The Journal of Jean-François de Galaup de la Pérouse, 1785–1788, Volume I

John Dunmore

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Volume I

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JOHN DUNMORE

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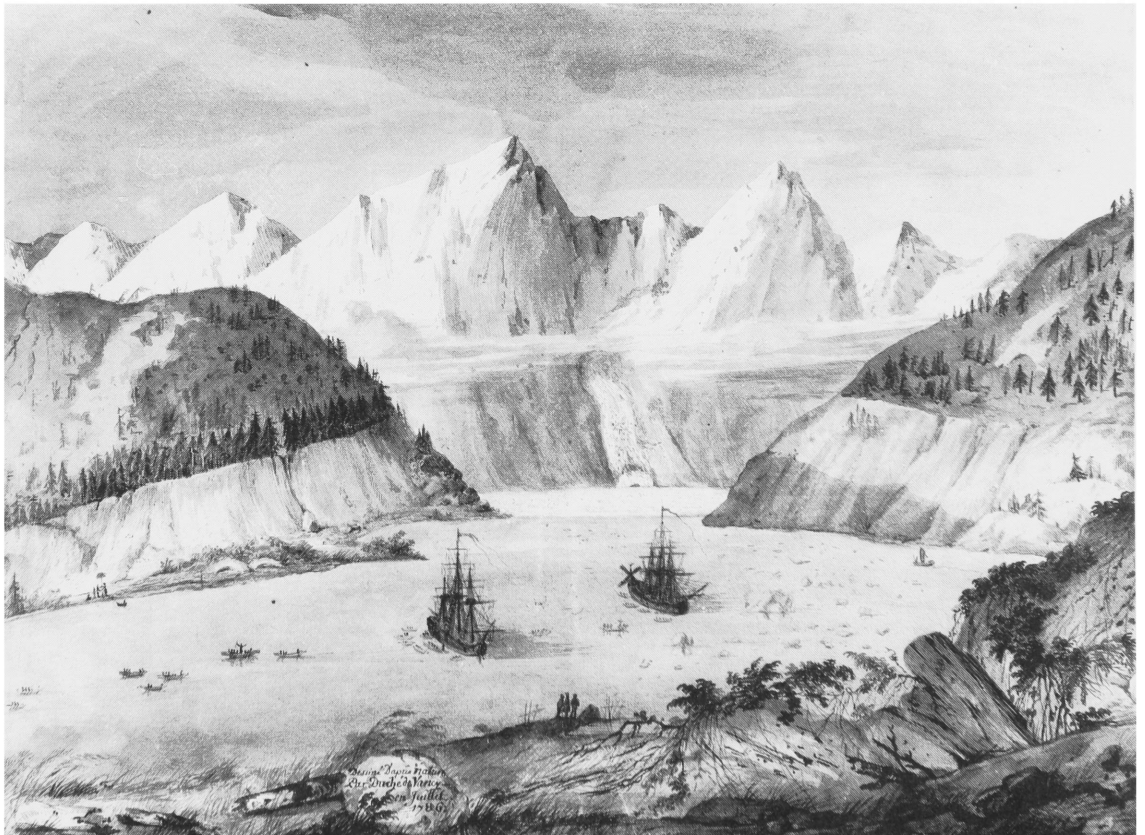

View of Port des Français, Northwest Coast, 'drawn from nature by Duché de Vancy in July 1786'. SHM 352:9.

The Journal of Jean-François de Galaup de la Pérouse 1785–1788

VOLUME I

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PREFACE

The quest for La Pérouse's journal goes back many years. During the 1960s while I was covering the broad field of French Pacific exploration, it struck me as strange that his journals were not listed in the records of the French Archives Nationales nor in those of the Service Historique de la Marine in the same manner as those of Bougainville, Surville or D'Entrecasteaux. The thought lingered nevertheless that they must be kept somewhere among the vast store of journals, correspondence, muster rolls and sundry papers of every kind that fill the seemingly endless shelves of the Archives. The French are creditably proud of their historical heritage and endeavour to preserve all the official documents that the ravages of wars and revolutions have spared. Having simply expressed the wish to read La Pérouse's original journal one day, I left it to the administrators' goodwill and the workings of chance, confident that one day the journal would emerge.

An expedition of such importance deserved recognition in the form of an annotated edition. James Cook had received the painstaking and devoted attention of J. C. Beaglehole, Bougainville's journal was about to appear in a fine commemorative edition, Surville's and J. R. Forster's journals would soon follow: La Pérouse could hardly be ignored.

There was, of course, Milet-Mureau's official publication of 1797, but there was no way to compare it with La Pérouse's own writings. Even if Milet-Mureau had not taken the kind of liberties with the content and style that Hawkesworth had taken with Cook's original journal, there was a dearth of acceptable footnotes. Milet-Mureau was neither a naval man nor a geographer; he was an army officer who had accepted the task of getting the manuscript ready for publication after several others, more qualified than him, had turned it down. He did his best, and the result was a credit to him, but his own style and indeed his own conclusions and preconceptions were everywhere apparent; the political situation in France

as he worked on the journal had clearly compelled him to make a number of changes, such as eliminating references to Louis XVI. But one thing remained clear: Milet-Mureau had had access to the original documents which, one felt, must still exist somewhere.

Time went by as from the other side of the world one waited for advice from Paris that the manuscripts had been found. Alas, the only news that came was a formal notification that the search had been fruitless. It was quite possible that, in the turmoil that followed the blackest years of the French Revolution, the journals had been lost, or that they had been discarded as no longer needed once the Milet-Mureau was on sale. Nevertheless, on occasional visits to Paris, I delved further into the possibility that the manuscript had remained with the printers, the Imprimerie de la République, now the Imprimerie Nationale, that it had been returned to some local or regional naval archives, that it had been handed over to La Pérouse's widow or kept by Milet-Mureau and perhaps was still extant among the family papers of some distant descendant. I spent some of the summer months of 1978 idly looking through semi-relevant records or along shelves, watched over with a mixture of suspicion and commiseration by a variety of minor officials. But however protracted a search may be through stores and archives, it cannot bear fruit if the documents sought lie elsewhere. The clue that the journal had been in the Archives nationales all along was revealed by a post-graduate student from the Ecole Nationale des Chartes, Mlle Catherine Gaziello (now Mme Hustache) who reported, with the modesty of the true scholar, that she believed she might have found the La Pérouse manuscripts bound inside other material and simply listed as 'Scientific Documents'. Even a cursory examination of these old volumes left no doubt that they were the pages Milet-Mureau had worked on and it is these which form the text of La Pérouse's journal published for the first time in English translation.

Therefore, first in a list of acknowledgement must be Catherine Hustache, without whose help little could have been accomplished. Her own thesis, concentrating mainly on the origins of the voyage and the preparations made before the ships sailed, was subsequently published as *L'Expédition de Lapérouse 1785–1788: réplique française aux voyages de Cook* (Comité des Travaux Historiques et Scientifiques, Paris, September 1984).

The next person whose assistance must be acknowledged is

Rear-Admiral Maurice de Brossard, who had not only written several books on La Pérouse and the history of French naval exploration in the Pacific, but had a first-hand knowledge of the island – Vanikoro – on which the ships had been wrecked in 1788. His role in assisting with the recovery of valuable items from the reef and in solving the questions that still remained unanswered was of major importance. His help in dealing with the problem of the expedition's last few weeks and its loss on Vanikoro, with matters relating to navigation and with tracing, with an ease and a skill born of long familiarity with the files of the French navy, the background of several of the minor officers, deserves the fullest acknowledgement. His friend, the prominent historian, Michel Mollat du Jourdin, a member of the Institute and the Academy of Marine, was in charge of a series of prestigious publications of original journals being organised by the Imprimerie Nationale, Paris, in which the journals of Louis de Bougainville's 1766–1769 expedition and of Giovanni Verrazano's 1524 voyage had already appeared. He proved a tactful and helpful friend, especially when the proposal was made to publish a substantial annotated and illustrated edition of the La Pérouse journal in time for the two hundredth anniversary of the departure of the *Boussole* and *Astrolabe* in 1785, a task which, because of typographical and design complexities, required the completed transcription, variants, references and introductory material, to be in the hands of the printers in less than four years.

In the course of the preparation of that edition, a number of specialists contributed their knowledge, and their assistance has also been of considerable value to the present work. Others joined them in the meantime, and the help provided by all of them needs to be gratefully acknowledged: Dr Pierre Amalric, President of the Association Lapérouse-Albi-France; Professor Glynn Barratt, University of Ottawa; Dr Sandy Bartle, Museum of New Zealand; Frank Carleton, Père Receveur Commemoration Committee, Kensington, New South Wales, Australia; Jennifer Carter, Curator, Lapérouse Museum, Sydney; Dr John Dawson, Victoria University, Wellington, New Zealand; Professor Kerry Howe, Massey University, New Zealand; Ian McLaren, University of Melbourne; Mr Jacques Thomas, La Pérouse Boomerang Club de France. Over the years, the staff of various institutions have provided help and information, and thanks are due in particular to the Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand; the Bibliothèque

Nationale, Paris; the Archives Nationales, Paris; and the Service Historique de la Marine, Vincennes, France, for their assistance and for kindly granting permission to reproduce illustrations and maps.

Not least, gratitude is due to the Council and Honorary Secretaries of the Hakluyt Society for making available to English readers this account of what is recognised as the greatest voyage of Pacific exploration organised by the French government in the period preceding the French Revolution.

Finally I acknowledge the kindness of the Service historique de la Marine Vincennes for permission to reproduce the seven illustrations and likewise the Archives nationales for authorising the reproduction of the maps and charts.

Waikanae, 1994 JOHN DUNMORE

EDITORIAL NOTE

The Choice of a Name

Anyone writing on La Pérouse is forced to make a choice between two widely used forms of the name: Lapérouse and La Pérouse.

