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# Discovery and Empire

the French in the South Seas





Cover image from the official letterhead for Nicolas Baudin's *Voyage of Discovery to the Southern Lands (1800-1804)*

## Discovery and Empire

edited by John West-Sooby

The French connection with the South Seas stretches back at least as far as the voyage of Binot Paulmier de Gonneville (1503-1505), who believed he had discovered the fabled great south land after being blown off course during a storm near the Cape of Good Hope. The story of his voyage remained largely forgotten for over 150 years, but eventually resurfaced in 1664 thanks to the publication by the Abbé Jean Paulmier of a document in which he argued, on the basis of this supposed discovery, for the establishment of a Christian mission in this 'third part' of the world.

While historians today contest the authenticity of various aspects of the Abbé Paulmier's *Mémoires*, there is no doubt about the impact it had in France, both on the collective imagination and, more concretely, on French plans for exploration and colonial expansion. It was not until the eighteenth century, however, that France began sending mariners to the southern oceans on a regular basis, and by that time a new maritime power had begun to emerge: Great Britain. Together, these two nations would play a decisive role in determining the configuration of these little known parts of the globe, and particularly of the Pacific, which had for so long been the almost exclusive preserve of Spain.

*Discovery and Empire* is a collection of essays that originated out of a symposium held at the State Library of South Australia on 8 July 2009. The symposium formed one of the strands of the XVIIth Biennial Conference of the Australasian Association of European Historians (6-9 July 2009).

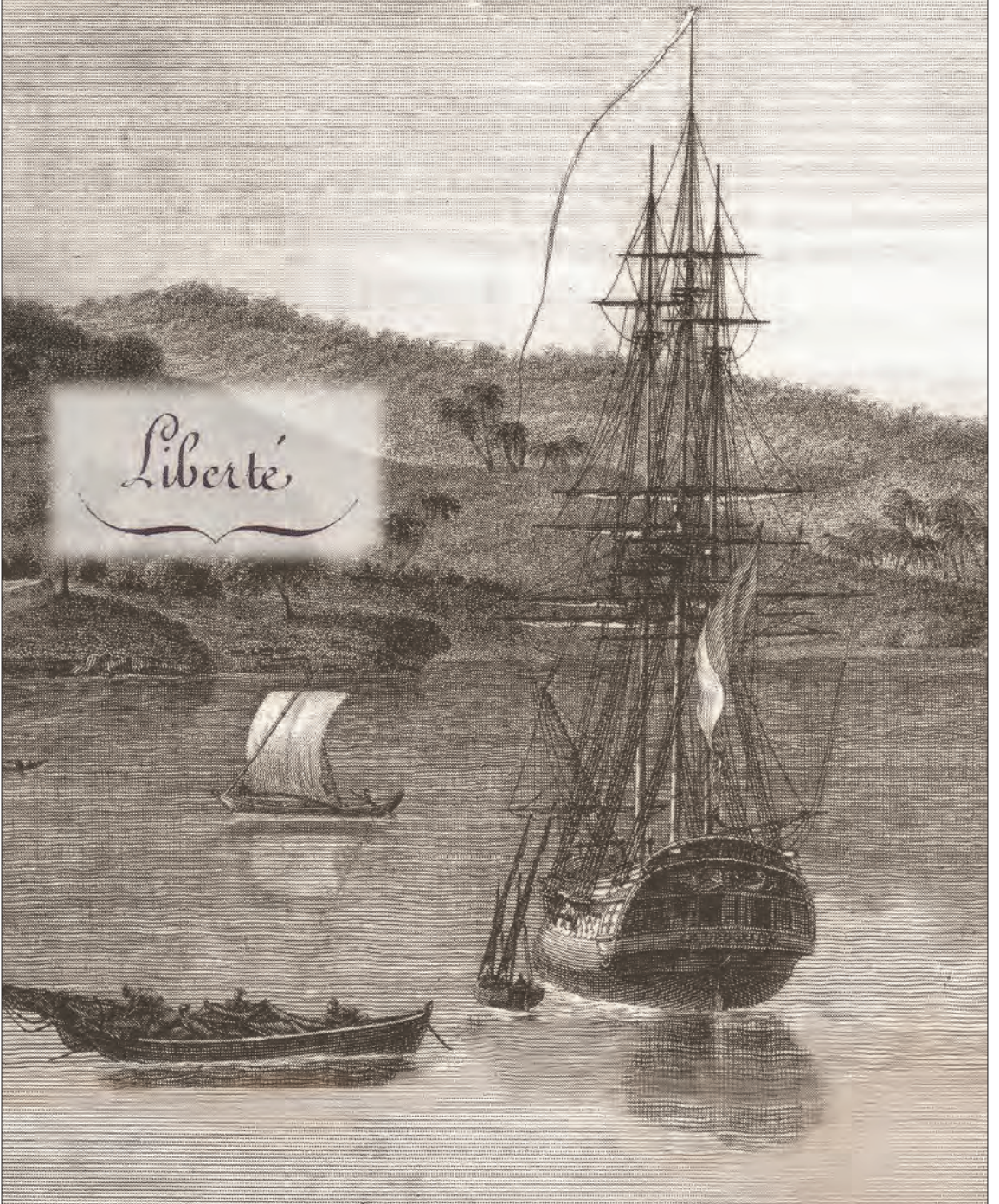


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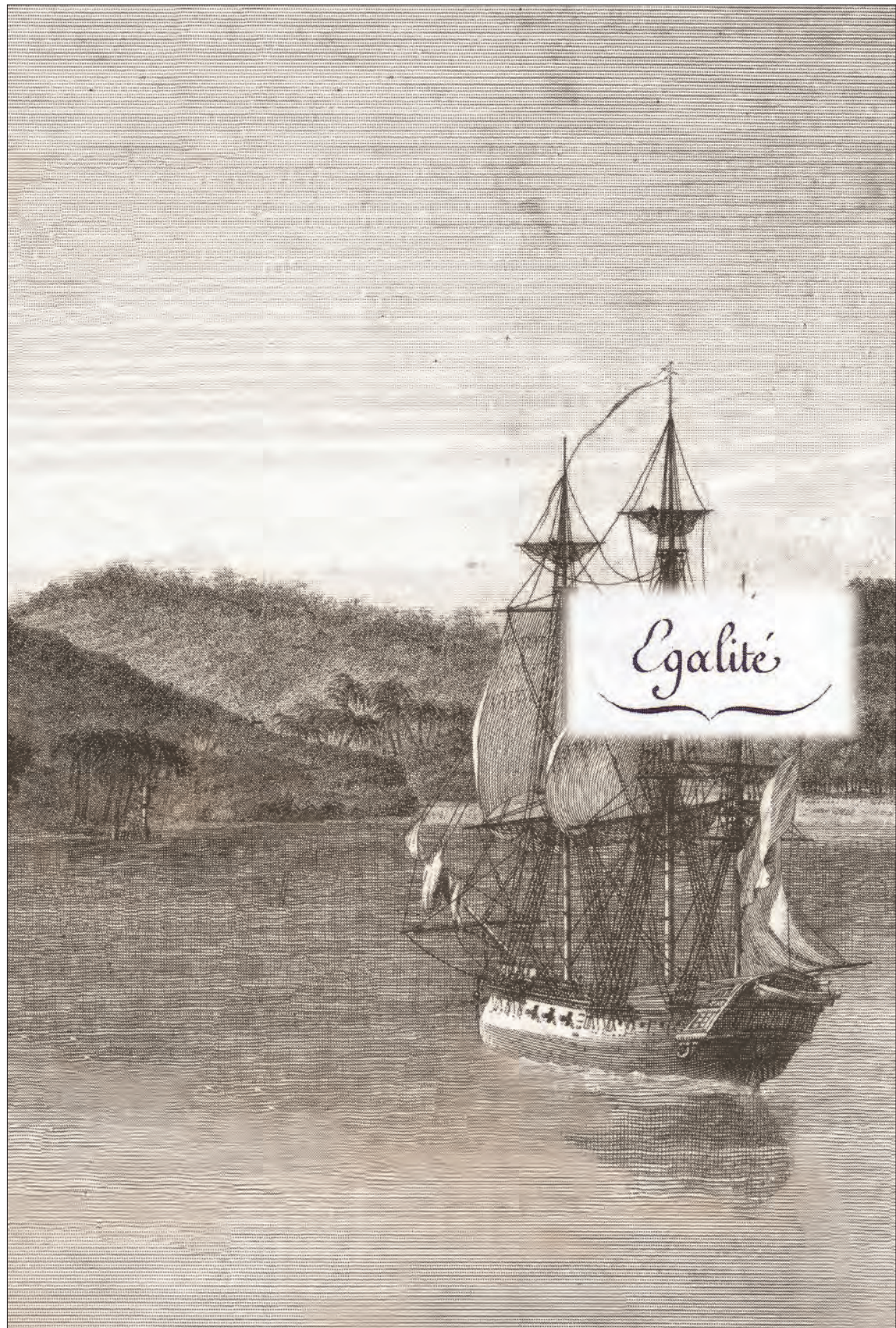
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edited by

John West-Sooby

*French Studies, School of Humanities  
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This book had its origins in a symposium that was held at the State Library of South Australia on 8 July 2009. The symposium formed one of the strands of the XVII<sup>th</sup> Biennial Conference of the Australasian Association of European Historians (6-9 July 2009), the overall theme for which was “Europe’s Expansions and Contractions”. I would like to express my thanks here to Peter Monteath of Flinders University and his conference organising committee for proposing the idea of a symposium on French exploration in the Pacific and supporting us in our efforts. Thanks are likewise due to the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Adelaide, which generously provided funding support for the organisation and hosting of that event.

Quality assurance for the volume was provided by a panel of anonymous reviewers, whose identity may now be revealed: Robert Aldrich (University of Sydney), Robert Dare (University of Adelaide) and Carol Harrison (University of South Carolina). Their insightful comments and criticisms were of significant benefit to the authors whose essays are published here. May they find here the expression of our collective gratitude for the time they devoted to the task and the expertise they brought to it.

Last, but not least, I would like to offer my sincere thanks to the authors of the essays themselves. Their cooperation and patience have

been a source of great comfort as I laboured to bring this project to fruition. I hope that the publication of this book will at last provide some reward for their cooperation and forbearance.

John West-Sooby

Adelaide

March 2013





# Introduction

John West-Sooby

The French connection with the South Seas stretches back at least as far as the voyage of Binot Paulmier de Gonneville (1503-1505), who believed he had discovered the fabled great south land after being blown off course during a storm near the Cape of Good Hope. The story of his voyage remained largely forgotten for over 150 years, but eventually resurfaced in 1664 thanks to the publication by the Abbé Jean Paulmier of a document in which he argued, on the basis of this supposed discovery, for the establishment of a Christian mission in this “third part” of the world.<sup>1</sup> While historians today contest the authenticity of various aspects of the Abbé Paulmier’s *Mémoires*, there is no doubt about the impact it had in France, both on the collective imagination and, more concretely, on French plans for exploration and colonial expansion.<sup>2</sup> It was not until the eighteenth century, however, that France began sending mariners to

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<sup>1</sup> See Margaret Sankey’s critical edition of the Abbé Paulmier’s *Mémoires touchant l’établissement d’une mission chrestienne dans le troisième monde. Autrement appelé, La Terre Australe, Meridionale, Antartique, & Inconnuë* (Paris: Champion, 2006). The Abbé Paulmier claimed to be a descendant of Esomericq, a native brought back to France by Gonneville.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Lévêque de Poncharouart has gone so far as to argue that the Abbé Paulmier made up the entire story of the voyage in order to further his own career in the Church. See his *Paulmier de Gonneville: son voyage imaginaire* (Beauval en Caux, 2000). For an account of current scholarship on the historical authenticity of Paulmier’s *Mémoires*, see Margaret Sankey (Guest Co-editor), “La Terre Australe: History and Myth”, special number of the *Australian Journal of French Studies*, 50, 1, 2013.

the southern oceans on a regular basis, and by that time a new maritime power had begun to emerge: Great Britain. Together, these two nations would play a decisive role in determining the configuration of these little known parts of the globe, and particularly of the Pacific, which had for so long been the almost exclusive preserve of Spain.

The early history of European exploration and discovery in the Pacific Ocean had indeed been dominated by the activities of the Spanish. Sighted and named the “Mar del Sur”, or “South Sea”, by Vasco Núñez de Balboa in 1513, this vast expanse of water was crossed a few years later by a Spanish expedition under the command of Portuguese explorer, Ferdinand Magellan. This expedition (1519-1522), which was the first to circumnavigate the globe, took Magellan from the straits at the foot of South America that now bear his name to the Philippines. The crossing was facilitated by the favourable winds that he encountered, and that led him to confer upon these waters the name of “Mar Pacifico” (peaceful sea). The Spanish authorities quickly seized the opportunity this presented to establish a profitable and enduring trade route between the Philippines in the west and the Pacific shores of the Americas in the east. For over two centuries, Spain and its galleons would enjoy largely untroubled mastery over the Great Ocean, famously dubbed the “Spanish lake” by historian Oskar Spate.<sup>3</sup> With the notable exception of Portugal, which periodically disputed the Spanish presence in the western Pacific, the rest of Europe remained largely unconcerned by Madrid’s almost exclusive control over this vast expanse of water.

All of this would change dramatically in the eighteenth century, thanks to a combination of factors. Commercial imperatives, most notably the development of the fur trade with China, gradually led others to venture into the region. In the 1760s, the Russian fur companies extended their

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<sup>3</sup> O.H.K. Spate, *The Spanish Lake* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1979). Also available online as an ebook through the Australian National University E Press.

activities through the Aleutian Islands and into Alaska. This prompted a swift response from Madrid, which sent a number of expeditions to the North Pacific in order to assess the threat posed by the Russians. The Spanish government also decided to strengthen the nation's colonial presence along the west coast of North America, in an attempt to re-assert and reinforce its claim to sovereignty over the region. Undeterred by this show of strength, however, a number of other European nations soon entered the fray, spurred on by the thirst for commercial gain and strategic advantage.<sup>4</sup>

The three major European centres that were most actively engaged in exploring these outer reaches of the globe during the second half of the eighteenth century were Paris, London and Madrid. It is perhaps no coincidence that these three powers were also simultaneously engaged in a struggle for geo-political advantage in other parts of the world, including at home. It is worth reminding ourselves briefly of some of the tensions that arose between the three nations during that period and of the various permutations in this three-cornered contest.

\* \* \*

Britain, France and Spain were major players in a number of conflicts that emerged during the course of the eighteenth century. The century had begun with the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1714), which pitted France and Spain against a coalition of countries including England, Austria and the Netherlands, along with the Holy Roman Empire. When

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<sup>4</sup> For a recent study of the lure of the fur trade and its impact, see John R. Bockstoe, *Furs and Frontiers in the Far North. The Contest among Native and Foreign Nations for the Bering Strait Fur Trade* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009). For a more general account of the history of European activity in the North Pacific, see Walter A. McDougall, *Let the Sea Make a Noise... A History of the North Pacific from Magellan to MacArthur* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004 [1993]).



Philippe d'Anjou, the grandson of French monarch Louis XIV, was crowned King of Spain following the death of Charles II in 1700, his accession to the throne raised the prospect of a dramatic shift in the balance of power in Europe in favour of France.<sup>5</sup> When a resolution was finally found, Britain emerged as the victor, gaining several territories from both France and Spain (including Acadia and Gibraltar). Some forty years later, these same nations would again find themselves in conflict, during the Seven Years' War (1756-1763). This war had as one of its main causes the clash of commercial and colonial interests between Britain and the house of Bourbon, and once more resulted in a loss of territories for the French and the Spanish.<sup>6</sup> The upheavals in France following the 1789 uprising meant that the century would end as it had begun, with most of Europe caught up in the Revolutionary wars. This time, France would gain the ascendancy, in Europe at least, though Britain remained a thorn in its side.

In addition to these “multi-national” conflicts, bilateral rivalries were renewed on a regular basis thanks to the emergence of several other confrontations during the course of the eighteenth century. From the 1740s through to the 1780s, new chapters in the story of Anglo-French competition were written both in North America, where the French sided with the colonists to expel their English masters, and in India, where England succeeded in marginalising French interests and eventually destroying them. By a natural progression, the Pacific became the next stage on which they would jostle, albeit this time in a more indirect and less confrontational manner, though the rivalry was no less

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<sup>5</sup> For differing perspectives on this particular conflict, see John Hattendorf, *England in the War of the Spanish Succession* (New York: Garland Publications, 1987) and John Lynn *The Wars of Louis XIV, 1667-1714* (New York: Longman, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> The causes of the Seven Years' War were of course extremely complex. It nevertheless had major consequences in terms of the “power contest” between France and Britain, as Daniel Baugh has argued in *The Global Seven Years War, 1754-1763* (London and New York: Pearson Press, 2011).

intense for all that. During the second half of the eighteenth century, France was just as busily engaged as Britain in foraging the oceans of the southern hemisphere in search of new opportunities. In the wake of the Seven Years' War and France's humiliating losses, the chance of making new scientific and geographical discoveries, which might also open up strategic and commercial possibilities, was a matter of national pride. Over this period, a succession of voyages left France for the southern seas: Bougainville, Surville, Marion du Fresne, Kerguelen and Saint-Allouarn, La Pérouse, d'Entrecasteaux, Baudin.<sup>7</sup> Many of these navigators visited parts of Australia and Van Diemen's Land, some by accident, others by design. Such visits continued into the nineteenth century, with voyages such as those of Louis Freycinet, Duperrey, Hyacinthe de Bougainville and Dumont d'Urville continuing the tradition of French exploration in and around Australia and New Zealand during the fifteen year period that followed the fall of Napoleon. The English understood only too well the motives behind this prolonged French presence in the region. Indeed, the establishment of settlements in various parts of Australia—most notably at Port Dalrymple and on the shores of the Derwent River in Van Diemen's Land, and at King George Sound on the south-west coast of New Holland—were direct consequences of the perceived need to forestall any French attempts to settle these regions.

If the Anglo-French rivalry was particularly keen throughout the second half of the eighteenth century and beyond, relations between Great Britain and Spain during this time were, if anything, even more tense. And once again, the distant southern oceans proved to be a prime battleground. On numerous occasions, the English provoked Madrid's

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<sup>7</sup> The history of French exploration in the Pacific, as the essays in this volume demonstrate, has been the subject of much historical enquiry. For an account of that longer history, see, for example, John Dunmore's *Visions & realities: France in the Pacific, 1695-1995* (Waikanae, New Zealand: Heritage Press, 1997) and his earlier *French Explorers in the Pacific* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2 vols, 1965/1969).

displeasure by taking the liberty of exploring the Pacific. Spain, which had only recently signed the Treaty of Madrid (1750) putting an end to its dispute with Portugal over the Spanish conquest and settlement of the Philippines, still considered itself to have sovereignty over the entire Pacific Ocean by virtue of the 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas and the 1529 Agreement of Saragossa. The British authorities came to view that position as highly contestable, if not preposterous. In defiance of Madrid's claims, Whitehall began sending ships of the Royal Navy to the Pacific, and also actively encouraged privateers to harass Spanish interests on the coasts of Peru and Chile, through raids and contraband trade. Scientific exploration added extra spice to this growing tension between London and Madrid. The succession of exploratory voyages dispatched by Britain to the Pacific during the two decades that followed the Seven Years' War soon led the Spanish authorities to view scientific expeditions not as noble ventures undertaken in the pursuit of knowledge but as a kind of Trojan horse designed to infiltrate their territories and undermine their nation's commercial and strategic interests. James Cook's three great Pacific voyages became a major source of irritation for the Spanish, who were highly sceptical about their scientific pretensions and who might well have sent out an expedition to apprehend him, if resources had been available.<sup>8</sup> Cook's discovery in 1770 of the east coast of Australia, which he claimed for Britain, was hardly designed to convince the Spanish authorities that his voyage had science rather than politics as its primary purpose. The subsequent establishment of a British settlement at Port Jackson in 1788 would confirm them in their suspicions. The Nootka Sound controversy, which was unfolding at the same time at the diametrically opposite corner of the Pacific, was yet another manifestation of the testy relations between Great Britain and Spain in the region.

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<sup>8</sup> On this subject, see Robert J. King, *The Secret History of the Convict Colony. Alexandro Malaspina's Report on the British settlement of New South Wales* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1990), p. 25.

As for the third and final bilateral relationship in this three-way tussle, that between France and Spain, the Bourbon family connections and the necessity of forming an alliance in order to oppose the imperial ambitions of Great Britain meant that direct and confrontational competition between the two neighbouring nations was largely put on hold during the second half of the eighteenth century. This does not mean, however, that Spain did not remain jealous or vigilant with respect to the Pacific Ocean. The voyages of Bougainville and La Pérouse, for example, did not fail to arouse suspicion, despite their scientific credentials, and notwithstanding the fact that they were granted passports by the Spanish government. The Captain-General of Chile, the Irishman Ambrose Higgins, identified with great lucidity the strategic advantages that were seen to be inherent in such voyages of scientific discovery. Shortly after the sojourn of La Pérouse at Concepción, Higgins wrote to the Viceroy of Peru to report on the activities of the French, lauding their “enthusiasm for research”, but adding: “we must not suppose for as much that they will put aside the interests of their nation by neglecting to identify, whenever possible, the places that are the most favourable for colonisation”.<sup>9</sup> Visits by La Pérouse to other Spanish settlements likewise led officials to conclude that his scientific pursuits were no more than a cover for the true political and strategic motives of his voyage.<sup>10</sup> Even among allies, albeit ones thrown together temporarily by circumstances, the pursuit of science could never be accepted as divorced from imperial designs.

\* \* \*

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<sup>9</sup> Letter dated 25 March 1786, quoted in Bolton Corney, *The Quest and Occupation of Tahiti by Emissaries of Spain in 1772-1776* (Cambridge: Hakluyt Society, 1914), vol. II, pp. 418-419.

<sup>10</sup> On this subject, see Donald Cutter’s commentary in Andrew David et al., *The Malaspina Expedition 1789-1794* (London: The Hakluyt Society, 2001), vol. I, p. xxxvii.



The Pacific thus became a contested site for these three European superpowers during the course of the eighteenth century. One of the reasons for this is the fact that, despite the long-standing presence of the Spanish, relatively little was yet known about the peoples of the Pacific or the natural history of the region. Its geographical configuration itself was still far from certain. And given the putative link between discovery and empire, this meant that the Great Ocean was seen as offering the potential for significant imperial expansion. It is little wonder, then, that the Pacific should have become a “site of convergence”, as John Gascoigne so eloquently explains in the opening essay to this volume.

The French would contribute more than their share to scientific and geographical knowledge of the region, though they would be noticeably less successful than the British in establishing a presence there—an indication that discovery was not always the direct route to empire. Indeed, despite the suspicions and suppositions of the Spanish, the French navigators who led voyages of scientific discovery to the Pacific during the second half of the eighteenth century appear to have been much less preoccupied with empire than they were with discovery. The journals and other writings of Bougainville, La Pérouse and Baudin, as analysed here by Jean Fornasiero and John West-Sooby, suggest that these commanders, while remaining alert to the resources and opportunities for trade presented by the places they visited, were much more focused on matters of a practical, aesthetic or scientific nature.

This curiosity about the world may well be explained by their status as Enlightenment travellers; but it is also possible to see in it the expression of a more enduring heritage. The South Seas had exerted a special fascination for the French ever since the publication in 1664 of the Abbé Paulmier’s *Mémoires*, which brought to their attention the voyage undertaken by Binot Paulmier de Gonneville at the dawn of the sixteenth century. As Margaret Sankey demonstrates in her detailed study, the

belief that Gonneville had discovered the fabled south land, the *Terra australis incognita*, entered the French imaginary during the latter decades of the seventeenth century and fuelled much speculation about the exact location of “Gonneville Land”. The desire to resolve this question was the driving force behind the sequence of expeditions that left France during the middle decades of the eighteenth century, from the 1738-1739 voyage of Bouvet de Lozier through to that led by Kerguelen and Saint-Allouarn in 1771-1772—and perhaps even beyond. Certainly, the utopian vision of Terra australis provided by Paulmier in his *Mémoires* would prove to have an enduring hold in France, and still coloured French thinking about the Pacific well into the nineteenth century. It featured prominently, for instance, in the debate regarding the establishment of a penal settlement in the region, as demonstrated by Jacqueline Dutton in the essay she has contributed to this volume.

In this respect, Britain’s “Botany Bay experiment” served, variously, as a model or as a counter-example for the French.<sup>11</sup> Some travellers, such as François Péron, considered that the penal colony established at Port Jackson provided the ideal conditions for the rehabilitation of criminals. Other visitors to the colony were far from convinced—including Louis Freycinet and Hyacinthe de Bougainville, both of whom led expeditions to the Pacific, having previously visited the region, like Péron, as members of the Baudin expedition (1800-1804). Like Alejandro Malespina, the leader of the Spanish expedition that visited Port Jackson in 1793, they considered that the convicts were living in appalling conditions and that many had not abandoned their immoral and criminal ways. They also roundly condemned the injustice of the penalty of deportation. One point on which everyone agreed, however, was that the establishment of a colony at Port Jackson was a fundamentally strategic move on the part

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<sup>11</sup> A question examined in some detail by Colin Forster in his *France and Botany Bay: The Lure of a Penal Colony* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1996).

of the British authorities and that it represented a clear threat to Spanish interests in the Pacific (as discussed in John West-Sooby's chapter in this volume).<sup>12</sup>

This concern for their fellow human beings was not limited to the fate of the convicts, of course. French travellers to the Pacific showed a particular fascination with the life and customs of the indigenous peoples they encountered. In fact, this interest quickly developed into a systematic form of study, and the French scientific expeditions that visited the South Seas during the latter years of the eighteenth century through to the first decades of the nineteenth played a key role in the development of the new science of anthropology. From Baudin's expedition onwards, French travellers were provided with detailed instructions regarding their interactions with native peoples, the experiments they should conduct with them, and the observations they should make.

Much has been written about the cross-cultural encounters involving the French in the Pacific, and notably the interactions between the members of the d'Entrecasteaux and Baudin expeditions and the Aboriginal peoples in Van Diemen's Land and New Holland—episodes that continue to invite scholarly analysis. Two essays in this volume make fresh contributions to that on-going conversation. One of the more contentious questions raised by French exploration in the Pacific is the role these voyages played in the emergence during the nineteenth century of theories about race. One expedition that has been largely overlooked in this debate is that led by Louis Freycinet to the Pacific in the years 1817-

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<sup>12</sup> This geo-political reading of British motives is made abundantly clear in the reports on the colony compiled by Malaspina and Péron, both of which have been translated into English with copious editorial commentary. See Robert J. King, *The Secret History of the Convict Colony. Alexandro Malaspina's Report on the British Settlement of New South Wales* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1990), and Jean Fornasiero and John West-Sooby, *French Designs on Colonial New South Wales. François Péron's Memoir on the English Settlements of New Holland, Van Diemen's Land and the Archipelagos of the Great Pacific Ocean* (Adelaide: The Friends of the State Library of South Australia, 2013).

1820. A significant step towards filling that gap is made here by Nicole Starbuck, who closely analyses Freycinet's observations of the physical attributes of the people of Oceania as well as his writings concerning their moral and intellectual characteristics. Although thoughts about Man and race had evolved significantly since his previous visit to the Pacific with the Baudin expedition, Freycinet reveals himself, through his essentially humanistic attitude, to be a scientific voyager very much formed still in the Enlightenment mould. This humanistic approach to the study of Man is likewise a strong thread in Shino Konishi's original analysis of the ways in which the early French (and British) visitors to Australia attempted to gain an understanding of the indigenous inhabitants by studying their various sensory capacities. In suggesting that these encounters between Europeans and native peoples constituted genuine moments of exchange, her study adds weight to the view that indigenous people did indeed have agency and that such occasions were far from one-sided affairs.

While caution is required in assessing the extent of the agency exercised by indigenous people in these cross-cultural encounters, given that we are largely condemned to interpret their reactions through the records left by their European interlocutors, it might seem even more problematic to attribute agency to the animals that were encountered and collected during these scientific expeditions. And yet, that is the task that Stephanie Pfennigwerth has set herself here. By considering the animals collected by the Baudin expedition, and notably the King Island emu, as subjects rather than objects, she highlights the decisive influence they had over the events of the voyage. Animals also offer a lens for re-evaluating the personalities and attitudes of the men who interacted with them, with some interesting results.

