

## Excursus G : The adventures of a little ship

Not only people, ships too led adventurous lives in the nineteenth century Pacific. One of them was the little two-masted schooner that in August 1839 lay for anchor in Kororareka, in front of the Catholic mission station. It measured 54 ft 4 inch by 13 feet 2 inch by 6 ft 2 inch (16.59 m. x 4.05 m. x 1.97 m.). Its tonnage is given as thirty-four in some documents, forty in others. It had a square stern and carried two masts. It had been built by William Coale in Salem (Massachusetts) on order of the American Board of Missions for the price of \$ 6,426.36. It sailed under the name *Missionary Packet* on 18 January 1826 for mission duty in the Hawaii Islands. It called in Rio de Janeiro, rounded Cape Horn, called in Valparaiso and reached Honolulu on 21 October. The little ship proved too expensive for the mission to run. It changed owners a few times and apart from short trips for the mission, was engaged in collecting sandal wood and in general trading.

Between 1832 and 1835 the *Missionary Packet* made four voyages to Tahiti and the Marquesas Islands. On one of these trips it went as far as Valparaiso. The ship was refitted twice and the hull given a copper lining. It was sold and resold, renamed *Oahu Packet* and *Honolulu*. It was used for whaling until bought by Captain Jules Dudoit, the French consul in Honolulu.<sup>1</sup> When in November 1837 the Picpus Fathers Maigret and Bachelot were forced to leave Hawaii, the consul sold them the *Honolulu* for 4,000 piastres (22,000 francs or \$ 3,000).<sup>2</sup> Bachelot was already ill when the two of them left for Pohnpei in Micronesia, and he died on the way. They kept his body, sealed in a tarpaulin until Maigret could bury him on an uninhabited islet in Micronesia. Maigret stayed in Pohnpei and the ship went on the undisclosed voyage<sup>3</sup> for which it was loaded already when bought. It returned to Pohnpei and took Maigret via Tahiti to Valparaiso where he arrived in December 1838, a few days after Baty and his companions, the second group of Marist missionaries. Maigret made the last payment and re-registered the ship as *Reine de Paix*.<sup>4</sup> He then took the Marists to the Gambier Islands and Tahiti, where Marists and Picpus came to an agreement that the two missions would jointly own the ship and use it in turn for six months a year. Petitjean paid Maigret half the purchase price, i.e., 11.000 francs.<sup>5</sup>

The Marists crossed the Pacific in the *Reine de Paix*, visited their confrères on Wallis and Futuna and reached the Bay of Islands in New Zealand on 14 June 1839.<sup>6</sup> A few weeks after their arrival Bishop Pompallier sent the ship with Épalle round the North Cape of New Zealand to take the luggage of Baty and Élie-Régis to Papakawau. Shortly

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<sup>1</sup> The story up to this point we owe to L. Jore, *La goélette «Notre-Dame-de-la- Paix»*, pp. 579 – 589.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. above, p. 69.

<sup>3</sup> Jore, loc. cit. thinks it may have been a voyage to China.

<sup>4</sup> The name is probably best translated as *Peaceful Queen*. Maigret took the name from the mission station on Mangareva (cf. Laval to Bonamie 08.09.38, *Annales*, 1840, p. 563). It is a title under which Mary was venerated in several sanctuaries in France (cf. *L Ami de la Religion*, vol. 102, p. 439). Nevertheless, *Reine de Paix* must have sounded rather unfamiliar to French ears: Chanel calls the ship *Notre Dame de Paix*, EC, p. 431, Pompallier says *Reine de la Paix* and the meticulous Jore makes it *Notre Dame de la Paix*.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. above, pp. 69 and 112.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. above, p. 113ff.

later, in September, he took the ship himself to see his missionaries on the Hokianga river, and visit Maori tribes in the North.<sup>7</sup>

On his return Pompallier said he found the *Reine de Paix* not sea-worthy. She was not broad enough for her length. Unless very well handled, she risked to capsize. Épalle supported the bishop: the ship nearly turned over at the North Cape. Not sea-worthy is a strange thing to say of a ship that had rounded Cape Horn and sailed the Pacific for fifteen years from Valparaiso to Hawaii, Micronesia and (probably) China. More likely the main problem with the *Reine de Paix* was that it was small compared to the larger vessels of the Protestants. An example of what Maxime Petit judged to be the core of the problems with the New Zealand mission, namely that Pompallier felt the mission should put up a big show and impose itself by its impressive set-up.<sup>8</sup>

In October or November 1839 Pompallier caught the captain and the crew drunk on board. He chased them off the ship and discharged them. Finding himself without captain or crew he sold the ship to John Roberton for 15,000 francs (£ 600), which was, he wrote to Colin, what the ship had cost.<sup>9</sup> In fact, as the ship had cost 22,000 francs he took a loss of 7,000 francs. This was what Petit was thinking of when he wrote to Colin, referring to the Picpus missionaries: 'I doubt if they are happy with the sale of the schooner that they had so much difficulty getting hold of in the first place. They will only get their share a long time after the sale, and perhaps not exactly what they are entitled to.'<sup>10</sup> On 14 May 1840 Pompallier asked Colin to refund the Picpus generalate the sum of 7,500 Francs, which left them with a loss of 3,500 without having been asked.<sup>11</sup>

Roberton paid £ 300 in cash and for the remaining £ 300 that he could not raise at the moment he 'deposited with the bishop the title-deeds of a part of Waihihi known later as the *John Roberton Property*'.<sup>12</sup> Roberton was drowned a year later and the money was never paid. The bishop got the property instead. Jore quotes a rumour that the ship was sold to a Kororareka fisherman who was later killed by Maoris, who set fire to the ship.<sup>13</sup>

When the fourth group of missionaries arrived in July 1840, Pezant, Tripe, Bertrand and Duperron, and handed Pompallier the next allocation of the Propagation of the Faith, he spent nearly all of it on a new ship. From the beginning he had set his heart on a ship of 100 to 120 ton.<sup>14</sup> No wonder he had been disappointed with the 40 ton *Reine de Paix*. Now he bought the 120 ton topsail schooner *Atlas* for £ 600 (15,000 francs). By the time he had done the necessary repairs and fitted it with the (in New Zealand conditions unnecessary) copper sheathing, it cost him £1,120 (28,000 francs) nearly twice the purchase price. As so often, he was ill-advised and taken for a ride.

He renamed it the *Sancta Maria* and endowed it with its own flag, a blue cross and a monogram of Mary.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. above, p. 130f.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. above, p. 179.

<sup>9</sup> LRO, doc. 59 [32].

<sup>10</sup> LRO, doc. 56 [4].

<sup>11</sup> LRO, doc. 59 [32].

<sup>12</sup> Keys, op. cit. p. 115.

<sup>13</sup> Jore, *Goélette*, p. 588f

<sup>14</sup> 14.05.1838, LRO, doc. 24 [11].

<sup>15</sup> LRO, doc. 71 [6], Simmons, op. cit. p. 52f.