APPENDIX: NAMES OF THE ISLANDS

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The coral islands of the western Indian Ocean are nearly all dependencies of the Seychelles. Among the exceptions are Agalega, which belongs to Mauritius, the Gloriosa Islands, which belong to the Malagasy Republic, and the islands of the British Indian Ocean Territory. Of these latter, Desroches, Farquhar and Aldabra were until 1965 part of the Seychelles, and the Chagos Archipelago was formerly administered by Mauritius. As the islands have generally been named after their discoverers or early explorers, their names recall the early history of the Indian Ocean.

Denis and Bird Islands

Denis Island bears the name of Denis de Trobriand, who took possession of it in the name of the King of France in 1777, while in command of the flute L'Etoile. Bird Island, better known in the Seychelles as Ile aux Vaches, has been named after the numerous sea birds, mainly Sooty Terns, which breed upon it. Its alternative name refers to the vaches marines, or dugongs, which were formerly found there.

Platte, Coetivy and Agalega

Platte (the correct orthography should be Plate) owes its French name to its topography. It is indeed so flat and low that it is difficult to locate, especially during rough weather. It was discovered and named by Lieutenant de Lamperiere, of the goelette La Curieuse, in 1769.

Coetivy bears the name of the Chevalier de Coëtivy, who sighted it on 3 July 1771, while in command of the flute Ile de France. Agalega or Galega derives, according to E. de Froberville, from Portuguese words meaning "the Galician". This island is therefore reported to have been named after the Galician navigator João de Nova, who is believed to have discovered it in 1501.

The Amirantes

The Amirantes, which figured on early Portuguese charts as the Ilhas do Almirante, or Admiral's Islands, are believed to have been named after Vasco da Gama, the celebrated Portuguese navigator, who is
believed to have sighted them in 1502, soon after acceding to the rank of Admiral, during his second voyage in the Indian Ocean. They were explored in 1771, the southern islands in January of that year by the Chevalier du Roslan of the corvette L'Heure du Berger, and by the Chevalier d'Hercé of the corvette L'Etoile du Matin; the northern islands by the Chevalier de la Bioéllière, also of the corvette L'Etoile du Matin, in November of the same year. They were formally taken possession of, in the name of France, on 7 September and 5 October 1802, by the Sieur Blin, who sailed from the Seychelles on the goelette La Rosalie for that purpose.

The origin of the name of the African Banks or Bancs Africains is not known. They were discovered and named Ilots Africains in 1797 by Admiral Willaumez, then a Capitaine de Vaisseau in command of the frigate La Régénérée.

Eagle Island, known in Seychelles as Rémiere, bears the name of an English ship which visited it in 1771. The origin of its French name is not known. Eagle was visited by the Chevalier de la Bioéllière in 1771.

Daros bears the name of the Baron d'Arros, Marine Commandant at the Ile de France (Mauritius) from 1770 to 1771.

Poivre bears the name of Pierre Poivre, the famous "Peter Pepper" and Intendant of the Ile de France (Mauritius) and Bourbon (Réunion) from 1769 to 1772. It was visited by the Chevalier du Roslan, but was named by the Chevalier de la Bioéllière, in 1771.

Boudeuse and Etoile are believed to have been named after the two ships of Bougainville's famous voyage round the world, from 1766 to 1769. They were explored and named by the Chevalier du Roslan in 1771.

Marie Louise was visited and named by the Chevalier du Roslan in 1771. It was the fourth island located by that explorer in the course of his voyage in the Amirantes. The origin of the name is not known.

Desnouefs, or Desneuf, which means "one of the nine", is believed to owe its name to the fact that it is one of the nine main islands of the Amirantes. It was, however, only the fifth island located by the Chevalier du Roslan, during his voyage in the Amirantes, in 1771, and who named it Ile des Neufs. On the other hand, according to E. de Froberville, the name should be "des Noeuds"; the origin of this latter name is not known.

Desroches has been named after the Chevalier des Roches, the Governor of the Ile de France (now Mauritius) and Bourbon (now Réunion) from 1767 to 1772. It was explored by the Chevalier de la Bioéllière in 1771.
Alphonse, St François and Bijoutier

Alphonse bears the name of its discoverer, the Chevalier Alphonse de Pontevez, of the frigate Le Lys, who visited it on 28 January 1730.

St François, which was discovered on the same occasion, was named presumably after the religious feast of 29 January, which is that of St François de Sales.

The origin of the name of the third island of the group, Bijoutier, is not known.

St Pierre, Providence and Farquhar

St Pierre bears the name of a ship, that of Captain Dechemin, who visited the island on 6 June 1732.

Providence was named "La Providence" by the crew of a French frigate, L'Heureuse, which was wrecked on a neighbouring bank in 1769, and who managed to reach the island.

The Farquhar Islands were formerly called Juan de Nova (or Jean de Nova), after João de Nova, the Galician navigator. Their names were changed in or about 1810, when they were renamed after the first British Governor of Mauritius, Sir Robert Townsend Farquhar. The islands were visited by the Chevalier de Pontevez in 1730.

The Aldabra Group

Cosmoledo, according to d'Avezac, bears the name of an unknown Portuguese navigator. The two main islands of the group, Menai and Wizard, have been named after two ships of Captain Moresby, who visited them in 1822. The group was sighted by Captain Nicolas Morphey, of the frigate Le Cerf, on 13 August 1756.

The name Astove, according to d'Avezac, derives from the Portuguese words "As Doze Ilhas", meaning the twelve islands, which he claims was originally the name of the Farquhar islands but which was transferred in error to Astove. Astove was visited by Captain Lazare Picault, of the tartane L'Elisabeth, and Captain Jean Grossin, of the boat Le Charles, in 1742, during their exploration of the Seychelles.

Assumption Island (Assomption in French) was discovered by Captain Nicolas Morphey on 14 August 1756, and named presumably after the religious feast of the next day.

The origin of the name Aldabra is uncertain. It has been said to derive from the Arabic "al-Kadhra", meaning "the green", and also from "Aldaraba", a type of door knocker the same shape as the atoll. According to d'Avezac the atoll should be named Ilha da Area, meaning
Sand Island, though this hardly seems appropriate. C. Elgood (Seychelles Bulletin, 6 April 1967) claimed that Aldabra could derive from the Arabic "al-Dabaran", which means the five stars in Taurus, more particularly the brightest of the group. If the first of these derivations is accepted, it could be attributed to the fact that the large lagoon on Aldabra produces a green reflection in the sky above the atoll, which can be seen for miles out at sea. Aldabra was sighted by Captain Lazare Picault and Captain Jean Grossin in 1742.

References