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This volume of essays cannot purport to offer a full and comprehensive account of the history of French exploration in the South Seas. There already exist some very fine syntheses of that long and colourful history, as well as numerous books and scholarly essays devoted to individual expeditions, their achievements and shortcomings, the people who participated in them, and the myriad of issues they raised. It is nevertheless hoped that, by showcasing some of the work that is currently being conducted in the field, this book will provide some new perspectives and insights into this vast and complex area of study. In setting out to achieve that aim, it also aspires to demonstrate the vibrancy of research into the role played by the French in the history of discovery in the Pacific—and the need for this work to continue.

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## Note on the Second Frank Horner Lecture

*John West-Sooby*

Following the sad passing of Frank Horner in 2004, an occasional lecture series was established in order to commemorate his memory and to honour his pioneering work on French exploration in the Pacific. His books on the Baudin and d'Entrecasteaux expeditions in particular are landmark studies in the field and remain essential reference works for scholars as well as for the wider reading public.<sup>1</sup>

The Inaugural Frank Horner Lecture was delivered at the University of Adelaide by Margaret Sankey, McCaughey Professor of French at the University of Sydney, on 10 July 2006. Entitled "Writing and Rewriting the Baudin Scientific Expedition to the Southern Hemisphere, 1800-1804", this lecture focused on the journals of the Baudin expedition and offered a typology for understanding their status as travel narratives.<sup>2</sup> Drawing on her intimate knowledge of these manuscript sources, she demonstrated that, in keeping with the lived experience of the men who sailed on that voyage, the textual records constitute a performative space characterised

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<sup>1</sup> His two major works are *The French Reconnaissance: Baudin in Australia, 1801-1803* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1987) and *Looking for La Pérouse: d'Entrecasteaux in Australia and the South Pacific, 1792-1793* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> For the text of that lecture, see Jean Fornasiero and Colette Mrowa-Hopkins (eds), *Explorations and Encounters in French* (Adelaide: University of Adelaide Press, 2010), pp. 103-134.

by both cooperation and conflict. It was a fitting homage to the work of Frank Horner, whose comprehensive study of the Baudin expedition was likewise based on a deep knowledge of its archival records.

The second Frank Horner Lecture, a revised version of which is published here as Chapter 1, was delivered by the distinguished historian John Gascoigne, Scientia Professor at the University of New South Wales. A specialist of the Enlightenment and the early modern period more generally, and a renowned expert on such iconic figures as James Cook and Joseph Banks,<sup>3</sup> John Gascoigne turns his attention here to the history of French exploration in the Pacific and to the role this vast expanse of ocean played in drawing together peoples from many horizons. He shows that, in pursuing their exploration of this “final frontier”, the nation states of Europe may well have had self-interest as their primary motive; ultimately, however, their combined efforts not only served to determine the configuration of the globe, but highlighted in the process the common humanity of the diverse peoples that inhabit it. In true Enlightenment spirit, the Pacific thus became a site of convergence.

Appropriately, this lecture was delivered, on 8 July 2009, in the South Australian Museum’s newly refurbished Pacific Gallery. The many resonances between the theme of John Gascoigne’s highly entertaining talk, the setting in which it was delivered, and the work of the scholar in whose honour the occasion had been organised, thus produced a moment of convergence that paid fitting tribute to the memory of Frank Horner.

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<sup>3</sup> John Gascoigne has published numerous books on the Enlightenment and on some of its key figures, such as *Science in the Service of Empire. Joseph Banks and the British State in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), *The Enlightenment and the Origins of European Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), *Captain Cook. Voyager Between Worlds* (London: Continuum, 2007) and *Science, Philosophy and Religion in the Age of the Enlightenment. British and Global Contexts* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2010).

# The Globe Encompassed: France and Pacific Convergences in the Age of the Enlightenment<sup>1</sup>

# 1

*John Gascoigne*

## Divergence and Convergence in World History

Divergence and convergence—these are the two great tidal movements which have shaped human history. From the remote origins of humankind in Africa, the history of humankind was largely characterised by divergence, with the history of the great Polynesian diaspora into the uncharted seas of the Pacific forming the last major chapter of this great scattering of humanity. This great outward wave of human settlement found its furthest shore with the settling of New Zealand around the period 1000-1200 AD. But this was also the period when the tide of human outward settlement began to recede, drawing together an increasing number of peoples and cultures which had once existed in relative isolation. As Northrup, to whose 2005 article<sup>2</sup> I am indebted for this way of looking at world

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter is a revised version of the second Frank Horner Lecture delivered by John Gascoigne on 8 July 2009 at the South Australian Museum. See ‘Note on the Second Frank Horner Lecture’ ahead of this chapter.

<sup>2</sup> David Northrup, “Globalization and the Great Convergence: Rethinking World History in the Long Term”, *Journal of World History*, 16, 3 (2005), pp. 249-267.



history (along with the recent works by the McNeills<sup>3</sup> and Fernandez-Armesto<sup>4</sup>), argues, from 1000 onwards we are increasingly in an age of convergence as different societies were more and more linked together in what eventually became a global network. In Europe, for example, from the time of the First Crusade of 1096-1099, Europe was in increasing, if belligerent, contact with its Islamic neighbours and its contact with a still wider world grew as the rapid expansion of the Mogul Empire in the thirteenth century drew together chains of connection that stretched to the Far East.

But it was, of course, above all the discovery of America that drew Europe into a wider and wider network of connections that covered an increasing area of the globe. As Voltaire put it, with pardonable hyperbole, in his *Essay on Universal History* (1756)—the title of which reminds us that world history is far from new—the discovery of America was “without doubt, the most important event that ever happened on our globe, one moiety of which had been hitherto strangers to the other”.<sup>5</sup> Columbus, of course, was aiming for the great markets of Asia when America got in the way. To that extent his Iberian rivals, the Portuguese, did even better with the arrival of Vasco da Gama in India in 1498, thus opening up a spice trade which was so lucrative that other European powers, and notably the Dutch, were soon to be active in taking it from the Portuguese. The effect of this westward expansion of the Spanish into the Americas and the eastward one of the Portuguese to Asia was, to cite Voltaire again, to make plain “what a small spot Europe is, and how great a variety is spread

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<sup>3</sup> J.R. and W.H. McNeill, *The Human Web: A Bird's-Eye View of World History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *Pathfinders: a Global History of Exploration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> Voltaire, *An Essay on Universal History, the Manners and Spirit of Nations, from the Reign of Charlemaign [sic] to the Age of Lewis XIV*, translated by Mr Nugent (London: J. Nourse, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 4 vols, 1759), vol. III, p. 209.

over the face of the earth”.<sup>6</sup> A more famous summation of the impact of Iberian expansion was the opening of Abbé Guillaume Raynal’s *History of the Two Indies* (1770): “No event has been so interesting to mankind in general, and to the inhabitants of Europe in particular, as the discovery of the new world, and the passage to India by the Cape of Good Hope”. Raynal continues on to underline the distinctly mixed consequences of the growing convergence that such expansion brought in its wake, arguing that because of it “a general intercourse of opinions, laws and customs, diseases and remedies, virtues and vices, was established throughout the world”.<sup>7</sup>

The impulses that drove Columbus and his contemporaries outwards from Europe were to be the main forces which promoted the more general convergence of humankind: the quest for God, Gold and Glory. These were the centripetal forces that from about 1000 AD began to counter the centrifugal forces that for millennia had led to the growing dispersal and divergence of humankind—chief among the latter being the quest for untapped resources and the attempt to escape one’s enemies. Once unleashed with such stunning effect by the discovery of America this quest for God, Gold and Glory worked its magnetism with ever increasing effect on what Georg Forster, the German polymath who accompanied Cook on his second voyage, termed the “restless inhabitants” of Europe.<sup>8</sup> This essay will turn to focusing on the way in which such impulses began to be played out in the history of Pacific exploration, especially from the standpoint of France.

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<sup>6</sup> Voltaire, *An Essay on Universal History*, vol. III, p. 215.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Raynal, *A Philosophical and Political History of the Settlements and Trade of the Europeans in the East and West Indies*, translated by J. Justamond (London: T. Cadell, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 1776), p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Georg Forster, *A Voyage Round the World*, edited by Nicholas Thomas and Oliver Bergthof; assisted by Jennifer Newell (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2 vols, 2000), vol. I, p. 200.

## God, Gold and Glory in the Reigns of Louis XIV and Louis XV

For France, the unexplored vast reaches of the Pacific offered some chance to overcome its late start in the exploration of the Americas. As early as 1582, Lancelot Voisin, Sieur de La Popelinière, had urged France to turn to the exploration of the Austral Lands as a means of emulating “the example of our neighbours”. Such lands might open to France the supposed blessings that the Spanish had gained through their mastery of America. For, he argued, drawing on the geographical orthodoxy since the time of Ptolemy that the lands of the Southern Hemisphere must be of a size to counterbalance those of the North: “these lands must be very large and as a consequence contain all the climates that exist in rich America”.<sup>9</sup> The extent of what he termed this “third world” meant that it had to contain all manner of riches and valuable commodities. His terminology reflects an increasingly influential European mental map of the globe which had recently been put into influential form in Gerardus Mercator’s 1567 map of the world. On this map the globe was divided into three great land masses: the Old World, taking in Eurasia and Africa, the New Indies or America and the unknown Austral Continent.

Voisin’s plea met with little result. France was plunged into civil war during the Wars of Religion of 1562 to 1598 and internal division continued to characterise it up to the time that Louis XIV assumed personal rule in 1661. The conditions for greater stability at home were laid by the ultimate victory over the Habsburgs abroad with the Treaty of the Pyrenees in 1659. This undermined the supposed invincibility of the Spanish army which, in turn, did go some way towards emboldening France (and other nations) to be less respectful of the Spanish claims that the Pacific was a “Castilian lake”.

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<sup>9</sup> Armand Rainaud, *Le Continent Austral: Hypothèses et Découvertes* (Paris: A. Colin, 1893), p. 364.

The early years of Louis XIV's reign saw some renewed interest in the projection of French power into the Pacific as a way of catching up with its rivals. Of the familiar trinity of centripetal forces that brought about a greater convergence of humankind, God, Gold and Glory, the one that was most overt in this period, at least to begin with, was God. For, in 1663, the French ecclesiastic, Jean Paulmier de Courtonne, argued the case for French missionary activity (with reference to Voisin's 1582 work) in what he termed, in the manner of Mercator, "the third world" or the "Austral Regions".<sup>10</sup> His work urging the establishment of a Christian mission in the Austral land was a late flowering of the French Counter-Reformation but also represented a critique of Spanish practice as colonisers and missionaries—being influenced by the figure who, ironically, did most to promote the Black Legend of Spain, the Spanish Bartolomé de Las Casas.

What proved most influential about the work was its argument that France already had a claim to these regions thanks to the exploits of Paulmier's forebear, Binot Paulmier, Sieur de Gonneville, who, allegedly, had planted the cross in the Austral Regions back in 1504. The fact that hitherto the claims of Gonneville had gone unnoticed and lacked any documentation did not prevent Jean Paulmier from successfully planting the seed of a French perception that it had a stake in the uncharted Pacific. The exploits of Gonneville were the explicit inspiration for later French seekers after the great Austral land such as Jean-Baptiste Lozier-Bouvet, who, in 1738-1739, set off, at the expense of the French East India Company, in search of Gonneville Land. He found only many icebergs and a body of land, which he called Cape Circumcision in honour of the feastday (1 January) on which he encountered it. His hope was that it was part of a large Austral continent, though, in actuality, it eventually turned

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<sup>10</sup> Jean Paulmier de Courtonne, *Mémoires touchant l'établissement d'une mission chrestienne dans le troisième monde. Autrement appelé, La Terre Australe, Meridionale, Antartique, & Inconnuë*, edited by Margaret Sankey (Paris: Champion, 2006), pp. 178-179.

out to be a small island which now bears Bouvet's name. Despite relentless bombarding of the East India Company and others with requests to go back for another search for Gonneville Land, Bouvet never returned.

Even in the time of Bouvet there were some sceptical voices, such as that of Jean-Baptiste Bénard de La Harpe, who had been active in the exploration of American territory in the vicinity of Louisiana. Before Bouvet set off to the Pacific, La Harpe took it upon himself to write to the East India Company to question the wisdom of the proposed itinerary and wondered aloud why it was that the tale of Gonneville was not made public until so long after it allegedly occurred back in 1503. If Gonneville did indeed discover anything it was, in La Harpe's opinion, no more than part of the coast of Virginia. Not that La Harpe dismissed the idea of a great Austral Land; but he thought it was better to look for it, as he put it, "by moving from the Southern Sea to the West of Chili"<sup>11</sup>—a view that was later to influence Bougainville, who discussed his plans with La Harpe.<sup>12</sup> Despite such doubts, the misty extent of Gonneville Land formed part of the backdrop to French perceptions of the Pacific until later in the century. After Cook's second voyage of 1772-1775, however, it was difficult to maintain the existence of Gonneville Land or, indeed, any great Southern Land apart from Antarctica. The need to eliminate Gonneville Land from French maps of the globe was conceded by that keen promoter of French exploration, the Duc de Croÿ, in 1776 when he wrote with homage to Cook—homage that transcended national boundaries—that because of his "superb voyage [...] We don't have to think nor talk any more of the history of Gonneville. If it did exist it was Madagascar and a mistake in the direction of the wind which was wrongly reported".<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Bénard de La Harpe to the Bishop of Rennes, 2 June 1738, Archives Nationales de France, B4/314.

<sup>12</sup> Étienne Taillemite, *Bougainville et ses compagnons autour du monde: 1766-1769, Journaux de navigation* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 2 vols, 1977), vol. II, pp. 5-8.

<sup>13</sup> Duc de Croÿ to ?, 15 March 1776, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, NAF Ms 9341,



But wherever Gonnevillle went (and the coast of Brazil is most likely, for it was the destination of a number of adventurous Norman merchants at that time) his belatedly-told history created an ethos which nourished the French search for the Austral Lands for a century or so after Jean Paulmier published his book in 1663.

Paulmier might urge the need for France to rescue “the poor miserable Australs” from the “tyranny of Satan” but, as always, the claims of God were often very entangled with those of Gold and Glory. His proposal, he reminded Louis XIV, was a most appropriate one for the “most Christian king and eldest son of the Church”, but it also brought considerable terrestrial advantages, being “an enterprise which is so glorious to France” and likely to “bring great benefits to his kingdom”. Paulmier himself envisaged that the traffic between Europe and the Austral Land would lead to a “mutual commerce”.<sup>14</sup> Paulmier’s arguments for French penetration of the Austral Lands were echoed by others with more overtly commercial goals. A memorial of 1699 piously echoed the call for the “Most Christian King [...] to establish Christianity in other parts of the world” and invoked the memory of Gonnevillle, but its main aim was to promote the Austral Lands as a possible base for French shipping.<sup>15</sup>

Plans for the expansion of trade through contact with the Austral Lands were accompanied by the quest for gold in its most literal form. The Spanish experience in America so dominated the imagination of Western Europe that would-be explorers of the Pacific, including the French, continued to hope that they, too, would find vast stores of precious metals. These illusions were heightened by the reports of earlier Spanish Pacific explorers, such as Alvarado de Mendaña and Pedro de Quirós, that there

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f. 388.

<sup>14</sup> Paulmier, *Mémoires*, pp. 254, 257.

<sup>15</sup> Voutron to Monseigneur, 10 February 1699, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, NAF Ms 9341, ff. 334-335.

was gold to be found, a fond belief embodied in the name given to the Solomon Islands by Mendaña in 1568 with its evocation of the mines of Solomon. Such beliefs prompted one French memorialist in 1710 to argue that there were uninhabited islands “to the west of the shores of South America which have an immensity of gold”.<sup>16</sup> These hopes lingered on well into the eighteenth century. In his journal of the expedition of Jean-François-Marie de Surville to New Zealand of 1769-1770, Guillaume Labé wrote disappointedly of New Zealand that “We expected also to find in this country wealth in the form of gold or silver, but our hopes were in vain”.<sup>17</sup>

During the reign of Louis XIV the search for new lands was overwhelmed in France by the preoccupation and cost of warfare, and he and his ministers were not persuaded that glory could be obtained by the discovery of New Worlds rather than the conquest of the old. But the French search for the Austral Lands was to be stimulated by the heritage of Louis XIV’s great minister, Jean-Baptiste Colbert, who had promoted French commercial interests abroad in the hopes of achieving greater national self-sufficiency, the better to promote French pre-eminence over its rivals. For it was the quest for gold in the less immediate and more arduous form of commercial gain which persuaded the East India Company, a largely Colbertian foundation, to support Bouvet’s expedition of 1738-1739 in search of Gonneville Land. By then the Company had access to bases in the islands of Ile de France (Mauritius), Ile de Bourbon (Réunion) and Madagascar, and had been reanimated by a major reorganisation from 1723 to 1725. Bouvet could offer the Company the enticing prospect of another base further to the south which, as he put it, could provide better harbours than the English had at Saint Helena and the Dutch at the Cape.

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<sup>16</sup> “Mémoire du Sieur de Moreneaux à la lettre de M. de Fontanieu, 1710”, Archives Nationales de France, B3/314.

<sup>17</sup> John Dunmore (translator and editor), *The Expedition of the St Jean-Baptiste to the Pacific 1769-1770* (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1981), p. 245.

As Bouvet made plain, his hopes of riches in the vast uncharted waters of the Southern Oceans owed much to the earlier accounts of the Spanish explorers, Mendaña and Quirós, and, colouring everything, was the still felt seismic shock of Columbus's epic voyage. For Bouvet, as for all explorers in the early modern period, Columbus was the model whose remarkable fortune they hoped to emulate. For Bouvet urged the East India Company to consider that "if the simple conjectures of Christopher Columbus" resulted in the discovery of the New World, how much more likely it was that a great new Austral continent might be discovered, given "the authentic reports of diverse navigations".<sup>18</sup> Bouvet's close contemporary, La Harpe, took up the same theme in a 1739 printed memorandum promoting "the Discovery of the Austral Lands, fifth part of the World", which dwelt on the way in which Columbus's discoveries had changed the balance of power in Europe. In the spirit of the Spanish conquest of the New World, he offered the prospect, too, of these new lands also containing "mines of gold and of silver". Such wealth would act as a counterweight to the intrigues of perfidious Albion, which was always trying "to expand to change once and for all its commerce and the balance and equilibrium of the nations of Europe".<sup>19</sup>

Bouvet's voyage was, as we have seen, inconclusive but he continued to urge the East India Company to search for the Austral Lands. In doing so he appealed to the way in which the balance of power was increasingly being determined by trade. As he tellingly wrote in his third memoir of February 1741 about the Dutch: "The power of these Republicans is perhaps ten times greater than it was 150 years ago. That of the English has also increased greatly since this time. The possessions of

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<sup>18</sup> Bouvet, "Mémoire [touchant la découverte des Terres Australes]", Bibliothèque Nationale de France, NAF Ms 9341, f. 340.

<sup>19</sup> [Jean-Baptiste Bénard de La Harpe], "Mémoire sur la France à la découverte des Terres Australes, cinquième partie du monde" [Printed], 1739, Archives Nationales de France, 3JJ/391, p. 8.

these nations have not changed in Europe. This increase of power comes totally from commerce.”<sup>20</sup> France, he urged, needed to do likewise, for Bouvet had grasped, contrary to the whole drift of Louis XIV’s quest for glory, that power came from trade, and particularly trade abroad, rather than European conquest. It was a theme which a much more influential promoter of French exploration, Louis de Bougainville, also later grasped in the wake of French defeat in the Seven Years’ War. For, he wrote in 1764, two years before setting out on his own great circumnavigation of the globe: “The balance of commerce has become that of power”. This was the means by which he hoped to reverse the national humiliation which he had witnessed at first hand at Quebec. For, he continued, it was his goal “to render to my mother land in the southern hemisphere what she no longer has in the northern”.<sup>21</sup>

## French Science and Exploration

The quest for gold, or at least wealth, was more and more the moving force in driving the French into the Southern Oceans, thus adding to what the McNeills term the human web which was pulling together the different societies around the globe. God was not entirely forgotten but was receding.<sup>22</sup> However, Bouvet’s expedition, abortive as it was, did help to stimulate another motive for the exploration of the Austral Lands, apart from God, Gold and Glory: the quest for knowledge in the form of science, a quest that was to gather considerable momentum in the second half of the eighteenth century in the high age of the French Enlightenment.

<sup>20</sup> Bouvet, “Mémoire”, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, NAF Ms 9341, ff. 353v-354.

<sup>21</sup> Louis-Antoine de Bougainville to ?, 4 July 1764, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, NAF Ms 9407, f. 11.

<sup>22</sup> A point illustrated by the conduct and reactions to Bougainville’s pioneering voyage to the Pacific, on which see François Moureau, “Philosophes et marins français dans la Mer du Sud avant Baudin: l’exemple de Bougainville et de ses compagnons”, *Australian Journal of French Studies*, 41, 2 (2004), pp. 15-32.

This had not been absent before. There has been a recent surge of work on the scientific aspects of the Spanish encounter with the New World—one of the finest flowerings of which was the remarkable *The Natural and Moral History of the Indies* by the Spanish Jesuit José de Acosta (Seville, 1590), a pioneering work of anthropology and natural history. It was in France, however, that the association between science and exploration was taken to a higher and more programmatic level. This owed much to the character of the absolutist state which supported the activities of the Academy of Science (founded in 1666). The Academy's origins were bound up with the quest for royal glory, but gradually this came to be associated with the glory of France itself. This established a clear bridge for this and other old regime scientific institutions to be reconstituted with similar aims (and often personnel) after the Revolution.<sup>23</sup> Whether pre- or post-Revolutionary, the French state remained willing to fund scientific activity and expeditions to promote national glory. It was a tradition that had been established early in the Academy's history with voyages such as that by Academician Jean Richer to Cayenne in 1675.<sup>24</sup> Far more well known was the Academy's sponsorship of the great pioneering Geodesic Expedition of Charles-Marie de La Condamine to Peru in 1735 and of Pierre-Louis Maupertuis to Lapland in 1736 in order to measure meridians of longitude near both the Equator and the North Pole. The ultimate goal was to determine whether, as Maupertuis had predicted,

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<sup>23</sup> Michael Osborne "Applied Natural History and Utilitarian Ideals: 'Jacobin Science' at the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, 1789-1870", in Bryant Ragan and Elizabeth Williams (eds), *Re-creating Authority in Revolutionary France* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992), pp. 124-143, and Carol E. Harrison, "Projections of the Revolutionary Nation: French Expeditions in the Pacific, 1791-1803", *Osiris*, 24 (2009), pp. 33-52.

<sup>24</sup> Michael S. Reidy, Gary Kroll, Erik M. Conway, *Exploration and Science. Social Impact and Interaction* (Santa Barbara: ABC Clio, 2007), p. 21; Nicholas Dew, "Vers la Ligne. Circulating Measurements around the French Atlantic", in James Delbourgo and Nicholas Dew (eds), *Science and Empire in the Atlantic World* (New York/London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 53-72.



the earth was flatter at the poles than at the equator—something which was decisively resolved in favour of Maupertuis and his fellow French disciples of Newton.

Bouvet had gestured towards the scientific significance of the exploration of the Austral Lands as far back as 1736 when, writing from Pondicherry, he had suggested that the East India Company establish in conjunction with the Academy of Sciences what was known of the geography of the Southern Seas.<sup>25</sup> His February 1741 memoir had outlined a programme of imperial botany, of the kind which Joseph Banks later pursued on a global scale, with a proposal for the transportation of seeds and plants of new valuable products to the French territories of Ile de France and Ile de Bourbon.<sup>26</sup> Something very like this was indeed later effected by Bouvet's successor as governor of these islands, Pierre Poivre, who introduced a variety of spices such as cinnamon, pepper, clove or nutmeg. This was an instance of the pioneering work of the French in the area of imperial botany, an example which the British were later to emulate.<sup>27</sup> By his 1767 memoir, Bouvet was much more definite about the scientific benefits of exploration, and waxed eloquent about the scientific possibilities opened up by a new land with its store of unknown plants and animals and a hitherto unstudied human population.<sup>28</sup>

By this time, however, Bouvet was pushing at an open door, for the scientific benefits of exploration had received the influential support of a

<sup>25</sup> Bouvet to Monsieur, 7 July 1736, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, NAF Ms 9341, f. 356.

<sup>26</sup> Bouvet, "Mémoire", Bibliothèque Nationale de France, NAF Ms 9341, f. 350v.

<sup>27</sup> Richard Drayton, "Apprendre des Français: les sciences et le deuxième empire britannique (1783-1830)", *Revue française d'histoire d'outre-mer*, 86 (1999), pp. 91-118; Richard Drayton, *Nature's Government: Science, Imperial Britain, and the 'Improvement' of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 112-114; Marie-Noëlle Bourguet, "La collecte du monde: voyage et histoire naturelle (fin XVII<sup>e</sup>-début XIX<sup>e</sup>)", in *Le Muséum au premier siècle de son histoire* (Paris: Éditions du Muséum d'histoire naturelle, 1997), pp. 163-196 (see p. 180).

<sup>28</sup> Bouvet, "Mémoire", Bibliothèque Nationale de France, NAF Ms 9439, f. 52.

number of major figures. A map drawing heavily on Bouvet's expedition was presented in 1744 to the Academy of Sciences by the great cartographer, Philippe Buache.<sup>29</sup> When, in 1749, Buffon published the first volume of his immensely influential *Natural History* he began with an exposition of the *Theory of the Earth* which drew explicitly on Bouvet's experience in order to urge the need for greater exploration of "the lands which are by the side of the Antarctic pole".<sup>30</sup> Buffon, who, since 1739, had held the influential post of superintendant of the Royal Garden, in turn urged his fellow Burgundian, Charles de Brosses, to produce a virtual manifesto in favour of the exploration of the Austral Lands in the form of the bulky but widely read *History of the Explorations of the Austral Lands* (1756)—a work which had a profound impact on Bougainville, among others. Like the great *Encyclopaedia* of Jean d'Alembert and Denis Diderot, to which de Brosses later contributed, it was a work that took as its point of departure the classification of knowledge constructed by Francis Bacon. But de Brosses used all possible arguments to promote French exploration of the Austral Lands. Along with science, commerce received considerable attention and its promotion, he argued in the manner of Bouvet, was essential given the wiles of the British and the way in which they were assuming "visibly the universal monarchy of the sea without regard or consideration for any other nation". As well as Gold, de Brosses appealed to motives based on Glory and, like others before him, attempted to persuade the French monarchy that discovery offered a better path to royal glory than warfare. Even God received what was perhaps a rather ritualistic mention with praise for the Jesuits as missionaries and a suggestion that their methods might be employed in the Austral Lands.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Paulmier, *Mémoires*, p. 97.

<sup>30</sup> Numa Broc, *La Géographie des philosophes, géographes et voyageurs français au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Éditions Ophrys, 1975), p. 176.

<sup>31</sup> Charles de Brosses, *Histoire des navigations aux Terres australes* (Paris: Durand, 3 vols, 1756), vol. I, pp. 1, iv, 5, 18-19.

Along with Buffon, the other great influence on de Brosses, as he explicitly acknowledged, was Maupertuis. Drawing on his own experience of state-sponsored scientific voyages of discovery, Maupertuis had argued in 1752 for royal support for exploration of hitherto unknown regions of the globe and, above all, the Austral Lands. The king to whom Maupertuis appealed in this address was, however, not that of France but rather that great patron of the *philosophes*, the Prussian Frederick the Great. Like Bouvet himself, Maupertuis argued that Bouvet's voyage offered the hope of finding a larger land mass and indicated the need for further exploration, this time on a scale beyond the means of the East India Company—hence the need for royal patronage.<sup>32</sup> Bouvet himself continued to hope that the Company would support his plans and he enthusiastically added Maupertuis's work to the store of ammunition with which he continued vainly to bombard it.<sup>33</sup> Others, however, recognised that the French monarchy might be a better route to promote this cause and Maupertuis's name figured in a number of memoranda sent to the Ministry of the Navy and Colonies on this issue, including one in 1770 from Kerguelen.<sup>34</sup> Three years later, the Vicomte de Flavigny also invoked Maupertuis's authority in writing in his memorial on the "Terres Australes" of 1773 that the exploration of that region would be "preferable to all the conquests of the universe" and that it would provide "new branches of commerce" and science.<sup>35</sup>

The impact of the trio of Buffon, de Brosses and Maupertuis (all of whom were influenced by the experiences of Bouvet) helped to consolidate

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<sup>32</sup> Pierre de Maupertuis, *Lettre sur le progrès des sciences* in his *Œuvres* (Lyon: J.-M. Bruyset, 4 vols, 1756), vol. II, pp. 375-381.