Official reports, the instructions issued to him, the medal struck for the expedition in 1785, the *Almanach Royal*, letters and reports written by his collaborators, the influential Milet-Mureau edition of the *Voyage* published in 1797, all use the spelling La Pérouse; roughly three-quarters of the books and articles written about the expedition follow this practice. Paris has a Rue La Pérouse; Noumea, in New Caledonia, its Lycée La Pérouse; Australia has its La Pérouse district (but a Lapérouse Museum) in Sydney; New Zealand has a Mt La Pérouse, 3080 m high, close to Mt Cook; there is a Bahia La Pérouse in Easter Island, and Maui in the Hawaiian Islands has its La Pérouse Bay; the strait between the island of Sakhalin and Hokkaido is called La Pérouse Strait. The French navy keeps to this spelling when it names its vessels after the explorer: the cruiser *La Pérouse* was launched in 1877, the hydrographic ship *La Pérouse* was well known in the Pacific and the Indian Ocean in the 1960s.[1]

However, the explorer's home town of Albi has its Lycée Lapérouse, its Place Lapérouse and an imposing monument to the memory of Lapérouse, as well as an Association Lapérouse Albi. The Paris Musée de la Marine uses this spelling.[2] The Société de

[1] The cruiser *La Pérouse* was launched at Brest on 5 November 1877, see *L'Illustration*, LXX, No. 1812 (1877), pp. 309–10. On the naval survey ship *La Pérouse*, see Jacques Fourney, 'Le *La Pérouse* à Mayotte', *La Revue Maritime*, 200 (July 1963), pp. 679–89, and 'Une Mission Hydrogaphique Exceptionnelle: Le *La Pérouse* à Mururoa', *La Revue Maritime*, 245 (July 1967), pp. 869–91. This question has been the subject of articles by Jacques Thomas in the *Nouvelle Revue Maritime* and elsewhere, see below.

[2] Cf *La Généreuse et Tragique Expédition Lapérouse*, by François Bellec, the director of the Musée de la Marine, Paris, published in 1985. However, the problem of the navigator's name is revealed in some of the illustrations, such as a reproduction of the 'Décret de l'Assemblée Nationale' of 24 February 1791 relative to the 'recherche de M. de la Pérouse' (endpapers) and one of the list of the officers of the *Boussole* 'aux ordres de M. de la Pérouse' (p. 10).

Geographie published an important collection of articles in 1888 under the title *Centenaire de la mort de Lapérouse.*[1] The official bicentennial edition of the journals, published by the Imprimerie Nationale – the lineal descendant of the Imprimerie de la République which published Milet-Mureau's *Voyage de la Pérouse* – adopted the spelling Lapérouse.

The matter is further complicated by the fact that the navigator was the first of his family to bear the name, and that since he had no children it died with him. Once his wife died in 1807, there were no Galaup de La Pérouse left. It was not until 21 February 1815 that a decree from Louis XVIII authorised the families of his two sisters to add 'La Peyrouse' to their own name.[2] A year later, on 18 March 1816, in Vannes, Brittany, the first birth certificate with the new name – now including the nobiliary particle – was issued, recording the birth of 'Alphonse Dalmas de la Peyrouse'. The spelling was erroneous, and the Dalmas family soon requested it to be amended to 'Pérouse'. This was not officially done until 1839, when a notice published in the *Bulletin des Lois* modified the 1815 decree and allowed the navigator's descendants 'to add to their names that of Lapérouse'.[3] Not only was the 'y' removed, but the name was now spelt in one word – and this in spite of the fact that letters had been signed prior to this date by 'Léon Dalmas de la Pérouse'.

The name had been created by the navigator's father when Jean-François de Galaup was about to enter the navy, a particularly class-conscious institution. The family's claim to the status of nobles was not under challenge, but in the eyes of some members of the older landed aristocracy, the Galaups could be regarded as relatively recent upstarts. A more resounding patronymic would be a help in his career and in his relations with other young officers. It was still possible at the time to change it by adding a more imposing surname to one's family name, a practice that sometimes incurred some criticism and even ridicule. The coming Revolution would put an end to it, laws passed in 1794 and 1803 requiring any such changes to go through lengthy legal processes.

The Galaups owned a farm known as La Pérouse (La Peyrouse, according to local spelling) meaning in the Occitan language, 'the

[1] But the title page included a reproduction of the 1785 medal with its reference to the ships under the command of La Pérouse.

[2] *Bulletin des Lois*, 5th series, No. 84, 2 March 1815.

[3] Ibid. No. 675, 29 August 1839.

stoney place'. They transferred it to the young man who was then able to call himself Jean-François de Galaup de la Pérouse, the last three words implying 'owner or lord of the (land and farm of) La Pe[y]rouse.'[1] The documents recording this transfer have not been found, but in 1772, when he was 31, Jean-François became godfather to his sister Jacquette's son, François-Marie-Léon Dalmas, and he is recorded in the baptism certificate as 'de Galaup de la Peyrouse'. The spelling 'Pérouse', however, appears in the great majority of official documents in which he is mentioned, thus avoiding confusion with the great Peyrouse family whose history in south-west France went back to St Louis and the Crusades.

The two-word spelling was used in official correspondence: from the Minister of Marine, from the Naval Commander at Brest, from Fleurieu, his friend and supporter, Director of Ports and Arsenals, from his subordinates, such as Fleuriot de Langle, and significantly by his wife in her appeals for assistance following his disappearance.

Evidence supporting the spelling 'Lapérouse' comes from two main sources. One is the nineteenth-century decrees allowing his sisters' descendants to add the name to their own patronym. In view of the original error of 1815, when the decree referred to 'Lapeyrouse', it is not impossible that the one-word spelling is another administrative error. The fact remains that today, surviving family members call themselves Lapérouse. Admittedly, they could not do otherwise without further tiresome administrative appeals.

Far more important is La Pérouse's own signature. He signed his letter 'Lapérouse' – as in fact did Eléonore, even though she separated the article from the noun in the body of her letters. The point has been made, with some emphasis, that his signature was an indication of his wish to be known as Lapérouse, but there is no record that he ever requested others, including his friends, to use this in preference to La Pérouse. The fact is that he used a highly

[1] From a legal opinion dated 30 September 1987 by Philippe Lemelletier, a legal consultant, genealogist and lecturer in law of Bordeaux, obtained by Jacques Thomas, of Paris, whose research on the background of the names Lapérouse/La Pérouse is hereby acknowledged. Further reference may be made to his article 'Lapérouse ou La Pérouse: légitimité d'une orthographe' in *Nouvelle Revue maritime*, Nos 2129–408 (January-February 1988), pp. 58–62, and in *Bulletin de la Société d'études historiques de la Nouvelle-Calédonie*, 71 (1987), pp. 67–71.

cursive form of writing and he often linked words together, omitting breaks or apostrophes. Thus we find 'delangle', 'Le Comte Dartois', 'Lamerique', 'Leurope'. A signature which linked the article to the following noun was quite common; well-known examples include the fabulist Jean de la Fontaine, the moralist François de la Rochefoucauld, the military leader Marie-Joseph de la Fayette (thus known in France, but normally referred to as Lafayette in the United States).

The evidence supporting the spelling Lapérouse thus seems to be outweighed by contrary evidence. Accordingly, in this work, unless the name used in the original text was Lapérouse, the form La Pérouse has been used.

Abbreviations used

The following simplified titles have been used for sources quoted in the text and footnotes:

Bulletin de la Société de Géographie 1888

Centenaire de la mort de Lapérouse, célébré le 20 avril 1888 en séance solennelle à la Sorbonne, [Bulletin de la] Société de Géographie, Series 7, vol. 9 (Paris, 1888), reprinted Albi, 1985.

Colloque Lapérouse Albi 1985

Colloque Lapérouse Albi, Mars 1985: Bicentenaire du voyage de Lapérouse 1785–1788. Actes du Colloque d'Albi. Association Lapérouse Albi-France, (Albi, 1988).

Cook, *Journals*

The Journals of Captain James Cook on his Voyages of Discovery. Edited by J.C. Beaglehole. 3 vols in 4, (Cambridge 1955–69): vol. I, *The Voyage of the* Endeavour, *1768–1771* (1955), vol. II, *The Voyage of the* Resolution *and* Adventure *1772–1775* (1961), vol. III, *The Voyage of the* Resolution *and* Discovery *1776–1780* (1967), with addenda and corrigenda (1961–69). (Hakluyt Society, Extra Series xxxiv-xxxvi).

Dunmore & Brossard

John Dunmore and Maurice de Brossard, *Le voyage de Lapérouse 1785–1788.* 2 vols (Paris, 1985).

Milet-Mureau, *Voyage*

M.L.A. Milet-Mureau, Voyage de La Pérouse autour du monde publié conformément au décret du 22 avril 1791. 4 vols (Paris, 1797).

Gaziello, *L'Expédition de Lapérouse 1785–1788*

Catherine Gaziello, *L'Expédition de Lapérouse 1785–1788: réplique française aux voyages de Cook.* Mémoires de la section d'histoire des sciences et des techniques, Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques (Paris, 1984).

Taillemitte, *Bougainville*

Etienne Taillemitte, Bougainville et ses compagnons autour du monde 1766–1769. 2 vols (Paris, 1977).

Dunmore, *Who's Who*

John Dunmore, *Who's Who in Pacific Navigation*, (Honolulu, 1991).

Abbreviations are used as follows:

AN	Archives Nationales, Paris
AN.M.	Archives Nationales, Section Marine, Paris
BN	Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris
NAF	Nouvelles Acquisitions Françaises (at BN)
PRO	Public Record Office
SHM	Service Historique de la Marine, Vincennes

Measurements

Under the Old Regime, measurements had not been standardised and could vary from one country to another and from one district to the next. It is possible to translate some French terms into English: a *brasse*, for instance, is normally translated as a fathom, a *lieue* as a league, and an *encablure* as a cablelength, but these are forms of usage and are not truly equivalent. Measures in use prior to the introduction of the metric system included:

Lieue de Paris : 2000 *toises* (1674–1737)

Lieue (for road travel) : 2000 *toises;* (for transport of grain) : 2400 *toises* (from 1737); for postal services: 2200 *toises* (from 1737)

Lieue marine : 1/20 of a degree (5.55km.)

Toise : 6 *pieds* or feet (1.949m.)

Pied de roi : 12 *pouces* or inches (0.325m.)

Pouce : 12 *lignes* (2.7cm.)
Ligne : 12 *points* (2.26mm)
Point : equivalent to 0.188mm.
Brasse : 5 *pieds* (1.624m.). English fathom: 6 feet (1.82m.)
Encablure : Cablelength, one-tenth of a mile (185.2m.). English cablelength: 120 fathoms or 720 feet (219.45m.)

