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# For Natives of New Found Lands: the Exploration Medal

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When they entered the Pacific Ocean, Europeans from the outset bartered and gave gifts to islanders in exchange for food, water and artifacts, as well as hoping to establish ties of friendship. Some early explorers handed out coins and medals but it was not until Captain Cook's Second Voyage of Discovery that specially made medals were given.

The concept of handing out specially made medals is attributed to Sir Joseph Banks, who had sailed on Cook's First Voyage of Discovery. Such medals depict the king or head of State and details of the expedition; they have since become known as Exploration Medals. The purpose of these medals was twofold: first, the natives could readily see the European chief's portrait and second, other Europeans, when they saw these medals, would recognise that a particular expedition had visited the region—not quite a territorial claim but certainly physical evidence that Europeans had been in the region. In those early times Europeans who discovered new land would lay claim to the territory by raising a flag and often leaving behind evidence in the form of a message in a bottle, on a tree or on a plaque, or by leaving medals with the local inhabitants.

Only a handful of medals was given over a period of sixty-five years from 1772 onwards by the three countries, Great

Britain, France, and Russia. After twenty years of collecting these medals I have managed to acquire examples from eight expeditions. In this paper I shall deal with a representative selection of the medals and explain how they were distributed and how they were received by the natives.

## **Resolution and Adventure medal, 1772** (the Killora example).

*Expedition Commander:* James Cook (Fig 1).

*Obverse:* Laureate bust of George III facing right. Legend, GEORGE.III.KING. OF. GR. BRITAIN. FRANCE. AND. IRELAND. ETC. In small letters, B:F (Boulton and Fothergill) on truncation.

*Reverse:* Stern view of two frigates. Legend, RESOLVTION ADVENTURE. In Exergue, SAILED FROM ENGLAND / MARCH MDCCLXXII (1772).

*Size:* 43mm. *Metal:* platina (bronze); other examples known in gold, silver and copper.

The first Resolution and Adventure medal was left on Bruny Island, Tasmania on 15 March 1773. The *Adventure* was anchored in Adventure Bay (later named after this ship) for the purpose of collecting wood and water. Its captain, Tobias Furneaux, saw no aborigines. But he came across a deserted shelter and found a 'spear, some bags and nets made of grass' and took them on board and in their place left:



obv.  
rev.  
Fig 1. The 'Killora' Resolution & Adventure medal.



Fig 2. The 'WL' (William Lanyon) Resolution & Adventure medal obverse.

*medals [the Resolution and Adventure medal] gun-flints, a few nails and an empty barrel with iron hoops on it.*<sup>1</sup>

Almost four years later during Cook's Third Voyage both ships, the *Resolution* and the *Discovery*, anchored in Adventure Bay for five days. Cook sighted twenty male aborigines walking along the shore and decided to meet them. As soon as he landed he gave:

*each of them a string of Beads and a Medal, which he thought they received with great satisfaction.*<sup>2</sup>

Only one of these medals has ever been found in Australia and the example shown here today is that medal, discovered in 1914 during ploughing on a farm at Killora, Bruny Island.<sup>3</sup>

### **The 'WL' (William Lanyon) Resolution & Adventure medal, 1772.**

*Expedition Commander:* James Cook (Fig 2).

*Obverse:* The legend has been erased and on either side of the king's head the letters W on the left and L on the right have been hand-engraved.

*Reverse:* Stern view of two frigates. Legend, RESOLUTION ADVENTURE. In exergue SAILED FROM ENGLAND /

MARCH MDCCLXXII (1772).

*Edge:* The edge is threaded, suggesting the medal had been screwed into a presentation item such as the lid of a box.

*Size:* 43mm. *Metal:* platina.

This medal is holed at the top.

William Lanyon sailed on Cook's Second and Third Voyages of Discovery, and was the only person on board with the initials W L. There is no official record that officers and crew acquired medals during Cook's voyages, but it is reasonable to assume they fell into their hands one way or another. This is the only exploration medal that has been personalized.

Around 1980, Jenny Loosley, of Seaby in London, acquired the medal from a woman who stated that it had been in her family a long time. The medal arrived in Australia a little later and has since passed through several hands including the late Richard Smith.

### **Boussole and L'Astrolabe medal, 1785.**

*Expedition Commander:* La Perouse (Fig 3).

*Obverse 1:* Bust of Louis XVI facing left, legend, LOUIS XVI.ROI DE FRANCE ET DE NAVARRE. In small letters below bust the engravers name, R.DVVIVIER. F. 1778. Translation: Louis XVI King of



obv 1.



obv 2



common rev

Fig 3. The Boussole and L'Astrolabe medal.

France and Navarre.

*Obverse 2:* Bust of Louis XVI facing right, legend: LUDOVICUS XVI REX CHRISTIANISS AA. In small letters below the bust, R. DVVIVIER. F. Translation: Louis XVI the most Christian king (this Christian title was conferred on a number of French kings by the Pope).