<sup>33</sup> Bouvet to the Compagnie des Indes, 8 February 1755, Archives Nationales de France, B4/314.

<sup>34</sup> John Dunmore, *French Explorers in the Pacific* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2 vols, 1965/1969), vol. I, p. 204.

<sup>35</sup> Vicomte de Flavigny memorial on the "Terres Australes", 1773, Archives Nationales de France, B4/314.

that linkage between science and exploration which the character of the French absolutist state strengthened. When Bougainville set off with royal approval in 1766, he took with him both a botanist and an astronomer. When, in 1771, Cook's first voyage prompted a French response in the form of the first voyage of Yves-Joseph de Kerguelen de Trémarec, a medically trained naturalist was on board. In the event, all that Kerguelen discovered was a group of islands in the far south of the Indian Ocean variously known as Kerguelen or, more evocatively, Desolation Islands, but these he grandly named Austral France and returned with high claims for his discoveries, which secured him another voyage. The opportunistic Kerguelen himself emphasised the scientific advantages of discovering "a third part of the entire world" and cited Maupertuis on the possibility of finding new peoples.<sup>36</sup> Preparations for his voyage included instructions for the naturalists on board from the Duc de Croÿ, who approvingly quoted Maupertuis on the benefits for humankind to be gained from the exploration of the Austral Lands.<sup>37</sup> Buffon added particular details on the collecting of insects and enthusiastically endorsed the voyage, arguing that there was the greatest possibility that the area he was exploring "contains lands which are situated near the tropics with a happy and warm climate".<sup>38</sup> In the event, Kerguelen returned empty handed and his misleading claims and other misdemeanours (such as taking a mistress with him) resulted in his imprisonment. Ironically, this later advanced his career after the revolution when he was viewed as a victim of the Old Regime and appointed a rear-admiral. Abortive though they were, the Kerguelen expeditions strengthened the scientific tenor of French exploration and this was taken to new heights in the expedition of La

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<sup>36</sup> Kerguelen, "France Australe", Bibliothèque Nationale de France, NAF Ms 9438, f. 95.

<sup>37</sup> Duc de Croÿ, "Observations pour les Naturalistes de l'Expedition de M. de Kerguelen", 5 February 1773, Archives Nationales de France, B/4/317 (127).

<sup>38</sup> Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon to M. le duc d'Aiguillon, 5 February 1773, Archives Nationales de France, B/4/317 (111).

Pérouse of 1785-1788 and the post-revolutionary voyages of Antoine Bruni d'Entrecasteaux of 1791-1793 and Nicolas Baudin of 1800-1804.

Whether prompted by God, Gold, Glory or science, the French expeditions in search of the Austral Lands formed part of a quest for completing the map of the globe—a quest that had been nagging at the European consciousness since at least the time of Columbus and was strengthened still more by the Enlightenment impulse to shine the light of reason on the dark corners of the earth. The Pacific, the last quarter of the earth to be peopled in the great divergence of humankind, was also the last to be fully drawn into the maps of the world that was part of the ever-increasing convergence of the species. Despite all the false starts and misadventures, by the eve of the Revolution French explorers and their supporters began to take a remarkably optimistic view about the extent to which it was possible to roll out a full map of the globe. When promoting Kerguelen's first voyage, the Duc de Croÿ had bemoaned the lack of attention paid to the exploration of the Austral Lands but nonetheless made the bold prediction that "The art of navigation, the sciences and astronomy are at present at the point that one would be able to predict that in less than 20 years there will be nothing essential remaining to be known".<sup>39</sup> Kerguelen's second voyage attracted the support of Bougainville as a means "of perfecting the knowledge of the globe [...] for a great nation".<sup>40</sup> Confidence mounted still higher with the reports of Cook's voyages, and especially his second, which eliminated the existence of any great Southern Lands apart from Antarctica. Writing a year after Cook's return from this voyage, the Duc de Croÿ thought that it meant that the map of the globe was now almost complete.<sup>41</sup> When La Pérouse wrote back to the minister for the Navy and Commerce from Siberia in 1787,

<sup>39</sup> Duc de Croÿ to ?, 12 Sept. 1771, Archives Nationales de France, B/4/317 (64).

<sup>40</sup> Bougainville to le Ministre, 27 February 1773, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, NAF Ms 9439, f. 70v.

<sup>41</sup> Duc de Croÿ, 15 March 1776, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, NAF Ms 9341, f. 388.

he made the point that, since he had “taken particular care to keep away from the routes of the navigators who preceded me”, he could therefore guarantee that on his return “there will not be one place of importance to explore on the globe”.<sup>42</sup> The world indeed seemed to be in the palm of the European explorer’s hand and the globe was now thought to have revealed its secrets.

### A Common Humanity?

How did such a view that the globe was now encompassed affect European attitudes to the societies that its travels brought within the web that stretched out from Europe? Engrained in the pervasive myth of Gonneville was the assumption that the French and the peoples of this new world were indeed of common stock. For, it was claimed, Gonneville had brought back with him an Indian prince who had married into the family and, indeed, it was from this union that Jean Paulmier de Courtonne, the author of the 1663 work, had been descended. As an orthodox Christian, Paulmier reflected the biblical view that all humanity was of “one blood”, referring to the peoples of the Austral Lands as “brothers” in need of conversion.<sup>43</sup> There was very little dissent from this view of a common humanity. Kerguelen did envisage the possibility that one might find another species of humanity but thought it more likely that they would encounter “natural people living in a primitive state without suspicions or remorse, unaware of the tricks of civilised people”<sup>44</sup>—that is, they would find people of the kind that Bougainville had already found in Tahiti.

For, until Bougainville’s voyage, there had been very little real contact with the peoples of these new lands, so the views expressed largely

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<sup>42</sup> John Dunmore (translator and editor), *The Journal of Jean-François de Galaup de la Pérouse 1785-1788* (London: The Hakluyt Society, 2 vols, 1994/1995), vol. II, p. 521.

<sup>43</sup> Paulmier, *Mémoires*, p. 181.

<sup>44</sup> Kerguelen, “France Australe”, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, NAF Ms 9438, f. 95.



reflected the existing European experience of other peoples, particularly in the Americas. While Paulmier's outlook expresses the Christian idealism of figures such as Las Casas, some of those urging that France look to the Austral Lands to increase its wealth reflected rather more the Spanish exploitation of native peoples. Bouvet, for example, envisaged that, when it came to the building of fortifications of new French bases there, the natives could be made to "do the fatiguing work".<sup>45</sup> For de Broses, the Austral Lands offered an opportunity for France to exercise a form of civilising mission, since the natives would "receive from us [...] the evident advantages that would result from a better ordered society", adding, with a remark that suggests a rather qualified belief in a common humanity, that this would enable them to "be eventually men as much as they are only in their appearance".<sup>46</sup>

As Kerguelen's remarks suggest, actual contact with the peoples of Tahiti on Bougainville's voyage in 1768 led to a Rousseauist idealisation of the noble savage that took its most extreme form in the writings of the naturalist Philibert Commerson and in the hymn of praise of this new utopia (as indeed he termed it), which was "the only corner of the earth inhabited by men without vices, prejudices, needs or dissension".<sup>47</sup> Inevitably, the pendulum of opinion was to swing back, with two incidents standing out: the reaction against notions of the noble savage that followed the massacre of Marc-Joseph Marion du Fresne and some of his men in New Zealand in 1772, and the later killing of some twelve of La Pérouse's men in Samoa in 1787. La Pérouse responded to this event with the bitter reflection that, "in spite of all the academies that crown the philosophers' paradoxes, man in an almost savage state and living in anarchy is a more

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<sup>45</sup> Bouvet, [1738 Additions to] 1735 "Mémoire", Bibliothèque Nationale de France, NAF Ms 9341, ff. 360-369.

<sup>46</sup> De Broses, *Histoire des navigations*, vol. I, p. 17.

<sup>47</sup> Taillemite, *Bougainville et ses compagnons*, vol. II, p. 507.

malevolent being than the wolves and tigers of the forests”.<sup>48</sup> The French, like other Europeans, were gradually to discover that the peoples of the Pacific were not paragons but people like themselves. This meant that they were capable of bad as well as good deeds—a common humanity meant on both sides also a common inhumanity.

Many of these conflicts arose from a lack of effective communication in the face of vast linguistic and cultural divides. One means of attempting to overcome them was to employ the medium of music. Jean Paulmier had recommended that the missionaries should bring musicians,<sup>49</sup> and a number of the French expeditions found that music could transcend the differences of culture. In 1769, during Surville’s Pacific voyage, one of his officers found that the peoples of the Solomons imitated perfectly the sailors’ songs.<sup>50</sup> Soon afterwards, in 1772, one of Marion du Fresne’s officers described the way in which, when the Maoris heard the playing of a violin, they “listen[ed] with the greatest attention”. Reciprocally, “Having heard our music, they wanted to give us theirs”.<sup>51</sup> When the d’Entrecasteaux expedition arrived at Buka Island, off Papua New Guinea, in 1792 they had a similar experience, with the playing of a violin provoking astonishment and joy, and gestures which “perfectly accompanied the time”.<sup>52</sup>

A much more basic form of communication was in some cases literally to strip Europeans bare to show that they were of the same stock

<sup>48</sup> Dunmore, *The Journal of Jean-François de Galaup de la Pérouse*, vol. II, p. 395.

<sup>49</sup> Paulmier, *Mémoires*, p. 181.

<sup>50</sup> John Dunmore (translator and editor), *The Expedition of the St Jean-Baptiste to the Pacific 1769-1770*, p. 87.

<sup>51</sup> Isabel Ollivier (translator and editor), *Extracts from Journals relating to the Visit to New Zealand in May-July 1772 of the French Ships the Mascarine and the Marquis de Castries under the command of M.-J. Marion du Fresne* (Wellington: Alexander Turnbull Library Endowment Trust, 1985), p. 333.

<sup>52</sup> Jacques Labillardière, *Voyage in Search of La Pérouse: Performed by Order of the Constituent Assembly during the years 1791, 1792, 1793, and 1794* (London: Stockdale, translated from the French, 2 vols, 1800), vol. I, p. 242.

as the indigenous peoples they encountered, as happened when Marion du Fresne's expedition arrived in Tasmania in 1772. Even allowing the Tasmanians close contact with the French sailors helped to establish that they were indeed fellow human beings. One of Marion du Fresne's officers recounts how "they were surrounded by the Savages who caressed them, touching their bodies all over, and appearing to be much astonished to find that they had the same shape as themselves though of a different colour".<sup>53</sup>

By around the end of the Old Regime in France, the globe had been largely encompassed and most of the Pacific now formed part of a vast web that had at least begun to link almost all human societies together. The forces of convergence driven on by Gold, God, Glory and the thirst for knowledge had largely reversed the millennia-old dynamic of divergence. For good and ill, humanity had a common destiny, though it continued to speak with diverse tongues and with little agreement as to the direction in which that destiny should take them.

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<sup>53</sup> Paul Chevillard de Montesson, "Extrait du Journal de la Campagne de M. Marion du Fresne", State Library of Tasmania, Allport MS Box 19, Folder One, March 1772 (p. 6).

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The Abbé Paulmier's *Mémoires* and  
Early French Voyages in Search of *Terra*  
*Australis*



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When one thinks of early French voyages in the southern hemisphere in terms of colonial expansion, what come to mind are the opportunities missed and the rivalries in which the French always seem to come off second best. One thinks first of Bougainville's circumnavigation and his Tahitian sojourn in 1768, arriving after Samuel Wallis, who had claimed possession of the islands for George III. Subsequently, two years before James Cook's exploration, Bougainville was prevented by the barrier of coral from exploring the northern coasts of New Holland.

One thinks also of the French eighteenth-century voyagers in search of the mythical *Terra australis*: Jean-Baptiste Charles Bouvet de Lozier in 1738-1739, Marc-Joseph Marion du Fresne, Yves-Joseph de Kerguelen de Trémarec and Louis François Marie Aleno de Saint Allouarn in the 1770s. Saint Allouarn claimed possession of the west coast of New Holland for France in 1772, 54 years before the first English settlement at King George Sound in 1826, but there was no follow-up on the part of the French Crown.

The above perspective on early French exploration of the southern hemisphere positions it in the context of English conquest and colonisation, the French story appearing as a series of failures, as regards both the obsessive search by the French for *Terra australis* and their lack of action when circumstances were propitious. It is clear that the French were interested in discovering new lands to conquer in the southern hemisphere but their efforts seem curiously dispersed and inconclusive. In this essay, I shall argue that the impetus for discovery by the French during the eighteenth century was inflected by their belief that a French navigator, Captain Gonneville, had discovered a part of *Terra australis* at the beginning of the sixteenth century. It was this specific territory that the French focused on rediscovering, neglecting and paying scant attention to other possibilities.<sup>1</sup>

The French had been interested in the idea of the hypothetical *Terra australis* as a locus for possible French conquest since the end of the sixteenth century, when La Popelinière, in his treatise *Les Trois mondes*,<sup>2</sup> expounded on the national advantages of such a discovery. It was only in 1654, however, that the news surfaced of the French discovery of *Terra australis*. The Abbé Jean Paulmier, in a draft document addressed to the Pope suggesting that the Church should establish a mission in the *Terres australes*, mentioned that the explorer Gonneville had discovered these southern lands in 1503. Ten years later, Paulmier published a considerably amplified work entitled *Mémoires touchant l'établissement d'une mission*

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<sup>1</sup> The failure of the French to stake their claim in the southern hemisphere during this period has been commented on by others, attributing the French lack of a systematic programme of world circumnavigation and mapping to the damaging effects on France of the Seven Years' War and the country's problems in Europe. My argument in this paper does not deny these causes but contributes another, important but hitherto neglected, causal thread.

<sup>2</sup> Henri-Lancelot Voisin, Sieur de La Popelinière, *Les Trois mondes*, édition établie et annotée par Anne-Marie Beaulieu (Genève: Droz, 1997 [1582]).

*chrestienne dans le troisième Monde, Autrement appelé, La Terre Australe, Meridionale, Antartique* [sic], & *Inconnuë*.<sup>3</sup> He sought the permission of Pope Alexander VII to send a French mission to evangelise *Terra australis*, discovered by Captain Gonneville, and claimed himself to be a descendant of a native of *Terra australis* brought back to France in 1504 by Gonneville. Paulmier's *Mémoires* included an extract from Gonneville's account of his voyage.

In spite of the uncertainty of the existence and location of *Terra australis*, Paulmier's proposal was favourably received both by the Pope and by Louis XIV, who would be called upon to fund the enterprise. The King could see advantages for possible trade, and the articles for a *Compagnie des Terres australes*, analogous with the fledgling French East and West India Companies,<sup>4</sup> were drawn up. Negotiation took place over several years and the Pope was even prepared to grant a bishopric for the *Terres australes*. It was the bishopric that would prove to be the stumbling block for Paulmier's plan. The Pope had decreed that the proposed bishopric should include Madagascar. The priests of the religious order of the Lazarists (the missionary order established by Saint Vincent de Paul) had already established missions on the island, and they were not pleased to see the unknown Paulmier's plan succeed and their own ambitions falter. It was they who finally managed to sabotage the *Terres australes* project, and thus, after 1668, Paulmier's plan appeared to be dead and buried.

However, because of the Abbé's glowing description in his *Mémoires* of the temperate and fertile land, inspired by the Spaniard de Quirós's account of his voyage of 1606, the idea of Gonneville's Land continued

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<sup>3</sup> Jean Paulmier de Courtonne, *Mémoires touchant l'establissement d'une mission chrestienne dans le troisième Monde, Autrement appelé, La Terre Australe, Meridionale, Antartique* [sic], & *Inconnuë* (Paris: Claude Cramoisy, 1664).

<sup>4</sup> Both established in 1664. The models for these companies were the English and Dutch East India Companies, established in 1600 and 1602 respectively.

to live on in the French imagination, for both writers and explorers, and provided the material for utopian novels<sup>5</sup> and the inspiration for several voyages in search of the Austral Lands.

Paulmier claimed that a French navigator and trader, Binot Paulmier de Gonneville, had set out in 1503 from Le Havre for the Spice Islands in a ship called *L'Espoir*, and had been blown off course during a violent storm in the region of the Cape of Good Hope. Disoriented, the voyagers had landed on an unknown shore where they stayed for six months. On returning to France, the voyagers had taken with them Essoméric, the son of the chieftain Arosca. Essoméric remained in France and married, and the Abbé claimed to be his great grandson.

The extract of Gonneville's account that Paulmier included in his *Mémoires* was purportedly taken from the short account of the navigator's voyage that the latter had lodged at the Admiralty in Rouen in 1505, after all other records of the voyage had been lost when *L'Espoir* was attacked by pirates in the English Channel on the return journey. Gonneville does not identify the country in which he sojourned, but Paulmier, one hundred and fifty years later, supposed this land to have been the *Terres australes*. From Gonneville's *Relation*, the Abbé deduced that the unknown land was

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<sup>5</sup> Gabriel de Foigny, pseud. Jacques Sadeur, *La Terre australe connue, c'est-à-dire la description de ce pays inconnu jusqu'ici, de ses mœurs et de ses coutumes, par Monsieur Sadeur, avec les aventures qui le conduisirent en ce continent & les particularitez du séjour qu'il y fit durant trente-cinq ans & plus, & de son retour... réduites et mises en lumière par les soins et conduite de G. de F.* (Vannes: J. Verneuil, 1676); Denis Vairasse, *Histoire des Sévarambes, Peuples qui habitent une partie du troisième continent, communément appelé la terre australe. Contenant un compte exact du Gouvernement, des Mœurs, de la Religion, du langage de cette Nation, jusques aujourd'hui inconnüe des Peuples de l'Europe. Traduit de l'anglois* (Paris: Claude Barbin, 4 tomes, 2 vols, 1677-1679; Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1979); [Simon Tyssot de Patot], *Voyages et aventures de Jaques Massé* (Bourdeaux [La Haye]: Jaques L'Aveugle, 1710). See my article: "L'Abbé Paulmier méconnu: le mythe et l'histoire des Terres australes en France au dix-septième et dix-huitième siècles", in Wallace Kirsop (ed.), *Studies in Eighteenth-Century French Fiction in Honour of Angus Martin*, *Australian Journal of French Studies*, 38, 1 (2001), pp. 54-68.





Figure 2.1: Abraham Ortelius, *Typus Orbis Terrarum*, Antwerp, 1570.



inhabited and fertile, and situated it to the west of the Cape of Good Hope (see Figure 2.1):

The country discovered by Captain Gonneville, whose voyage has to some extent given birth to our project, must be situated further on towards the South-East of there [the Land of Parrots].<sup>6</sup>

Thus Gonneville's Land, as conceived by Paulmier, was believed to be between the meridians of 60 and 80 (in relation to the Canary Islands meridian) and below the Cape of Good Hope, somewhere in the general area between the islands of Madagascar and Tristan da Cunha.

There is no mention of Gonneville and his land prior to that in Paulmier's *Mémoires*. But after the Abbé's publication, the search for the fabled Gonneville's Land became the motivation for French voyages to the southern hemisphere and the constant thread linking them. It was only when Captain James Cook's decisive second voyage put paid to the mythic South Land that the French quest ceased.

The earliest map to depict Gonneville's Land was that of Louis de Mayerne-Turquet, published some time after 1661 (see Figure 2.2),<sup>7</sup> which situated the "Pais d'Arosca" to the *east* of the Cape of Good Hope. This map was followed in 1677 by that of Pierre Duval (see Figure 2.3), depicting Gonneville's Land to the *south-west* of the Cape. Subsequent French thinking and searching would oscillate between east and west of the Cape of Good Hope.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> "Il faut mettre plus de là, & en tirant au Sud-Est, le pays de la découverte du Capitaine de Gonneville, dont le voyage ayant en quelque façon donné la naissance à nostre projet". Paulmier, *Mémoires*, p. 9 (my translation).

<sup>7</sup> This map is dated 1648 but bears Louis XIV's coat of arms, indicating that it is a state of the map posterior to 1661 and therefore *after* Paulmier has begun circulating his *Mémoires* in manuscript form. The "Pais d'Arosca" is not indicated on other extant copies of the map, also dated 1648 and bearing the imprint of Louis XIII's coat of arms.

<sup>8</sup> See my article: "Est ou Ouest: le mythe des terres australes en France aux XVII<sup>e</sup> et XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles", in Kumari Issur and Vinesh Hookoomsing (eds), *L'Océan Indien dans les littératures francophones: pays réels, pays rêvés, pays révélés* (Paris et Réduit: Éditions Karthala



Figure 2.2: Louis de Mayerne Turquet [“La Nouvelle manière de représenter le globe terrestre en laquelle il est entièrement réduit dans un cercle, sans aucune division de ses parties”], Antoine de Fer (Paris, dans l’Isle du Palais).



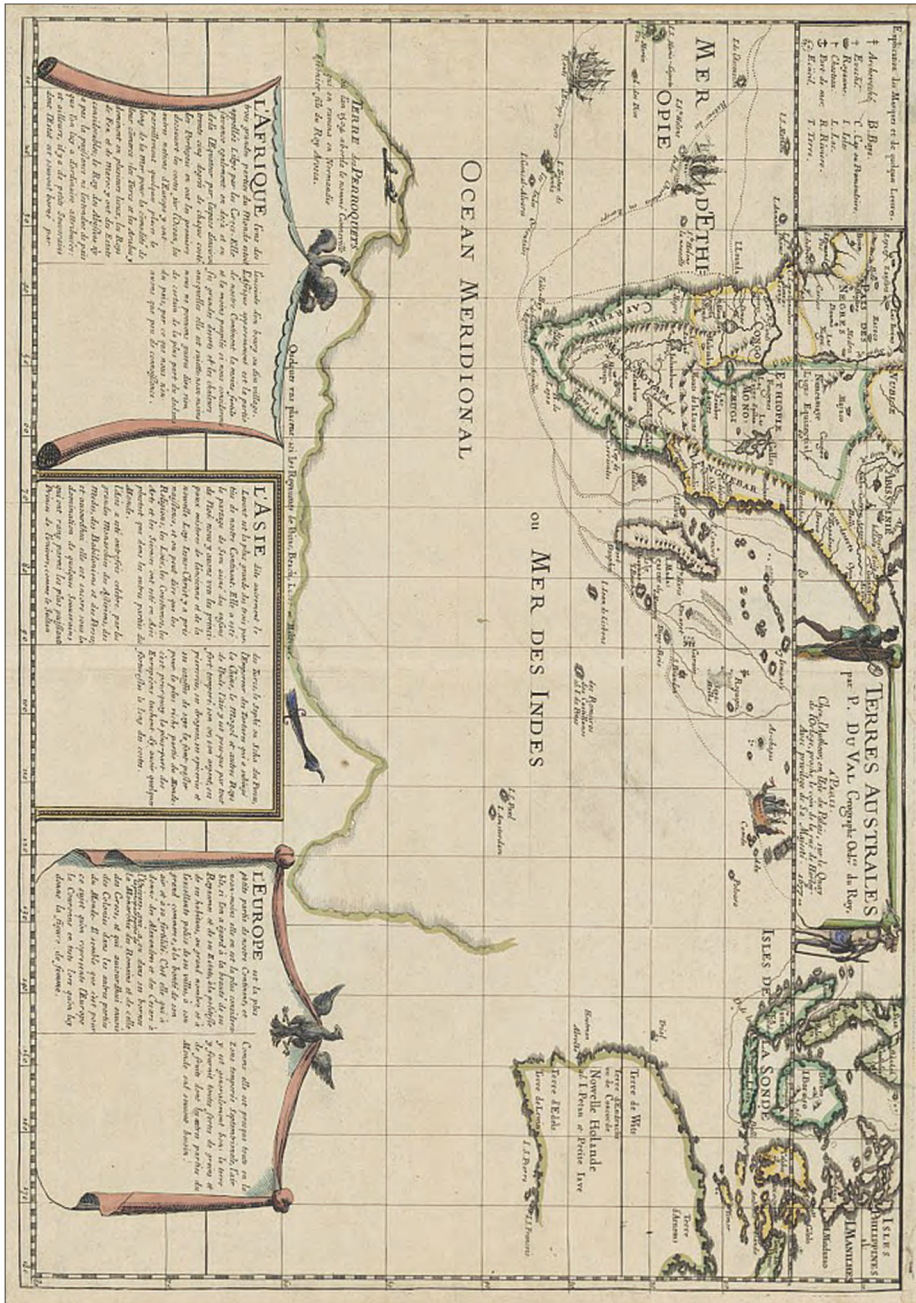


Figure 2.3: Pierre Du Val, “Terres Australes par P. Du Val, Geographe Ordinaire du Roy. À Paris. Chez l’auteur en Isle du Palais, sur le Quay de l’Orloge”, *Carte universelle du monde*.

Apart from the lure of a land flowing with the proverbial milk and honey, one of the reasons for the continuing pregnancy of Paulmier's project was his reasonably precise location of the land, which thus provided a concrete focus for future would-be explorers. Several voyagers during the late seventeenth century requested support to search for *Gonneville's Land*. Beaujeu was one. He wrote several letters between 1696 and 1698 to the King's representative, de La Touche, requesting to be sent in search of the land discovered by Captain *Gonneville*: "This Captain de *Gonneville* on this route landed by chance on the *Austral Land* towards the south-east of the *Cape of Good Hope*".<sup>9</sup>

In 1699, *Voutron*, another ship's captain from *Rochefort*, requested permission to search for unknown lands in the southern oceans at 31° latitude,<sup>10</sup> stating that they were to be found on the route from the *Cape of Good Hope* to *Batavia*, and that it was probable that the Dutch had already discovered them:

it is almost impossible for the Dutch not to have discovered them. What makes me believe both that the lands are good, and that the Dutch fear that another nation will take them over, is that they have forbidden their pilots on pain of death to make maps of them, or to tell foreigners about them.<sup>11</sup>

*Voutron's* request was favourably received and, in a letter written from *Fontainebleau* by the King's representative, he promised to seek royal

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et Presses de l'Université de Maurice, 2001), pp. 13-26.

<sup>9</sup> "Ce capitaine de *Gonneville* sur cette route aborda par hasard à la terre australe vers le Sud Est du Cap de Bonne Espérance". Bibliothèque Nationale de France, NAF Ms 9341, f. 330 (my translation).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 333v-334v. He notes that these lands had been seen by his brother-in-law in 1687.

<sup>11</sup> "il est presque impossible que les *Hollandois* ne les aient découvertes. Ce qui me fait croire et qu'elles peuvent être bonnes et qu'ils craignent qu'une autre nation ne les habitent [sic] c'est qu'ils ont deffendu sous peine de vie à leurs pilotes d'en faire des cartes et d'en donner connoissance aux estrangers." *Ibid.* (my translation).

support whensoever the King “would wish to attempt to discover the lands named on the map New Holland.”<sup>12</sup> It is probable that the conflation of New Holland with Gonneville’s Land resulted from a misreading of Voutron’s request, since the identification of Gonneville’s Land with New Holland is not, to my knowledge, to be found elsewhere during this period, although the outlines of this land mass had appeared on some Dutch maps since 1648 (see Figure 2.4).<sup>13</sup>

Another voyage proposal from the same period was that of the *Sieur de Sainte-Marie* who, more aligned with Paulmier’s ideas, wanted to spread the gospel in the *Terres australes*, that he likewise believed to be to the south-east of South Africa.

In spite of initial interest on the part of authorities, none of these projects eventuated, as Louis XIV gave no evidence of wishing to revive the search for the *Terres australes*, nor to search for New Holland.

The confusion between the hypothetical *Terres australes* and the Dutch discovery of the coasts of New Holland and the French paranoia concerning Dutch duplicity were to be powerful factors favouring the continuation of the search for Gonneville’s Land by the French.