Personal Names and Place Names

Names of individuals and places appear in their accepted French or English spelling in introductory material, in appendices and in footnotes. In the translation of the journal and letters, they have been left as spelt, even though La Pérouse and others spell them variously in their MSS. Place names, however, have been standardised in their most common form where variants occur, to avoid unnecessary confusion. The English form has been used for well-known places or translated into English when the name is a descriptive one. Thus Cape Beau-Temps becomes Cape Fairweather. In other cases, La Pérouse's spelling has been retained, usually in italics with, if necessary, the English equivalent between square brackets.

INTRODUCTION

THE BACKGROUND

The expedition of the *Boussole* and *Astrolabe* must be set in the context of the Age of Enlightenment, but also against a background of Anglo-French rivalry expressed in a series of wars waged in many parts of the world. As the influence of Spain waned and Dutch interests remained centered on the islands of South-East Asia, the exploration of the Pacific, outwardly motivated by a thirst for knowledge, was affected by an undercurrent of political and strategic manoeuvrings. Perhaps nothing illustrates this more clearly than the expedition of Louis de Bougainville in 1767–69, which had its genesis in France's loss of its Canadian possessions and in Bougainville's attempt to set up a French colony on the Falkland Islands, which could be viewed – and indeed was viewed by London – as a move to establish a French base at or near the south-eastern entrance to the Pacific Ocean; Spain felt concerned that this challenged its own claims to the South American continent and its off-lying islands; Britain, even more worried that the French might gain control of an important sea route, intervened; France stepped back – and Bougainville won, as a sort of consolation prize, the right to sail on a major voyage of Pacific exploration of considerable geographical and hydrographical value.[1]

The moves and counter-moves of politicians and diplomats should not, however, obscure the strength and influence of the scientific world in the eighteenth century. In England, the Royal Society had been active since 1660, but the spirit of scientific enquiry had spread through Europe. It reached into such distant courts as those of Catherine the Great of Russian, Frederick the Great in Prussia and Louis XV the Well-Beloved in France; minor

[1] See Taillemitte, *Bougainville*, I, pp. 11–18.

rulers such as the Landgrave of Hesse-Cassel and the Stadtholder of the Netherlands had their own minor museums of science, and members of the nobility and wealthy bankers and merchants had their own collections, and in many cases their laboratories where they carried out – or had carried out on their behalf – experiments in chemistry and physics, their botanical gardens, their libraries. They were not only rich enough, but enthusiastic enough to subsidise scientific expeditions, the work of instrument makers and the publication of scientific papers.

Knowledge was spread to a wider audience, among the middle classes and into the provinces, by the great encyclopedias: Chambers' *Cyclopaedia* of 1728 in England, the *Enclyclopaedia Britannica* of 1768 in Scotland, and the influential *Encyclopédie* which appeared in France between 1751 and 1772. The French *Encyclopédistes* were typical of an age that had become passionately interested in knowledge and social philosophy; they included the most eminent minds of France: Diderot, d'Alembert, Voltaire, Montesquieu, Rousseau, Marmontel, Quesnay and Turgot. Their interests ranged into politics and trade: Quesnay, although a medical man, became the leader of the *Physiocrates* or *Economistes* who were seeking a formula that might solve France's problems and form the basis of a general economic theory. From there, their discussions extended into political theory and, dangerously for their times, into the rationale for a constitutional monarchy. They theorised about the social evolution of mankind, wondered whether the complexities of modern civilisation had not corrupted the innate goodness of human beings, and whether proof of this could not be found in unknown region where uncorrupted *bons sauvages* might yet have survived.

Parts of the world which Europeans had not yet explored held a great fascination for scientists of all kinds and for the educated public as well. Buffon's monumental *Histoire naturelle*, which began to appear in 1748 and was destined to reach 44 volumes, described in vivid detail what was known of the animal kingdom, but he began his work with a volume on the 'theory of the earth'. The question remained: what new species of animals and plants were there still in distant corners of the globe, waiting to be discovered.[1]

[1] Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon (1707–88). The final volumes were published after his death, the last one appearing in 1804. His views on the history of the earth were condemned by the Sorbonne in 1751 as modernist and counter to biblical revelation.

In an age of encyclopaedic collections, voyages of discoveries to the Pacific were not overlooked. The most influential work of the period was Charles de Brosses's two-volume *Histoire des navigations aux terres australes*, published in 1756 and reprinted in an English translation, without acknowledgment, by John Callander, in 1766–8 under the title *Terra Australia Cognita*.[1] This was followed in 1770–1 by Alexander Dalrymple's *An Historical Collection of the Several Voyages & Discoveries in the South Pacific Ocean*. The groundwork was now done, the problems stated and the potential for further discoveries and eventual colonisation laid out.

A major point of argument had been the possibility that, in southern oceans, might be found a vast southern continent. As enthusiasts speculated on its existence, they dreamed of the great wealth it might contain, and especially of untapped resources of gold and silver. More realistically, government ministers, aware that gold mines eventually become exhausted, saw its value in geostrategic terms: whoever controlled the southern continent would in turn control the seas. Navigators venturing into unknown seas found no solid evidence that it existed, and as the Pacific Ocean became better known so the hazy boundaries of the continent vanished into the distance. Alexander Dalrymple remained a firm believer, but James Cook swept vast tracts of ocean on his first voyage without coming upon any sign of its existence. The Frenchman Jean-François de Surville, sailing east from New Zealand to South America in 1770, cut another swathe across empty seas. When Cook returned, in 1773, he completed the work by sailing deep into the Antarctic.[2]

France, by then, was exploring the South Indian Ocean. Hopes had been raised in 1772 when Yves-Joseph de Kerguelen reported that he had had 'the good fortune to discover the southern continent.'[3] What he had done was to come upon the island which now bears his name, and which he should have reported as rocky,

[1] Callander's aim was not merely the advocacy of further Pacific exploration, but the extension of the British empire to regions where France planned to establish her own claims. See J. Dunmore, 'Rivalités franco-anglaises dans le Pacifique', *Le Colloque d'Akaroa*, Wellington, 1991, pp. 88–93.

[2] 'I had now made the circuit of the Southern Ocean in a high Latitude and traversed it in such a manner as to leave not the least room for the Possibility of there being a continent, unless near the Pole and out of the reach of Navigation.' Cook, *Journals*, II, p. 643.

[3] Quoted in A. Dupouy, *Le Breton Yves de Kerguelen*, Paris, 1929, p. 131.

dangerous and snow-covered. The enthusiasm which his glowing reports understandably aroused in government circles led to a second expedition being sent under his command which ended in bitter disappointment and disgrace. One positive result from this sad affair was that France would ensure, when another voyage of exploration was planned, that the man placed at its head would be experienced and reliable, and that the campaign would be carefully laid out in advance.

Nothing could be done until the great powers were at peace. Between 1778 and 1783, France was involved in the American War of Independence. French prestige, which had greatly suffered after the losses sustained in the Seven Years War, was restored by successful participation in the anti-colonial struggle. The French Navy, especially, which had gained from major reforms carried out from 1775–6, had proved itself in a number of engagements against the Royal Navy. Political and strategic considerations, new openings for trade, the need to maintain France's improved standing on the world scene, all these factors contributed to the move towards a major voyage of exploration. James Cook had been the dominant figure since 1770, but he had been killed on Hawaii in 1779. It was not entirely a matter of honour that a Frenchman should take up his mantle and complete his work, but it fitted neatly into the pattern of Anglo-French rivalry at a moment in history when England was suffering from the after-effects of an unfortunate conflict in which France had found itself on the winning side. It would be, as Catherine Gaziello expressed it in her study of the genesis and planning of La Pérouse's voyage, 'a French counter-stroke to the voyages of Cook.'[1]

The mood in France was favourable to some action being taken. Louis XVI, who had come to he throne in 1774, was interested in geography and a keen student of the literature of exploration. So were the philosophers, merchants, *littérateurs*, and ordinary Parisians who knew, or thought they knew, a great deal about the world's

[1] Gaziello, *L'Expédition de Lapérouse 1785–1788: réplique française aux voyages de Cook*, Paris, 1984, a major study of the voyage, based on a most exhaustive examination of the sources. The word *réplique* has subtleties that are not easy to render into English: 'answer' sounds too weak, 'counter-stroke' has a semi-belligerent undertone which is probably not wholly appropriate; 'riposte' or 'response' is no better for a set of actions which were intended to restore the balance and ensure that a Frenchman would also stand tall in the Pacific exploration's Hall of Fame.

largest ocean. Many were familiar with Bougainville's and Cook's voyages, accounts of which had been best-sellers. Merchants in particular were interested in the possibility of trade and above all in the fur trade. John Ledyard, the ambitious American who had sailed with Cook and a man of great if not always practical enthusiasm, even persuaded a group of Lorient traders to plan the fitting out of a ship for this purpose in February 1785.[1] The scheme fell through, but it illustrated one facet of French interest: the commercial one.

Although there can be little doubt that a French voyage of exploration had been in the mind of French officials for some time, and that some kind of plans were being discussed in high places during 1784, and probably as early as the second half of 1783 when the war was in its final stages, no document has been found in French archives with an earlier date than 2 February 1785. It is a receipt for 600 *livres*, relating to a payment made to William Bolts from the Ministry of Marine's secret funds – and Bolts was particularly knowledgeable about the Northwest Coast and the rich fur trade.

William Bolts born in the Netherlands in 1735, had moved to England in 1749 and worked variously for an English merchant, the East India Company, Austria and on his own account.[2] He had made contacts with the French in Mauritius in 1780 and appears to have been invited to travel from London to Paris towards the end of 1784, where he met the Directeur des Ports et Arsenaux de la Marine, Claret de Fleurieu, who was working closely with the Minister of Marine, the Maréchal de Castries. The plan suggested by Bolts, inspired by James Cook's third voyage, was to send ships to the Northwest Coast, purchase otter skins, take these to China and barter them for Asian goods which would be finally sold in Europe, thus making a profit at each stage of the journey. This scheme would form part of the first proposal for a combined voyage of exploration and trade which was submitted for the king's approval. Bolts overlooked the complications that would arise out of an official naval expedition trading on the coast or even, as the first French draft envisaged, sailing in concert with a merchant

[1] See J. Sparks, *Memoirs of the Life and Travels of John Ledyard*, Boston, 1847, pp. 195–201.