*Reverse:* Centre inscription in ten lines all within a wreath, LES FREGATES / DU ROI DE FRANCE / LA BOUSSOLE / ET L'ASTROLABE / COMMANDÉES PAR M.M. / DE LA PEROUSE / ET DE L'ANGLE / PARTIES DU PORT / DE BREST / EN JUIN 1785. Translation: The King of France's frigates La Boussole and L'Astrolabe, commanded by Messieurs de la Perouse and de Langle, left the port of Brest in June 1785.

*Size:* 60mm. *Metal:* gold, silver & bronze.

*Mint:* Paris.

In Cook's Bay, Easter Island, during his voyage to the Pacific, La Perouse writes in his journal;

*I took them to be chiefs and gave them medals which I tied around their necks with a chain; but I soon noticed that they were in fact the worst thieves, although they gave the impression of trying to chase those who stole our handkerchiefs*

[and items of clothing], *but with no intention of catching them.*<sup>4</sup>

#### **Geographe and Naturaliste medal, 1800.**

*Commander:* Nicolas Thomas Baudin (Fig 4).

*Obverse:* Bust of Bonaparte facing left. Legend, BONAPARTE PREMIER CONSUL DE LA REP. FRANC<sup>e</sup>. Below bust, EXPEDITION DE / DECOUVERTES / AN. 9. On truncation the engraver's mark, MONTAG. Translation: Bonaparte, First Consul of the Republic France Expedition of Discoveries Year 9. Year 9 refers to the ninth year of the recently established French Republican Calendar (1800/1). The actual month of the expedition's departure was October 1800.

*Reverse:* In six lines, LES CORVETTES / LE GEOGRAPHE ET / LE NATURALISTE, / COMMANDEES PAR / LE CAPITAINE / BAUDIN, with a scroll device below. Translation: The corvettes Geographe and Naturaliste commanded by Captain Baudin.

*Size:* 38mm. *Metal:* silver, gilt, bronze, white metal. *Mint:* Paris.

In King George Sound, Western Australia, Baudin records in his journal:

*While exploring the environs of [Rivière*



Fig 4. The Geographe and Naturaliste medal.



Fig 5. The Uranie medal.

des Français, now known as Kalgan River, some 10 kilometres inland from Oyster Bay]...we found two rather peculiar and interesting monuments erected by the natives...The first was 7 or 8 feet from the stream, on a piece of bare ground that was 3 feet in circumference and surrounded by finely tapered spears painted red at the tip. There were eleven in all.

Baudin speculated that what he had found were two warriors' graves and as such forbade anyone to deface them. He then placed 'two medals and some glass beads on each one'. This was the only occasion that he distributed medals in Australia.<sup>5</sup>

### Uranie medal, 1817.

*Expedition Commander:* Louis de Freycinet (Fig 5).

*Obverse A:* Bust of Louis XVIII facing right, with ribbon in hair. Legend, LOUIS XVIII ROI DE FRANCE ET DE NAVARRE. Below truncation in minute letters engraver's name GAYRARD F. and below mint master's name in minute letters DE PUYMAURIN D. Translation: Louis XVIII King of France and of Navarre).

*Reverse:* Legend above, HEMISPHERE AUSTRAL and below, PHYSIQUE ASTRONOMIE. Inscription in the centre, LACORVETTE L'URANIE / M<sup>R</sup>. L<sup>S</sup>. DE FRECINET, COMMAND<sup>T</sup> / S.A.R.M. GR

LE DUC D'ANGOUL-ME / AMIRAL DE FRANCE. / M<sup>R</sup> LEV<sup>TE</sup> DUBOUCHAGE / MINISTRE DE LA MARINE. / 1817. Below the date in minute letters, the mint master's name, DE PUYMAURIN D. RF. Translation: southern hemisphere, Physics (and) Astronomy, the corvette *Uranie* commanded by Louis de Freycinet, His Royal Highness the Duke of Angoulême, Admiral of France, Monsieur the Viscount of Bouchage, Minister of the Navy, 1817. *Size:* 40mm. *Metal:* silver & bronze. *Mint:* Paris.

Only one medal was recorded in the commander's journal. It was not presented to a native but to a prominent Australian colonial family living in Paramatta, NSW. The presentation occurred in late 1819. To acknowledge the late Governor Philip Gidley King's (1758–1808) assistance to the Baudin expedition of which Freycinet himself was a member, he visited the King family at Vineyard Cottage, Parramatta. Freycinet left a testimonial expressing the French Government's gratitude to the King family and:

*a handsome silver medal bearing on one side the image of King Louis and on the other side details of the Uranie's voyage.*<sup>6</sup>

**Vostok and Mirny medal, 1819** (Orient & Pacific).



obv. rev.  
Fig 6. The Vostok and Mirny medal.

