

THE RUSSIAN-AMERICAN COMPANY SHIP

SUVOROV IN SYDNEY IN 1814

The second Russian navigation to the Australian shores took place only in 1814 when the *Suvorov* ship of the [Russian-American Company](#) (RAC) arrived in Sydney. She, as well as *Neva*, was to deliver cargo to Novoarchangelsk. The ship was lead by a young lieutenant, a future famous Russian navigator and naval commander [M.P. Lazarev](#). *Suvorov* set off on her far and hard voyage to the shores of the Russian America on the 21 of October 1813. After having called in Rio-de-Janeiro M.P. Lazarev decided to continue the navigation along the already tried "Gagemeister's route". His ship successfully crossed the Atlantic and Indian oceans and on the 24th of August 1814 arrived in Port-Jackson. The further navigation of the ship was successful as well. After the cal in Australia the Russian seamen discovered previously unknown islands in the Cook Archipelago, which were named in the honor of the ship the Suvorov Islands. On the 30 of November 1814 *Suvorov* arrived in Novoarchangelsk, and in May of 1815 having loaded the cargo of fur, set off on the return route. Having visited Peru and left behind the Cape of Horn *Suvorov* returned to Kronschtadt on the 6th of August 1816. The circumnavigation, which lasted nearly three years, was over.

The circumnavigation of *Suvorov* was purely commercial and her call in Port-Jackson was caused by the necessity to give the crew a rest and do the scheduled repairs. Nevertheless, the participants of the navigation actively conducted scientific research: they did hydrographic and meteorological measurements. Many officers - educated and inquisitive people - wrote about their impressions into diaries.

The Russians spent three weeks in Australia - till the 13th of September 1814. They had to replenish not only the food and water supplies but to repair their ship. The authorities of New South Wales welcomed the Russian guests warmly and wholeheartedly: the inhabitants of the remote colony were happy to see any visiting ship from overseas. This warm reception was largely determined by that that *Suvorov* was the first to bring to Australia a long-awaited news about victory over Napoleon and marching of the Allied troops into Paris. As a sign of recognition of special merits of the Russian arms in this victory, M.P. Lazarev received invitation from the Governor of New South Wales [L. MacQuarie](#) to anchor his ship in front of the Governor's residency although usually no stay of any foreign ship in that part of the Sydney harbor was allowed. On the occasion of the victory the fireworks and festive gathering were held. Excursions to the outskirts of Sydney were organized for the Russian officers, the local "high society" held balls and receptions in their honor. The friendly disposition of the hosts to their guests enabled the Russian seamen to get closely acquainted with the life of the new English colony.

By the middle of the second decade of the XIX century the situation in New South Wales was far unlike it during the Gagemeister's visit. Energetic and industrious MacQuarie had resolutely eliminated the *Rum Mafia*. He had brought order to the administration of New South Wales and fixed up its financial system. Trying to assist the development of new territories and agriculture of the colony, he encouraged exploration of the lands adjacent to Sydney, built roads to the newly discovered regions. The proportion of the free population had considerably grown - due to the free settlers from England as well as due to the freed convicts which had done their terms. In order to encourage them to stay in Australia the administration of the colony provided them with land. Public buildings were built, new schools and libraries opened with active co-operation of L. MacQuarie. The dynamic development of the English colony in Australia left a strong impression on the Russian travelers and, of course, found its reflection in their diaries.

Although *Suvorov* was the second Russian ship to visit the fifth continent it was members of the crew who left us detailed descriptions of the British colony in Australia. These include diaries of *shturman* (navigator) Alexey Rossiiskiy and senior officer lieutenant Semen Unkovskiy. The Rossiiskiy's trip diary or "journal" as it was then called is more interesting for it also has literature merits.

By the beginning of the navigation on *Suvorov* Rossiiskiy had just turned 20. He was born into a merchant's family of modest means and only his hard working attitude and outstanding abilities helped him enter the Kronshtadt Navigation School. After graduation the young man was appointed as a *sturman* (navigator) to *Suvorov*. He meticulously recorded everything he saw during the navigation in his diary with no important detail missing. His sharp analytical mind, his observation in accordance with his romantic enthusiasm typical for youth were reflected in his diary.