[2] See on this fairly elusive character, N. L. Hallward, *William Bolts, a Dutch Adventurer under John Company*, Cambridge, 1920.

vessel; but Fleurieu was fully aware of his government's policy of watching any moves England was making to establish trading footholds in distant lands and, if possible, anticipating them.[1]

It is highly likely that La Pérouse was involved at an early stage in the planning. During the summer of 1784, he had been held back in Lorient by the possibility that the Battle of the Saints, back in April 1782, when Admiral Rodney defeated the French fleet, might be the subject of a court-martial; but he then went to Paris and worked closely, if unofficially, with Fleurieu. Assisting them were the Marquis de Chabert-Cogolin,[2] a naval man and a member of the Académie des Sciences who specialised in the problem of longitudes, and Jean-Nicolas Buache de la Neuville, a leading hydrographer and geographer.[3] By January 1785, the project was sufficiently crystallised for Fleurieu to obtain estimates from the naval treasury for an expedition consisting of two ships. La Pérouse, however, was not sure that he would be appointed to head it, and on 8 February he wrote to his wife that he was 'still in the same state of uncertainty.... nothing has been decided.'[4] He no doubt expressed the same unease to Fleurieu who, the next day, told him that he was shortly to be given a major appointment. In view of the commercial orientation of the draft proposal, La Pérouse may have felt that such a command might not be entirely appropriate for a senior officer of the king's navy. Tempering his possible dissatisfaction was the fact that 1784 had been a year during which many naval units had been decommissioned and a considerable number of unemployed officers with good war records had been looking for whatever appointment might come their way.

He need not have worried. Louis XVI turned down the suggestion of combining trade with exploration. It would not only have been infra dig for the king's ships to take part in a commercial

[1] Gaziello, in *L'Expédition de Lapérouse 1785–1788* , pp. 50–1, shows how Bolts's plan fitted in with French policies and quotes a note by Fleurieu which makes it clear that La Pérouse himself 'considered it important to forestall the English on the Northwest Coast of America.' (AN. M. 3JJ 386, f.30.)

[2] Joseph de Chabert-Cogolin (1724–1805) had worked on charts of Newfoundland and the Canadian coast and supervised work on the navigational guide *Le Neptune de la Méditerranée*.

[3] Born in 1741, he was the nephew of the famous geographer Philippe Buache and became curator-hydrographer at the Dépôt des Cartes of the hydrographic service. He died in 1825.

[4] AN. M. C7 165, f. 37.

enterprise, it could also create awkward incidents. In this his instinct was right, for within a very few years rivalry on the North-west Coast would give rise to the Nootka Incident which led the major powers to the brink of war; other problems of a like nature could easily arise in other parts of the world if royal units found themselves forced to defend the interests of an accompanying merchantman.

What would have been a relatively narrow undertaking was accordingly rapidly broadened into a major voyage of exploration. Commercial possibilities were still to be investigated, for instance around Japan and in eastern seas, but hydrography and scientific work became dominant. And underlying it all were political considerations added by government officials.

The king's role in deciding the form which the voyage was to take is hard to assess. For some, the expedition was Louis XVI's own, carefully planned by him, with La Pérouse commanding it, as it were, as a proxy.[1] In fact, it was planned by a number of people, with additional elements being contributed between March and May by naval specialists, including La Pérouse, by individual scientists and learned societies. The programme grew as planning proceeded. It had been hatched in secrecy, but by late March 1785 it became common knowledge and it aroused considerable enthusiasm among geographers and specialists of all kind. The *philosophes* found in an undertaking that was to carry on the work of James Cook a vehicle for research into a wide range of subjects, from chemistry to ethnology.

Undeniably, Louis XVI's intervention occurred at a very early stage. There is no evidence that he initiated the project, but he may have been informally approached in 1784 by Castries, the Minister of Marine, and encouraged him to proceed with preliminary planning. He responded to Fleurieu's draft proposal with enthusiasm. He had a genuine interest in geography and had been trained by the older Buache, Philippe, appointed to the offical post of Hydrographer in 1730. In 1769, at the age of 15, the future king had drawn a map, in colour, of the environs of Versailles, now held in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.[2] It includes blank spaces such as

[1] For a view which stresses the role Louis XVI may have played, see Paul and Pierrette de Coursac, *Le Voyage de Louis XVI autour du monde: l'expédition Lapérouse*, Paris, 1985.

[2] BN, Cartes et Plans, ref. C.4349.

are found on explorers' charts, labelled 'Places which have not been surveyed'. Familiar with the accounts of navigators' voyages, he was also well advised on international problems. All this is reflected in the marginal comments he made on Fleurieu's *Projet*. He tersely rejects some suggestions as useless; in other cases he advises caution; he shows awareness of the danger of sailing at certain times of the year in stormy seas and of allowing the ships to sail separately; he does not rule out the benefits which new knowledge might bring to traders and whalers.

Once the king had formally approved the project, planning could go ahead. Louis XVI had commented on the overall programme, interested himself in the safety of his officers and men, and probably took a major role in drafting the instructions outlining to La Pérouse how he should behave towards native peoples. The next stages were the detailed planning of the itinerary and, finally, outlining the scientific work the expedition should undertake. This was done under Fleurieu's general supervision by officials in the Ministry of Marine, the Dépôt des Cartes et Plans and his own Direction des Ports et Arsenaux. Fleurieu reported to Castries, and through him, or possibly on some occasions directly, kept the king advised of progress.

The plan of navigation was to a large extent based on what James Cook had left unfinished. An inventory had been drawn up of what remained to be done. This had to be fitted in with the changing seasons, sea currents and the prevailing winds, ports of call – a broad rule was to avoid spending more than four months at sea without touching land – which were suitable politically and for the resources they could offer, and the commercial and scientific aims of the campaign. Essential features of any itinerary were the North-west Coast and the North-East Pacific.

The broad lines were probably agreed in April. In their final version, dated 25 July 1785, they outlined a complex voyage across the southern and northern Pacific. From Brest La Pérouse was to sail to Funchal and across to South America, continuing south in the hope of finding the Ile Grande, supposedly discovered by a Frenchman named Roche in the South Atlantic, thence to South Georgia Island and on to Sandwich Land, Staten Land and Cape Horn. Alternatively, he could touch at the Falkland Islands for refreshments and go through Le Maire's Strait to Christmas Sound and Tierra del Fuego.

There were various questions to settle in the South-West Pacific once La Pérouse had entered the ocean, such as the existence of Drake's Land and a supposed discovery made in 1714 by a Spanish captain, which was now believed to be unsubstantiated. A call at Easter Island would enable the French to rest their crews and prepare them for the crossing to Tahiti. La Pérouse would sail among the Society Islands, leaving seeds and shrubs which might be of value to Europeans navigating in these distant seas, and follow Bougainville's tracks through the Samoan and Tongan archipelagoes. He would then veer slightly north of west to survey the western coast of New Caledonia. The next stage would take him to Vanuatu and the Solomons, to the Louisiades, to Cook's Endeavour Strait, north of Cape York Peninsula, into the Gulf of Carpentaria, to begin an anti-clockwise navigation of the Australian continent, ending at Van Diemen's Land and finally across the Tasman Sea to New Zealand for refreshments and repairs. This, it was calculated, would take twenty months – he was to leave Queen Charlotte Sound, New Zealand, in March 1787.

This part of his instructions La Pérouse almost completely ignored. He had been clearly told that 'His Majesty did not intend that he should be compelled to adhere in all respects to this plan'.[1] He was left in no doubt that the itinerary had been drawn up as a broad guide: what mattered was to complete Cook's great work. There was little left to be done among the Society Islands, not much in Tonga and very little indeed around New Zealand. To spend the first year of a major and costly expedition revisiting places Cook had already surveyed and written about seems a strange priority. If one goes back to the earliest plan and the Bolt-inspired *projet*, one wonders why the French officials did not invite La Pérouse to sail to the Northwest Coast and across to China as soon as he had rounded Cape Horn – which is precisely what he did do. It is possible that the official instructions were calculated, in part, to throw the English off the scent, and that he was told privately that an early survey of the Northwest Coast and a report on the fur trade were the real priorities. William Pitt and Lord Howe, back in London, had no doubt learned some time in April, through their network of spies, that the French were planning a

[1] Concluding note to the main instructions: 'Sa Majesté n'a point entendu qu'il dût s'assujétir invariablement à ce Plan'. See 'Instructions', below.

major voyage, and at a time when British traders were setting out for the Northwest Coast they would have been more concerned about the French muscling in on the fur trade than about a voyage of exploration which, in its way, was a tribute to James Cook. The French, in fact, had representatives in London looking for instruments and information for the La Pérouse voyage: official sympathy and understanding would be helpful, and indeed it was forthcoming, for La Pérouse had proved a gallant and humane enemy during the recent war and the official aims of his voyage in no way threatened Britain's interest. The great sweep around the southern Pacific was therefore not a matter for concern and, for instance in the case of New Caledonia, it could be seen as sensibly complementing some of Cook's work. If there was a strategic or a political subplot – and any statesman or diplomat worth his salt would expect there to be one – it was not too sinister. Lord Dorset, the British ambassador in Paris, wrote to the Foreign Secretary on 5 May what he thought the French might be up to:

> I have the honour to inform your Lorship that Mons. de la Pérouse will shortly sail from Brest, and it is reported, with some degree of authority, that he has orders to visit New Zealand, with a view to examine into the quality of the timber of that country, which it is supposed, by the account given of it in Captain Cook's voyage, may be an object worthy of attention.
>
> This plan is recommended by Mons. de Suffrein, who says that ships may with little difficulty go from Mauritius to that country. It is believed that the French have a design of establishing some kind of settlement there; if it shall be found practicable, as it will be necessary to tap the trees at least six months before they fell them, in order to lighten the wood, which has no other defect, as is said, than that of being too heavy to use in its natural state.[1]

Dorset, however, had no great reputation as a political analyst and the Foreign Secretary relied more on other sources of information; but keeping London guessing would have been part of Versailles strategy.

Be that as it may, La Pérouse decided to invert the programme and begin with the second part. The instructions proposed that,

[1] In O. Browning (ed.), *Despatches from Paris 1784–1790*, Royal Historical Society, Camden Series III, vol. xvi, London, 1909, pp. 52–3. La Pérouse's instructions in fact required him to report on the possibility of a British settlement having already been established or being planned in New Zealand.

from New Zealand, he would proceed to Hawaii and Spanish California, then towards the Northwest Coast to seek a passage, if there was one, that might lead from the Pacific to Hudson Bay. If he found no sign of this famed North-West Passage, he was to continue north to within sight of the St Elias Mountains, and along the Aleutian chain to Kamchatka. He could then explore the Kuriles, the east coast of Japan, the Ryukyus and Formosa before putting in at Canton, Macao or Manila as circumstances dictated. This section of the voyage, it was optimistically predicted, would be completed in nine months – by the end of 1787.