It is not until 1734 that the next French proposal to search for the *Terres australes* is recorded. Jean-Baptiste Charles Bouvet de Lozier, having read Paulmier’s *Mémoires* and searched in vain for the complete account of Gonneville’s voyage and the documents related to it, attempted to persuade his employer, the East India Company, to send him in search of the *Terres australes*. His first petition to the Company was heavily reliant on Paulmier’s *Mémoires* for its descriptions of Gonneville’s Land. It aimed

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<sup>12</sup> “voudrait tenter la découverte des Terres nommées sur la Carte Nouvelle Hollande”. *Ibid.* (my translation).

<sup>13</sup> The earliest Dutch maps to record various coasts of the land mass that would later be named New Holland date from the early seventeenth century.



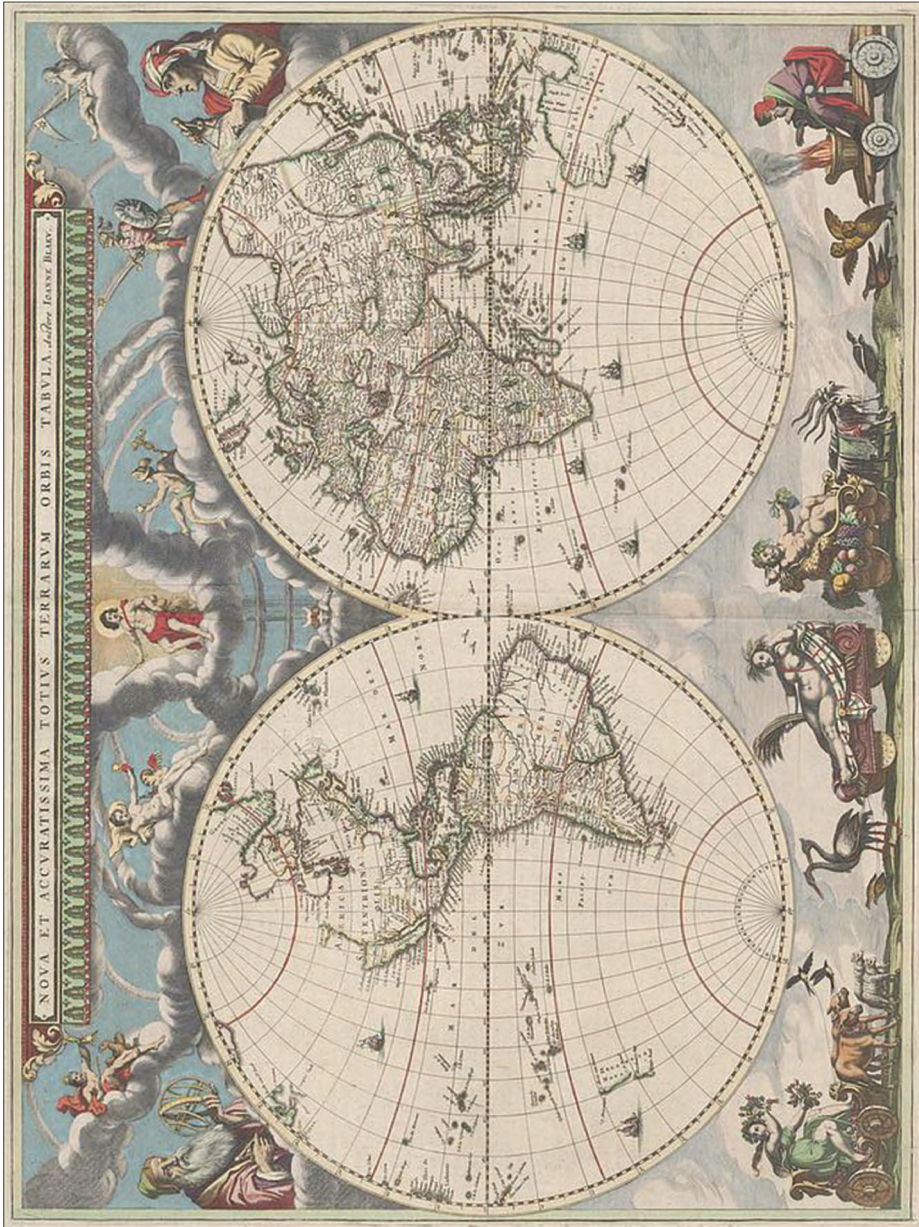


Figure 2.4: Joan Blaeu [mappemonde de 1648], "Nova et accuratissima totius terrarum orbis tabula", *Geographia, quae est cosmographiae blauianae pars prima, qua orbis terrae tabulis ante oculos ponitur, et descriptionibus illustratus*, tome 1, Amstelædami, Labore et Sumptibus Joannis Blaeu, MDCLXII.



at both discovery and the evangelisation of the natives. Bouvet's petition was followed by two others before his request was finally granted in 1738.

Bouvet's principal aim was to find new trading posts and a maritime base on the route to the Indies. He left Lorient in the frigates the *Aigle* and the *Marie* on 19 July 1738 and arrived at the Ile Sainte Catherine, near the Brazilian coast, on 18 November. Bouvet then travelled south-east, his direction being determined by the maps of Guillaume de L'Isle, the Royal Geographer (see Figure 2.5), who situated the *Terre de Vue* (also named the *Promontoire des Terres australes*) and other parts of the *Terres australes* in this area, between Cape Horn and the Cape of Good Hope. Although it was the middle of summer, the weather was cold and the expedition found no trace of the *Terre de Vue*. On 1 January 1739, however, the travellers perceived a peak of land at 54° 20' latitude and 25° 47' longitude that Bouvet, believing it to be part of the *Terres australes*, named Cap de la Circoncision. For twelve days the French tried to land but did not succeed because of the ice, wind and snow. Bouvet returned to the Cape of Good Hope and then sailed back to France, arriving on 24 June. On his return, he wrote to the Company: "I am sorry to tell you that the Austral lands [...] are much too far towards the Pole to serve as a staging post for ships going to India."<sup>14</sup>

Bouvet's account of his voyage was published in the *Journal de Trévoux*.<sup>15</sup> In 1740-1741, Bouvet tried unsuccessfully to persuade the Count of Maurepas, the Minister for the Navy under Louis XV, to finance a new expedition to the *Terres australes*. For Bouvet, inspired by the utopian vision of the Abbé Paulmier, the snow and ice were obstacles which could

<sup>14</sup> Bibliothèque Nationale de France, NAF Ms 9341, f. 340: "Messieurs, j'ai le chagrin de vous dire que les Terres australes [...] sont aussi de beaucoup trop reculées vers le Pôle pour servir de relâche aux vaisseaux de l'Inde". (My translation.)

<sup>15</sup> "Relation du voyage aux Terres Australes des vaisseaux l'Aigle et la Marie", *Mémoires pour l'Histoire des Sciences et des Beaux-Arts*, Trévoux, February 1740, Article XII, pp. 251-276.

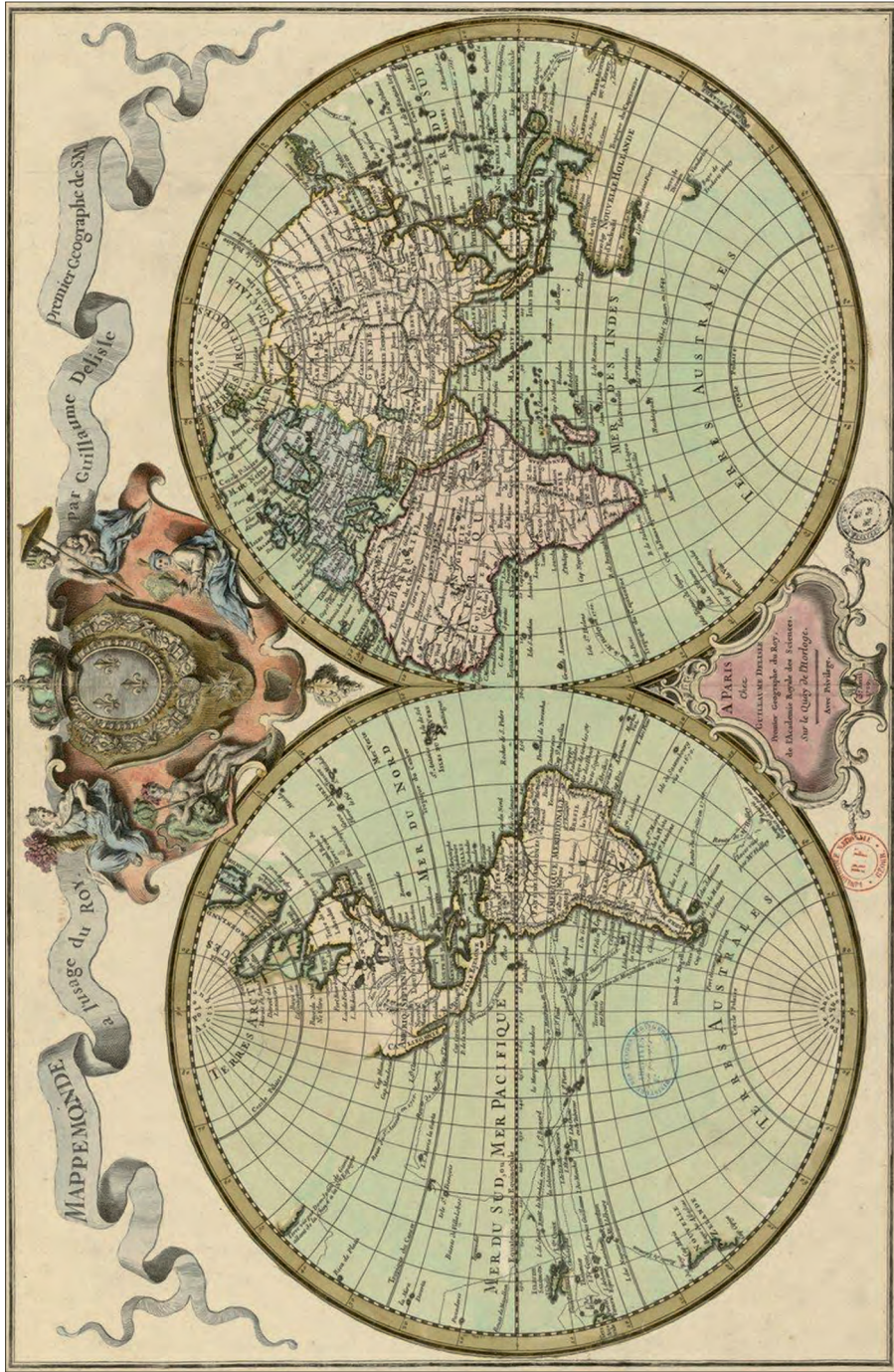


Figure 2.5: Guillaume de L'Isle, "Mappemonde à l'usage du Roy", 1720.

be hiding a rich and fertile land, but for the Company the inhospitable nature of the icy land discovered by Bouvet did not seem promising.

Again in 1745, when Bouvet suggested another voyage in search of the *Terres australes*, Jean-Baptiste Bénard de La Harpe, a soldier, writer and trader who had explored America extensively, wrote to the Duc de Richelieu to attempt to dissuade the East India Company from agreeing to Bouvet's proposal. Bénard de La Harpe had read Paulmier's *Mémoires* and was sceptical of the Abbé's claims that Gonneville's Land was to be found south of the Cape of Good Hope:<sup>16</sup> "The Austral lands to the south of the Cape of Good Hope are too far towards the pole to be of any use."<sup>17</sup>

The utopian strain in the French search for Gonneville's Land in *Terra australis* persisted, however, in spite of these setbacks. In 1739, the year in which Bouvet returned from his unsuccessful voyage, the cartographer Philippe Buache published his first map incorporating Bouvet's discoveries. Buache was Guillaume de L'Isle's son-in-law and used the latter's maps as his point of departure, adapting them to agree with his own theorising. In a sequence of maps, beginning with that of 1739, he developed his ideas concerning *Terra australis*.

The centre of this first map (see Figure 2.6), is the South Pole, and the routes taken by the *Aigle* and the *Marie* are clearly indicated. Bouvet's discovery, the Cap de la Circoncision, to the south-west of the Cap des Terres australes, is also marked, and Buache indicates the path taken by Halley's ship in 1700, where he encountered ice. On the map as well are to be found discontinuous lines indicating the west and south coasts of New

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<sup>16</sup> Because of the distance travelled and the length of the journey, Bénard de La Harpe believed that the land discovered by Gonneville was Maryland. He suggested that the Company should search rather "less than 600 leagues west of Chile".

<sup>17</sup> Bibliothèque Nationale de France, NAF Ms 9341, f. 378: "Les Terres Australes qui sont vers le Sud du Cap de Bonne Espérance, se retirent trop vers le pôle antarctique pour être d'aucune utilité." (My translation.)



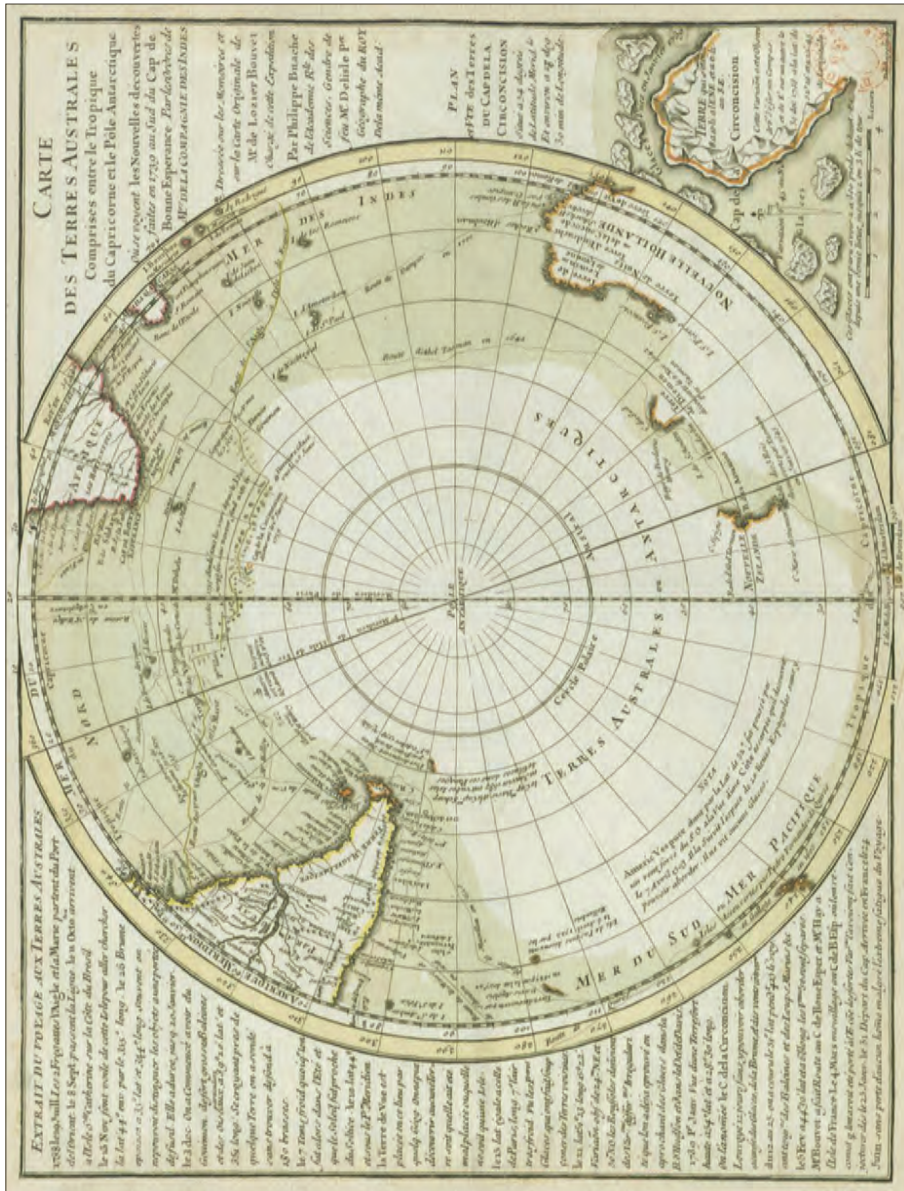


Figure 2.6: Philippe Buache, “Carte des Terres Australes Comprises entre le Tropique du Capricorne et le Pôle Antarctique Où se voyent les Nouvelles découvertes faites en 1739 au Sud du Cap de Bonne Esperance Par les Ordres de M<sup>rs</sup> de la Compagnie des Indes. Dressée sur les Memoires et sur la Carte Originale de M<sup>r</sup> de Lozier Bouvet Chargé de cette Expedition”, Paris, Sur le Quay de la Mégisserie, 1739.

Holland, Van Diemen's Land and New Zealand. The *Terres australes* are merely depicted as fragments, organised around the empty polar centre.

In 1744 Buache modified this map considerably and presented it subsequently to the Académie royale des Sciences, together with his *Considérations géographiques et physiques sur les Terres Australes et Antarctiques*.<sup>18</sup> This new map, published in 1754, differed from that of 1739 in that it now depicted in some detail the as yet undiscovered Austral Lands (see Figure 2.7). Instead of an empty space at the South Pole, there was an area entitled “Mer glaciale conjecturée”, enclosed by two masses of land, one small and one large. According to Buache, the straits separating these two masses let through the ice from the Pole which then poured into the southern ocean at two points. This ice, flowing out into the ocean, surrounded the land masses, constituting a barrier which blocked access to vast southern lands. In his *Considérations*, Buache developed the idea that the *Terres australes* were joined at three points to the other continents: at Drake's Land, which was joined to South America; at the Cap de la Circoncision, joined to Africa; and at New Zealand, which was joined to New Holland. On Buache's map, Van Diemen's Land and New Holland were situated where they had been on his previous map, but New Zealand formed the tip of the land mass which was now called the “Antarctic lands” and on which were marked the Land of Parrots and Gonneville's Land—Buache surprisingly does not indicate that these lands are “conjectured”!<sup>19</sup>

Buache's map, although fanciful, did in fact correspond to scientific thinking of the time. In the theorising of the existence of a large southern land mass, much debate had taken place about whether the northern and southern hemispheres were in fact symmetrical, as had been suggested

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<sup>18</sup> In July 1754.

<sup>19</sup> This is an interesting indication of the French mindset, in that the general contours of New Holland, apart from the east coast, were commonly known at this time, as is confirmed in maps by de L'Isle and in another map by Buache.

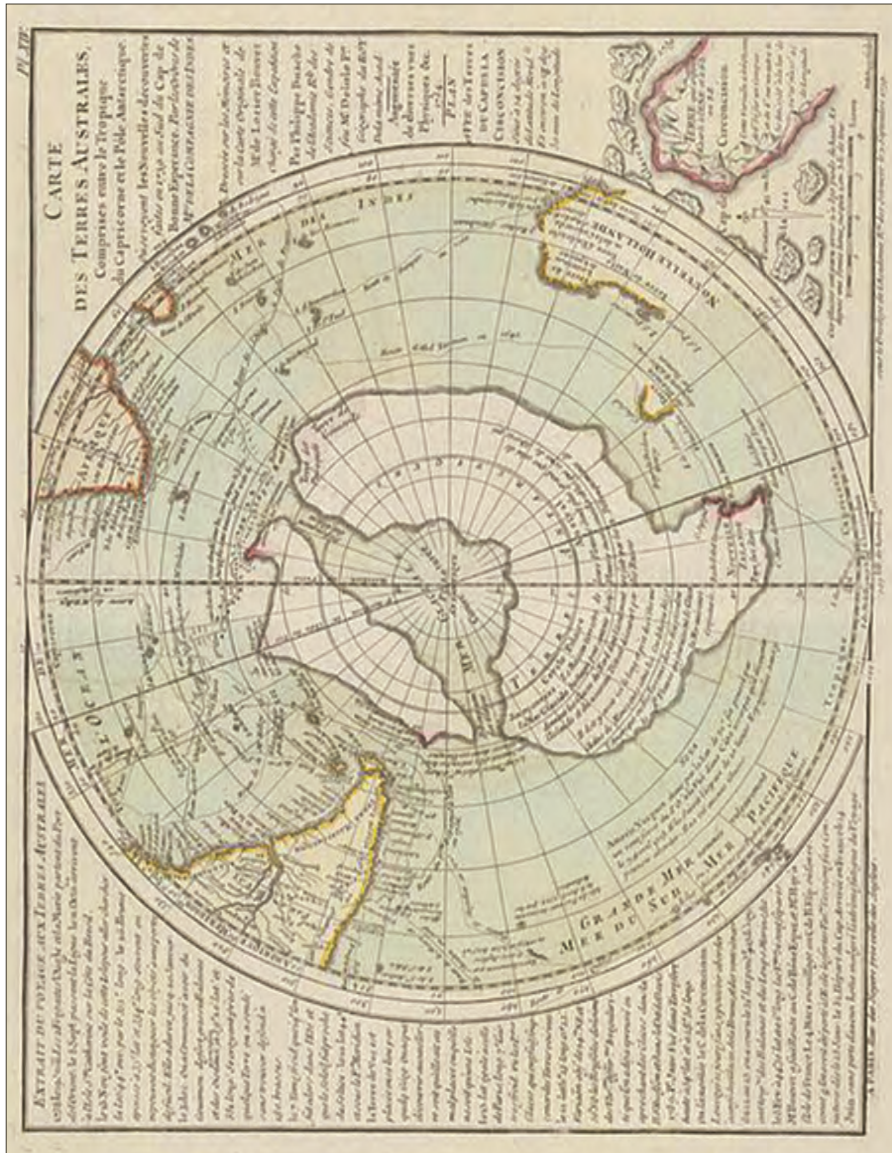


Figure 2.7: Philippe Buache, “Carte des Terres Australes, Comprises entre le Tropique du Capricorne et le Pôle Antarctique, Où se voyent les Nouvelles découvertes faites en 1739 au Sud du Cap de Bonne Esperance. Par les Ordres de M<sup>s</sup> de la Compagnie des Indes. Dressée sur les Mémoires et sur la Carte Originale de M<sup>r</sup> de Lozier Bouvet Chargé de cette Expedition. Augmentée de diverses vues Physiques &c.”, Paris, Quay de l’Horloge du Palais, 1754.



by various proponents of the existence of *Terra australis* since Antiquity. A growing body of thought suggested that the hemispheres were not symmetrical in matters such as land mass, ocean and climate. The French naturalist, Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, believing in the existence of *Terra australis*, suggested in his *Théorie de la terre*, published in 1749,<sup>20</sup> that the hemispheres were not symmetrical. He concluded that the presence of ice at latitudes nearer to the equator in the southern hemisphere than in the northern hemisphere was a sure sign that the Austral Lands did in fact exist, because he believed that ice occurred in the ocean only when land was close.

Thus, in a reinforcement of the utopian topos, Bouvet's lack of success, instead of shaking the French conviction in the existence of the *Terres australes*, reinforced the idea that temperate lands, albeit guarded by ramparts of ice and snow, waited to be discovered at higher latitudes in the southern seas. In his *Lettre sur les progrès des sciences*, the French mathematician Pierre-Louis Moreau de Maupertuis developed his ideas concerning the search for *Terra australis*. He considered that Bouvet, finding snow and ice at 52° latitude, had abandoned his search too early and stated his preference in the future for exploration, rather, to the east of the Cape of Good Hope:

Indeed it is obvious from the headlands that have been sighted, that the austral lands to the east of Africa are much closer to the equator and extend as far as those climates where the most precious productions of nature are to be found.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Armand Rainaud in *Le Continent austral* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1893) notes that Buffon, after Captain Cook's voyages, changed his tune in his later *Époques de la nature* (1778).

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Rainaud, *Le Continent austral*, p. 408: "On voit en effet, par les caps qui ont été aperçus, que les terres australes à l'est de l'Afrique s'approchent beaucoup plus de l'équateur et qu'elles s'étendent jusqu'à ces climats où l'on trouve les productions les plus précieuses de la nature." (My translation.)

Both Buffon and Maupertuis, strong in their belief in the existence of the *Terres australes*, argued that their discovery would present a unique opportunity for France to stake its claim in the southern hemisphere.

Inspired by Maupertuis's letter and encouraged by Buffon, President Charles de Brosses published in 1756 his *Histoire des navigations aux Terres australes*.<sup>22</sup> This has aptly been called the “swan song of the *Terres australes*”.<sup>23</sup> In it, de Brosses detailed the history of the search for the *Terres australes* and then set out the advantages for France in pursuing the quest. Dividing the *Terres australes* into three areas, *Magellanie* (beneath South America and the Cape of Good Hope), *Australasie* (beneath India and including the Spice Islands and New Holland) and *Polynésie* (the Pacific area), he argued that the French should begin their search in *Australasie*, below New Guinea and the islands in this area. His *Histoire des navigations* was accompanied by several maps by Vaugondy, representing the state of French geographical knowledge (see Figure 2.8). The east coast of New Holland is conjectural—the northernmost part being labelled the Austral Land of the Holy Spirit, which was the name given by de Quirós to the land he discovered in 1606.<sup>24</sup>

One of the authorities on which de Brosses based his argument for the quest for the *Terres australes* was the Abbé Paulmier. In all, de Brosses devoted eighteen pages to Paulmier and to Gonneville's voyage, regretting that only the extract of Gonneville's account he had found in Paulmier's *Mémoires* was available. Disagreeing with earlier geographers

<sup>22</sup> Charles de Brosses, *Histoire des navigations aux Terres australes contenant ce que l'on sçait des mœurs & productions des Contrées découvertes jusqu'à ce jour: & où il est traité de l'utilité d'y faire de plus amples découvertes, & des moyens d'y former un établissement* (Paris: Durand, 1856; Amsterdam/New York: N. Israel/Da Capo Press, 1967).

<sup>23</sup> Paolo Carile, “Géopolitique européenne et mythe austral aux XVI<sup>e</sup> et XVII<sup>e</sup> siècles: Mendaña et Quirós à la recherche du continent austral”, in Sylviane Leoni and Réal Ouellet (eds), *Mythes et géographies des mers du Sud* (Dijon: Éditions universitaires de Dijon, 2006), p. 27.

<sup>24</sup> Present-day Vanuatu.

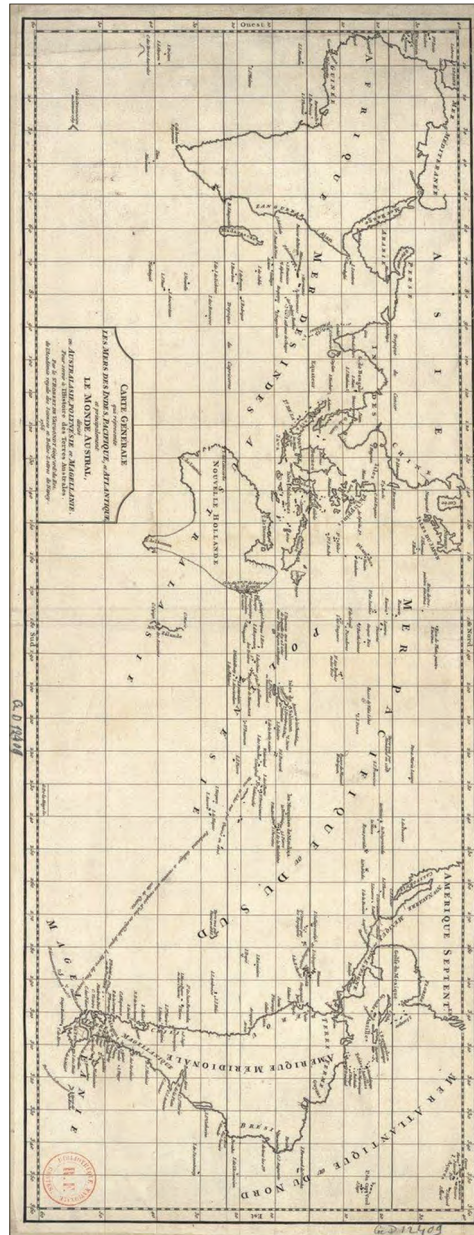


Figure 2.8: Robert de Vaugondy, “Carte Générale qui représente Les Mers des Indes, Pacifique, et Atlantique et principalement le Monde Austral divisé en Australasie, Polynésie et Magellanie. Pour servir à *L’Histoire des Terres Australes*.” Par le S<sup>r</sup>. Robert de Vaugondy Géog<sup>r</sup> ord. du Roi de l’Académie royale des Sciences et Belles-Lettres de Nancy. 1756.

and cartographers,<sup>25</sup> de Brosse reasoned that it was in *Australasie* that Gonneville's Land was to be found—that is, below the *Petites Moluques*.<sup>26</sup> As well, he argued that this part of the *Terres australes* was more accessible to French exploration than *Polynésie*. Envisaging that the many islands to be found in the region bordered a larger undiscovered continent which was not necessarily New Holland, he believed that the French should begin a search of the area in the islands to the east and west of New Guinea, moving progressively south (see Figure 2.8). De Brosse also thought that the centre of the unknown land might be home to a superior, civilised nation.

