingshausen has, in a minor sense, been called in as witness on one side or the other. Without actually entering the lists it is therefore necessary to be especially careful over the translation of this part of the voyage and state the facts as dispassionately as possible. At the same time the unbiased historian of polar history may be

permitted to deplore the fact that far more ink and paper has been spent on this controversy over priority of discovery than would have been needed to print Bellingshausen's voyage in English five times over.

To the not too biased mind the undoubted facts about the discoveries in this sector are as follows. In February 1819 the South Shetlands were first discovered by William Smith in the brig *Williams*, and he revisited them again in October of the same year. The brig was then chartered by the British Admiralty to survey the new discovery, and under a naval master, Edward Bransfield, and with Smith aboard as pilot, a survey was made of the islands during which more continuous land was sighted on January 30, 1820, and plotted on the chart to the south of the South Shetland group itself, the land being named Trinity Land "in compliment to the Trinity Board". It is interesting to recall that on the day that Bransfield saw this land Bellingshausen was 60° of longitude to the east and 5° (300 nautical miles) of latitude farther south, and two days before had been within 30 miles of the main continent, hidden from him by foggy weather. It is strange to reflect that but for that fog there might have been a difference of opinion over a century later as to who first, by an hour or so, saw the mainland of the continent, though one side of the current dispute alleges that Bransfield did not in fact sight it at all.

The protagonist for this side is in fact none other than the American sealing captain who came on board the *Vostok* on January 25th, 1821, from his 44-ton sloop, the *Hero*. Rather more than two months earlier than the date of this meeting and ten months later than Bransfield, this captain, Nathaniel Palmer, had re-discovered the Trinity Land of Bransfield. More accurately, he had been sent to look at land which had already been seen from Deception Island (Teille Island of Bellingshausen). There can be no doubt that Palmer made this short voyage of 60 miles or so to verify the land, and what took place in the interview between Bellingshausen and Palmer would, at first sight, appear to have nothing to do with Bransfield's voyage a year earlier.

The argument on one side has, however, taken the form of an attempt to prove that Bransfield never saw his Trinity Land, that Palmer was the first to sail close to it and that therefore the latter's name should have priority of all others. To this end two other accounts of the interview between the Russian and the American which have appeared in print are used as evidence.

The Russian account is brief enough and one gathers that Palmer was aboard for less than an hour and gave (almost certainly through an interpreter) an interesting account of the sealing, the ships engaged, the anchorages and so on. He may have described his discovery of land  $1^{\circ}$  farther south, but if so it is strange that Bellingshausen does not mention it, especially as he had not heard of Bransfield's discovery of Trinity Land but only of Smith's earlier discovery of the group of islands.

The two other accounts go far beyond this, however, and in justice to history some mention must be made of their embroidery. The first and more accurate is one given by Edmund Fanning in a book called *Voyages round the World* published in New York in 1833, twelve years after the event itself. The meeting is described in some detail, including an offer by Palmer to pilot the Russian ships into Yankee Harbour (Deception Island), almost certainly true though it is not in Bellingshausen's account. Bellingshausen's alleged reply, however, cannot be true as given in Fanning: "The commodore thanked him kindly, 'but previous to our being enveloped in the fog', said he, 'we had sight of those islands, and concluded we had made a discovery, but behold, when the fog lifts, to my great surprise, here is an American vessel. . . .'"

Either the interpreter bungled his translation very badly or else Bellingshausen was being flattering to the extent of sheer falsehood, since he had come expressly to that place to see the islands which he had heard of six months before. The account goes on: "His astonishment was yet more increased, when Captain Palmer informed him of the existence of an immense extent of land to the south. . . the commodore was so forcibly struck with the circumstances of the case, that he named the coast then to the south, Palmer's Land." We are left with the alternatives that either this conversation did take place but that Bellingshausen did not believe Palmer and therefore avoided all mention of it either in text or map, or that the conversation did not follow that course.

Perhaps the most charitable conclusion is that with the difficulty of language neither had a very clear idea of what the other had been saying.