The third section would take the expedition north again, to Korea, the Sea of Japan, along the west coast of Hokkaido and back to Kamchatka for a period of rest and refitting before sailing south to the Mariana Islands, to Mindanao, the Moluccas and through the Indonesian group to the Indian Ocean and the Ile de Fance. The homeward journey would take the ships into the Atlantic where there was an opportunity to avoid boredom by checking the positions of a number of islands – Gough, Diego Alvarez, Tristan da Cunha, Saxemberg, Dos Picos – which would add zest to the final stage of the expedition since it was doubtful that they all actually existed and only a throrough search and luck could settle the issue. It was expected that the ships would be back in Brest in the late summer of 1789, four years after their departure.

This massive undertaking could no longer be seen as a voyage aimed at discovering new openings for French merchants and fishermen and forestalling British moves in the post-war period. It was a voyage of exploration, cast in the traditional mould, a grandiose version of all that had gone before. When La Pérouse returned, the Pacific Ocean and some of the southern seas would have shed their last shreds of mystery. All that was needed to round off the great expedition was a comprehensive programme of scientific research.

Once the plan of navigation had been decided, approaches could be made to the many scientific bodies that were eager to benefit from the voyage. This was done towards the end of April. The Maréchal de Castries wrote formally to Condorcet, the permanent secretary of the Académie des Sciences, and La Pérouse called on him shortly after. No time was lost: on 25 and 27 May, drafts prepared by its various sections were read to members of the Académie, and the final *mémoires* were sent to Castries on 8 June. The Société Royale de Médecine was consulted at much the same time, and its report was

ready by 31 May. La Pérouse went to see Buffon at the beginning of May, obtaining his advice on natural history and through him on work to be carried out by the expedition's gardener.

The scientists were not given a detailed itinerary. Fleurieu and La Pérouse agreed between them that a broad indication of the latitudes to be visited would suffice. As a result, the responses are remarkably broad and all-embracing: better information might have produced more specific requests for investigations and reports in localities of particular interest. However, it must be remembered that the expedition was being planned at a time when scientists were rarely specialists working in mutually exclusive areas of knowledge; theirs was the age of encyclopaedic curiosity, and the response to Castries might have been no different had he appended copies of the itinerary to his letter.

The list of those who collaborated in the preparation of these scientific summaries and questionnaires reads like a *Who's Who* of the eighteenth-century French world of science. The Marquis de Condorcet was a renowned mathematician elected to the Académie des Sciences in 1769 at the age of 26; he became its secretary in 1777 and was elected to the Académie Française in 1782; a biographer, he had already written a life of the economist and politician Turgot, and was at work on a biography of Voltaire; active during the French Revolution, he published a theory on the intellectual progress of mankind, *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain*, but lost his life in the upheaval of the Terror. Antoine-Laurent Lavoisier is considered the founder of modern chemistry; an active member of the Académie des Sciences, he helped Condorcet to contact his colleagues and was probably the author of the chemistry section of the main *mémoire* on scientific problems. Jean-Charles de Borda and Jean-Sylvain Bailly wrote the section dealing with mathematics and astronomy – Borda was a noted naval astronomer and Bailly, a member of the Académie Française and of the Académie des Sciences, as well as of the Académie des Beaux-Arts, was also an astronomer. Louis Daubenton and Haüy prepared the section on physics – the former was a reputed naturalist, but Haüy eclipsed him as the author of a major work on crystallography. Leclerc de Buffon's renown as the author of the great, and at the time still incomplete *Histoire complète et scientifique de la nature* extended far beyond France's frontiers. In his shadow, but an important guide in the field of ornithology, stood H.J. Brisson, author of

an influential *Ornithologia* in seven volumes; and André Thouin, Buffon's assistant and a professor at the Royal Botanical Garden, who wrote at length on botanical issues and the preservation of plants. All were men of wide interests, and these included the economic and political situation in France: not merely Condorcet, but Lavoisier and Bailly lost their lives during the Revolution.

While the scientific memoirs were being drawn up and argued over, Fleurieu and La Pérouse were discussing the choice of those scientists who were to be invited to join the expedition and the instruments they would need. Up-to-date charts were also essential. Two men acted as their advisers: Borda and Buache.

Borda had seagoing experience; he had been associated with the navy since 1767 and had sailed in the *Flore* in 1771 to test Berthoud's new chronometers. He recommended Monge and Dagelet for the La Pérouse expedition and possibly others. Fleurieu and the Minister, Castries, both consulted him on other points, and especially on the scientific instruments that would be required – his own reflecting circle was included among the items taken on the voyage. His precise role is not minuted among the documents relating to the expdition; its importance, however, is apparent from a letter addrssed by the Minister to Fleurieu as early as 29 March: 'I should like you to call on Friday; I should also like the Chevalier de Borda to attend with these gentlemen; after which we shall remain alone with Mr de Borda.'[1]

Jean-Nicolas Buache de Neuville belonged to a dynasty of geographers and cartographers, the Delisles and the Buaches. The Royal Geographer and a member of the Académie des Sciences, he had worked at the Dépôt des Cartes et Plans since 1773. Undoubtedly, Fleurieu consulted him informally while the campaign was being planned; once this was done, it fell to him to draw the charts. This involved a great deal of work under considerable pressure. He prepared three large maps of the Pacific Ocan, divided into northern, central and southern sectors, made five copies and appended tables of latitudes and longitudes. He drew 27 detailed maps and charts to accompany Fleurieu's instructions, making two copies of each so that both La Pérouse and Langle would have one. His aim was to present a cartographic summary of all that was known about

[1] AN. M. 2JJ 103. A biography was written by J. Mascart, *La Vie et les travaux du chevalier Jean-Charles de Borda (1733–1799)*, and published in Lyons in 1919.

the regions the expedition would visit, and like the various *mémoires* drawn up for La Pérouse by scientists and philosophers his work displays an encyclopaedic knowledge and an eagerness to have a vast array of questions answered. The task was completed on 13 June; it had taken six weeks of unremitting toil. Assisting him was his young cousin, Charles-François Beautemps-Beaupré, who would one day become the official geographer and cartographer on D'Entrecasteaux's great expedition.

One of the five copies of Buache's great map of the Pacific Ocean was reserved for Louis XVI. The king had played a significant part in the planning of the expedition: he would follow its progress on his map as reports came in from the various ports of call, and the eventual fate of La Pérouse's two ships would concern him until the very eve of his execution when, as he had done on many occasions before, he enquired: 'Is there any news of La Pérouse?'

THE NORTH-WEST PASSAGE

For centuries, symmetry was the chimera of geographers. In the sixth century B.C., the Greek Anaximander had not only split the world into four hemispheres, but drawn each one surrounded by water. This concept of symmetry combined with a circumfluent ocean was adopted by the Romans and copied by medieval cosmographers. It not only had the advantage of balance, but by then it could easily be defended by referring to the authority of the Ancients.

In the same frame of mind, closet geographers sought to prove the existence of a southern continent by using the equilibrium theory, arguing that the land masses of the northern hemisphere needed to be balanced by similar masses in the south, lest the globe topple over; and a corresponding argument was brought out to justify the belief that a strait must cut through northern America because the Strait of Magellan existed in the south.

Some held the view that a North-East Passage would be found in northern Asia, and some indeed looked for it, although this was a more difficult and dangerous undertaking. Northern America, however, looked at from across the Atlantic, offered the promise of

deep inlets and unexplored bays: the greatest of these was Hudson Bay, a real inland sea, almost empty and scarcely explored, where rivers came to their final rest from some even more mysterious and promising hinterland.

The northern Pacific was less explored, but what few reports there had been, coming from Spanish sources, mentioned deep inlets curving inland towards vast lakes which might well be those of Upper Canada, known by then to stretch inland from the great St Lawrence River. This alternative was far more tempting than the Hudson Bay region into which some claim Sebastian Cabot had sailed in 1509, almost a century before Henry Hudson himself was sent by the Muscovy Company to seek a passage to Cathay through northern waters, because the obstacle which had destroyed the hopes of these men and of all their successors, namely impassable ice, would not be found, at least in such frightening masses, further south.

The Spaniards, owing to their early domination of the Pacific, were the first to build up theories about a northern passage leading from the Pacific to the Atlantic. Not only were small expeditions making their way cautiously up the coast from Mexico, but the discovery of the Japan Current, the *Vuelta de Poniente*, which flowed from west to east in the northern Pacific, turned their attention to a possible route back to Spain across the northern Atlantic for their galleons from Manila. Such a route would cut months from the voyage home.

In the 1560s, maps originating from Italy began to show a mysterious *Streto de Anian* around 63–66° of northern latitude, penetrating deep into the American continent and temptingly inching its way towards the areas which were to become Great Slave Lake and Hudson Bay. When Francis Drake appeared on the Pacific coast, began to raid Spanish possessions, and then mysteriously vanished, the Spanish speculated that he might well have entered the Pacific through this Strait of Anian.[1]

At the same time as Drake's voyage Sir Humphrey Gilbert's *Discourse for the Discoverie of a New Passage to Cataia*, published in

[1] The mysterious Anian may be a corruption of 'Aniu', a name given by Marco Polo to a land believed to lie to the east of China, see Ronald Latham (ed.) *The Travels of Marco Polo*, New York, 1982, p. 217. It may be worth pointing out that the aboriginal people of Japan are called the Ainus – in which case the story of the Strait of Anian transposed them to another continent.