His book was to constitute a precious resource, for both the French and the English,<sup>27</sup> for subsequent searches for the *Terres australes* and for Gonneville's Land. Several years after the publication of de Brosse's *Histoire des navigations*, Louis-Antoine de Bougainville, together with his cousin Bougainville de Nerville, delved into the colonial archives to find records of Paulmier's submissions to the Pope. Bougainville was interested in searching for Gonneville's Land and an officer of the East India Company, Antoine-Jean-Marie Thévenard, was pushing for a further search in the southern oceans in the area of Bouvet's discovery. Bougainville submitted a report to Choiseul, stressing the importance of countering British colonial domination and suggesting that the French set up a settlement in the Austral Lands. Because of the parlous state of the Royal coffers, this was considered to be too ambitious an undertaking and a settlement in the Falkland islands was decided, or, failing that, in the South Lands believed to be "three to 400 leagues to the south-south-

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<sup>25</sup> He mentions Duval and Nolin.

<sup>26</sup> Ternate, Banda, Amboine.

<sup>27</sup> John Callander in his *Terra Australis Cognita, or, Voyages to the Terra australis or Southern Hemisphere* (Edinburgh: A. Donaldson, 1766) closely follows de Brosse's work, not mentioning him by name and calling him "the French Writer". Callander's work was an important source book for Captain James Cook.

east of the Falkland Islands”.<sup>28</sup> In 1763 Bougainville left on his voyage to found the short-lived French colony on the Falklands.

On completing this voyage, Bougainville came to believe, like de Brosses and Bénard de La Harpe, that the undiscovered south lands were to be sought in the Pacific rather than in the Indian Ocean. When, after much diplomatic negotiation, he was charged with handing over the Falklands to Spain, he began planning his circumnavigation of the world, via the Straits of Magellan or Cape Horn, and China, looking for some island close to China where a trading post might be set up by the East India Company. In the draft instructions given him by the Duc de Praslin, he was to look for various little-known lands, “Diemen’s Land, New Holland, Carpentaria, the Land of the Holy Spirit”, and to claim for France any empty or new land he came across.<sup>29</sup> His voyage in fact resulted in no new possessions for France, although he named the island of Bougainville after himself and his voyage has the distinction of being the first documented French circumnavigation of the globe.

After Bougainville’s voyage, the French continued to focus on the search for Gonneville’s Land, although, curiously, later French voyages in search of *Terra australis* paid little attention to de Brosses’s hypotheses. Buache, who had mapped Bouvet de Lozier’s discoveries, weighed in again with a third *Terres australes* map, dated 1770, which he presented to the Admiral Duc de Penthièvre, evidently in the hope that he would be persuaded to send forth another expedition in search of unknown lands in the south. The 1770 map (see Figure 2.9) superimposes the southern hemisphere on the northern hemisphere, presenting, differently from

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<sup>28</sup> “Mémoires relatifs aux îles Malouines et aux Terres australes”, Archives nationales de France, Colonies, 7:507. Quoted in John Dunmore, *Storms and Dreams, Louis de Bougainville: Soldier, Explorer, Statesman* (Sydney: ABC Books, 2005), p. 95.

<sup>29</sup> See Louis-Antoine de Bougainville, *Voyage autour du monde*, critical edition by Michel Bideaux and Sonia Faessel (Paris: Presses de l’Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2001), pp. 386-390.





Figure 2.9: Philippe Buache, “Hemisphere meridional où l’on voit les Parties inconnues du Globe qui sont à découvrir autour du Pôle Antarctique et les vastes étendues de Terres que peuvent renfermer ces espaces inconnus”. Dressé par P. Buache, 1<sup>er</sup> géographe du Roy présenté à S. a. S. Monseigneur le duc de Penthièvre en aout 1770.



1754, a vast land mass around the south pole, of which Van Diemen's Land is a part.<sup>30</sup> Buache wished to show in this way that the latitude of countries in the northern hemisphere corresponded to countries in the southern hemisphere and that colonisation must thus be viable, because of the similar climatic conditions.

Marion du Fresne and Kerguelen-Trémarec were the last two French explorers to search for Gonneville's Land. Marion du Fresne was sent by Pierre Poivre, the administrator of Mauritius (then the Ile de France), to repatriate Ahu-Toru, the Tahitian whom Bougainville had brought back to France.<sup>31</sup> Marion's brief was also to attempt to discover Gonneville's Land, to the south-east of the Cape of Good Hope. The expedition left Port Louis in October 1771 and, after calling at the Cape of Good Hope, came across two small islands at 46° south and 37° east that he called the Austral Islands, believing them to be part of the undiscovered Austral Lands. Marion then continued east, visiting the Prince Edward Islands and discovering and naming the Crozet Islands,<sup>32</sup> 46° to the south-east of the Cape of Good Hope, where he spent five days attempting to land. He subsequently stopped off in Van Diemen's Land and arrived on 4 April 1772 in New Zealand, naming the northern island "la France australe". He was massacred in the Bay of Islands by the natives on 12 June 1772.

Kerguelen's first voyage is contemporaneous with that of Marion du Fresne and was commissioned by the Abbé Terray, Minister for the Navy, to search for Gonneville's Land:

a large continent to the south of the islands of St Paul and Amsterdam [ie to the south-east of the Cape of Good Hope] which must occupy that part of the globe, from 45° latitude south, descending almost to the pole, in an immense space where none

<sup>30</sup> Gonneville's Land is not named, as it had been on the 1754 map.

<sup>31</sup> Ahu-Toru was to die from smallpox shortly after the expedition left Port Louis.

<sup>32</sup> Previously discovered by the Dutch.

have yet ventured. It appears however to be the case that the Sieur de Gonneville landed there around 1504, and stayed there for six months.<sup>33</sup>

Kerguelen left France on 1 May 1771 for Mauritius, from where, in the *Fortune*, and accompanied by Saint Allouarn in the *Gros Ventre*, he departed to search the southern seas. In January 1772 he encountered lands shrouded in ice and snow below the Cape of Good Hope, and on 14 February 1772 he took possession for the French Crown of the archipelago that would be named after him, the Iles Kerguelen. Convinced that behind them lay Gonneville's Land, he hastened back to Mauritius to proclaim that he had discovered the *Terres australes*. Meanwhile Saint Allouarn, who had lost sight of the *Fortune*, continued on to the west coast of New Holland, arriving at Cape Leeuwin in March and sailing north along the coast. On 30 March, as noted earlier, he took possession of the western half of New Holland in the name of Louis XV. Before continuing on to Timor, he buried a bottle containing a parchment document at Turtle Bay on the northern tip of Dirk Hartog Island, at the entrance to Shark Bay, to commemorate his visit.<sup>34</sup>

Meanwhile, Kerguelen had returned to France and regaled the King with a glowing description of the resources in the lands he had discovered. Such was Kerguelen's perceived "success"—La Pérouse tells us that he was hailed in France as being a "new Christopher Columbus"—that he

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<sup>33</sup> "un grand continent dans le sud des îles de St Paul et Amsterdam, et qui doit occuper cette partie du globe, depuis les 45° de latitude sud, jusqu'aux environs du pôle, dans un espace immense où l'on n'a point encore pénétré. Il paraît assez constant cependant que le sieur de Gonneville y aborda vers l'an 1504, et y séjourna près de six mois". "Mémoire pour servir d'instructions", le 25 mars 1771, signed by Louis and countersigned by Terray, in Yves-Joseph Kerguelen, *Relation de deux voyages dans les mers australes et des Indes, faits en 1771, 1772, 1773, et 1774*, preface and notes by Alain Boulaire (Paris: Le Serpent de Mer, 2000), pp. 20-21 (my translation).

<sup>34</sup> During 1998, bottles and French coins, believed to have been left there by Saint Allouarn, were found by archaeologists at this site.

was provided in 1773 with the means to mount a second expedition to return and establish a colony in the *Terres australes*. On 26 March 1773, shortly before Saint Allouarn's return to France, Kerguelen left Brest in the *Rolland* and, after stopping briefly at Mauritius, sailed south again to the Kerguelen Islands. This time he was obliged to acknowledge the truth of the islands' desolate nature. With scurvy having become endemic amongst his crew, he was obliged to return to France and admit his failure, resulting in his court martial and imprisonment. Already at this juncture Cook was engaged in his second voyage (1772-1775), which would demonstrate definitively that the utopian Gonneville's Land did not exist south of the Cape of Good Hope.

The French focus on the Indian Ocean in the eighteenth century, conditioned by the search for the mythical Gonneville's Land, did not thus produce the hoped-for results, either in Christian converts or in trade and colonies in the Austral Lands. The French *Terra australis* dream culminated in a meagre harvest of islands: the islands of the Crozet group, discovered by Marion du Fresne in 1772, and the Iles Kerguelen, discovered by Kerguelen-Trémarec, likewise in 1772. Bouvet's Cap de la Circoncision is on Bouvet Island, a volcanic island in the Southern Atlantic at 56° 26' latitude. It is the furthest south of the islands discovered by the French but now belongs to Norway. It would only be after the exploding of the Gonneville myth that the French would, in the nineteenth century, turn their interest and efforts towards the more profitable Pacific Ocean.

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# The Acquisitive Eye? French Observations in the Pacific from Bougainville to Baudin



Jean Fornasiero  
John West-Sooby

When Nicolas Baudin returned to France in June 1798 following his successful expedition to the West Indies,<sup>1</sup> the Director of the Paris Museum, Antoine-Laurent de Jussieu, was moved to write to the Minister of Marine and the Colonies recommending that another scientific mission be entrusted to this “excellent mariner” so that the nation might benefit further from his talents. In his enthusiasm, Jussieu declared that “the experience of the past and the knowledge of his former achievements make us believe that he follows worthily in the steps of Bougainville, La Pérouse and d’Entrecasteaux, and that he will be more fortunate than the last two.”<sup>2</sup> Just under two years later, Jussieu would be granted his wish: in April 1800, the First Consul, Bonaparte, signed off on a proposal for a

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<sup>1</sup> See Michel Jangoux’s edition of Baudin’s *Journal du Voyage aux Antilles de La Belle Angélique* (Paris: PUPS, coll. “Imago mundi-Textes”, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> “Cet excellent marin peut encore rendre d’autres services à la patrie [...]; l’expérience du passé et la connaissance de ses travaux antérieurs nous font croire qu’il marchera dignement sur les traces de Bougainville, de La Pérouse et d’Entrecasteaux et qu’il sera plus heureux que ces derniers.” Letter from Jussieu to Minister Bruix dated 2 Thermidor Year VI (20 July 1798), Muséum national d’Histoire naturelle AJ15 569. Quoted in Frank Horner, *The French Reconnaissance: Baudin in Australia 1801-1803* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1987), p. 36.



new voyage of discovery to the Southern Lands, under the command of Nicolas Baudin.<sup>3</sup> The fates—or as one member of Baudin’s team would have it, Clio, the Muse of History in person—seemed to have smiled upon the newly commissioned captain.<sup>4</sup>

Despite Jussieu’s firm belief, however, the captain was not to enjoy a happier fate than La Pérouse or d’Entrecasteaux, nor did Clio’s patronage extend to the voyage itself. For Baudin had enemies, and they were so successful in blackening his reputation that they managed to cast a shadow over the entire undertaking.<sup>5</sup> Upon the return of his expedition in 1804, the commander was thus not seen to have followed “worthily” in the steps of his predecessors and, despite its many achievements, the voyage was denied the recognition it deserved. With the passage of time, and more particularly in recent years, the expedition has gone a long way toward regaining its standing as one of the major scientific voyages of the day,<sup>6</sup> a reversal of fortune which invites us to return to the question of Baudin’s own reputation. History has long since absolved Baudin of the charges of brutality and incompetence that were levelled at him, concluding that his “bad reputation” was undeserved, even fabricated for political reasons.<sup>7</sup> The time is therefore ripe to re-open the case of his relationship to the

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<sup>3</sup> For a full account of the genesis of Baudin’s voyage to Australia, and of Baudin’s role in instigating it, see Horner, *The French Reconnaissance*, pp. 37–42.

<sup>4</sup> This sentiment was expressed by François Péron, the expedition’s zoologist, in a poem he wrote for the banquet held to commemorate the expedition’s imminent departure. See Horner, *The French Reconnaissance*, p. 80.

<sup>5</sup> On the reception of the voyage in France, see Horner, *The French Reconnaissance*, chapter 15.

<sup>6</sup> It would be fastidious here to re-trace the historiography of the Baudin expedition, a recent summary of which can be found in Margaret Sankey, Peter Cowley and Jean Fornasiero, “The Baudin Expedition in Review: Old Quarrels and New Approaches”, *Australian Journal of French Studies*, 41, 2 (2004), pp. 4–14.

<sup>7</sup> On this latter question, see the recent work of Jean-Luc Chappey, “Le capitaine Baudin et la Société des observateurs de l’homme. Questions autour d’une mauvaise réputation”, *Études sur le XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 38 (2010), pp. 145–156.

extended family of French mariners, which, in turn, opens a much wider set of questions. What did it mean to occupy “worthily” the rank of scientific voyager at that particular time, that is, in the context of French maritime discovery of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries? How did these mariners respond to the expectations placed upon them as commanders and, indeed, what were these expectations? It is by analysing the common imperatives that guided their decisions that we can establish a sound basis for examining Baudin’s leadership in comparison with that of the two commanders with whom he can most readily be compared: Bougainville and La Pérouse.<sup>8</sup>

In order to do so, we need look no further than the documents that give us the greatest insight into the manner in which the commanders discharged their duties: their journals. It is here that they record their daily observations but also engage in reflections upon their decision making and their perception of their role. As commanders of scientific expeditions, they were charged with a task that was clearly different from that of mariners engaged exclusively in trade or warfare. They were not only responsible for the safety of their men and for ensuring that they completed their particular mission; they were also the representatives of their nation, whose values and aspirations they embodied on the global stage. Their observations, in contrast to those of the scientists who travelled with them, and whose task it was to focus on their particular field of expertise, were informed, consciously and unconsciously, by a wider and more complex set of values and parameters—which included the navigational, the political, the strategic and the economic, as well as the scientific. It is in this respect that, beyond the differences in itineraries and in the lands and peoples observed, useful comparisons can be made

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<sup>8</sup> For reasons of space, we have excluded d’Entrecasteaux from this comparison, in that his search for La Pérouse added a further weight of national expectation and hence an additional layer of complexity to his particular leadership role. In a wider study, d’Entrecasteaux would naturally have his place.

between the three commanders. What is important here is not so much whether the three navigators looked for and saw the same things but rather whether they saw with the same eye. And was this the acquisitive eye, the eye of the coloniser or potential future possessor? Or was it the inquisitive eye of the scientific traveller? Or both at once? To examine the nature and quality of the gaze that these navigators cast upon the unknown worlds they surveyed is to understand the way in which they sought to exercise their command, and how they juggled the complementary interests of science and nation.

Simon Ryan, in his study of the official accounts of Australia's inland explorers, has asserted that there are three modes of evaluation of the landscapes of discovery—the aesthetic, the scientific and the economic<sup>9</sup>—although he admits that the frontiers between them will always overlap to some extent. These three categories—and this caveat—form a useful starting-point for our own analysis, although we have deemed it necessary to add two categories of our own, which we see as most pertinent in the case of maritime exploration of the period. Firstly, we intend to consider observations of a political or strategic nature, in view of the intense Anglo-French rivalry that was being played out on the global stage during the voyages of all three navigators. Secondly, we recognise the need to account for observations of a practical nature, that is to say which relate to the immediate survival of their expedition and that of the navigators who would follow in their wake. Such occupational and personal concerns are never far from the thoughts of mariners encountering new and possibly hazardous worlds, nor are they entirely synonymous with the economic evaluation of the landscape with which the interests of the nation are more closely intertwined. In short, then, we propose here to analyse the observations of Bougainville, La Pérouse and Baudin through the lens of

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<sup>9</sup> Simon Ryan, *The Cartographic Eye: How Explorers saw Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

five categories: the strategic, the practical, the aesthetic, the scientific and the economic.

In approaching the first category of the strategic, we must, of necessity, be less reliant on the observations of the commanders than will be the case for the remaining four categories. The commanders' journals, precisely for reasons of national interest and diplomacy, do not often engage directly with strategic matters. In order to pursue this particular question, it is thus more helpful to study the background against which the voyages were conceived. The first important point to make in this respect is that the French scientific expeditions of the period were predominantly state-sponsored ventures and that the admirable and altruistic motive of pushing the boundaries of knowledge did not preclude the possibility of deriving some commercial or strategic benefit from any discoveries that might be made. There is no doubt that the voyages of discovery that left Europe for the southern oceans in the second half of the eighteenth century and the early part of the nineteenth were inspired in large part by Enlightenment values and were designed to satisfy the public's growing curiosity regarding the natural world and the peoples that inhabited it. Nevertheless, the geo-political context in which they were undertaken inevitably meant that strategic concerns could not be ignored. This also applied to the work of the scientists themselves, who had to negotiate the tensions between the internationalist agenda of the Republic of Letters and the interests of their respective nations. As John Gascoigne has demonstrated in his study of Joseph Banks, science might well have been a cosmopolitan pursuit in many respects, but that did not come at the expense of service to empire.<sup>10</sup> The mariners who led voyages of scientific discovery to the southern oceans during this period were acutely aware of this. As John Dunmore has put it, "the exploration of

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<sup>10</sup> John Gascoigne, *Science in the Service of Empire. Joseph Banks, the British State and the Uses of Science in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

the Pacific, outwardly motivated by a thirst for knowledge, was affected by an undercurrent of political and strategic manoeuvrings.”<sup>11</sup> And in the second half of the eighteenth century, with Spain’s influence waning and the Dutch remaining focused on the islands of South-East Asia, that political undercurrent was predominantly characterised by Anglo-French rivalry.<sup>12</sup> It is this background that is relevant to the three voyages that concern us here.

The first of these, the voyage of Bougainville, was organised in the wake of the Seven Years’ War (1756-1763), which resulted in the humiliating loss for France of most of her overseas territories. In addition, Bougainville’s first duty, before entering the Pacific, was to hand the Falkland Islands back to Spain—an especially galling task for him as it was he who had officially taken possession of the islands for France in 1763 and who had overseen their settlement, drawing largely on the Acadian population that had become displaced after the fall of French Canada. It is therefore reasonable to assume that this question of the competition for overseas territories had not faded from his mind as he explored the Pacific, and it would be difficult to imagine that this in turn did not influence his observations of the lands and peoples he encountered there.

The voyage of La Pérouse was undertaken in the wake of yet another Anglo-French confrontation, albeit through the intermediary of a third party, but this time it was the French who emerged on the victorious side. The American War of Independence resulted in a significant reversal of fortune and a major territorial loss for England, whose defeat at the hands of the American colonists was due in no small measure to the intervention of the French (1778-1783). With England licking her wounds, the French saw an opportunity to regain some prestige and, more pragmatically, to

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<sup>11</sup> John Dunmore (translator and editor), *The Journal of Jean-François de Galaup de la Pérouse 1785-1788* (London: The Hakluyt Society, 2 vols, 1994/1995), vol. I, p. xvii.

<sup>12</sup> As Alan Frost has shown in several studies, most recently in his *Botany Bay: The Real Story* (Collingwood: Black Inc., 2011).



counter-balance the strategic and commercial influence the British had begun to establish in the Pacific, thanks in particular to the voyages of James Cook. Accordingly, an entire section of the instructions given to La Pérouse was devoted to political and commercial objectives.<sup>13</sup> While this certainly did not escape the attention of the authorities in England, the London Cabinet nonetheless gave its blessing to the La Pérouse expedition, partly, no doubt, because the proposed itinerary was seen to honour the work of Cook by complementing his discoveries. More importantly, perhaps, the British did not consider that the official aims of the voyage posed a threat to their interests in the Pacific. As John Dunmore concludes: “If there was a strategic or a political subplot—and any statesman or diplomat worth his salt would expect there to be one—it was not too sinister.”<sup>14</sup> It was taken for granted, then, that this ambitious new voyage of discovery would not be devoted to science alone. In fact, Georg Forster, the German naturalist and travel writer who had sailed on Cook’s second voyage, would go so far as to suggest that the La Pérouse expedition was designed principally to remedy the French public’s “dangerous Anglomania” and “passion for liberty—so destructive of peace and good order”<sup>15</sup>—a claim that was vehemently denied by Milet-Mureau in his official account of La Pérouse’s voyage. In any event, there was no denying the link between discovery and empire, which had by then become almost an accepted fact. As the Captain-General of Chile, Irishman Ambrose Higgins, noted in a letter he wrote to the Viceroy of Peru shortly after he had hosted La Pérouse and his men in Concepción:

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<sup>13</sup> La Pérouse’s instructions are reproduced in the official account of his voyage that was compiled by Milet-Mureau on the basis of the captain’s journals. See *Voyage de La Pérouse autour du monde* (Paris: Imprimerie de la République, 4 vols, 1797), vol. I, pp. 13-61. They are given in English translation in John Dunmore’s edition of the *Journal of la Pérouse*, vol. I, pp. cx-cl.

<sup>14</sup> *Journal of la Pérouse*, vol. I, p. xxvi.

<sup>15</sup> Georg Forster, *Voyage philosophique et pittoresque, sur les rives du Rhin, à Liège, dans la Flandre, la Hollande, etc. fait en 1790 par George Forster* (Paris: F. Buisson, 2 vols, an III [1795]), vol. I, p. 311.

none of the members of the present expedition exhibits any thought but enthusiasm for research, for the improvement of navigation, for the extension of geographical knowledge, the exploration of seas and islands, and for determining with the greatest exactitude the configuration of the Globe and all it contains of use for its inhabitants. That, as would seem, is the philosophy of these admirable men; but still, it is not to be supposed that they will set aside their nation's interests by neglecting to keep an eye, as chances offer, on the places best adapted for settlement [...].<sup>16</sup>

It is precisely that “eye” that is of interest to us here, the eye of the scientific voyager that was essentially inquisitive, but from which the acquisitive gaze was never absent.

As for Baudin, the revolutionary wars and Bonaparte's failed Egyptian campaign of 1798, which had once more pitted the French against the British, ensured that his voyage would likewise have as a backdrop the traditional rivalry between these two nations. Not that there was anything explicitly political in Baudin's instructions, apart from the injunction to verify whether the British had established a settlement in Tasmania's D'Entrecasteaux Channel—from which it is tempting to deduce that the French might have had some interest in doing so themselves. It is important to note that, in compiling Baudin's instructions, the geographer and former Minister of Marine, Pierre Claret de Fleurieu, did not include a section relating to political and commercial aims, in contrast to the instructions he had drawn up for La Pérouse, other portions of which he adopted for this new voyage.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, we know that Bonaparte

<sup>16</sup> Letter dated 25 March 1786 and quoted in Bolton Corney, *The Quest and Occupation of Tahiti by Emissaries of Spain in 1772-1776* (Cambridge: The Hakluyt Society, 3 vols, 1913/1914/1919), vol. II, pp. 418-419.

<sup>17</sup> Baudin's instructions are reproduced in Jacqueline Bonnemaïn (ed.), *Mon voyage aux Terres Australes. Journal personnel du commandant Baudin* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 2000), pp. 74-80. They are also included in Christine Cornell's English translation of Baudin's sea-log, *The Journal of Post-Captain Nicolas Baudin, Commander-in-Chief of*

was genuinely interested in science and the arts, albeit with national pride and prestige as his underlying motive. The recent Egyptian campaign, for instance, may well have been a military failure, but it had provided a significant impetus for French scientific and cultural pursuits. In the context of the times, however, it was inevitable that a new voyage of discovery would arouse suspicions, irrespective of whether or not there was any evidence to support them. Joseph Banks, who was instrumental in ensuring that the British authorities granted Baudin a passport, in the name of international scientific cooperation, refused to believe that this expedition did not have an essentially political motivation and predicted that the French would visit Port Jackson in order to assess the British colony, even though this did not figure in their itinerary.<sup>18</sup> He certainly wasted no time in urging the Admiralty to organise its own voyage, in order to forestall any discoveries the French might make on Australia's unknown south coast. His plan was largely effective, and would have been entirely successful if Matthew Flinders had not lingered on the southwest coast of New Holland before heading into the uncharted waters of the continent, where he famously met Baudin coming the other way.

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*the Corvettes Géographe and Naturaliste, assigned by order of the government to a voyage of discovery* (Adelaide: The Friends of the State Library of South Australia, 2004 [1974]), pp. 1-6.

<sup>18</sup> In a letter to Philip Gidley King dated 1 January 1801, Banks wrote: "Two French ships sailed from Havre in October last for the avowed purpose of surveying the NW coasts of New Holland [...]. If they visit you and I suppose they will it will be very desirable that you pick out of any of their people, who will tell you, the history of their visit to the French islands and as much as you can of what they have done there". Mitchell Library, King family — Correspondence and memoranda, 1775-1806 A 1980/2 CY 906, p. 37. Interestingly, Banks was proved correct, though the decision to visit Port Jackson was taken by Baudin himself, and well after his charting of the Australian coastline had begun. On Baudin's decision to depart from his itinerary and head for Sydney, see Nicole Starbuck, "La Relâche à Sydney et la deuxième campagne du *Géographe*", *Études sur le XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 38 (2010), pp. 133-142. For an account of the British attitude towards the Baudin expedition, see John West-Sooby, "Le Voyage aux Terres Australes vu par les Anglais", *Études sur le XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 38 (2010), pp. 187-201.

As well as being exploits in their own right, then, all three of these French scientific voyages would to some degree be seen to be, and indeed were, of strategic importance. With this in mind, it is only to be expected that geo-political concerns would have some effect on what their commanders looked for and the way in which they viewed it. As we proceed with our close textual analysis of their journals, we shall be able to gauge the extent to which this lens of the national interest has subtly affected their observations of the landscapes, natural productions and indigenous peoples they encountered during their travels.

Naturally, the journals all abound in references to the practical concerns the commanders dealt with on a daily basis. One of their prime considerations when they visited new shores was to identify their potential for assisting or endangering navigation. Such information could prove vital for the future maritime endeavours of the nation. The commander's eye is trained to look for possible harbours, anchorages and navigational hazards, as well as to assess what resources these shores might offer for ships to obtain wood, water and other much-needed provisions. Bougainville's description of a harbour he discovered on one of the islands of Tierra del Fuego is typical in this respect:

When you have only to wait for a favourable wind, all you need do is anchor in this bay. If you want to collect wood and water, or even careen your ship, you could not wish for a more suitable place for these operations than the Port de Beaubassin.<sup>19</sup>

La Pérouse similarly highlights the advantages offered by the harbour he discovered in Alaska and named "Port des Français", but which is now known as Lituya Bay:

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<sup>19</sup> Louis-Antoine de Bougainville, *Voyage autour du monde* (Paris: Folio, édition de Jacques Proust, 1982), p. 184 (our translation). References to this edition of the published French account, all translations of which are our own, will henceforth be indicated in parentheses after the quotation, using the abbreviation: BV.

There is no harbour in the whole world as convenient for the speedy completion of work that is often so difficult in other countries: waterfalls [...] coming down from the mountain tops drop the clearest water straight into barrels held in the longboats, driftwood lies around along the shore which borders a sea as placid as a lake.<sup>20</sup>

Equally important is the imperative to describe coastal features so that future navigators are able to identify their location. Here is how Bougainville describes the lie of the land at Cape Forward, on the southern tip of the South American continent:

Facing Cape Forward Tierra del Fuego forms an arc with a radius of some 4 leagues, which merging in the distance with the mainland gives no inkling of any exit. Several [exits] appear on Tierra del Fuego, bays and what looks like harbours are visible on all sides. These mountains, snow-covered all the year round, which make up this land, are all jagged and broken up by inlets. Cape Forward presents a surface with 2 headlands approximately  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a league apart, the E one being higher than the W. There is almost no bottom, however between these two points one could anchor in a sort of small bay in 15 fathoms sandy ground.<sup>21</sup>

There are many such passages to be found in the journals of Bougainville and La Pérouse.