No such treatment can be applied to the later account, which might be ignored altogether were it not that it conveys an entirely false impression of Captain Bellingshausen. If it were true, indeed, it

would convict our author of a very serious act of *suppressio veri*. It is in a paper by a niece of Captain Palmer, presented in 1907, that is, eighty-six years after the event, but said to be based on a journal of Captain Palmer himself. The niece, Mrs Loper, gives a graphic account of the meeting and the conversation, of which the relevant part runs as follows:

“On hearing that Palmer had been so far as 63° 45' S., Bellingshausen ‘rose much agitated’, asked to see the log and chart, and while it was being fetched had luncheon served; asked many questions about the sealing; examined the papers without comment, then rose and said: ‘What do I see and what do I hear from a boy in his teens—that he... has pushed his way to the pole through storm and ice and sought the point I... have for three weary anxious years searched day and night for... What shall I say to my master? What will he think of me? Be that as it may, my grief is your joy; wear your laurels with my sincere prayers; I name the land you have discovered in honor of yourself, noble boy, Palmer Land.’”

Setting aside the fact that this long speech would have to be through an interpreter, and ignoring the curious envy attributed to a man who had just come from discovering land nearly 400 miles farther south, the unpleasant deduction remains that if this conversation were true Captain Bellingshausen has pointedly omitted all mention of it, an accusation which his editor will in no circumstances allow to pass unnoticed.

In the first place so ornamental a speech by a man of Bellingshausen's seniority and gravity hardly rings true. Allowing for the embellishments of copiers, whether nieces or others, one might conclude that the Russian captain had indeed made some diplomatic and complimentary speech to the cheerful young American which had grown with passage of time to such an extravagance, were it not that his complete suppression of every mention of its subject would be entirely out of character for such a man. Throughout the book he is always intensely interested in and studiously appreciative of all discoveries by other men. Nor, if he had indeed been shown a log and charts of the new discovery, would he have disbelieved the story entirely, the only other explanation for his neglect to mention it.

There is a more significant sentence of Bellingshausen's two days later when he had discovered and named the “Three Brothers” group of islands. He says, “Farther south, it appeared to me that land

was visible in the heavy clouds, but the thick weather hindered our observing it properly. I therefore left it to some future navigator to determine if there really is an island in this direction."

That would be the strangest language to use if indeed Bellingshausen had understood from Palmer that in that very direction there was extensive land, making his suppression even more palpable, and one by which he could not possibly profit.

With that we must take leave of this unhappy and distasteful sequel to the undoubted fine work of three men, Bransfield, Palmer and Bellingshausen, which has been distorted or disparaged in order to press the question of priorities and the extent of map to be covered by a name. The editor would be rightly criticized if he boldly proposed to replace the alternatives of Palmer Land or Graham Land for the 400-mile long peninsula with the name Alexander Land, yet in truth he would have a better case, since it is by far the most difficult end of the peninsula to discover and fortunately has never been questioned as to date or accuracy.<sup>1</sup>

After their careful survey of the South Shetlands and part of the South Orkneys the Russian ships turned northwards for a comparatively uneventful voyage homeward.

As they sailed into the Gulf of Finland back to Kronstadt, their port of departure, they did, in fact, all but vanish from the pages of exploration which they had so worthily laboured to enrich.

It is not clear whether the enthusiasm with which the Russian Admiralty had sent out the ships had cooled or whether the Court, prime mover in publicity, was otherwise engaged, but it is clear from the Russian Preliminary Narrative that even when the narrative had been written it required special pleading to have it published and even then it attracted but passing attention.

It is difficult to believe that this was wholly due to its being in Russian, and one is led to seek further explanation.

One contributory cause of the apparent indifference of foreign readers is no doubt that the book is comparatively heavy reading, and

<sup>1</sup> Readers may well ask for the sources of the argument which has taken up so much space. The essential pros and cons are to be found in the following: (1) *The Discoveries of Antarctica within the American Sector, as Revealed by Maps and Documents*. By William Herbert Hobbs, University of Michigan. Philadelphia, 1939. (2) "On some misrepresentations of Antarctic history." Article by A. R. H. in the *Geographical Journal*, vol. xciv, October, 1939. (3) "The Charting of the South Shetlands, 1819-28." By Lieut.-Commander R. T. Gould, R.N., ret., in *The Mariner's Mirror*, vol. xxii, No. 3, July, 1941.

a second is that the voyage is not eventful in the sense that many others were. There was no tragedy and no outstanding discovery. History shows that it is the expedition which has either great good fortune or great disaster which finds a large reading public.