London in 1576, expounded the benefits and practicality of what he had been seeking for ten years: an expedition to open up an alternative route to the East. He eventually sailed himself to Newfoundland where bases could be set up for further exploration, and at much the same period, Martin Frobisher's expeditions were being organised. These British attempts to find a North-West Passage would continue for many years, causing constant disquiet at the Spanish Court and giving rise in turn to Spanish voyages along the northern coast.[1]

In 1596, Apostolos Valerianos, a Greek from Cephalonia, better known as Juan de Fuca, met two Englishmen in Venice, Michael Lok and John Dowlass, and told them of a voyage he had made in 1592 to search for the Strait of Anian; he had found an inlet in 47–48° N. and had sailed through it to the Atlantic, this requiring twenty days. He was now endeavouring to find sponsors for a return voyage, which he estimated could take thirty days.[2] More serious evidence of the existence of deep inlets which might conceivably lead inland and, through rivers and lakes, into the Atlantic, was obtained from reports by Sebastián Vizcaíno who sailed north from Acapulco in 1602. A few years later, strange claims came from one Lorenzo Ferrer Maldonado that he had actually sailed west through the Strait of Anian in 1588 and met German traders on the way who spoke to him in Latin.[3]

Although the Spaniards were anxious to secure this strait in order to maintain their predominance in the Pacific Ocean, and were, to some extent, tempted by fanciful reports of wealthy lands through which the strait was supposed to pass, occasional attempts to discover it ended in failure. A new element came into play in 1624, when Abraham Goos published a map in Amsterdam, which

[1] See Henry R. Wagner, *The Cartography of the Northwest Coast of America to the Year 1800*, Berkeley, 1937, and the same author's *Spanish Voyages to the Northwest Coast of America in the Sixteenth Century*, San Francisco, 1929. Glyndwr Williams has dealt with British voyages in *The British Search for the Northwest Passage in the Eighteenth Century*, London, 1962 and in 'Myth and Reality: James Cook and the Theoretical Geography of Northwest America' in Robin Fisher and Hugh Johnston (eds), *James Cook and his Times*, Seattle, 1979, which he has updated in the same editors' *From Maps to Metaphors: The Pacific World of George Vancouver*, Vancouver, 1993. The literature on this topic is rapidly expanding.

[2] Pedro Novo y Colson, *Sobre los viajes apócrifos de Juan de Fuca y Lorenzo Ferrer Maldonado*, Madrid, 1881.

[3] W.M. Mathes, *Sebastian Vizcaíno y la Expansión Española en el Oceáno Pacífico 1580–1630*, Mexico, 1973, pp. 81–2.

showed California as a great island. A great offshore island implies a range of inlets, passages and straits: a new location for the Strait of Anian became available.

The Goos map was followed by another, a year later, the work of the Englishman Henry Briggs, and soon a tradition became established which dominated seventeenth-century cartography.[1] It took explorations by land, at the end of the century, to destroy the myth and return California to its peninsular state. Once it ceased to be regarded as an island, California could no longer conceal a mysterious strait. But the belief lingered on that somewhere, now obviously much further north, there was an opening which, however tortuous it might be, led from the Pacific to the Atlantic.

The belief was revived in England, where successive failures by explorers of northern Canada to find any real trace of a North-West Passage had bred discouragement among investors. The tenacious Strait of Anian reappeared and, since English merchant adventurers had not sailed along the Northwest Coast, nothing had yet been disproved in British eyes.

In 1708, the *Monthly Miscellany, or Memoirs for the Curious* published a letter by Bartolomé de Fonte, 'then Admiral of New Spain and Peru and now Prince of Chili', in which he stated that, to forestall a possible discovery by the English of the North-West Passage, he had been sent with four ships, sailing north from Callao in April 1640. Somewhere north of Cape Blanco, he had discovered an entrance he named Río de los Reyes, which led him into a great lake, and thence by smaller lakes and rivers he had been able to sail north-east, meeting on the way a ship commanded by a captain from Boston. At this point, the two captains stopped, exchanged courtesies and turned back. Fonte had not actually sailed right through the strait, but by deduction he could easily have done and visited his fellow-captain in New England.

The article aroused little interest. It contained interesting details about the shores along which he claimed to have sailed and the abundance of fish he found in the lakes and rivers, but it did not provide the solid information any English merchant adventurer would have needed, and in particular the location of the strait's Atlantic opening.

It eventually proved of value to a tireless promoter of the North-

[1] Wagner, *Cartography*, pp. 114, 128–9.

West Passage theory, Arthur Dobbs, an Ulster landowner who was instrumental in promoting the expedition of Christopher Middleton in 1741–2. For this he needed every shred of semi-evidence he could lay his hands on, and although he favoured Juca de Fuca's story, since the latitude was closer to that of Hudson Bay which was the route he proposed, he later added Fonte's for good measure. The Middleton expedition was an unmitigated failure – like others before him, he was defeated by ice and scurvy. Another expedition organised in 1746 by Dodds also ended in total failure.

Dodds publicised Fonte's voyage through the publication of his *Account of the Countries Adjoining to Hudson's Bay* (London, 1744). It struck a chord in English hearts, encouraged the British Parliament to offer a reward of £20,000 to whoever discovered the strait, gave rise to a disastrous voyage led by William Moor and Francis Smith, and led one Theodore Swaine Drage to publish a map in 1748 on which the strait was clearly shown.[1]

French geographers of good repute were taken in. Joseph-Nicholas Delisle and Philippe Buache – the latter, the Royal Geographer – addressed the *Académie Royale des Sciences* in 1750 presenting the Fonte voyage as fact, and followed this up with a map that gained wide acceptance. Buache's map of 1752 was not without value in summarising contemporary knowledge of the north Pacific region, but his outline of northern America is full of speculative blanks and dotted outlines, with a great western sea opening out towards the Great Lakes and a wide Strait of St Lazarus going east and north to the edge of Hudson Bay.[2]

This led the Spanish to advance counter-evidence: Fr Andrés Marcos Burriel's 1757 *Noticia de la California* poured scorn on the Fonte story – but his work was dismissed by others as an attempt by the Spanish to conceal the existence of a real strait which would benefit Spain, but endanger her South American possessions should other nations discover it. When it was translated into English a couple of years later, the pages dealing with the Fonte expedition

[1] John Barrow, *A Chronological History of Voyages into the Arctic Regions; Undertaken Chiefly for the Purpose of Discovering a North-East, North-west or Polar Passage between the Atlantic the Pacific*, London, 1818, pp. 278–96.

[2] Philippe Buache, *Considérations géographiques et physiques sur les nouvelles découvertes au nord de la Grande Mer appelée vulgairement la Mer du Sud, avec les cartes qui y sont relatives*, 2 vols, Paris, 1752–3. These and related geographical theories and attitudes in the eighteenth century have been ably analysed by Numa Broc in *La Géographie des philosophes*, Paris, 1972.

were omitted, allowing the editor to comment that the existence of a strait was 'a very probable thing'.[1]

A British expedition, properly organised, with scientific as well as less lofty aims, was needed to find the answer. The end of the Seven Years War made such an undertaking possible and John Byron was despatched in 1764 with the *Dolphin* and the *Tamar* to explore, among other parts of the Pacific, the Northwest Coast of America 'with great care and diligence', being advised in his instructions that 'mariners of great Experience...have thought it probable that a passage might be found' and requested to follow any such passage 'to the Eastern side of North America through Hudson's Bay...and return to England that way'.[2] Byron's ships were in no condition to attempt such a navigation and he wisely ignored the request. Britain's first real attempt to solve the north-west puzzle came to nothing.

By then, in spite of immense logistic problems, Russian explorers were beginning to reach the coast of Alaska. French cartographers succeeded in incorporating the voyages of Bering, Chirikov and others into their maps of the northern Pacific, combining them with Fonte and de Fuca's supposed voyages. In Müller's *Voyages from Asia to America* of 1761, in a map based on Delisle's work, Chirikov's discoveries are shown as reaching just to the edge of Fonte's Río de los Reyes, opposite the St Lazarus Archipelago.[3] In another, less influenced by the French, one finds attempts to find room for Francis Drake's New Albion and the even more elusive Port of Fancis Drake, 'wrongly named Port St Francisco'.

There was now too much doubt in official minds in London and Paris. The focus had shifted towards other Pacific puzzles, especially the perennial mystery of the southern continent. The Spanish continued to assert their claims to the Northwest Coast, particularly as Russian fur traders were starting to encroach on it, but efforts to defend what Spain regarded as her northern possessions were not closely linked to a belief in the existence of some elusive North-West Passage.[4]

[1] [Miguel Venegas] *A Natural and Civil History of California*, 2 vols, London, 1759.

[2] Robert E. Gallagher, *Byron's Journal of his Circumnavigation*, Cambridge, 1964 quoting PRO, Adm. 2/1332.

[3] Gerhardt Friedrich Müller, *Voyages from Asia to America*, London, 1761.

[4] James R. Gibson analysed Russian activities in 'A Notable Absence: The Lateness and Lameness of Russian Discovery and Exploration in the North Pacific 1639–1803', in Fisher and Johnston, *From Maps to Metaphors*, Vancouver, 1993.

James Cook's first voyage of 1768–71 was restricted to the central and southern Pacific, and his next expedition took him towards the Antarctic. By the time he was back in England, in 1775, the likelihood of a North-West Passage had been greatly lessened by explorations made overland by Samuel Hearne in 1771–2, but the arguments could only be laid finally to rest by a detailed survey of the North American coast. This would not be easy, because it was so indented and so cluttered by offshore islands, and much of the time fogbound, but it needed to be done. The task was assigned to Cook.

Men like Daines Barrington, a lawyer, antiquary and amateur geographer, had been gathering evidence since the early 1770s. Arguments over the practicality of a passage situated in high latitudes hinged on the issue of impassable ice fields; although it was accepted that ice formed readily in lakes and rivers, the view that salt prevented freezing and that accordingly sea water would not freeze – or do so only in very high latitudes – was widely held. Exploratory voyages showed that this did not necessarily mean that ships could find a satisfactory route in polar seas, but it did allow for the claim that a North-West Passage might still be practicable if it were found in northern Alaska. Daines Barrington was influential in persuading Parliament to renew its offer of a substantial reward for anyone who found this passage. The year 1775 was a particularly active one for all promoters of an expedition to get to the North-West Passage before either the Russians, or the Spanish, or the French discovered it. And in July 1776, Cook's instructions were handed to him.

