

Jacques Bernard Hombron (1798 – 1852)

Jacques Bernard Hombron was born in Paris on 15 April 1798, the son of a lawyer from Fribourg in Switzerland. After studying surgery in Lyon (1818–1819) he attended the École de Médecine Navale and graduated in 1821. He then served in the Hôpital de Pointe-à-Pitre in the French colony of Guadeloupe in the Caribbean, and in 1826, after his return to Paris, submitted a thesis on yellow fever for the degree of Doctor of Medicine. During the next decade he married in Brest, and sailed as a surgeon on French naval vessels, including two return voyages to Brazil and around Cape Horn to Chile and Peru.

Hombron was passionate about natural history, especially geology and mineralogy, and in 1837 he joined Dumont d'Urville's third voyage to the southern hemisphere. Two corvettes were assigned: the *Astrolabe*, commanded by Dumont d'Urville and the *Zélée* under the command of Charles Jacquinot, together with a royal directive to take the French flag as far south as possible. Botanical collecting was the responsibility of Jacques Hombron, senior surgeon on the *Astrolabe*, and Honoré Jacquinot (aged 23), junior surgeon on the *Zélée* and half-brother of the captain. Hombron frequently joined d'Urville's botanical excursions, and junior medical officer Louis Le Breton assisted also, but is best remembered for his artistic contribution to the expedition records.

The expedition sailed on 7 September 1837 from Toulon, and after nearly four weeks in the Straits of Magellan, headed south and made fruitless attempts to penetrate the pack ice, before exploring the Pacific and arriving at Hobart on 12 December 1838. Leaving Hombron and other crewmen to

recuperate, a second cruise explored to the south of Tasmania. The French finally left Hobart again on 26 February 1840, sailed to the Auckland Islands and anchored for eight days (12–20 March 1840) in Ross Harbour, principally to make further magnetic observations. The naturalists seem to have collected few flowering plants, but did, however, make a good collection of seaweeds. After five weeks in New Zealand, from 26 March to 4 May 1840, mostly in the Bay of Islands, the voyagers returned home via the East Indies and Cape of Good Hope and reached Toulon on 6 November 1840.

Dumont d'Urville did not see the completion of his account of the voyage – he, his wife and surviving son died on 4 May 1842 in what was then the worst railway accident in Europe – but three months earlier he was gratified to learn that four of his editorial staff, including Hombron, had been decorated with the *Légion d'honneur*. Hombron and Jacquinot co-edited the expedition's botanical and zoological volumes, and the remaining volumes were edited by Vincendon-Dumoulin, hydrographer to the expedition. Military physician and botanist Camille Montagne (1784–1866) studied and wrote notes on the seaweeds (1842) and some of the mosses and liverworts (1843), which J D Hooker included in the *Flora Antarctica* (1844). Montagne honoured Jacques Hombron in the names of two of the forty seaweeds collected from Auckland Island: *Rhodomenia hombroniana*, (transferred to the genus *Callophyllis* in 1849) and *Jania hombroniana* (now a synonym of *Corallina hombronii*).

Although his personal records are missing from the naval archives at the Château de Vincennes, Jacques Bernard Hombron is known to have died in 1852.