Soon after the navigation of *Suvorov* Rossiiskiy switched to civic service. It is known that he was still at it in the end of the 40-ties but his further exploits remain obscured. His authentic diary has not survived by now but some extracts from it were published shortly after the end of the navigation of *Suvorov*. In 1818 a passage from the Rossiiskiy's diary, devoted to the stay of the Russian ship in Brazil, appeared in the "Panteon Slavnyh Rossiskyh Muzhei" (Pantheon of the Glorious Russian Men) magazine, and in 1820 another passage "Of the Stay of the *Suvorov* ship in New Holland" appeared in the "Sorevnovatel Prosvesheniya i Blagotvoreniya" (Assistant to Enlightenment and Welfare) magazine. This publication became practically the first description of Australia made by a Russian traveller in the Russian press.

The Unkovskiy's diary which is devoted to the circumnavigation of *Suvorov* and her stay in Australia is of a great interest as well. Semen Unkovskiy (1788-1882) himself did not leave any noticeable impact on the history of the Russian Navy. Due to the family circumstances he had to resign shortly after the end of the *Suvorov* navigation. He is known to the naval historians largely due to the fact that he was the father of the Admiral Ivan Semenovich Unkovskiy - a prominent Russian navigator, captain of the *Pallada* frigate glorified by a Russian writer [I.A. Goncharov](#).

What kind of a country did the Russian seamen see more than 180 years ago? Before all both Rossiiskiy and Unkovskiy were sincerely stunned by the exclusively fast and energetic economical development of the new British colony. "The English work loving in this land,- Unkovskiy wrote,- revives New England; green fields, blooming gardens and huge herds of sheep and stock are seen everywhere". "Impossible to believe, - Rossiiskiy noted in turn, telling about Sydney, - that any other city may have come into a better condition in 26 years". (Rossiskiy counted since 1788- year of founding of Sydney). Both Russian travellers noted an exceptional caretaking and good amenities of the English settlement. "Everything is worked out with a lot of care, - Unkovskiy wrote, - and makes happy not only the host but even a stranger who accidentally comes to this remote shore". From the point of view of the Russian travellers the houses of the English settlers are comfortable as well. Each family has her own stone house which an eye enjoys not only due to its external view but by its interior as well: "Beautiful neatness and cleanness, - Rossiskiy emphasised,- are seen indoors too. Next to each house there is a vegetable garden where all domestic vegetation and smelly flowers are planted.

The crewmen of *Suvorov* visited Sydney and Paramatta - the latter was a place of suburban leisure time spending of the Sydneysiders. Both settlements left the most favourable impressions on the Russian travellers. They pointed out the "scenic view" of Sydney and the beauty of Paramatta, which "may be called the paradise on Earth by its pleasant location". Rossiiskiy and Unkovskiy described in detail the Governor's Palace and other public buildings: many of those "could be compared with the first ones in Europe". Perhaps, the Russians were a bit exaggerating in their delight. All that should not be surprising taking into account that the stay in Sydney after a long and tiring crossing of the Indian Ocean could seem especially pleasant. Of course, there also was the juvenile admiration. Anyway, Rossiiskiy described his walkabouts in the outskirts of Port-Jackson, his socialising with young English females, the exotic for Russians nature of the

New Holland with this kind of delight. By the way, either in the Rossiiskiy's diary or the Unkovskiy's notes there are no attempts to provide any somewhat serious analysis of the natural-climatic conditions of Australia or her flora and fauna. These two documents are very different in this regard from the descriptions of the New Holland made during the subsequent Russian circumnavigations (M.N. Vasiliev and G.S. Shishmarev, F.F. Bellinsgausen and M.P. Lazarev).

Undoubtedly, Rossiiskiy in his diary exaggerated the correction effect of settling of convicts in Australia. "Anyone deported here for a crime, - he affirmed, - is much better off than the simple people of England, being short of nothing and, eventually, becomes a kind and useful citizen". The appraisal of life conditions of convicts as overly soft was to become traditional for all Russian travellers who studied this issue. Most of the convicts remained in Australia after release, but, as Rossiiskiy emphasized, the free settlers played more and more significant role in the economy of the colony. Their numbers grew, and the colonial government provided land and funds for development. The Russians noticed the already growing specialisation of the colonial agriculture. "All local people, - Rossiiskiy wrote, - do their best in sheep breeding; that's why one should guess that the English will not have to buy wool from other lands to produce cloth". Unkovskiy was very optimistic about the prospects of economic development of New South Wales in general. "It seems, - he wrote, - that the New Holland will eventually become one of the richest English settlements".