They required him to sail to the Northwest Coast and 'carefully to search for, and to explore, such Rivers or Inlets as may appear to be of a considerable extent and pointing towards Hudsons or Baffins Bays, and if....there shall appear to be a certainty, or even a probability, of a Water Passage into the aforementioned Bays, or either of them, you are, in such case to use your utmost endeavours to pass through with one or both of the Sloops.'[1] Cook found no passage, unless the ice-choked Bering Strait far to the north could be considered such. He found no trace of Juan de Fuca Strait and bad weather kept him far from shore when he reached the latitude of 'the pretended Strait of Admiral de Fonte'. In fact, he belonged

[1] Cook, *Journals*, III, I, p. ccxxii.

to that substantial group of experienced and realistically minded mariners who had little faith in these straits: 'I give no credet to such vague and improbable stories, that carry their own confutation along with them.'[1]

Cook was followed on the Northwest Coast by another experienced and realistically-minded mariner, La Pérouse. The leading French geographers of his day were still reluctant to relegate Fuca and Fonte to the realm of imaginary voyagers – but too much evidence was now piling up to make their earlier position tenable. La Pérouse was still enjoined in the instructions he received to seek, on the Northwest Coast, a river or narrow inlet that might lead, by way of lakes, to Hudson Bay; but there was more emphasis on the potential offered by the fur trade, and on the possibility of Spanish, Russian and English settlements. However tempted the current Royal Geographer, Buache de la Neuville, the earlier Buache's nephew, might have been to mention the hypothetical western sea or the Strait of St Lazarus, he kept strictly to what was known at the time of La Pérouse's proposed expedition and set aside what was guesswork. As far as the North-West Passage was concerned, La Pérouse's function was to verify and complete the work which fog, storms and ice had prevented James Cook from carrying out to his satisfaction. His masters, just as the British Lords of the Admiralty had done with Cook, urged him to explore any passage which looked truly promising, but there was no urging to go forward into sounds and narrow waterways simply to discover something which geographers believed should exist.

La Pérouse had little faith in the speculations of these closet geographers. Fables or frauds, it mattered little: they were essentially a waste of time for navigators who had so much to do in the real world of uncharted waters, looming cliffs and dangerous shoals. Others, equally down-to-earth – men like Vancouver – were soon to follow him. The British Admiralty did not cling to any firm belief that the Passage existed, but it added it to Vancouver's instructions all the same;[2] after all, there were so many inlets, so many rivermouths still inadequately surveyed: one never knew what might be found. Vancouver found nothing, beyond

[1] Ibid., I, p. 335.

[2] W. Kaye Lamb (ed.), *The Voyage of George Vancouver 1791–1795*, London, 1984, I, 84, 283–4.

evidence that there were numerous deep inlets which Spanish explorers might have entered and more than enough for their sailors to use as the basis of plausible yarns. Juan de Fuca Strait might not lead all the way to the Atlantic, or even to some great inland sea, but at least it existed.

The myth lingered on for a few years. But published accounts of Cook's and Vancouver's voyages, and of La Pérouse's in France, the steady advance of the Russians and the arrival of the fur traders, put an end to the centuries-old speculation. The Strait of Anian vanished into the mists and Admiral de Fonte returned to the world of fantasy that had spawned him, and after so many hardships endured by explorers along the coast and across the land the North-West Passage finally faded away.

THE PARTICIPANTS

I. The Officers

Jean-François de Galaup was born at Le Gô, just outside Albi in south-west France, on 23 August 1741.[1] The family was influential and respected. The earliest Galaup to appear in local records was Huc Galaup who became a member of the Albi town council – a *consul* – in 1487; it began a family tradition: the Galaups provided *consuls* for next two centuries. The family fortunes grew steadily through the years, and in 1558 a Jean Galaup appears as 'Seigneur et Baron de Brens', at which date the Galaups acquired the yearned-for nobiliary particle and henceforth were known as 'de Galaup'. Their sons became magistrates, priests and army officers; they were careful to marry into families of distinction and to ensure that they rose slowly but surely towards the status of nobles. La Pérouse in no way followed the family pattern, although he was to acquire a fame far greater than any of his ancestors or relatives. He entered the navy, married beneath him, for love and not for advancement, and showed little interest in the niceties of Versailles and court life.

His paternal grandmother was the daughter of an army captain,

[1] See John Dunmore, *Pacific Explorer: The Life of Jean-François de la Pérouse 1741–1788*, Palmerston North and Annapolis, 1985.

his mother, Marguerite de Rességuier was the daughter of a colonel. The only link with sea life was a longstanding friendship between the Galaups and their distant relatives, the La Jonquières. Pierre-Jacques Taffanel de la Jonquière, born in 1680, had joined the navy, risen to the rank of commodore and ended his life as governor of French Canada; his nephew Clément Taffanel de la Jonquière also joined the navy and in the 1740s was beginning a distinguished if less brilliant career.[1]

Clément visited the Galaups and on at least one occasion brought with him a friend, another navy man, Charles d'Arsac de Ternay. It is reasonable to assume that their tales and their influence inspired the young Jean-François to seek a similar career. He had probably never seen the sea when he set out in November 1756 for Brest and the cadet school, the Hôtel de Saint-Pierre which housed the corps of the *Gardes de la Marine*.

His father, Victor-Joseph, no doubt after overcoming his surprise and a feeling of disappointment that the family pattern was being broken, decided that his son would have every chance of success. The first step was a change of name. Galaup, even with the nobiliary 'de', sounded inadequate beside such names as Taffanel de la Jonquière and D'Arsac de Ternay. The navy was very class-conscious and there were constant strains in wartime when 'temporary gentlemen' had to be given commissions; the distinction between the two castes was illustrated by a difference in the colour of their uniforms: officers from the aristocracy were known as the 'Reds' to distinguish them from those who had been recruited from the merchant service whose uniform was predominantly blue. One way of protecting his son from the petty innuendoes of his fellow cadets was to add an extra landed title to his name.

The Galaups owned a tenanted farm close to Albi, the Domaine de La Peyrouse. The name, which roughly translates as 'the rocky one', is not uncommon in south-west France, and there was a powerful and well-known aristocratic family, the La Peyrouse, who owned extensive lands in Périgord and Languedoc. If his new name became associated in people's minds with the La Peyrouse family, it would do Jean-François no harm. The property itself was

[1] On the links between La Jonquière and La Pérouse, see H. Manavit, 'Ce que Lapérouse doit à La Jonquière', *Revue du Tarn*, III, 1969, pp. 163–72, and H. and C. de la Jonquière, 'Une Famille Tarnaise: Les Taffanel de la Jonquière', *Colloque Lapérouse Albi 1985*, pp. 35–40.

not formally transferred to him until 1782, but the income seems to have been. So, when he left for Brest the young man became Jean-François de Galaup de la Pérouse (although he invariably signed letters and reports with the single word 'Lapérouse') and in time, when he began to move in government and court circles, he was referred to as the Comte de la Pérouse.[1]

He had joined the *Gardes* at the height of the Seven Years War. There was little time for formal study. On 3 May, he sailed from Brest in the *Célèbre* with the squadron of Dubois de la Motte, with reinforcements for Louisbourg on Cape Breton Island in what is now known as Nova Scotia. Commanding the *Célèbre* was Taffanel de la Jonquière, who would with Ternay be the young man's guide and mentor during his formative years. The *Célèbre* sailed back to France in October, and after a brief period of shore leave La Pérouse joined Ternay's frigate *Pomone*, then followed him onto the *Zéphire* and once more sailed to Canada. Back in Brest he was able to resume his studies before joining the *Formidable* in June 1759, to become part of an expedition intended to effect a landing in England. Admiral Hawke neutralised this French threat at the Battle of Quiberon Bay, during which the *Formidable* was captured and La Pérouse slightly wounded and taken prisoner. Released on parole, he was given leave and sent home to Albi to recuperate.[2]

He later resumed his studies in Brest, but was back in North American waters in 1762, sailing to Newfoundland in the *Robuste*, still under Ternay. The return journey, in September, was dangerous, with an English squadron lying in wait for them near Ushant. Ternay tried to find a port further south, on the Atlantic coast, but he was compelled to sail all the way to La Coruña in northern Spain. He remained there until 9 January 1763. By then the war was drawing to a close. French Canada and French India were lost, among other overseas colonies, and the treasury was empty. Now 21, still a *garde de la marine*, La Pérouse was sent home to Albi. It was a bleak time. His future depended on the government's policies: if

[1] On this, see Editorial Note, 'The Choice of a Name'. It should be borne in mind that 'comte de la Pérouse' is a courtesy title which usage would have confirmed with the passing in time; there is no record of any 'raising to the peerage' as some commentators have assumed.

[2] The early career of La Pérouse is detailed in M. de Brossard, *Lapérouse: des combats à la découverte*, Paris, 1978, pp. 15–96, and Dunmore, *Pacific Explorer*, pp. 37–61.

Versailles decided to retrench, his career in the navy would vegetate; it might even come to an end.

A number of young officers, those who had other prospects, went back on permanent leave to their families, effectively leaving the navy. Others, La Pérouse among them, declared themselves ready to accept whatever might become available. He returned to Brest, completed his formal studies and, on 1 October 1764, was promoted to the rank of *enseigne*. He then served on various *gabares* – little more than coastal storeships – sailing down to Bayonne to load timber from the Pyrenees and back to Brest. In 1768 he was able to join Ternay in the *Turquoise*, carrying out hydrographic work around the Brittany coast. It marked the end of three years of dreary work, not very different from what a merchant marine officer would be doing. (One cannot resist, at this point, thinking of James Cook's time on the coal run and in the Baltic trade.)

His period with the *Turquoise* was a valuable learning experience, though a brief one, followed by a spell in the *Belle-Poule*, an impressive frigate. This was interrupted for a few months when he was sent in command of a *bugalet* – an ammunition lighter – to check on English shipping movements and set up signalling stations on the coast. Back in the *Belle-Poule* at the end of 1770, he sailed to the West Indies and a year later, the frigate having been placed under Ternay's command, he sailed with his protector to the Ile de France in the Indian Ocean. Ternay had been appointed governor of the Ile de France (now known as Mauritius). He was to keep La Pérouse with him until 1776 when both returned to France.[1]

The Indian Ocean opened up a new opportunities for him. It did more: it introduced him to the exciting world of exploration. The Ile de France was the outpost from which expeditions like those of Marion du Fresne and Kerguelen set out for unknown seas, and it was there that men like Bougainville put in on the penultimate stage of their homeward voyage after crossing the Pacific Ocean. Geographers and cartographers back home might speculate about the existence of a southern continent and argue theory: here men and women knew at first hand of the problems and the dangers involved and argued over the benefits which would derive if one of the navigators the distant ocean should come upon a new land.

