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BOOK REVIEW

Louis Claude de Freycinet (2004) *An Account of the Corvette L'Uranie's sojourn at the Mariana Islands, 1819. Supplemented with the Journal of Rose de Freycinet*. Translated and prefaced by Glynn Barratt. Occasional Historic Papers Series n° 13. Saipan: Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands Division of Historic Preservation. 348 pp; ISBN: 1-878453-59-9. Available both Hdbk and Pbk.

reviewed by

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The discussion of the history of the Marianas has long been dominated by translations of Spanish observations and reports, both by the Micronesian Area Research Center in Guam and by Roger Levesque. An exception to the rule has been Glynn Barratt, whose area of expertise is the Russian exploration in the Pacific and who has already produced some material on the Marianas (cf. Barratt 1984).

Louis Claude de Freycinet (1779–1842) undertook a voyage of scientific discovery to the Pacific, which took from 1817 to 1820. Commanding the corvette *L'Uranie*, he visited New Guinea, islands in the Western Carolines, the Marianas and then Hawaii, Sydney and the Falklands, where he suffered shipwreck. His collections and observations, however could be saved.

Freycinet was a capable naval officer who had been to the Pacific before as part of Baudin's expedition to Australia. Unlike other navigators at the time, Freycinet concentrated less on the discovery of new islands, and more on the scientific investigation of oceanographic

and geological aspects of the region, with the French Academy of Sciences setting a research programme. Unlike the Baudin expedition, however, Freycinet took along no scientists, who might prove to be troublesome and disruptive to ship discipline, but had the scientific work carried out by capable naval officers. Freycinet also broke with tradition when he smuggled his wife Rose aboard and took her on the voyage. Like Freycinet himself, she too maintained a journal, the relevant sections of which are also included in this volume.

In 1819 Freycinet arrived at Guam where he stayed for three months (17 March – 6 June), a considerable period of time. His account of the stay, which forms the core of the volume under review, is unique in the detail it provides on early nineteenth century Marianas customs, economy and environment.

The prolonged stay on Guam, and the unlimited access granted by the Spanish governor, allowed Freycinet not only to carry out his research programme, covering geography, magnetism, oceanography, climatology, pedology

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and geology of Guam as well as the other islands visited, but also to make very detailed observations on Chamorro health and physique, nutrition, village organization, material culture, customs, social systems, produce, fishing and general economy. In addition to observations on the then current colonial administration, ranging from structure and taxation to personnel and equipment, Freycinet diligently compiled whatever he could learn about pre-Spanish customs and laws. In addition to his observations, Freycinet and his officers also collected large numbers of specimens of fauna and flora, as well as geological samples, which provided ample scope for researchers back in France.

As guests of the Spanish Governor of the Marianas. Freycinet, his wife and his officers experienced Spanish hospitality and through their accounts provide us also with an insight to the lifestyle of the Spanish administration.

Unlike the earlier accounts by Kotzebue or Chamisso who had stopped over at Guam in 1817, Freycinet's account is systematic and detailed. Rose de Freycinet's narrative adds different angles to some of the official observations.

Louis Claude de Freycinet's account was first published in French in a five-volume set between 1827 and 1839. Jacques Arago, one of de Freycinet's officers, published his own account in 1823, preceded de Freycinet's account

and thus taking away some of the fame. Unlike de Freycinet's account, the Arago version was translated into English in 1823 and remained the sole source for all non-francophone researchers. Rose de Freycinet's observations in form of letters sent to her mother were collated and published in book form in 1927. These too were untranslated.

Glynn Barratt's publication now makes available for the first time all of de Freycinet's observations to an anglophone audience. The text relating to the Marianas has been translated and extensively annotated. It can easily be predicted, that de Freycinet's observations will soon find much use in historic research proper, while providing an added historic dimension to other disciplines, such as health, land use or the economy.

On a formal level, the volume is very well produced, with many illustrations in colour. The author, the CNMI Historic Preservation Office which published the book and the CNMI Council for the Humanities, which funded the project, are to commended for this very necessary addition to the bookshelf.

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