As for Baudin, he is just as attentive as his predecessors to such practical navigational concerns. His description of Western Australia's Geographe Bay, for example, is dominated by indications intended for future mariners:

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<sup>20</sup> *Journal of la Pérouse*, vol. I, p. 111. References to John Dunmore's edition of La Pérouse's journal will henceforth be indicated in parentheses after the quotation, using the abbreviation: LPJ.

<sup>21</sup> John Dunmore (translator and editor), *The Pacific Journal of Louis-Antoine de Bougainville 1767-1768* (London: The Hakluyt Society, 2002), p. 16. References to this edition of Bougainville's journal will henceforth be indicated in parentheses after the quotation using the abbreviation: BJ.



While we were off this coast, the currents twice changed direction. From Cape Leeuwin to Cape of Discontent [Cap des Mécontents], they carried us strongly a little West of South, and sometimes, a little East as well. But from the second cape on, as we headed North, they seemed to be running more often West of North than in any other direction.

The tides along the coast and in the bays are not too strong and scarcely rise more than 6 feet at high water, or 8 or 9 with the new and full moons. [...] None of the coast that we have seen has reefs or hazards stretching out to sea, and those that are right in close are too obvious not to be avoided. [...] Nowhere along the coast from Cape Leeuwin to the Cape of Discontent (where the hillocks, which are a little inland, are not so well-wooded as in Geographe Bay), may one anchor without running the risk of having one's cable at least badly damaged, if not snapped. Whereas, inside Cape Geographe, the anchorage is clear everywhere in the bay.<sup>22</sup>

Like his fellow navigators, and in accordance with naval practice, Baudin also scrupulously notes details of soundings, bearings and wind directions whenever he is in sight of land. While such details might not be of prime interest to the general reader, their importance in practical terms is abundantly clear. So much so, in fact, that Bougainville is moved to complain bitterly about writers such as the Abbé Prévost who edit down and disfigure mariners' journals:

Frankly, the way in which fine style writers render sailors' journals is pitiful. They would blush at the stupidities and absurdities they make them say, if they had the slightest knowledge of naval terminology. These authors take great care to cut back every detail that has to do with navigation and that could help to guide navigators; they want

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<sup>22</sup> *Journal of Nicolas Baudin*, p. 197. References to this edition of Baudin's journal, translated by Christine Cornell, will henceforth be indicated in parentheses after the quotation, using the abbreviation: NBJ.

to make a book that appeals to the silly women of both sexes and end up writing a book that every reader finds boring and no one finds of any use. (BJ, pp. 24-25)

Any assessment of Baudin's journal would conclude that he measured up admirably to Bougainville's exacting professional standards in this regard.

If our three commanders were all attentive to their duty with respect to the practical aspects of the landscapes they observed, how do they compare when it comes to the other dimensions of the explorer's gaze: the aesthetic, the scientific and the economic? In terms of aesthetics, firstly, it is interesting to note that the descriptions of landscapes that can be found in the journals kept by mariners during this period frequently incorporated details that were of little or no apparent navigational value. As explorers sailing to shores that most of their compatriots—including, of course, the authorities to whom they were reporting—could never hope to visit, they instinctively understood the need to create a clear and detailed visual image of the lands they encountered. This narrative imperative alone would ensure that they viewed these lands through the same lens as those for whom they were writing, although there was no reason why they themselves would not have shared contemporary tastes. Their observations indeed confirm that they were in tune with the prevailing aesthetic of the picturesque.<sup>23</sup> For example, they displayed a predilection for landscapes characterised by order and balance. With respect to composition, variety was the key, but only if the scene presented some semblance of organisation, whether naturally occurring or crafted by human agency. Colour and line were also important: greenery was greatly appreciated, not just because it signalled fertile land, but also for its own sake and for the pleasant contrast it provided with the dreary

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<sup>23</sup> For the history and description of the term, albeit in the English context, see the classic work by Christopher Hussey, *The Picturesque: Studies in a Point of View* (London: Frank Cass & Co Ltd, 1967 [1927]).

greys and blacks of barren rocks; in similar fashion, hills or mountains offered a welcome relief to the horizontal line of the sea or of low-lying land—especially important given the flattening effect produced when land is seen on the horizon from out at sea.

This aesthetic is particularly prevalent in the journals of Bougainville and La Pérouse. The descriptions of Tahiti and other Pacific islands that are to be found in Bougainville's published narrative quickly captured the public's attention because of their exoticism, but they also struck a chord because his readers could instantly identify with the aesthetic values inherent in them:

The sight of this coast rising up in the form of an amphitheatre offered us the most pleasant spectacle. Although the mountains there are very high, nowhere does the rock show its arid bareness: everything is covered with woods. We could hardly believe our eyes when we discovered a mountain top laden with trees right up to its single peak which rose to the same level as the inland mountains on the southern part of the island. It did not appear to be more than thirty *toises* in diameter and this decreased in size as it rose; you might have taken it from a distance for an immensely tall pyramid that the hand of a skilful decorator had adorned with garlands of leaves. Meadows and groves were interspersed about the lower-lying land, and along the whole length of the coast, a border of low and even land, covered with plantations, dominated the sea-shore, at the foot of the highlands. It is there, in the midst of banana trees, coconut trees and other trees laden with fruit, that we saw the habitations of the islanders. (BV, pp. 223-227)

Apart from the fruit trees, the only exotic element in this description is the lushness of the vegetation. All of the other details appeal to an aesthetic to which the contemporary European reader would have had no difficulty in responding: greenery hiding barren rock, the neat division into zones, the

symmetry of the lines, the overall sense of order, and the references to the civilising agency of the human hand (the skilful decorator, the pyramids, the plantations). To demonstrate that it is these aesthetic features more than the exoticism of the landscape that catch Bougainville's eye, we need only consider his description of the land near Cape Forward in Patagonia, which can hardly be described as a tropical paradise:

In the afternoon we went ashore, the weather was mild, a kind of grassland stretches along the landing place which is very attractive and sandy. Then woods rise up in the shape of an amphitheatre. (BJ, p. 17)

It is true that, as this extract suggests, Bougainville's journal entries are often more matter-of-fact and less effusive than the descriptions to be found in his published account, which are more studied and are composed as set pieces; nevertheless the same aesthetic principles are in evidence in his journal and the same features are regularly highlighted—greenery, waterfalls,<sup>24</sup> the amphitheatre shape, the contrasting but complementary zones.

Two examples from the journal of La Pérouse will suffice to show that he viewed landscapes from essentially the same aesthetic viewpoint as Bougainville. In describing the island of Maui, in Hawaii, La Pérouse focuses in similar fashion on the variety of lines, the greenery, the

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<sup>24</sup> Bougainville is particularly fond of waterfalls, irrespective of where they are to be found. In Patagonia, he says, "we discovered a fine bay with a superb harbour at the bottom of it; a remarkable waterfall, within the harbour, encouraged me to name them *Cascade Bay and Cascade Harbour*." (BV, p. 185) In Tahiti: "As we ran along the coast, our eyes were struck by the sight of a beautiful waterfall which sprang forth from the top of the mountains and propelled its foaming waters into the sea. At its foot was a village, and there appeared to be no waves breaking on this part of the coast. We all wished to be able to anchor within reach of this beautiful spot" (BV, pp. 223-224). The description in his journal is less lyrical, but he nevertheless notes of this sight that "it makes your mouth water" (BJ, p. 59). On New Ireland, he is likewise struck by the magnificence of a waterfall, saying: "this waterfall would be a worthy subject for the greatest of painters" (BV, p. 325).

disposition of the different topographical zones and the evidence of a human presence:

The island of *Mowhee* looked delightful; I coasted along it one L(eague). offshore. [...] We could see waterfalls tumbling down the mountainside into the sea, after providing water for the natives' homes; these are so numerous that one might mistake an area of 3 or 4 L(eague)s for a single village; [...] the trees crowning the mountains, the greenery, the banana trees we could see around the houses, all this gave rise to a feeling of inexpressible delight (LPJ, I, p. 80).

As we sailed, the mountains receded towards the interior of the island which displayed itself to us in the shape of a relatively vast amphitheatre, but yellow-green. (LPJ, I, p. 82)

As a point of contrast, here is how La Pérouse describes his first sighting of Mount Saint Elias on the coastline of Alaska:

The sight of land, which ordinarily makes such a pleasing impression after such a long navigation, did not have that effect on us. The eye rested painfully upon all this snow covering a sterile and treeless land. The mountains seemed to be a little distance from the sea which was edged by a rocky plateau a hundred and fifty or two hundred *toises* in length, black as though it had been burned by a fire, lacking trees and greenery of any kind, which contrasted strikingly with the whiteness of the snow we could discern above the clouds; it formed the base of a long mountain range that seemed to stretch out for 15 L(eagues)s from E. to W. (LPJ, I, pp. 96-97)

Despite some interesting visual features, such as mountains and a striking if bleak effect of contrast, the structuring elements that go towards creating a positive aesthetic appeal are absent from this scene.

It is evident, then, that La Pérouse and Bougainville both bring to their perceptions of landscape their feel for the picturesque, an aesthetic



awareness that is heightened by the particular circumstances of their voyages. Bougainville's Arcadian depictions of Tahiti and its inhabitants appear all the more utopian for the contrast this land provides with the trying conditions he has left behind him in Tierra del Fuego and the Straits of Magellan. As La Pérouse notes on sighting the Hawaiian islands after likewise passing through those same straits and enduring a long and arduous journey: "One needs to be a sailor and be reduced as we were, in these hot climates, to a bottle of water a day to understand our feelings"<sup>25</sup> (LPI, I, pp. 80-81). Baudin was no different in this respect. Even though his itinerary did not lead him to any tropical island paradises, he was equally sensitive to the contrast between those landscapes that offered a variety of lines, colours and composition and those that did not. While coasting along the shores of Leeuwin Land, for example, he notes:

All the land that we have explored has looked arid to us. As far as the coast nearest us is concerned, the most noticeable hills were, in the main, covered with a type of heath which gave us little height. Sometimes we made out a few plateaux with trees of a rather lovely green, all of which only served to make looking at the parts which lacked them more disagreeable. (NBJ, p. 162)

His description of the section of the south coast of "New Holland" now known as the Coorong, which he found arid and featureless (NBJ, pp. 376-379), is likewise all the more stark and depressing for the contrast it provides with the lushness of south-east Tasmania, which Baudin had just left behind and which he presents in terms that suggest a certain level of familiarity and comfort (NBJ, p. 347).

Where Baudin differs from La Pérouse and Bougainville, however, is in the style and the composition of his landscape descriptions. As we

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<sup>25</sup> This echoes Bougainville's reaction when he sees the island of Celebes: "the eye of the mariner, who has only just emerged from a diet of salted provisions, sees with rapture herds of cattle wandering about these pleasant plains which are embellished by groves scattered here and there." (BV, p. 382)

have noted, such descriptions in the hands of Baudin's two predecessors frequently take the form of set pieces and usually contain the same elements, with minor variations in the order in which they are presented. Bougainville and La Pérouse are also fond of sprinkling classical references through their descriptions. The rocky headland of Cape Quade, in the Straits of Magellan, reminds Bougainville of "ancient ruins" (BV, p. 205), for example. He is also fond of quoting from Virgil's *Aeneid*. La Pérouse similarly has classical references at his fingertips, as in this description of the sentiment on board when it was realised that a landing on the beautiful Hawaiian island they had come upon would be impossible: "all this gave rise to a feeling of inexpressible delight; but the waves were breaking wildly against the rocks and, like new Tantaluses, we were reduced to yearning, devouring with our eyes what was beyond our reach." (LPJ, I, pp. 80-81) Although Baudin writes with an easy style, he is not in the habit of drawing on such references in his descriptions. Differences in class and education between the merchant's son and the two noblemen from the *ancien régime* are no doubt significant factors here. But this is more a question of style than substance. The picturesque, with its melding of landscape and human presence, is undoubtedly the aesthetic that corresponds to the tastes of all three men and to their practical needs as mariners; it also alerts them to a desirable location and hence to a worthy object of possession. In other words, the enjoyment of the picturesque does not exclude practical considerations from entering into play any more than it prevents the discoverer from casting an acquisitive eye over the pleasurable landscape he surveys.

When it comes to the scientific gaze, a more significant distinction can be drawn between Baudin and his two predecessors. Baudin's journal contains innumerable observations on the plants and animals of all kinds that he encounters. While waiting at night off the coast of Cape Leeuwin,

for example, Baudin decides to put the time to good use by lowering the dredge in order to see what they might find on the ocean floor:

Each sounding indicated a good bottom of sand, sometimes mixed with small particles of coral, so to make the night seem shorter and to satisfy my curiosity, I decided to put down one of our dredges. I was convinced that despite the great depth of the water, I would find some beautiful shells or other curious objects, so we started dredging. [...] We threw the dredge over at ten o'clock and paid out 150 fathoms of line. Half an hour later it was pulled up, and to our great satisfaction, we found it full of different objects which we were most impatient to look at. Having got a tub ready beforehand, we emptied everything into it and were most surprised to see amongst the contents a large variety of things that were new to us. [...] Most of it consisted of sponges, many of them small ones shaped like a potato, pieces of soft coral and several beautiful marine plants. The only live animals that we found were two types of worm which we immediately put in spirit. The marine plants and various types of coral seemed to us the most valuable things and we made a large collection of them, as well as of little branches of coral. Except for two small white nerites and a black goose-barnacle, we did not find a single shell-fish. (NBJ, p. 158)

Descriptions of this length and detail are frequent in Baudin's journal. His observations on the natural world are an inherent part of the story he tells, and he weaves them into his narrative of events in an almost casual or incidental manner, as in this example (from the stay in D'Entrecasteaux Channel):

we had scarcely come aboard before the wind began to blow furiously. I brought back some flowering plants that nobody had found before and several types of seed. We found indigo in a number of these, which seemed a strange thing to us in such latitudes. Furthermore, this plant is fairly common here. (NBJ, p. 317)

In contrast, very few such passages can be found in the narratives of Bougainville and La Pérouse. It is not that they were uninterested in science or unaware of the importance of scientific pursuits; it was simply that, apart from the sciences related to navigation, such as astronomy or hydrography, they did not feel compelled—or equipped—to make observations of a scientific nature. Bougainville, for example, is conscious of the need to include descriptions of the natural world in travel narratives, but carefully avoids going beyond his comfort zone, which is firmly determined by what is “useful” in nature. His presentation of the flora and fauna of the Falkland Islands is typical in this respect:

In order to provide a proper description of the following animals, I would have needed much time and the eyes of the most skilful naturalist. Here are the most important remarks, extending only to those animals that were of some usefulness. (BV, p. 99)

He then proceeds to describe the various birds to be found on the Falkland Islands, in some detail, but almost always ending with a comment on their nourishing qualities and their taste (including their eggs).<sup>26</sup> There were also many flowers on these islands, but he did not examine them because no particular “need” compelled him to do so.<sup>27</sup> Bougainville is happy when he is able to report that his botanist, Commerson, has collected some unknown and interesting plants;<sup>28</sup> but he does not include any detailed reports in his journal, rightly presuming that this task would be capably

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<sup>26</sup> Of the snipes to be found there, he writes that they are “lean” in spring, so “autumn is the season in which they make for excellent eating.” (BV, p. 104) Of a kind of curlew: “It has a whistle that is easy to imitate, and this was subsequently useful to our hunters, but pernicious for it.” (BV, p. 104)

<sup>27</sup> “Among several other plants that we were not moved to examine because we had no need to do so, there were many flowers, but all of them were odourless” (BV, p. 96).

<sup>28</sup> “Mr Commerson, accompanied by the Prince of Nassau, took advantage of these days in order to botanise. All kinds of obstacles had to be overcome, but this harsh terrain had in his eyes the merit of novelty, and the Strait of Magellan has enriched his notebooks with a large number of unknown and interesting plants.” (BV, p. 180)

undertaken by Commerson himself. La Pérouse similarly abdicates that particular responsibility.

This does not, of course, indicate any failing on the part of Bougainville and La Pérouse as commanders of scientific voyages, especially given that the scientific objectives of their expeditions were not as wide-ranging and ambitious as those which Baudin had to fulfil. What this difference does indicate, however, is that Baudin, whose interest in science was genuine and whose record as a botanical voyager was well established, was very much the right man for the particular job the French authorities gave him. His numerous and detailed scientific observations are a reflection of the highly specific skills that he brought to his leadership, skills that required him in particular to be mindful of the preoccupations of the unusually large contingent of scientists who accompanied him. In general, however, as the examples of Bougainville and La Pérouse indicate, the commander was not required to possess the eye of the naturalist, but rather to ensure that the naturalists were able to pursue their own observations, a duty to which Baudin was particularly attentive.

Some differences also affect the final element of the explorer's gaze: the economic. The contexts in which this gaze was exercised were subject to significant variation, since, of the three commanders, only La Pérouse had specific instructions relating to commerce, with a brief to investigate possibilities for France to enter the fur trade with China. However, all three would have been acutely aware of the geo-political background to their voyages and of the strategic importance of trade and territorial possessions in the Pacific. With this in mind, we might expect each of the captains to view the places visited with a sharply acquisitive gaze. Interestingly, however, this does not generally prove to be the case. All three are of course attentive to the resources that might be provided by the lands they encounter, beyond those that mariners depend upon. They



also record in some detail the European settlements they visit, paying particular attention to such strategic questions as defence capabilities or relations with the indigenous inhabitants. And yet rarely, if ever, is there anything particularly covetous or nationalistic in their evaluations of the resources, real or potential, that seemed to be on offer in the various places they visited.

All three show an awareness of the commercial opportunities offered by whaling, for example, but none of them seems to push the case for France to become involved. In Bougainville's presentation of the Falkland Islands, he mentions the presence of whales and various types of seal, and even notes that "their oils and skins had already formed a branch of trade",<sup>29</sup> but that is the extent of his observations on the subject. The profits to be gained from whaling and sealing were more widely known by the time La Pérouse sailed, and he was certainly alert to the possibilities offered by the southern oceans, but generally in an abstract way,<sup>30</sup> or else in the context of his comments regarding the situation of a particular community—the lack of enterprise of the inhabitants of Chile,<sup>31</sup> for

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<sup>29</sup> "The coat of all these animals is not covered with down, such as one finds on all of those that are hunted in North America and in the Rio de la Plata. Their oils and skins had already formed a branch of commerce." (BV, p. 105)

<sup>30</sup> Off the coast of Tierra del Fuego, just through the Strait of Le Maire, he notes: "Throughout our navigation through the Strait at a half league from the shore we were surrounded by whales; it is evident that they are never disturbed—our ships did not frighten them, they were swimming majestically half a pistol shot from the frigates; they will be the sovereigns of these seas until such time as whalers come to make the same war against them as in Spitzbergen or Greenland. I doubt that there is a better place for this type of fishing anywhere in the world. Ships would anchor in safe bays, with at hand water, wood, some antiscorbutic plants and seabirds; without going a league, their boats could take all the whales they want to fill their hold. The only inconvenience is the length of the voyage which requires about five months of navigation for each crossing, and I believe one can stay in these waters only in December, January and February." (LPI, I, p. 37)

<sup>31</sup> A few days after leaving Concepción, he writes: "Throughout the night we were surrounded by whales—they swam so close to our frigates that they threw water on board as they blew. It should be noted that not one has ever been harpooned by a resident

instance, or the deleterious effects of Portugal's trade monopoly on the local inhabitants on the island of Santa Catarina.<sup>32</sup> Baudin similarly notes the abundance of whales when he visits Western Australia's Shark Bay, but only to surmise that the Dutch might be looking one day to exploit this fishery and to comment on the danger they present to navigation in the waters of the bay.<sup>33</sup>

As is to be expected, all three commanders produce comprehensive reports on the European colonial settlements they visit: Bougainville on Buenos Aires and Montevideo, La Pérouse on Madeira, Concepción and the Philippines, Baudin on Timor and Port Jackson, to name a few. This was, however, no more and no less than standard practice. It is also true that La Pérouse, in accordance with his instructions, is alert to commercial opportunities, but if he mentions France it is generally in a non-committal manner, simply noting of Lituya Bay, for example, that "if the French government had any plans for a trading post along this part of the American coast, no other nation could raise the slightest objection." (LPJ, I, p. 103) Even Bougainville's acts of possession when he visits the Pacific islands come across in his journal, as in his published narrative, as simple

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of Chile; nature has accumulated so many benefits in that kingdom that it will be several centuries before this branch of industry is developed." (LPJ, I, p. 52)

<sup>32</sup> Of Santa Catarina he observes: "Whaling is very successful, but it is a monopoly of a Lisbon company which has three shore stations along the coast, catching about 400 whales a year, sending the oil as well as the spermaceti to Lisbon by way of Rio de Janeiro. The local people are merely spectators of this activity which brings them no gain, and unless the government comes to their assistance and grants them charters or other forms of encouragement which might lead to trade, one of the finest places on the earth will continue to languish and will be of no benefit whatever to its mother country." (LPJ, I, p. 27)

<sup>33</sup> "It seems that the Dutch were very careful in taking the bearings of this whole coastline, which they may very well have their eye on for whaling—the sole resource it can offer. These creatures are so plentiful here, that one is often inconvenienced by them and the boats are sometimes in danger, so close do they come. Another thing is, that when one tacks in the bay, they are a constant source of worry because of the enormous masses of water that they stir up. These look like reefs, upon which the sea is breaking furiously." (NBJ, p. 206)

and mechanical enactments of a traditional practice with no particular meaning and certainly with no discussion of the benefits France might derive from such territories. By the time La Pérouse sailed, this practice had in fact become so meaningless that Count Fleurieu's instructions specifically directed him not to indulge in it. On the one occasion on which he did so—on Lituya Bay's Cenotaph Island—it was without the slightest conviction and only at the insistence of the local Indian chief.<sup>34</sup> And Baudin, for his part, was certainly not in the business of claiming territory.

What this points to is a kind of dignified distance from such matters on the part of our three navigators, and also a certain sensitivity to the rights and the plight of indigenous peoples. We should, however, remind ourselves that, despite being travellers of the Enlightenment, none of them placed any store in the Rousseauian notion of the noble savage. In fact, Bougainville and La Pérouse were quite open in their hostility towards Rousseau and other like-minded *philosophes*. The following comment from Bougainville's journal, which was not reproduced in his official narrative, provides a good indication of their attitude: "They [the Patagonians] piss in a crouched position, would this be the most natural way of passing water? If so, Jean-Jacques Rousseau who is a very poor pisser in our style, should have adopted that way. He is so prompt to refer us back to Savage

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<sup>34</sup> "It was unlikely that this chief owned any of the land; the system under which these people live is so democratic that the country probably belongs to the whole group; however, as numerous natives were witnesses to this transaction, I was entitled to conclude that they were giving their support to it, and I accepted the chief's offer, convinced anyhow that this contract of sale could be disallowed by many tribunals if ever these people challenged it, because we have no proof that the witnesses represented anyone or that the chief was the real owner; nevertheless, I gave him several ells of red cloth, some axes, adzes, iron bars and nails; I also gave presents to all his followers. Having thus concluded and settled the deal, I took possession of the island with the usual formalities—I had a bottle buried under a rock, in which was an advice that possession was taken, and I placed nearby one of the bronze medals struck before our departure from France." (LPI, I, pp. 110-111) It is interesting to note his presumption here of a European form of justice.

Man.” (BJ, p. 12) Nevertheless, all three navigators expressed great concern for the welfare and well-being of native peoples. Despite having just claimed Tahiti for France, Bougainville notes with some relief in his journal that there do not appear to be any valuable mineral resources on the island:

Our chaplain assured me that he had examined a piece of some red mineral, but I do not know what has become of it. One would certainly find some pearls, as we obtained some pearl oysters. Indeed it is to be wished for the sake of the inhabitants that Nature had refused them items that attract the cupidity of Europeans. All they need are the fruits which the soil liberally grants them without any cultivation, anything else, which would attract us, would bring upon them all the evils of the iron age. (BJ, p. 74)

Inspired by sentiments of a very similar nature, La Pérouse explains why he did not take possession of the island of Maui:

Although the French are the first to have stepped onto the island of *Morwee* in recent times, I did not take possession of it in the King’s name. This European practice is too utterly ridiculous, and philosophers must reflect with some sadness that, because one has muskets and canons, one looks upon 60000 inhabitants as worth nothing, ignoring their rights over a land where for centuries their ancestors have been buried, which they have watered with their sweat, and whose fruits they pick to bring them as offerings to the so-called new landlords. It is fortunate for these people that they have been discovered in an age when religion is no longer a pretext for violence and greed. Modern navigators have no other purpose when they describe the customs of newly discovered people than to complete the story of mankind. Their navigation must round off our knowledge of the globe, and the enlightenment which they try to spread has no other aim than to increase the happiness of the islanders they meet, as they add to their means of subsistence by

introducing in the different islands bulls, cows, goats, ewes, rams, etc. They have also planted trees and sowed seeds from every country, and brought iron tools which should enable their skills to make very rapid progress. We would have felt ourselves well rewarded for the great hardships this campaign has caused us if we had succeeded in eradicating the practice of human sacrifices that is common among most of the South Sea islanders. (LPJ, I, p. 88)

And finally, Baudin's now famous letter to Governor King, written, aptly enough, during his visit to King Island, demonstrates that he shared the compassionate and humanitarian views of his predecessors, whose Enlightenment point of view he echoes in strikingly similar terms:

I have never been able to imagine that there was any justice or even fairness on the part of Europeans in seizing, in the name of their government, a land which when first seen was inhabited by men who did not always deserve the titles of "savage" and "cannibal" that have been lavished on them, as they are still only nature's children and just as uncivilised as Scottish Highlanders or our peasants of Lower Brittany, etc, who, even if they do not eat their fellow men, are no less harmful to them for all that. From this it seems to me that it would be infinitely more glorious for your nation as for my own to mould for society the inhabitants of their own countries, over whom they have rights, rather than attempting to undertake the education of those who are very far away by first seizing the land that belongs to them and that has given birth to them.<sup>35</sup>

It is important, of course, not to idealise or romanticise the attitudes of these three navigators, whose principles would be regularly tested by the circumstances that arose during the course of their voyages. All the same, what our analysis has highlighted is that, although they may have fulfilled their duty by noting the resources and trade opportunities

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<sup>35</sup> Letter from Baudin to Governor King dated 3 nivose an XI [23 December 1802]. Reproduced in *Historical Records of New South Wales*, vol. V, pp. 826-827 (our translation).

offered by the lands they visited, their gaze was much less coloured by economic preoccupations than by considerations of a practical, aesthetic or scientific nature. Even if we can discern in these latter categories the subtle hint of an imperial gaze or the interest in resources of a future possessor, we can see that the eye they cast on the natural world and the peoples that inhabited it was much more inquisitive than acquisitive. It is in this context that they displayed an unequivocal commitment to Enlightenment values—values which transcended their defence of the narrow government interests of the day. These were precisely the values that they deemed central to their role as worthy representatives of their nation, values which led them to distance themselves from commercial concerns and to adopt the disinterested grandeur of the diplomatic observer. In this sense, Baudin's writings and observations show him to be no different from his predecessors. Indeed, Baudin positions himself consciously in their lineage, in the mould of the eighteenth-century voyager, of which he appears as the last of the line, rather than the first of a new breed of scientific voyagers of the nineteenth century.

If we return now to the notion of “worthiness”, which initiated this discussion, it is clear that Baudin's observations reveal him as pursuing his multiple objectives in the same way as his predecessors, and viewing all that he encountered with an inquisitive rather than acquisitive gaze. His only claim to difference is his passion for scientific observation, which, far from disqualifying him from occupying the rank of a Bougainville or a La Pérouse, or from revealing in him any form or conduct or culture unbecoming to a maritime discoverer, merely serves to enhance his claim for the indulgence of Clio.