It was an exciting period. While the *Belle-Poule* was on her way

[1] On Ternay, see M. Linyer de la Barbée, *Le Chevalier de Ternay*, Grenoble, 1972.

across the Indian Ocean, somewhere between the Cape of Good Hope and the Ile de France, in July 1772, James Cook was setting out from Plymouth on his second voyage. When Ternay and La Pérouse arrived at Port-Louis, Ile de France, in August, they found the island in a state of ferment over the Kerguelen discovery. Yves de Kerguelen in the *Fortune* had sailed south from the island on 16 January, acccompanied by the *Gros-Ventre* commanded by François de St Allouarn; on 12 February he had discovered a stretch of land which he hastened back to Port-Louis to report about, having lost touch with the *Gros-Ventre* in thick fog. On 16 March, a mere five months before La Pérouse's arrival, Kerguelen reached Port-Louis, went to see the governor and the civil administrator and gave a glowing account of his discoveries that led the governor to write at once to the Minister in France that '[everything] seems to indicate a country that is inhabited and carefully cultivated'[1] and the administrator to write separately and with even greater enthusiasm that 'M. de Kerguelen has discovered for France, in the space of two months, a new world....It is not possible that so immense a discovery, so close to the Ile de France, since one can get there in three weeks, should fail to procure great advantages to the colony.'[2] Kerguelen had sailed back to France on 27 March to press for an immediate expedition to complete his explorations. By the time Ternay and La Pérouse reached Port-Louis, the excitement had cooled somewhat: it all seemed too good to be true – and what had happened to the *Gros-Ventre*?

Ternay took over from Des Roches as governor, while Maillard du Mesle, an administrator more concerned to balance the island's precarious budget than with grandiose schemes for new colonies, replaced Poivre. Within a few days, the *Gros-Ventre* appeared. St Allouarn had followed the original instructions, which were to sail east from the South Indian Ocean; he had reached Cape Leeuwin in Australia, explored the western coast of the continent as far as Shark Bay and then turned back for Timor and the Ile de France. St Allouarn was brought ashore in very poor health and died within a short time. The expedition brought with it the startling news that there was no pleasant inhabitable land in the South Indian Ocean, no sign of any continent, nothing but bleak islands, snow and

[1] Des Roches to the Minister, 20 March 1772. BN, NAF 9439–90.
[2] Poivre to the Minister, 21 March 1772. BN, NAF 9439–91.

storms. The existence of a southern continent was looking increasingly doubtful, for 1772 was also the year when the first French-language account of James Cook's *Endeavour* voyage was published, avidly read and promptly reprinted – and Cook's voyage had made deadly inroads into the continental theory.

Kerguelen meanwhile was granted his request for a second expedition. It was to be far grander, far more costly than the first. The official approval came on 16 September 1772, just eleven days after St Allouarn's return to the Ile de France. Since Versailles knew nothing of the *Gros-Ventre*'s reports, plans went ahead. When Kerguelen sailed in March 1773, with the *Oiseau* and the *Rolland*, a report of St Allouarn's voyage was about to reach France, but Kerguelen could not be called back. His two ships met with various mishaps and eventually separated, with the *Oiseau* going to Madagascar for supplies. Kerguelen did not reach the Ile de France until August. Ternay, but especially Maillard, were unco-operative; they made it difficult for Kerguelen to obtain replacements for the 34 sick he had to leave behind and to get a small corvette for coastal reconnaissance. Nevertheless, he had orders from the Minister and the officials were forced to help him, albeit ungraciously. Kerguelen sailed south on 8 November, reached Kerguelen Island on 14 December, carried out some surveys in appalling weather, had to admit that the place was of no value to anyone and sailed back to Madagascar and France in mid-January 1774. A year later, back in France, he was arrested, court-martialled on a number of charges and sentenced to six years' imprisonment, some of his incompetent and insubordinate officers being dismissed from the service or imprisoned.[1]

The year 1773 was marked by more bad news. In May the *Marquis-de-Castries* and the *Mascarin* limped into Port-Louis. They had sailed from the island with high hopes in October 1771 under Marc-Joseph Marion du Fresne.[2] The plan was to return to Tahiti a

[1] Kerguelen has had his defenders, notably M. de Brossard, *Kerguelen le découvreur*, Paris, 1970. He was ambitious and reckless, foolishly eager to undertake tasks the magnitude of which he failed to appreciate and all too easily given the means to attempt them; he was then unscrupulously fierce in his endeavours to justify himself. '[He] had resilience and unbounded self-confidence', but '[his] expeditions typified the drawbacks of the old class structure of the Navy'. Dunmore, *French Explorers in the Pacific*, I, 1965, pp. 248–9.

[2] On Marion du Fresne, see Dunmore, *French Explorers*, I, 1965, pp. 166–95, and Isabel Ollivier (transl.), *Extracts from the Journals of the Ships*, Mascarin *and* Marquis de Castries, Wellington, 1985.

Polynesian taken to France by Louis de Bougainville and sail in search of the southern continent. The expedition had met with some success in the South Indian Ocean, discovering some small groups of islands, stopped briefly in Tasmania and gone on to New Zealand where Marion du Fresne and a number of officers and men had been killed. Under a new commander the expedition had sailed north towards the Tongan archipelago, but no one had any enthusiasm left for any further exploring, the Polynesian had died of smallpox, the ships were in a bad state of repair, and the French made for Guam and Manila. Now, after some overhaul but many desertions in the Spanish colony, the ships were back, the officers and crew totally dispirited.

Consequently in his years in the Ile de France, La Pérouse was subjected to conflicting influences. On the one hand, there were news of discoveries James Cook was making throughout the Pacific, showing what could be achieved by a well-led and well-planned expedition, and there remained among the residents of the island a substantial and vocal number who had been impressed by what Bougainville had done and who still felt the French could and should organise their own expedition; and on the other hand, there was Maillard, the powerful *Intendant*, who was firmly opposed to any venture that might further strain the island's resources, and who was seconded in his views by Ternay who was concerned about the need to strengthen the island's defences and self-reliance. Supplies were often inadequate, and ships from France arrived only at irregular intervals and they needed to be refitted and revictualled in order to continue their voyage to the French Indian settlements or to start back on the journey home. So La Pérouse learned caution and realism, but he also acquired a yearning to sail one day towards that vast ocean about which so much had been written and which, from Port-Louis, looked tantalising near.

Ternay's instructions, like Maillard, were to carry out economies, to eschew grand schemes and to build up the island as a staging post to the east, and to do this he needed to strengthen the French presence in the Indian Ocean. He used La Pérouse's talents to develop this strategy, but first he needed to take prompt action to deal with a serious food shortage resulting from cyclones which had devastated the island in March and April. La Pérouse was transferred to *L'Africaine*, commanded by Claude-Joseph du Chayla, and sent to Madagascar in early September. The *Africaine*,

a storeship carrying 40 guns – needed to impress the tribes of Madagascar who were almost constantly at war – made several expeditions to the east coast of Madagascar and to the nearby island of Bourbon (present-day Reunion), bringing back supplies of rice and bullocks. Then on 21 April 1773, La Pérouse took over command of the *Seine*, a ship of 700 tons, carrying 30 guns, with a complement of 110 officers and men.

His instructions were to sail to India by way of Bourbon and the Seychelles, following a route suggested some years earlier by Jacques-Raymond de Géron de Grenier and partly investigated in 1771 by Kerguelen. The practicality of the route was still not established, and there was speculation about the existence of an island called St John of Lisbon which the British might occupy and use as a base in the Indian Ocean. Ternay's long-term plan was to lessen dependence on the call at the Dutch-held Cape settlements for French ships on their way to the east by building up the Ile de France as the centre of a series of French bases including the Seychelles and the Amirantes in the north, Madagascar in the west, Rodriguez in the east, plus any other islands as yet undiscovered. If rumours about St John of Lisbon were even partly true, it was important to ensure that it fell into French hands; but rumours have a tendency to mushroom, and in the case of St John of Lisbon a cloud along the horizon or an erroneous longitude recorded for Rodriguez had been transformed into an island of economic and strategic significance. So La Pérouse would help to banish it from the maps, but he achieved a great deal more than that.

On 18 May 1773, he sailed with the *Seine*. He followed Grenier's route, keeping a wary eye for unknown dangers along the way. He had no chronometer and depended on dead reckoning, on constant soundings and on signs traditionally used by sailors: flights of birds, cloud formations, the colour of the sea. He made his way towards the Seychelles which he reached on 5 June. His longitude was 150 miles out but, making allowance for his lack of instruments, unreliable charts, unexpected currents and the general unawareness of the problem of compass deviation, it was a creditable result.

The islands were idyllic, but life ashore belied the promise of nature. The small European settlement on the island of Mahé was in total disarray; twenty or so squabbling settlers huddled in huts or squatted on the beach, leaving the weeds to take over their

struggling plantations. La Pérouse had instructions to reorganise the colony, a task which took him three weeks. He then went on to Pondicherry, a French port in south-east India, spent a month there and sailed for Bengal on 27 August. He reached the mouth of the Ganges on 3 September and continued upriver to Chandernagore, the French settlement near Calcutta. He took on a cargo of comestibles for the Ile de France and began the slow voyage down the Hooghly to the Bay of Bengal in mid-December, watched suspiciously by a British guardship. He proceeded down the coast to Masulipatnam and Pondicherry, taking on more supplies for Mauritius, and sailed home on 3 February 1774, dropping anchor at Port-Louis on 24 March.[1]

The *Seine* had completed a useful voyage, during which he had gained a great deal of experience. Ternay granted him a respite of five months ashore while the ship was repaired. La Pérouse spent much of his time in the navy's offices, poring over charts and journals, writing a detailed report and catching up with news from France. He was now 32, an age when promotion begins to assume an importance coloured by anxiety. France had been at peace for more than ten years. Advancement was slow and La Pérouse was still an *enseigne* surrounded by others of his own age, all competing for the attention of the naval authorities. Under the Ancient Regime, birth and connections mattered greatly. La Pérouse had protectors like La Jonquière and Ternay, but others had well placed relatives. A 'red' officers he might be, but he lacked the uncle at court, the well-connected cousin, the sister married into the old nobility which others could call upon to place a good word in the influential ear at the right moment. And the Indian Ocean was far away from Versailles where beat France's administrative heart.

Ternay sent him back to India. The *Seine* reached Pondicherry on 20 September 1774 and after nearly a month there was sent to the French port of Mahé and then along the Malabar coast to Mangalore. This was the northernmost limit of the area controlled by Haydar Ali, the Mysore leader who was fiercely defending his independence against the British India Company and whom the French were supplying with arms. Not unexpectedly Haydar Ali welcomed him like an official representative of France and put on

[1] La Pérouse's 'Journal de la flûte du Roi *La Seine*' is held at the Archives Nationales, AN.M. C7 165, pp. 123–45.