

Book Club of California

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"Bibliophile Influences History" could have been headlines in late eighteenth-century London. Two organizations in Sydney, the Australian National Maritime Museum at Darling Harbour, and Hordern House, publisher and dealer in antiquarian books, at Potts Point, worked together to produce a beautiful facsimile of a remarkable work: Alexander Dalrymple, *An Account of the Discoveries Made in the South Pacific Ocean previous to 1764* (1767). This 140-page work launched British scientific exploration and brought modern Australia and New Zealand into being.

How did it come to be? At age fifteen, Dalrymple (1737-1808) joined the East India Company, where he embarked on his life's quest - not the company's ordinary paperwork, but something more grand. "General geography and discoveries have almost from infancy been the fond object of his attention," he wrote in the *Account*, but his goal was focused: "The first and most striking object of research was, the discovery of a Southern Continent." He reasoned that "a Continent is wanting on the South of the Equator, to counterpoize the land of the North, and to maintain the earth's motion." With this in mind, Dalrymple scoured India and the East Indies for books, manuscripts, and charts on South Pacific explorations, and for five years, sailed around Borneo, the Sulu Archipelago, and the Philippines, producing the first of ultimately 4,000 charts for the East India Company. In 1765, the young explorer arrived in London. While browsing in the antiquarian book shop of Thomas Davies on Russel Street, Dalrymple found a treasure that brought his research together. A century before, the French economic wizard Jean Baptiste Colbert had assembled two volumes of manuscripts and pamphlets on Spanish explorations. As Dalrymple held them, a plan took shape.

Venus crossed in front of the sun four times every 243 years, and the next transit would be on June 3, 1769. Observations taken from different parts of the globe aided astronomical calculations, but unfortunately in the southern hemisphere, the planet of the love goddess appeared only to a tiny sliver. The Royal Society intended to have observers in place - but where? The professor of astronomy at Oxford, who in 1766 convinced the Society to back the idea, plotted points on a 1714 map with greatly inexact longitude. In 1767, Dalrymple, a mere thirty years old, determined to be the Society's candidate, and made his case by circulating a few copies of a small octavo volume: *The Account*. In it, he made no mention of the transit of Venus; he intended a voyage of discovery. Dalrymple's great achievement was, as a bibliophile, to acquire the best accounts of South Sea exploration; as a historian, to evaluate the observations; and as a navigator, to adjust longitude and revise Robert de Vaugondy's 1756 map.

The Account contained three parts, with the first the largest. In Part I, "A Geographical Description of Places," Dalrymple summarized and quoted narratives from Spaniard Alvaro de Mendaña in 1567 to Dutchman Jacob Roggeveen in 1722. With its large type, latitude and longitude placed in the margins, and succinct information, he had produced sailing directions - all pointing to a large hole between the northwest coast of Australia and a southeast fragment of New Zealand.

Dalrymple provided "An Examination of the Conduct of the Discoverers in the Tracks they pursued" in the second portion as a study of leadership. Without a strong sense of purpose, lacking in the commanders recorded, an expedition would fail. Tied in was another laudable purpose: "Indeed he shall think his pains amply rewarded," Dalrymple wrote, "if these sheets are instrumental in saving the life of one Indian from the destruction occasioned by impatience."

In the final section, "Investigation of what may be farther expected in the South-Sea," Dalrymple returned to his boyhood goal - the search for the Great South Land. "There is a seeming necessity for a Southern Continent to maintain a conformity in the two hemispheres," he declared. As a friend of Adam Smith, the first modern economist, Dalrymple postulated that England needed "the discovery of new countries and people, to invigorate the hand of industry."

On April 3, 1768, the Admiralty crushed Dalrymple's dreams when it refused to give control of a navy ship to a civilian; he refused to go as an observer, since divided commands produced disastrous results. The coveted post went to James Cook, nine years older than Dalrymple, who had mapped the St. Lawrence River during wartime and charted the angular, rugged coast of Newfoundland.

Was Dalrymple's influence at an end? No! On August 25, 1768, naturalist Joseph Banks boarded the Endeavour at Plymouth carrying the Account. Besides heading toward Tahiti for the transit of Venus, James Cook had secret instructions to investigate the "great southern continent." On this epochal first voyage, lasting until 1771, Cook sailed into the void on Dalrymple's chart and found the east coast of Australia and the north coast of New Zealand, claiming both lands for Great Britain. With the Account aboard, Cook knew that if he did not possess the resolution for discovery, Dalrymple would endeavour to replace him for the next voyage.

Dalrymple, incidentally, was the impulse for Captain Cook's second expedition. From 1772 to 1775, Cook searched from Australia to South America - being the first to cross the Antarctic Circle - for the elusive continent. A chronometer coupled with lunar observations gave him accurate longitude, and banished the Great South Land forever. Meantime, while Cook was at sea - and even wrecked for all that England knew - Dalrymple revealed publicly his plan for discovery. In 1769, he doubled the preface and offered the Account in a small edition - 101 were remaindered to the author - keeping "Printed in the Year 1767" on the title page. Quickly, though, Dalrymple replaced it, strengthening his fitness for command through a two-volume translation of Spanish and Dutch narratives, *An Historical Collection of the Several Voyages and Discoveries in the South Pacific Ocean (1769 and 1771)*. Since then, only twenty-two copies of the Account are known, all with the expanded preface.

This edition of Dalrymple's Account is the first reprint and the third number of the Australian Maritime Series, which makes available facsimiles of unobtainable works. Newbold & Collins hand bound 950 copies, containing 188 pages, in midnight blue Scottish calf for the spine and Margo Snape's marbled papers for the covers. Dr. Kevin Fewster of the Maritime Museum provided the forward, while Dr. Andrew Cook of the British Museum, author of a forthcoming biography of this eighteen century cartographer and navigator, introduced Dalrymple's life and times.

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