Both Russian travellers pointed out some other sides of economic life of the colony. The noted development of its external trade, good supplies and moderate prices. Rossiiskiy also referred to the financial situation of New South Wales pointing out the shortage of silver and copper change. Both Rossiiskiy and Unkovskiy specially addressed to the strong demand for and high prices on the traditional Russian export goods - canvas, linen, iron - on the local market. No doubt, the travelers being at the RAC service meant the possible development of the Russian-Australian trade.

Rossiiskiy and Unkovskiy paid a lot of attention to the Australian Aboriginals in their notes. Their comments are interesting, first of all, as they resulted from direct contacts of the *Suvorov* crewmen with native population of the fifth continent. The Russians contacted the Aboriginals during their work ashore (collection of food supplies, astronomy observations, etc.), the Aboriginals came aboard as well. Rossiiskiy was most detailed when telling about his encounters with the "natural inhabitants". He described their looks, decorations, tells what he knew about their life style and tools. The pages of his diary devoted to the Aboriginals and published in 1820 were the first publication in Russia of notes of a Russian traveler who had met the natives of the far continent himself.

The Rossiiskiy's interest to the natives of Australia was not idle at all - he tried to obtain Aboriginal artifacts and arms for his collection of rarities. The *sturman* from *Suvorov* managed to barter three spears and some other things. He had to give two bottles of rum for it. Rossiiskiy pointed out and not without a regret that after the arrival of the English drinking habits had developed amongst the natives. All his attempts to offer the Aboriginals clothes and ornaments were resolutely declined by the latter.

The problem of relations between the English and the Aboriginals was partially addressed in the Unkovskiy's notes. He, in particular, pointed out the fact of employment of the Aboriginals by the English as valets. His story about a meeting with a Maori from New Zealand he met in the house of the Reverend Marsden in Paramatta is also interesting. Two *kings* and their twelve relatives positively impressed Unkovskiy. He told about their looks, tattoos, movements during a warrior's dance which was performed specially for the Russians.

In the Rossiiskiy's and Unkovskiy's notes, of course, one can see the appraisal of the Aboriginals as people unable to be civilized what was traditional for the beginning of the XIX century. It is no doubt, though, that such an assessment of the natives had been obtained by the Russians from the English. However, the Russians themselves did not share at the slightest the animosity

towards native typical for the White newcomers. For example, after somewhat a gladiator fight between Aborigines which was a part of the 'cultural program' prepared by the authorities of New South Wales for the Russian seamen, Rossiiskiy being frankly outraged wrote the following in his diary: 'Anyone would be badly shaken by this bestial fight; but the English instead of pulling the wilds apart do their best to set them on each other. It's fearsome to think to what extent they lack any mercy to the humankind! Watching the suffering of the likes of yours has already become an entertainment!'

Generally the Russian seamen were impressed by the warm reception given to them. 'One should have seen how cheerfully we were welcomed and with what respect anyone coming ashore from our ship was received: the sailors were forcefully dragged to the pubs and entertained in a brotherly manner', - Rossiiskiy wrote. The officers of the English garrison organized a dinner for the officers from *Suvorov*. The Russians were also twice invited for a dinner by the Governor of New South Wales MacQuarie. The Russian guests were allowed to move about Sydney and its suburbs freely.

No doubt the friendly attitude of the English colonial administration towards the crew of *Suvorov* contributed to the fuller acquaintance of the Russian seamen with the life of the new colony. The stay of *Suvorov* in Port-Jackson was long enough (21 day) to see and find out a lot. That's why the notes of the navigators made more than 180 years ago are not simply a documentary evidence about one of the first encounters of the Russians and Australians. These notes composed by objective foreign observers are also an interesting source on history and ethnography of the fifth continent.