Further, it appeared at a time when polar interest was directed chiefly to the North-West Passage and the far more eventful expeditions of Parry, of Franklin, and of Rae, in all of which land travel with its more vivid adventures captured attention.

Whatever the reasons, it is a fact that little but a bare outline of the voyage found its way to the nations most busy with exploration, and it was not until 1837 that any English chart showed the track of the expedition. The Hydrographic Section of the British Admiralty duly noted the discoveries and in due course used extracts from the narrative in its publications.

It is therefore to be confessed that this very remarkable voyage had but small effect on subsequent Antarctic exploration for a very long time.

Bellingshausen's immediate successor bent on discovery in the South Atlantic was James Weddell, who must have known of the Russian voyage as he was at the South Shetlands immediately before and soon after, but his own remarkable voyage was made long before the Bellingshausen narrative appeared.

The contrast between the expeditions of the Russian naval captain and the British ex-naval master was mainly one of facilities, both men being of that calibre which pursues a purpose to the utmost. Weddell with his 160-ton brig, the *Jane*, and his 65-ton cutter, the *Beaufoy*, and his total crews of but 35 men, had even less luck than the Russians as far as discovery of new land was concerned. He had the good fortune to have an extraordinarily ice-free season and reached a point nearly 3° farther south than Cook, but as his deep thrust into that open sea produced no landfall his voyage was on the whole of negative value.

When in the late thirties there was a revival of official interest in the Antarctic culminating in the despatch of French, American and British expeditions under Dumont D'Urville, Wilkes and Ross, the work of Bellingshausen became better known, but only Biscoe visited the same areas of the Antarctic.

In the brig, the *Tula*, and the small cutter, the *Lively* of but 50 tons, Biscoe made a circumnavigation somewhat similar to that of Bellingshausen, some ten years after him. He had similar difficulties with the

pack ice, but partly on account of his greater mobility in the small vessels he was able to get farther south at several points. He thus discovered Enderby Land in February 1831, the first discovery of truly continental land in the Antarctic, as we now know. Later, on the same voyage, he discovered Adelaide Island and the Biscoe Archipelago, both north of the Russian discovery of Alexander Land.

As already noted, the great revival of official Antarctic exploration in the late thirties and early forties was directed towards the sector south of Australia and New Zealand, a part which Bellingshausen had not visited. It was not till the beginning of the twentieth century therefore that a renewal of exploration led to further assaults on the regions to which the Russians had paid most attention.

These, then, are some of the reasons why the Russian text has remained untranslated into English for more than a century. Now that it is available in full the historian of exploration of the Antarctic will be able to assess its value in more detail than can be given in a short introduction.

It is less easy to draw a clear picture of Bellingshausen himself than of his expedition and it would remain so even were biographical details more readily available. He was clearly of that breed of naval men who are prone to sink their private affairs and opinions beneath the calls of their duty and who have earned the cognomen of the silent service for the navy. Born in the province of Estonia, on the island of Oesel, he was within the influence both of German culture and that of the intelligentsia of St Petersburg. All internal evidence, however, points to his having difficulty in expressing himself, as being a man of action rather than of words. Not that he was barren of ideas in any way; indeed his excursions into scientific hypothesis in the book are almost brilliant for a man of strictly naval training.

In the social sphere he appears to have been on the whole friendly but punctilious, and probably acted more formally than he really felt. His relations with his officers, too, seem to have been good but official and correct, and even when he betrays great satisfaction with them he does so in terms exhibiting the restraint proper to a report.

There is no doubt that he was a firm disciplinarian and there are rumours of an incredible number of lashes awarded as punishments to his crew on the voyage. Yet he treated his men with a consideration as to their health and welfare which was unusual in his day and was obviously not based solely on his desire for efficiency. A similar