*Expedition Commander:* Fabian Gottlieb Bellingshausen (Fig 6).

*Obverse:* Head of Alexander I facing right. Legend, Translation: Alexander the First, by the Grace of God, Emperor of all the Russias. АЛЕКСАНДРЪ ПЕРВОЙ Б. М. ИМПЕРАТОРЪ ВСЕРОС.

*R e v e r s e :*

In five lines, Translation: The sloops *Vostok* (Orient) ШЛЮПЫ / a n d ВОСТОКЪ / И / МИРНЫИ. / 1819 ГОДА.

*Mirny* (Pacific), 1819. Signature in minute letters, I. Shilov (die sinker).

*Size:* 42mm *Metal:* silver & bronze *Mint:* St Petersburg.

Although the first medal to be distributed was given during the expedition's first visit to Sydney in March 1820, Bellingshausen makes no mention of the presentation in his journal. The medal was only mentioned by leading seaman Yegor Kiselyov in his own journal:

*our captain gave him [Boongaree, chief of the Broken Bay Tribe] a hussar's great coat and a bronze medal, and his wife a white blanket and a pair of woman's earrings.<sup>7</sup>*

**Otkrytie and Blagonamyereny medal, 1819** (Discovery & Well-intentioned).

*Expedition Commander:* Mikhail Nikolaich Vasilev.

*Obverse:* (No image of obverse available;

Milford Haven records: 'same as preceding'<sup>8</sup>).

*Reverse:* In five lines, Signature in minute letters, I. Shilov (die sinker). Translation: The sloops *Otkrytie* [Discovery] and *Blagonamyereny* [Well- ШЛЮПЫ / ОТКРЫТИЕ / И / БЛАГОНАМВРЕННЫ. / 1819 ГОДА.

intentioned], year 1819.

*Size:* 42mm *Metal:* silver & bronze. *Mint:* St Petersburg.

There were two Russian expeditions, each with two ships. Both expeditions simultaneously left Russia for Sydney before going their separate ways. The *Otkrytie* and *Blagonamyereny* commanded by Vasilev sailed north to find a north-west passage, and the *Vostok* and *Mirny* commanded by Bellingshausen explored the South Pacific as well as the Antarctic region.

The fact that medals were distributed on the South Pacific–Antarctic expedition implies that Vasilev also would have taken with him his expedition medal for distribution to natives. But details of any medal distribution are not readily available because the voyage was unsuccessful and the expedition journal was never published. In NSW the Russian officers were treated well beyond the customary civilities by Governor Macquarie and the other dignitaries in the colony. It is likely that some silver medals would have been given to these colonists.

**La Coquille medal, 1822.**

*Expedition Commander:* Louis-Isidor Duperrey (Fig 7).

*Obverse:* Louise XVIII facing right, with a ribbon in hair. Legend, LVDOVICVS·XVIII FRANC·ET·NAV·REX. (Translation:



obv. rev.  
Fig 7. The La Coquille medal.



obv. rev.  
Fig 8. The L'Astrolabe 1826 medal.

Louis XVIII King of France and of Navarre). On truncation, ANDRIEU F. and in minute letters below, DE. PUYMAURIN DI.  
*Reverse:* Legend, VOYAGE AUTOUR DU MONDE DE LA CORVETTE LA COQUILLE. Centre inscription, S. A. R. M<sup>GR</sup>. LE DUC D'ANGOULÊME / AMIRAL DE FRANCE / M<sup>R</sup>. M<sup>IS</sup> DE CLERMONT-TONNERRE PAIR DE FRANCE MINISTRE DE LA MARINE. / M<sup>R</sup>. DUPERREY LIET. DE VAU. COMT. L'EXPÉDITION / 1822. Translation: Voyage around the world of the corvette *Coquille*, His Royal Highness the Duke of Angoulême, Admiral of France. Mr. de Clermont-Tonnerre, Peer of the French Ministry of the Navy. Lieutenant Duperrey, Commander of the expedition in 1822.  
*Size:* 50mm. *Metal:* silver & bronze.  
*Mint:* Paris.

While on Ualan Island [Marshall Islands] in 1824, Duperrey records:  
*...a gift of a six inch nail to the king who seemed very pleased; he then gave him a medal of the expedition which I placed around his neck, but the king didn't seem too pleased as he didn't know what the medal was for. It was utterly impossible for us to make him understand. He wanted every [thing] he saw; we had brought along a black bottle which contained brandy; he asked us for it and we gave it to him. When it was empty he seemed very contented.*<sup>9</sup>

### L'Astrolabe 1826 medal.

*Expedition Commander:* Jules-Sebastian-Cesar Dumont d'Urville (Fig 8).