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# Discovering the Savage Senses: French and British Explorers' Encounters with Aboriginal People

# 4

*Shino Konishi*<sup>1</sup>

Joseph-Marie Degérando, who penned the ethnographic instructions that were adopted for the Baudin expedition's voyage to the South Seas, advised French naturalists and scientific travellers to investigate the "senses of the Savage".<sup>2</sup> He urged them to ascertain which senses native peoples most frequently called upon and what circumstances influenced their development. These instructions also requested explorers to compare indigenous people's faculties of sense to those of the Europeans, and to determine to "what class and species of sensation do they attach most pleasure?" Degérando even proposed a methodology, which Baudin and his men were rarely if ever in the position to carry out. He suggested that the ethnographer should judge each particular sense against the following criteria:

1. the art with which two or more sensations are distinguished;
2. the tenuity of sensations that can be noticed; 3. the number of

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Ned Curthoys and the anonymous reviewers for their helpful advice on earlier drafts of this chapter.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph-Marie Degérando, *The Observation of Savage Peoples*, translated by F.C.T. Moore (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), p. 82.

sensations that can be simultaneously grasped; 4. the speed with which the operations are carried out; 5. the capacity to prolong them for a more or less long period without fatigue; 6. finally, the precision of the judgements which sometimes accompany them.<sup>3</sup>

Degérando's naïve disregard of the practical circumstances in which explorers would commonly find themselves was patent, for they rarely had the opportunity to follow his carefully constructed methods of observation. However, his instructions reveal the broader significance placed on investigating the human senses in the eighteenth century. The eighteenth-century philosophers, scientists and explorers were fascinated by the study of human sensations, as advances in anatomy shed light on the physiology of the sense organs, and theories about the progress of humankind influenced European ideas on cultural and civilisational differences in sensory discernment.

As anthropologist Jack Goody notes, "The basic senses are our windows on the world. [...] All experience of the world outside is mediated by these senses".<sup>4</sup> This fact has been long recognised, and the nature of human sensations has been pondered since Antiquity.<sup>5</sup> Yet the study of sensory history has only emerged as a dynamic field of investigation in recent decades. According to Mark M. Smith, sensory history examines the role of the human senses "in shaping peoples' experience of the past, and shows how they understood their worlds and why".<sup>6</sup> However, anthropologists point out that the senses are not purely physiological, but are in fact culturally constructed. Constance Classen observes that

<sup>3</sup> Degérando, *Observation of Savage Peoples*, p. 82.

<sup>4</sup> Jack Goody, "The Anthropology of the Senses and Sensations", *La Ricerca Folklorica*, 45 (2002), p. 17.

<sup>5</sup> Aristotle, for example, examined the senses in *De Anima*, Book II, chapter 6. See Richard Sorabji, "Aristotle in Demarcating the Five Senses", *The Philosophical Review*, 80, 1 (1971), pp. 55-79.

<sup>6</sup> Mark M. Smith, "Producing Sense, Consuming Sense, Making Sense: Perils and Prospects for Sensory History", *Journal of Social History*, 40, 4 (2007), p. 842.

“Different cultures present strikingly different ways of ‘making sense’ of the world”, for different cultures recognise varying numbers of senses, and privilege different senses.<sup>7</sup>

In the modern West it has long been maintained that the sense of sight dominates our way of thinking, and since the Enlightenment this sense has served “as an authenticator of truth, courier of reason, and custodian of the intellect”. At the same time, the other senses were “essentially sidelined”.<sup>8</sup> For instance, Marshall McLuhan argues that this privileging of sight was due to the advent of new developments in communications technology, such as the invention of the printing press in the fifteenth century, which distinguished and separated the West from both “the ‘tribal’ societies of Africa and the Orient” and its pre-modern self.<sup>9</sup> The so-called “great divide” thesis which accentuated this ocularcentrism was further reinforced by Michel Foucault’s influential work on surveillance, and has led to there being more scholarly studies on sight than on all of the other senses combined.<sup>10</sup> However, this notion of a “great divide” has been challenged by scholars who have questioned the established sensory hierarchy and reasserted the significance of the other senses.

Hearing is second on the list in terms of scholarly attention because it is also considered a higher sense. Historians and anthropologists alike

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<sup>7</sup> Constance Classen, *Worlds of Sense: Exploring the Senses in History and Across Cultures* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Mark M. Smith, *Sensing the Past: Seeing, Hearing, Smelling, Tasting, and Touching in History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), pp. 8-9.

<sup>9</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962), pp. 159-160. Quoted in Smith, *Sensing the Past*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>10</sup> Smith, *Sensing the Past*. Key works include: Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, translated by A.M. Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1975); Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, translated by Alan Sheridan (New York: Penguin, 1987); and Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).



have argued that sounds shaped daily life in both early modern Europe and non-European societies, with bells, drums, the call to prayer of the Muezzin and so on enabling the coordination of civic, economic, religious and social life. Such sounds were also shaped by the self-fashioning of the elite, who distinguished themselves from the lower-class rabble by “embracing quietude”.<sup>11</sup> However, as Mark Smith argues, most aural history is focused on music.<sup>12</sup> In her study of cross-cultural encounters between Pacific Islanders and German ethnomusicologists in the eighteenth century, Vanessa Agnew has found that “eighteenth-century voyagers were confronted with the question of whether music had its own independent agency or whether its effects were culture bound”.<sup>13</sup> She argues that such encounters disrupted the Europeans’ confidence in their own “aesthetic technology”, as they were forced into the role of “vulnerable listener” and exposed to new forms of music which both affirmed and challenged their assumptions about the hierarchical significance of music and the uniqueness of European musical forms.<sup>14</sup>

Taste is usually deemed to be a lower faculty for it is a proximate sense and cannot operate over distances. However, it was not always considered to be a lower-level sense. Taste became significant in the eighteenth century as food supplies became more reliable. Consequently, discourses on food and taste came to stress quality over quantity, or, as David Howes and Marc Lalonde assert, “delicacy rather than gluttony”.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> On this point, see David Garrioch, “Sounds of the City: The Soundscape of Early Modern European Towns”, *Urban History*, 30 (2003), pp. 5-25; Ruth Finnegan, *Communicating: The Multiple Modes of Human Interconnection* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 72-73; and Smith, *Sensing the Past*, pp. 42-47.

<sup>12</sup> Smith, *Sensing the Past*, p. 41.

<sup>13</sup> Vanessa Agnew, “Listening to Others: Eighteenth-Century Encounters in Polynesia and their Reception in German Musical Thought”, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 41, 2 (2008), p. 166.

<sup>14</sup> Agnew, “Listening to Others”, pp. 166 and 176-183.

<sup>15</sup> David Howes and Marc Lalonde, “The History of Sensibilities: Of the Standard of Taste in Mid-Eighteenth Century England and the Circulation of Smells in Post-

According to Walter Ong, taste “above all discriminates, distinguishing what is agreeable or disagreeable”; as a result, it enabled “men of society” to articulate more elaborate notions of discrimination and refinement.<sup>16</sup> Taste allowed people to individuate themselves by exercising their good taste and refinement at a time when urbanisation and economic modernisation impacted on other markers of class, for example by enabling the hoi polloi to dress like the elites. As Smith argues, the sense of taste in the eighteenth century was considered “superior to sight because ruling classes (and races) understood [it] to be more reliable in fixing identities in rapidly modernizing societies”.<sup>17</sup>

On the other hand, touch has long been considered an inferior sense, connoting something more “carnal, lewd, primitive, emotional, and less intellectual than sight”.<sup>18</sup> This is partly because it is different from the other senses in that there is not a specific organ limited exclusively to sensing touch. As Sander Gilman observes, skin “is not only an organ of sense but it serves as the canvas upon which we ‘see’ touch and its cultural associations”. The act of touching and being touched was associated with sex, and after Europe’s contact with the New World, it was also blamed for the spread of disease.<sup>19</sup> Increased contact with non-European peoples

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Revolutionary France”, *Dialectical Anthropology*, 16 (1991), p. 127.

<sup>16</sup> Walter Ong, *The Presence of the Word: Some Prologomena for Cultural and Religious History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 117. Quoted in Howes and Lalonde, “The History of Sensibilities”, p. 128. Taste in this period was not limited to gustatory taste, but also extended more broadly to a range of aesthetic contexts, for example, David Hume’s “Of the Standard of Taste” (1757). According to Carolyn Korsmeyer, such works highlighted that the way in which we respond to aesthetic appreciation is like “the savoring of a flavour in which perceptions and pleasure merge”, for “taste provides the chief analogy by which the apprehension of the beautiful and of fine artistic qualities and even social style is explicated”. Carolyn Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste: Food and Philosophy* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1999), p. 40.

<sup>17</sup> Smith, *Sensing the Past*, pp. 82-83.

<sup>18</sup> Smith, *Sensing the Past*, p. 93.

<sup>19</sup> Sander Gilman, “Touch, Sexuality and Disease”, in W.F. Bynum and Roy Porter (eds), *Medicine and the Five Senses* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 199-200.

also reinforced European notions that touch was a primitive sense because it was assumed to be the dominant sense of so-called savage peoples; as Scott Manning Stevens notes, the “naked body of the savage thus maximised the exposure of this sense to the world around it”.<sup>20</sup>

Finally, smell is one of the more ambiguous senses, and perhaps the most elusive to historical investigation. It is considered a “higher faculty” because it “can perceive objects at a distance”, but at the same time it is “stronger in animals than in humans”, which makes it seem more debased.<sup>21</sup> More importantly, as Clare Brant further notes, “Smell has an evanescence that makes comprehensive recovery difficult” for “it evades representation in words and pictures”.<sup>22</sup> Consequently, there has been little significant scholarship on the history of smell compared to other senses; as Constance Classen, David Howes and Anthony Synott argue, “smell is repressed in the modern West, and its social history ignored”.<sup>23</sup> Yet smell has impacted on the history of how human groups relate to others; it is one of the main ways in which people distinguish between the familiar and the unknown. Annick le Guérer asserts that it “can inspire either recognition or rejection”.<sup>24</sup> This response is prosaically explained by anthropologist Constance Classens, who argues that the tendency to ascribe odours to other races and social groups is universal because “most people are so accustomed to their own personal and group scents as to

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<sup>20</sup> Scott Manning Stevens, “New World Contacts and the Trope of the ‘Naked Savage’”, in Elizabeth D. Harvey (ed.), *Sensible Flesh: On Touch in Early Modern Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), p. 135.

<sup>21</sup> Clare Brant, “Fume and Perfume: Some Eighteenth-Century Uses of Smell”, *Journal of British Studies*, 43 (2004), p. 446.

<sup>22</sup> Brant, “Fume and Perfume”, p. 449.

<sup>23</sup> Constance Classen, David Howes and Anthony Synott, *Aroma: The Cultural History of Smell* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. ii. See also Smith, *Sensing the Past*, p. 59.

<sup>24</sup> Annick le Guérer, *Scent: The Mysterious and Essential Powers of Smell*, translated by Richard Miller (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993), p. 24. Cited in Brant, “Fume and Perfume”, pp. 455-456.

not be aware of them and only notice the odours of others”.<sup>25</sup> Yet, at various times in history accusations of malodorousness and stench have been used to oppress, malign and mistreat women, slaves, the lower classes and non-European people, most notably African slaves transported to the New World. Consequently, smell is as an “index of cultural difference” and, increasingly since the eighteenth-century, odourlessness has been considered in the West a sign of progress and civilisation.

While sensory history has developed in recent decades, there has yet to be a systematic study of how ideas of the senses influenced cross-cultural encounters between European explorers and indigenous peoples. This essay will examine the accounts of late eighteenth-century expeditions to Australia, comparing the French expeditions led by Marc-Joseph Marion du Fresne, Bruni d’Entrecasteaux and Nicolas Baudin, which explored Van Diemen’s Land in 1772, 1792 and 1793, and 1802 respectively, with the British First Fleet’s exploration and settlement of Port Jackson under Governor Arthur Phillip (1788-1792). I will examine the explorers’ attempts to understand the different sensory capacities of Aboriginal people, that is, the Europeans’ fragmentary and occasionally detailed observations about Aboriginal people’s reactions to various smells, tastes, textures, sounds and sights they provided. The sensory stimuli the explorers most often deployed consisted of their personal belongings, food and beverages, though, unfortunately, their expectations that Aboriginal people would be astounded and impressed by what they took in of the Europeans’ supposedly superior material culture, cuisine and physicality went unrealised. Instead, I will argue, the explorers were often affronted by the lackadaisical Aboriginal responses, and developed a growing unease at finding their own bodies and physical capabilities the subject of indigenous perceptions.

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<sup>25</sup> Classens, *Worlds of Sense*, p. 59.

## Smell

Even though the European explorers were no doubt “on the nose” themselves due to their confined shipboard conditions and late eighteenth-century hygiene standards, they recorded their observations of Aboriginal people’s apparently unpleasant smell. Lieutenant David Collins, the judge-advocate of the Port Jackson colony, noted that “both women and men” emanated “a most horrible stench” during the hot weather. This, he explained, was due to the “perspiration from their bodies” and their “disgusting practice of rubbing fish-oil into their skins” which served “as a guard against the effects of the air and of mosquitoes, and flies; some of which are large, and bite or sting with much severity”. Even though he understood the reason behind the practice, his visceral revulsion at their smell was perhaps compounded by seeing some people “with the entrails of fish frying in the burning sun upon their heads, until the oil ran down over their foreheads”.<sup>26</sup>

Although the British found the Port Jackson Aborigines malodorous, they were surprised to find that in turn Aboriginal people were sensitive to British smells. Governor Phillip noted that even though the “bodies of these people in general smell strongly of oil [...] they are not without emotions of disgust, when they meet with strong effluvia to which their organs are unaccustomed”.<sup>27</sup> In this instance, he had just observed a man who, “after having touched a piece of pork, held out his finger for his companions to smell, with strong marks of distaste”. In this instance, Phillip was affronted by the man’s apparent disdain for the aroma of his

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<sup>26</sup> David Collins, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales*, edited by Brian Fletcher (Sydney: A.H. & A.W. Reed in association with the Royal Australian Historical Society, 2 vols, 1975), vol. I, p. 457.

<sup>27</sup> Arthur Phillip, *The Voyage of Governor Phillip to Botany Bay: with contributions by other Officers of the First Fleet and observations on affairs of the time by Lord Auckland*, edited by James J. Auchmuty (Sydney: Angus & Robertson in association with the Royal Australian Historical Society, 1970), p. 78.

food, despite his own bodily odour. Watkin Tench similarly observed of Arabanoo, the first man the British held captive in the colony, that “Bread and salt meat he smelled at, but would not taste”, presumably because the smell was not to his liking.<sup>28</sup> French explorers also noticed in Van Diemen’s Land that the Aboriginal people did not appreciate their smell. Alexandre d’Hesmivy d’Auribeau, d’Entrecasteaux’s captain on the *Recherche*, gave an old man he had encountered “a sniff of eau de Cologne” in order to gauge his reaction. The man responded by making “a slight face”, leading the Frenchman to infer that “he did not like this smell, which was apparently too strong”.<sup>29</sup> The explorers generally received a stronger reaction from the Aboriginal people when they tried to ascertain their sense of taste.

## Taste

British and French explorers alike recorded various details about the Aboriginal diet, that is, the foods they ate and how they both procured and prepared them. The British First Fleet officers frequently asserted that the Port Jackson Aborigines only ate fish, for they were regularly seen fishing with nets or spears on the harbour. Further, they tended to assume that Aboriginal people lacked the skills and equipment to hunt the timid kangaroos and fowl that had posed such a challenge to their own armed gamesmen. Despite their assertions, however, the British unwittingly detailed a relatively varied Aboriginal diet.<sup>30</sup> Tench pitied the Aborigines

<sup>28</sup> Watkin Tench, *Sydney’s First Four Years, being a reprint of ‘A Narrative of the Expedition to Botany Bay’ and ‘A Complete Account of the Settlement at Port Jackson’*, edited by L.F. Fitzhardinge (Sydney: Library of Australian History in association with the Royal Australian Historical Society, 1979 [1789 & 1793]), p. 140.

<sup>29</sup> See the extract from d’Hesmivy d’Auribeau’s *Journal* presented under the title “D’Hesmivy d’Auribeau’s first meeting with the Natives, 1793”, in Brian Plomley and Josiane Piard-Bernier, *The General: the visits of the expedition led by Bruny d’Entrecasteaux to Tasmanian waters in 1792 and 1793* (Launceston: Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, 1993), p. 286.

<sup>30</sup> Shino Konishi, “Idle men: the eighteenth-century roots of the Indigenous indolence myth”, in Frances Peters-Little, Ann Curthoys and John Docker (eds), *Passionate Histories:*



for having “no resource but to pick up shellfish, which may happen to cling to the rocks and be cast on the beach, to hunt particular reptiles and small animals, which are scarce, to dig fern roots in the swamps or gather a few berries, destitute of flavour and nutrition which the woods afford”.<sup>31</sup> Collins similarly documented the range of food sources they ate to the Britons’ “wonder and disgust”, such as “large worms and grubs”, and eels which they caught in traps “at a certain season of the year”.<sup>32</sup>

However, this distaste may have been peculiar to the British. It is widely asserted that, despite the plethora of new foods introduced in the wake of their imperial expansion, eighteenth-century Britons rejected foreign foods and instead “emphasised the Englishness of their national cuisine” in order to distinguish themselves from their continental rivals.<sup>33</sup> Howes and Lalonde suggest that “to eat British food was to affirm one’s participation in the British nation”,<sup>34</sup> a precept which might have been especially pressing for the Port Jackson colonists, far removed from their homeland in a still largely unexplored and unknown new land. Other Europeans, in contrast, seemed more open to exploring exotic tastes. Collins revealed that his “European” servant “often joined [the Aborigines] in eating” grubs, assuring the sceptical judge-advocate that “it was sweeter than any marrow he had ever tasted”.<sup>35</sup>

The French explorers were also more appreciative of the Aboriginal diet than the British had been. During their exploration of D’Entrecasteaux Channel in Van Diemen’s Land, members of the Baudin expedition encountered a very friendly Aboriginal family returning to

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*Myth, Memory and Indigenous Australia* (Canberra: Australian National University E Press, Aboriginal History Monograph 21, 2010), pp. 106-110.

<sup>31</sup> Tench, *Sydney’s First Four Years*, p. 287.

<sup>32</sup> Collins, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales*, vol. I, p. 462.

<sup>33</sup> Smith, *Sensing the Past*, p. 82.

<sup>34</sup> Howes and Lalonde, “The History of Sensibilities”, p. 128.

<sup>35</sup> Collins, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales*, vol. I, p. 462.

their huts after fishing for shellfish. The family's old patriarch took Henri Freycinet by the hand and motioned for the Frenchmen to return with them to their huts where they could prepare their freshly caught shellfish, a "large species of haliotis [abalone] that [was] peculiar to these shores". Upon arriving, they immediately lit a fire. They then placed the big shells on the flames, "and there (as in a dish) the flesh cooked. It was then swallowed, without any sort of seasoning or preparation." As Péron goes on to note: "Eating these shellfish, cooked in this way, we found them very tender and succulent."<sup>36</sup> The British, on the other hand, rejected the indigenous modes of cooking and immediately assumed that they could introduce their own superior culinary techniques to the primitive natives. On Phillip's first encounter with Aborigines at Port Jackson, an intrepid man approached the landing party and, under the governor's guidance, "voluntarily intrusted himself" to be taken to their fire where some of the marines were "boiling their meat". He appeared to marvel at this method, so the British inferred that Aborigines only knew how to broil their food. Phillip "contrived to make him understand that large shells might conveniently be used" for boiling, and hoped that this man would then "introduce the art of boiling among his countrymen".<sup>37</sup> While the British and French explorers differed in their evaluations of the indigenous culinary arts, both assumed that they could tantalise the Aboriginal sense of taste with their own superior foods.

The British and French alike hoped that by literally breaking bread with the Aboriginal people they would eventually be welcomed into their company, but unfortunately the unwilling hosts usually "return'd [the

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<sup>36</sup> François Péron, *Voyage of Discovery to the Southern Lands*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, translated by Christine Cornell (Adelaide: The Friends of the State Library of South Australia, 2 vols, 2006/2003 [1824]), vol. I, p. 181. The members of the Baudin expedition were perhaps more open to new indigenous food sources such as the haliotis because there were several naturalists on board who had the taxonomic skills to recognise newly discovered species, whereas many of the British officers of the First Fleet did not.

<sup>37</sup> Phillip, *Voyage of Governor Phillip*, p. 49.

bread] or threw it away without so much as tasting it".<sup>38</sup> On the rare occasions on which they did agree to taste the bread they were offered, they usually "threw the rest back in [the Europeans'] faces with a kind of disdain".<sup>39</sup> This reluctance to try European fare at first confounded the explorers. The naturalist Jacques-Julien Houtou de Labillardière exclaimed: "We did not know to what to ascribe their repugnance for our viands, but they would taste none that we offered them". He was surprised that they "would not even suffer their children to eat the sugar [they] gave them, being very careful to take it out of their mouths the moment they were going to taste it".<sup>40</sup> Yet the indigenous people accepted familiar indigenous foods that were presented to them, such as fish or turtles on the mainland and lobster in Van Diemen's Land, suggesting that their reticence to taste what the Europeans offered them was not simply a sign of their disinclination to fraternise with the strangers. Élisabeth-Paul-Édouard de Rossel, d'Entrecasteaux's lieutenant and astronomer, at first wondered if Aboriginal people's unwillingness to try European food was due to "some unfortunate experience they had with previous navigators". However, on further reflection he was "inclined to think" that they instinctively only wanted to "eat the sort of food with which their upbringing [...] had acquainted them".<sup>41</sup>

<sup>38</sup> James Cook, *The Journals of Captain James Cook on his Voyage of Discovery, 4 vols, Volume One: The Voyage of the Endeavour 1768-1771*, edited by J.C. Beaglehole (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1955), p. 52.

<sup>39</sup> Le Dez, *Extrait d'un nouveau voyage en australazie en 1772*, Archives Nationales de France (Archives Privées), Fonds Bougainville 155 AP 3, pièce 4. See Edward Duyker (ed.), *The Discovery of Tasmania: Journal Extracts from the Expeditions of Abel Janszoon Tasman and Marc-Joseph Marion Dufresne 1642 & 1772*, translated by Edward, Herman & Maryse Duyker (Hobart: St. David's Park Publishing, 1992), p. 32.

<sup>40</sup> Jacques de Labillardière, *Voyage in Search of La Pérouse, Performed by Order of the Constituent Assembly, During the Years 1791, 1792, 1793, and 1794...* Translated from the French (London: John Stockdale, 2 vols, 1800), vol. II, p. 47.

<sup>41</sup> From Rossel's edition of the *Voyage de d'Entrecasteaux* (Paris: Imprimerie impériale, 2 vols, 1808), vol. 1. Quoted from the English translation of the relevant extract in Plomley and Piard-Bernier, *The General*, p. 308. Baudin noted instances in which the Aboriginal

Despite recognising Aboriginal people's conservative tastes, the French persisted in trying to tempt them. The explorers' rations of beer, wine and spirits were one of their scant shipboard luxuries, and they hoped that these prized possessions would tantalise Aboriginal tastebuds. One of d'Entrecasteaux's sailors imagined that "he could not regale them better than with a glass of brandy". However, he was vexed to find that when the men tasted his valuable liquor they promptly spat it out.<sup>42</sup> Labillardière observed that "it seemed to have given them a very disagreeable sensation".<sup>43</sup> Such a fussy palate surprised the French explorers, given that the Aboriginal people seemed "infinitely unparticular about water" and would happily drink it no matter how "turbid and muddy" it was by simply spitting out "the foreign bodies that they could not swallow".<sup>44</sup> The British observed a similar aversion to alcohol among some of the New Hollanders. Arabanoo and Colbee, another kidnapping victim, allowed themselves to smell the various "liquors" offered, but refused to try them, drinking only water.<sup>45</sup>

Bennelong, who was taken captive at the same time as Colbee, was the notable exception. The British were struck by Bennelong's immediate fondness for their "viands", and by the fact that he drank their liquors

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people would "neither eat nor drink anything that our men took ashore with them." See Christine Cornell (trans.), *The Journal of Post-Captain Nicolas Baudin, Commander-in-Chief of the Corvettes Géographe and Naturaliste, assigned by order of the Government to a Voyage of Discovery* (Adelaide: The Friends of the State Library of South Australia, 2004 [1974]), p. 305. See also p. 318.

<sup>42</sup> Labillardière, *Voyage in Search of La Pérouse*, vol. II, p. 39. One of Baudin's sailors also tried to instigate a friendly exchange with the Aboriginal people by giving a young man a bottle of arrack, which was a valuable part of the crew's alcohol allowance, but the man threw the bottle overboard without even tasting it, causing a comrade of the rebuffed sailor to dive into the water to rescue it. Péron, *Voyage of Discovery*, vol. I, p. 178.

<sup>43</sup> Labillardière, *Voyage in Search of La Pérouse*, vol. II, p. 39.

<sup>44</sup> "D'Hesmivy d'Auribeau's first meeting", in Plomley and Piard-Bernier, *The General*, p. 282.

<sup>45</sup> Tench, *Sydney's First Four Years*, pp. 140 and 159.

“with eager marks of delight and enjoyment”.<sup>46</sup> Tench was particularly surprised that Bennelong was not more affected by alcohol, given that fermented drinks were new to him.<sup>47</sup> When Baudin’s expedition arrived at Port Jackson in 1802, Pierre Bernard Milius had the opportunity to meet Bennelong and was at first charmed by his “rather good” English and by his reminiscences about his years spent in England.<sup>48</sup> Yet during his visits Milius found that Bennelong “drank to the health of Lady Dundas and would have happily drunk to the health of all the ladies of England had I been inclined to pour him more drinks”.<sup>49</sup> Milius usually grew weary of Bennelong’s over indulgence, and was “obliged on several occasions to throw him out”.<sup>50</sup> Fortunately not all of the explorers’ experiments on their indigenous subjects’ senses led to such ignominious ends for Aboriginal people.

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<sup>46</sup> In the end, though, Bennelong’s tendency to over-imbibe overshadowed other aspects of his life and character. His obituary stated that “His propensity for drunkenness was inordinate; and when in this state he was insolent, menacing and overbearing. In fact, he was a thorough savage, not to be warped from the form and character that nature gave him by all the efforts that mankind could use”. *Sydney Gazette*, 3 January 1813, cited in Inga Clendinnen, *Dancing with Strangers* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2003), p. 271.

<sup>47</sup> Tench, *Sydney’s First Four Years*, pp. 159-160.

<sup>48</sup> Milius refers to this man as Banedou, but he must be referring to Bennelong for he states that this man had lived a number of years in England. Bennelong went to England with Governor Phillip in 1792 and, after several requests, returned to Sydney in 1795. Pierre Bernard Milius, *Récit du voyage aux Terres Australes par Pierre Bernard Milius, second sur le Naturaliste dans l’expédition Baudin (1800-1804)*, transcription du texte original par Jacqueline Bonnemains et Pascale Hauguel (Le Havre: Société havraise d’études diverses, Muséum d’histoire naturelle du Havre, 1987), p. 49.

<sup>49</sup> “Il me parut conserver le souvenir de plusieurs personnes qu’il avait connues en Angleterre, il but à la santé de Lady Dundas et aurait volontiers porté la santé de toutes les dames anglaises, si j’avais été disposé à lui faire verser à boire”. Milius, *Récit du voyage aux Terres Australes*, p. 49 (my translation).

<sup>50</sup> “Mr Banedou renouvela si fréquemment ses visites, qu’elles finirent par m’importuner. Je fus obligé, différentes fois, de le mettre à la porte.” Milius, *Récit du voyage aux Terres Australes*, p. 49.

## Touch

British and French explorers observed many occasions on which Aboriginal people touched each other. Perhaps the best known examples are early British accounts of Aboriginal men's brutal treatment of women, in which they were seen casually to deal blows against them.<sup>51</sup> Lesser known are the explorers' observations of Aboriginal people's tender handling of their children. Bruni d'Entrecasteaux observed a family in Van Diemen's Land, and was pleased to "witness the tokens of tenderness that these simple and kind men display towards their children. [...] They were caressing them and played with them in a most engaging way". He noticed that the "children's trifling quarrels were soothed without violence by a slight punishment, followed by caresses which promptly dried the tears". D'Entrecasteaux proclaimed that this "primordial natural affection is alive in them in all its purity and intensity", and lamented: "Oh! how much would those civilised people who boast about the extent of their knowledge learn from this school of nature!"<sup>52</sup> The delicacy of the Aboriginal people's sense of touch was also observed by the British First Fleet officers. The astronomer, Lieutenant William Dawes, recorded the most detailed vocabulary of an Aboriginal language to be made in the eighteenth century, and his notebooks on the Eora languages reveal the increasingly intimate relationship he developed with his young female informant Patyegeerang. He learned from her, for instance, that the word *Putuwá* meant: "To warm one's hand by the fire and then to squeeze gently

<sup>51</sup> See Clendinnen, *Dancing with Strangers*, pp. 159-167. For a critique of historians' prima facie acceptance of these accounts, see Shino Konishi, "Wanton with Plenty: Questioning Ethno-historical Constructions of Sexual Savagery in Aboriginal Societies, 1788-1803", *Australian Historical Studies*, 39, 3 (2008), pp. 356-372.