*Obverse:* Head of Charles X facing left, Legend CHARLES X ROI DE FRANCE ET DE NAV. In minute letters below truncation DEPAULIS. F. DEPUYMAURIN. D.

*Reverse:* Legend VOYAGE DE DÉCOUVERTES DE LA CORVETTE L'ASTROLABE. Centre, inscription in ten lines S. A. R. / M<sup>GR</sup>. LE DAUPHIN, / AMIRAL DE FRANCE / M<sup>R</sup>. C<sup>TE</sup> CHABROL / DE CROEZOL, / PAIR DE FRANCE, MINISTRE DE LA MARINE / M<sup>R</sup>. DUMONT D'URVILLE, / CAPITAINE DE FRÉGATE / COM<sup>T</sup>. L'EXPÉDITION / 1826. Translation: Voyage of discovery of the corvette *Astrolabe*. His Royal Highness the Dauphin, Admiral of France, Commandant Mr Chabrol de Croezol, Peer of France, Ministry of the Navy. Mr Dumont Durville, Captain of the frigate, Commander of the expedition, 1826.

*Size:* 50mm. *Metal:* silver and bronze.  
*Mint:* Paris.

At King George Sound, WA, on 11 October 1826, M. de Sainson, the *Astrolabe* artist, recorded in his diary:

*About a dozen men and two boys were standing around a fire; but when they*



obv. rev.  
Fig 9. The Adventure and Beagle medal.

*recognized their comrade clothed, and decked out in a necklaces and mirrors and the various trinkets that had been given him, their delight knew no bounds.*<sup>10</sup>

De Sainson illustrated this scene which shows the necklace with a medal attached. As this medal depicts the head of Charles X we can be certain that it is the expedition medal.

**Adventure and Beagle medal** (dated 1826, 1827 or 1828).  
*Expedition Commander:* Philip Parker King (Fig 9).

*Obverse:* In the centre, GEORGE IV. Legend, H.B.M.S. ADVENTURE AND BEAGLE 1828. (The letters HBMS are an abbreviation for His Britannic Majesty's Ship.)

*Reverse:* Britannia seated beneath a crown within wreath.

*Size:* 26mm. *Metal:* brass. *Maker:* unknown.

Prior to leaving England for the first major survey, Commander Captain Philip Parker King stated that he had provided himself:

*with medals, to give away to Indians with whom we might communicate, bearing on one side the figure of Britannia, and on the reverse "George IV", "Adventure and Beagle," and "1826".*<sup>11</sup>



obv. rev.  
Fig 10. The The Astrolabe and Zelee medal.

The crude workmanship of the medals and his statement which appeared in the published account of the voyage as a footnote suggest that they were not official Admiralty medals. King may have obtained the idea from Cook's Journals.

*Near Terra Del Fargo January 1827*  
[w]hen Mr Cooke landed, he presented some medals to the oldest man, and the woman, and suspended them round their necks. A friendly feeling being established, the natives dismounted' and the natives then let the Europeans ride their horses.<sup>12</sup>

**The Astrolabe and Zelee medal, 1837.**

*Expedition Commander:* Dumont d'Urville (Fig 10).

*Obverse:* Head of Phillippe I facing left. Legend, LOUIS PHILIPPE I. ROI DES FRANÇAIS. In minute letters below truncation, Barre F<sup>T</sup>.

*Reverse:* Legend, VOYAGE AUTOUR DU MONDE, EXPLORATION DU POLE AUSTRAL. Central inscription, CORVETTES / L'ASTROLABE ET LA ZÉLÉE / M<sup>l</sup>. DUCAMPE DE ROSAMEL / VICE-AMIRAL / MINISTRE DE LA MARINE / M<sup>l</sup>. DUMONT D'URVILLE / CAP<sup>e</sup>. DEV<sup>u</sup>. COMM<sup>t</sup>. L'EXPÉDITION / M<sup>l</sup>. JACQUINOT/COMM<sup>t</sup>. LA ZÉLÉE / 1837. Translation: Voyage around the world, exploration of the South Pole.



The corvettes *Astrolabe* and *Zelee*. Mr Ducampe de Rosamel, Vice-Admiral, Ministry of the Navy Mr Dumont d'Urville, Captain and Commander of the expedition Mr Jacquinot, Captain of the *Zelee*, 1837.

*Size*: 50mm. *Metal*: silver, bronze. *Mint*: Paris.

Dumont d'Urville acknowledged the fact that islanders were no longer interested in receiving medals. As a consequence, while anchored off Cape Horn, he marked the 1838 New Year by presenting eighteen of the silver expedition medals to officers and eight of the bronze to petty officers.<sup>13</sup>

Of all medals, the exploration medal series is certainly one of the most historical, yet seldom collected. I am in the process of writing a book on this topic and hope this brief introduction will stimulate interest in this series.

## Notes

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