<sup>52</sup> Bruni d'Entrecasteaux, *Voyages to Australia and the Pacific 1791-1793*, edited and translated by Edward Duyker and Maryse Duyker (Carlton South, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 2001), p. 142. See also Labillardiere, *Voyage in Search of La Pérouse*, vol. II, p. 302.



the fingers of another person".<sup>53</sup> These accounts of intimate touching were brief observations, however.

Perhaps the most detailed investigation of the perceived meanings Aboriginal people attributed to touch was François Péron's lengthy discussion on the Van Diemen's Land Aborigines' ostensible ignorance of "the action of *embracing*".<sup>54</sup> During his time spent with the Oyster Bay people, Péron noticed that they did not appear to embrace one another. He found this curious. "In vain", he notes, "did I address myself to several of them in turn to make them understand what I wished to discover". He concludes that "they knew nothing of it." To be absolutely sure, he "went to put [his] face close to theirs so as to kiss them" and, when they responded with a "look of surprise", he assumed it was the look that "an unfamiliar action produces in us"—one he "had already observed among the natives of D'Entrecasteaux Channel". Then, when he actually kissed them, he asked "*Gouanarana?* (what is that called?)", and found that their "unanimous response was: *Nidegô* (I don't know, I don't understand)". Péron conducted a similar experiment with caressing, again receiving only looks of "surprise" and eliciting the word "*nidegô*" in response to his caresses. He likewise deduced that the "notion of *caressing* seems to be just as foreign to them". The zoologist thus concluded that "these two actions—so full of charm and, to us, so natural: kissing and affectionate caressing—would appear to be unknown to these fierce, primitive people." Unlike d'Entrecasteaux, Péron "never saw—whether in Van Diemen's Land or whether in New Holland—a single savage embracing another of his sex or even of the opposite sex".<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> William Dawes, *Vocabulary of the language of N.S. Wales in the neighbourhood of Sydney. Native and English*, by Dawes, [notebook B], Ms 41645 (b), Marsden Collection, Library of the School of Oriental and African Studies, London, 1790-1791, p. 21. URL: <http://www.williamdawes.org/ms/contents.php> (accessed 10 March 2010).

<sup>54</sup> Péron, *Voyage of Discovery*, p. 222.

<sup>55</sup> Péron, *Voyage of Discovery*, p. 222.

However, the explorers' descriptions of the Aborigines' haptic sensations were not limited to their intimate interactions with one another. They also included the effects of the inclement weather on their naked bodies. This is important, for, as literary scholar Scott Manning Stevens argues, "It is the sense of touch that primarily governs all human interactions with our environment".<sup>56</sup> In an attempt to elicit a friendly first encounter with the Aboriginal people of Van Diemen's Land, Marion du Fresne instructed two of his men to strip naked before meeting the Tasmanians. Perhaps it was this incident which aroused the Frenchmen's sympathy: it gave them first-hand experience of the cold these people had to endure. Le Dez posited that "they must suffer very much during the winter, which must be long and hard".<sup>57</sup> Though their two ships the *Mascarin* and the *Marquis de Castries* had visited Tasmania during the summer, the Frenchmen still found it startlingly cold. One of the ensigns, Jean Roux, noticed that: "Although they are situated in a higher latitude than our Europe, the cold is infinitely more unbearable. The actual season here is summer, but it is as cold as February in our climate."<sup>58</sup> Having determined that the Tasmanians went naked, they assumed that their only method for "fending off the cold" was "by lighting fires",<sup>59</sup> and that this was why they "are never without fire".<sup>60</sup>

The British in Port Jackson also observed Aboriginal people "shivering and huddling themselves up in heaps" as they waited "until

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<sup>56</sup> Stevens, "New World Contacts", p. 135.

<sup>57</sup> Le Dez, *Extrait*, in Duyker, *The Discovery of Tasmania*, p. 34.

<sup>58</sup> Jean Roux, *Journal du voyage fait sur le vaisseau du Roi 'Le Mascarin', commandé par M. Marion, Chevalier de l'Ordre Royal et Militaire de St Louis, Capitaine de Brulot: accompagné de la Flutte 'le Marquis de Castries' pour faire le voyage de L'Isle de Taity ou de Cythère, en faisant la découverte des Terres Australes, passant à la nouvelle hollande, à la nouvelle Zelande &c. &c.*, Archives Nationales de France, Série Marine, 4JJ 142 °18. Quoted in English translation in Duyker, *The Discovery of Tasmania*, p. 42.

<sup>59</sup> Le Dez, *Extrait*, in Duyker, *The Discovery of Tasmania*, p. 34.

<sup>60</sup> Roux, *Journal*, in Duyker, *The Discovery of Tasmania*, p. 42.

a fire can be kindled” to warm themselves.<sup>61</sup> Governor Arthur Phillip observed some Aboriginal people during a rain shower, and noticed that they covered their heads with pieces of bark. He assumed that their nakedness was merely a consequence of their ignorance, and hoped to take advantage of their sensitivity to the cold and attempt to civilise the “savages” by introducing them to the benefits of clothing. He claimed that it was “undeniably certain that to teach the shivering savage how to clothe his body, and to shelter himself completely from the cold and wet” was imperative.<sup>62</sup> To this end the governor ordered a supply of “frocks and jackets to distribute among them, the design of which [was] to be made long and loose, and to serve for either men or women”.<sup>63</sup> He also made Bennelong wear an outfit made of “thick kersey so that he may be so sensible of the cold as not to be able to go without cloaths”.<sup>64</sup> To his consternation, this plan failed, for, when Bennelong eventually absconded from the colony, he first “stripped himself of his very decent cloathing, left them behind, and walked off”.<sup>65</sup> Rather than developing a sensitivity

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<sup>61</sup> Tench, *Sydney's First Four Years*, p. 47.

<sup>62</sup> Phillip, *Voyage of Governor Phillip*, p. 141.

<sup>63</sup> Phillip, *Voyage of Governor Phillip*, p. 138.

<sup>64</sup> P.G. King, “Lieutenant King’s Journal”, in John Hunter, *An Historical Journal of Events at Sydney and at Sea, 1787-1792, by Captain John Hunter, Commander H.M.S. Sirius, with Further Accounts by Governor Arthur Phillip, Lieutenant P.G. King, and Lieutenant H.L. Ball*, edited by John Bach (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1968 [1793]), p. 269. Clendinnen states that “Phillip’s very basic strategy was to develop a physical dependence on warmth”. Clendinnen, *Dancing with Strangers*, p. 108.

<sup>65</sup> John Hunter, *An Historical Journal of the Transactions at Port Jackson and Norfolk Island...* (Adelaide: Libraries Board of South Australia, Australiana Facsimile Editions No. 148, 1968 [1793]), p. 139. It would become apparent that Bennelong associated clothing with the colony. The first time he was seen again was at the whale feast four months later, where he was naked and, to some of the officers, barely recognisable. He agreed to meet with the governor; but first put on a shirt to wear. Despite having worn one throughout his five-month long incarceration, he only managed to put it on after being assisted. Tench, *Sydney's First Four Years*, p. 135. Evidently, clothing bore no lasting significance to him, and he only wore a shirt in recognition of its importance to Phillip.

to the cold, Bennelong returned to his own people's custom of apparent undress.

The explorers' observations of the Aborigines' tactile sense were not limited to what they saw, but also encompassed what they themselves felt when they were touched, prodded and poked by them. Marion du Fresne's two sailors who were sent ashore naked in Van Diemen's Land initially received a very warm reception. One of the ensigns, Paul Chevillard de Montesson, recorded that the "Diemenlanders could not leave looking at them and touching them". He attributed this to the fact that "they were two big boys, well-built and very white".<sup>66</sup> This tactile inspection was not an uncommon experience for the explorers, especially when there was a question over their gender. Jacques de Saint Cricq, a sub-lieutenant on the Baudin expedition, noted that when "they saw a beardless one among us, they would immediately feel his breast and often they would even unbutton his waistcoat, to make certain that he was not a woman".<sup>67</sup>

The Port Jackson Aboriginal people were also curious to see if the explorers practised the same customs as they did and, without the benefit of a common language, would resort to rough touching in order to find out. As Arthur Bowes Smyth reports, the British, noting that "Every one had the tooth next to the fore tooth in his upper jaw knock'd out", were "at a Loss as to y<sup>e</sup> Motive of this Custom".<sup>68</sup> However, the First Fleet officers

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Whether this was to indulge the governor's tastes or to suggest he was Phillip's equal is difficult to ascertain.

<sup>66</sup> Paul Chevillard de Montesson, *Journal of the voyage of M. Marion Dufresne, Fireship Captain and Knight of Saint Louis, Commanding the King's flute the Mascarin having under his orders the Chevalier Duclesmeur; Naval Guard, Commanding the Marquis de Castries. Departed from the Isle de France for Otahiti and New Zealand.* Quoted in Edward Duyker, *The Discovery of Tasmania*, p. 47.

<sup>67</sup> N.J.B. Plomley, *The Baudin Expedition and the Tasmanian Aborigines, 1802* (Hobart: Blubberhead Press, 1983), p. 141.

<sup>68</sup> Arthur Bowes Smyth, *The Journal of Arthur Bowes Smyth: Surgeon on Lady Penryth*

quickly recognised that tooth avulsion was a significant custom within the local polity. They also realised that the Aboriginal people wondered if they too adopted the same practice after they noticed that Governor Phillip was missing his front tooth. George Worgan, who had first-hand experience of their rough investigations, claimed that “they will sometimes thrust their Fingers into your mouth to see if you have parted with this Tooth”.<sup>69</sup> They were similarly curious to see if the Europeans pierced their noses. While most of the Aboriginal men had nasal piercings, they did not always wear an adornment, and Captain John Hunter noted that it was only a minority who wore a “stick or small bone” in their nose.<sup>70</sup> Consequently, though the piercing could, according to James Cook, who visited the east coast of New Holland in 1770, accommodate a bone as “thick as his finger”, the aperture was not always obvious. Hence, it was not immediately apparent to the Aboriginal men that the Europeans did not also have their noses pierced. Worgan reported that one of the Port Jackson men wanted to know if he “likewise” had “the hole in that part”, and in order to find out “picked up a Quill one Day” and tried to “poke it through [Worgan’s] Nose”. Not satisfied with trying his experiment on the poor surgeon, the “Fellow” then performed the same test on “two or three other Gentlemen’s” noses.<sup>71</sup> While these indigenous investigations might have been somewhat painful, however, they were not as humiliating as when the Europeans tried to ascertain Aboriginal people’s sense of hearing.

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1787-89, edited by Paul G. Fidlon and R.J. Ryan (Sydney: Australian Documents Library, 1979), p. 57, and George Worgan, *Journal of a First Fleet Surgeon* (Sydney: Library Council of New South Wales in association with the Library of Australian History, 1978), p. 14.

<sup>69</sup> Worgan, *Journal*, p. 14.

<sup>70</sup> William Bradley, *A Voyage to New South Wales: The Journal of Lieutenant William Bradley RN of HMS Sirius, 1786-1792* (Sydney: Trustees of the Public Library of New South Wales, facsimile edition, 1969), p. 73.

<sup>71</sup> Worgan, *Journal*, p. 14, and Phillip, *Voyage*, p. 42.

## Hearing

Perhaps the easiest and most entertaining method the explorers came up with to gauge the Aborigines' sense of hearing was to see how they reacted to loud bangs produced by exploding gunpowder or firing guns. Alexandre d'Hesmivy d'Auribeau, captain of d'Entrecasteaux's *Espérance*, tried this method a number of times. The first time, he "placed gunpowder on an oyster shell and set fire to it". Initially, the Aborigines were frightened by the "resulting explosion", but then he thought their response turned to "admiration" for they "pressed [him] strongly to do it again several times, and their astonishment was always the same". Encouraged by their reactions, d'Hesmivy d'Auribeau then had "a double-barrelled gun" brought to him. However, aware of the gun's capabilities, perhaps from seeing the explorers hunting or else remembering Marion du Fresne's tragic visit twenty years earlier, which had resulted in the killing of a local man, the Aboriginal people's fear of the weapon was patently communicated to him. On seeing it, they immediately "lay down with their eyes shut, wishing to show [him] that this weapon caused death". Despite this unambiguous signal, d'Hesmivy d'Auribeau "had the two shots fired a little way off in an opposite direction" and saw that the "noise frightened them greatly". Finally, the Frenchman realised that he would "be offending them if [he] did it again".<sup>72</sup>

On encountering a different group of Aboriginal people a little while later, d'Hesmivy d'Auribeau again wanted to gauge their reaction to loud explosions. He was disappointed that he "could not obtain any fire in order to show them the explosion of gunpowder that had produced so startling an effect on the natives" before, so he "lit torchwood with a flint and steel in front of them, but they paid little attention". Realising that he could only provoke a strong reaction by producing a loud noise,

<sup>72</sup> "D'Hesmivy d'Auribeau's first meeting", in Plomley and Piard-Bernier, *The General*, pp. 279-280.



he decided “to try firing a gun” again. He picked one up and “showed them as well as [he] could the noise that it would make, then fired it some distance off” from everyone. Again, the Aboriginal people “were all extraordinarily frightened”, and the French explorers could only “reassure them by giving them a few objects and behaving cheerfully”.<sup>73</sup> From his crude experiments, d’Hesmivy d’Auribeau only learned that Aboriginal people were deathly afraid of guns.

The more serious study of the Aborigines’ sense of hearing was achieved through gentler means. The members of the Baudin expedition, for example, were particularly keen to see how Aboriginal people would respond to musical sounds. They were guided in this by the instructions drawn up by Degérando, which specified that explorers should seek wherever possible to examine Aboriginal songs and musical instruments because he assumed these were one of the main amusements in Indigenous society.<sup>74</sup> Degérando observed that it was often striking to the European that “people with scarcely a subsistence [concern] themselves with their pleasures” such as music.<sup>75</sup> Whenever the opportunity arose, Baudin’s men tested the Aboriginal ear. On the previously mentioned occasion on which they shared an abalone meal cooked by a friendly family in Van Diemen’s Land, the explorers came up with the idea of repaying their hosts by “giving them some music”. This was, however, not so much “to entertain them” as to “discover what effects [their] songs would have upon [the Aborigines]”. After some discussion, the explorers decided to sing a spirited rendition of *La Marseillaise*, because, even though it had been “so unfortunately prostituted during the revolution”, Péron thought

<sup>73</sup> “D’Hesmivy d’Auribeau’s third meeting with the Natives, 1793”, in Plomley and Piard-Bernier, *The General*, p. 285.

<sup>74</sup> His list of their imagined “arts of amusement” is rather brief and chaste, encompassing “songs and musical instruments”, poetry, an appreciation of “perfect harmony”, and “luxuries which are sometimes so extraordinary”. Degérando, *The Observation of Savage Peoples*, pp. 97-98.

<sup>75</sup> Degérando, *The Observation of Savage Peoples*, pp. 97-98.

its “warlike music” was “charged with warmth and enthusiasm” and best “suited [their] purpose”. When the explorers began to sing, they noticed the Aboriginal people react instantly as they abandoned their meals and “listened attentively”, before manifesting their satisfaction “in such bizarre contortions and gestures” that the French “had difficulty in containing [their] pressing desire to laugh”. The Aboriginal family “had no less trouble, during the song, in stifling their enthusiasm; but as soon as a verse came to an end, they all cried out together in admiration”. One young man caught the explorers’ attention as he “seemed to be beside himself; he tugged his hair, scratched his head with both hands, his body moved about and, at different times, he shouted long and loud”. At the same time “the little children were imitating their relatives’ grimaces and gestures”. For Péron, “there was no quainter sight than that of these small piccaninnies jumping for joy at the sound of our singing”.<sup>76</sup>

The French explorers had no explanation for the audience’s exuberant reaction to their song, and their bewilderment was further compounded by the indigenous response to their next serenade. The Aborigines’ apparent appreciation of the rendition of *La Marseillaise* convinced the explorers to regale them with another song, and this time they tried some “tender little airs”. Given the explorers’ aim was to “discover what effects [their] songs would have” upon their indigenous subjects, perhaps they chose a more sentimental song in order to gauge the Aborigines’ sensibility and aesthetic appreciation. Historian James H. Johnson argues that “at the end of the Old Regime” a “new way of listening” emerged amongst French audiences, “one more attuned to sentiments and emotions in the music”. This development encouraged audiences to “turn inward to feel the passions the music evoked”.<sup>77</sup> Perhaps the French explorers, then, aimed

<sup>76</sup> Péron, *Voyage of Discovery*, pp. 181-182.

<sup>77</sup> James H. Johnson, *Listening in Paris: A Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, Studies on the History of Society and Culture, 21, 1995), p. 81. Quoted in Smith, *Sensing the Past*, p. 50.

to ascertain whether the Aboriginal people had the capacity to listen to their “tender airs” and reflect quietly upon the emotions they invoked, rather than just responding mimetically as they had done to the stirring rhythm of the first song.

As the Frenchmen crooned, they thought that the “natives certainly appeared to grasp their [songs’] actual meaning”, but were perplexed by the Aborigines’ muted response, leading Péron to presume that “sounds of that kind affected them only slightly”.<sup>78</sup> While it is evidently impossible to recover the significance of ballads in the pre-colonial indigenous society of Van Diemen’s Land, it is also difficult to deduce the reality of their reaction. Péron was so taken with their vociferous response to the first song that perhaps none of the Aboriginal people’s subsequent reactions could have satisfied his new desire for affirmation.

If this was the case, Péron could only be grateful that he did not receive the same response d’Entrecasteaux’s men had met with two decades earlier. At that time Alexandre-François La Fresnaye de Saint-Aignan, the newly appointed captain of the *Recherche*, noticed that the Aboriginal people did not appear to have any musical instruments of their own. This, combined with the enthusiastic response he had received from the “islanders at Bouka” in the Solomon Islands, inspired him to play his violin for his Aboriginal audience. However, according to Labillardière, when Saint-Aignan began to play, his “self-love [ego] was truly mortified, at the indifference shown to his performance”. Even though Labillardière himself dismissed Saint-Aignan’s recital by describing it as “some noisy tunes”, he still posited that “Savages, in general, are not very sensible to the tones of the stringed instruments”.<sup>79</sup> Jacques-Malo la Motte du Portail supported Labillardière’s hypothesis, proposing that their ears were

<sup>78</sup> Péron, *Voyage of Discovery*, p. 181.

<sup>79</sup> Labillardière, *Voyage in Search of La Pérouse*, vol. II, p. 45.

“not susceptible to sound as ours are”.<sup>80</sup> D’Hesmivy d’Auribeau likewise noted that the “sounds and harmony” of the violin “did not delight” the Aborigines at all, and “even displeased them, for they gave [the violinist] to understand that their ears were hurting from the music”. This, along with their reactions to his gunshot experiment, led him to conclude that the Aborigines “do not like and are generally afraid of all that has too violent an effect upon their senses, especially their hearing”.<sup>81</sup>

The musician in Saint-Aignan was, however, not so easily dissuaded. Having realised that the Aboriginal people of Van Diemen’s Land had “little taste for the violin”, Labillardière recorded that the next day, when he and his men again encountered the same group, Saint-Aignan “flattered [himself] that they would not be altogether insensible to its tones if lively tunes, and very distinct in their measure, were played”. This time, the Aboriginal audience waited before reacting, so the musician “redoubled his exertions, in hopes of obtaining their applause”. Unfortunately, it was not forthcoming. After a long pause, his audience finally delivered their judgement *en masse*: “the whole assembly stopp[ed] their ears with their fingers, [so] that they might hear no more”.<sup>82</sup> The poor musician, mortified by this unequivocal reaction, dropped his bow from his hand mid-song, a fact that Labillardière, unlike his fellow observers, made sure to document for posterity. The voyagers were soon able to restore their dignity by singing some songs instead, and were pleased to see that the Aboriginal people “seemed to listen to them with pleasure”.<sup>83</sup> They even accompanied them, singing along “very softly”.<sup>84</sup> The Aboriginal

<sup>80</sup> “Journal of La Motte Du Portail (*Espérance*)”, in Plomley and Piard-Bernier, *The General*, p. 302.

<sup>81</sup> “D’Hesmivy d’Auribeau’s first meeting”, in Plomley and Piard-Bernier, *The General*, p. 281.

<sup>82</sup> Labillardière, *Voyage in Search of La Pérouse*, vol. II, p. 55.

<sup>83</sup> “Journal of La Motte Du Portail (*Espérance*)”, in Plomley and Piard-Bernier, *The General*, p. 302.

<sup>84</sup> “Extracts from the journal of Joseph Raoul, Second pilot on the *Recherche*, for 1793”,

audience then “attempted more than once to charm [the Frenchmen] by songs”. Labillardière observed that “Several times two of them sung the same tune at once, but always one third above the other, forming a concord with the greatest justness”. He was “singularly struck” by the similarity of their tunes “to those of the Arabs of Asia minor”.<sup>85</sup> The musical experiments conducted by the d’Entrecasteaux expedition thus produced mixed results. Again, it is difficult for historians to interpret the Indigenous reaction to European music. Even though all of the explorers thought that the Aboriginal people did not like the sound of the violin, for example, Labillardière’s ambivalent comments about Saint-Aignan’s playing suggest that neither did all of the Europeans.

The British also suffered a lukewarm response to their musical performances. The local Aboriginal people had been very reluctant to enter the confines of the Port Jackson settlement, so great excitement was generated the first time that two of them visited the colony of their own volition. The Governor gave the two visitors some presents and “did every thing that he thought might Induce them to stay, or come again and bri[n]g their Companions”. One of these enticements was a musical rendition: the “Drum was beat before them”, but this appeared to terrify them “exceedingly”. The surgeon George Worgan noticed that they seemed to like the sound of the fife, a loud and shrill small flute, although, perhaps unsurprisingly, only for “2 or 3 minutes” at a time. In general, though, the British were perturbed by the Aborigines’ apparent indifference to the things they hoped would dazzle them. The Aborigines’ only response to the music was occasionally to make a “grunting Noise by way of keeping Time to the Tune”. Worgan complained that the “Objects which must have been entirely new to them did not excite their Curiosity or Astonishment so much as one might have expected”. Even though the

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in Plomley and Piard-Bernier, *The General*, p. 306.

<sup>85</sup> Labillardière, *Voyage in Search of La Pérouse*, vol. II, p. 50.

surgeon was baffled by the Aboriginal visitors' muted response to the Britons' musical performances, he still concluded that "Music of any kind [did] not attract their attention".<sup>86</sup> Like the French, the British were also confident that, after a mere few musical performances, they had accurately assessed Aboriginal people's sense of hearing, and concluded that they had little ear for foreign instruments or loud noises.

## Sight

While the other senses, as we have seen, were not necessarily forgotten or ignored, and have left clear historical traces, for the eighteenth-century explorers the Aborigines' sense of sight was their main interest. Degérando considered sight "the most important" sensation, and his instructions specified that explorers should take the utmost care in observing savage people's sense of sight. Further, it was the only sensation which all explorers traditionally described.<sup>87</sup>

Sight was indeed the only sense which the British buccaneer William Dampier described after his first visit to the north-west of the continent in 1688. Noticing the prodigious number of flies that buzzed around, Dampier claimed that the Aborigines' "Eye-lids are always half closed, to keep the Flies out of their Eyes". Thus, he surmised, "they never open their Eyes as other People, and therefore cannot see far unless they hold up their Heads, as if they were looking at something over them".<sup>88</sup> He was not alone in speculating on the impact the environment had on Aboriginal people's eyesight. Labillardière "imagined that these people, passing most of their nights in the open air, in a climate of which the temperature is so variable, must have been subject to violent inflammations of their

<sup>86</sup> Worgan, *Journal*, p. 19.

<sup>87</sup> Degérando, *Observation of Savage Peoples*, p. 82.

<sup>88</sup> William Dampier, *A New Voyage Round the World. The Journal of an English Buccaneer* (London: Hummingbird Press, 1998), p. 218.



eyes". However, he was surprised to find that "all of them appeared to have their sight very good", with the exception of just one person "who had a cataract".<sup>89</sup>

Despite Dampier's speculation, later explorers generally concluded that Aboriginal people had "particularly fine" eyesight.<sup>90</sup> Tench even pointedly refuted Dampier's earlier claim, asserting that their visual acuity was "far from being defective, as the author [Dampier] mentions those of the inhabitants of the western side of the continent to be". Rather, Tench insisted, their eyes were "remarkably quick and piercing".<sup>91</sup> He did admit, however, that the men's eyesight grew weak at a comparatively younger age, due to the "almost perpetual strain in which the optic nerve [was] kept, by looking out for prey".<sup>92</sup>

Hunter was astounded not only by the accuracy of the Aboriginal men's sight, for he noticed that they "seldom miss their aim" when spearing fish, but also by the strategies they had developed to enhance their vision when hunting. He observed that the colonists sometimes saw men "lying across their canoe[s]" with their face under the water so that they could see the fish clearly, without "the tremulous motion of the surface, occasioned by every light air of wind", obscuring their vision.<sup>93</sup> Collins considered that "their existence very often depend[ed] upon the accuracy" of their eyesight, not only in the procurement of food, but also because of their martial traditions. He observed that the indigenous art of dodging spears thrown by multiple opponents was used in a range of their ceremonies, and in the execution of their laws. Thus, Collins speculated that "a short-sighted man (a misfortune unknown to them [...]) would never be able

<sup>89</sup> Labillardière, *Voyage in Search of La Pérouse*, vol. II, p. 304.

<sup>90</sup> Collins, *Account*, vol. I, p. 459.

<sup>91</sup> Tench, *Sydney's First Four Years*, pp. 46-47.

<sup>92</sup> Tench, *Sydney's First Four Years*, p. 275.

<sup>93</sup> Hunter, *Historical Journal*, p. 63.

to defend himself from their spears, which are thrown with amazing force and velocity”.<sup>94</sup>

The French and British explorers alike were keen to show Aboriginal people a range of European objects in order to gauge their reactions to the foreign wares and perhaps introduce them to the Europeans’ superior technology in an attempt ostensibly to civilise them. D’Hesmivy d’Auribeau noted that, when they showed “a miniature portrait of a woman” to a group of Aboriginal people in Van Diemen’s Land, they “examined it with particular care—the women especially—and displayed great astonishment”.<sup>95</sup> On a later occasion, d’Entrecasteaux’s men convinced three young Aborigines to board their dinghy to visit the ship; however, only one of them braved the journey there. Once aboard, he marvelled at “the great number of new things before him”. D’Hesmivy d’Auribeau “showed him a magnifying mirror” and noted that “he was very surprised by it and very quickly displayed his desire to have it”. Unfortunately, he was not able to keep it as it was d’Hesmivy d’Auribeau’s last one. However, the man seemed equally “delighted by the sight of the fowls in cages”, and almost everything he encountered on the ship he “saw and touched with pleasure”. His only slightly ambiguous response was upon seeing a “gallery” in “the General’s chamber” which held a number of “their assegais, baskets, kangaroo skins etc” that the French had collected in Van Diemen’s Land. On seeing these, “he showed a surprise as extraordinary as it is difficult to convey”, but then quickly seemed “delighted to find these objects again”.<sup>96</sup> The French also demonstrated the use of some of their European objects to the Aboriginal spectators. Saint-Aignan showed

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<sup>94</sup> Collins, *Account*, vol. I, p. 459.

<sup>95</sup> “D’Hesmivy d’Auribeau’s first meeting”, in Plomley and Piard-Bernier, *The General*, p. 281.

<sup>96</sup> “D’Hesmivy d’Auribeau: second meeting with the Natives”, in Plomley and Piard-Bernier, *The General*, p. 284.

them a lens which he “held up to the sun’s rays” in order to “set fire to a piece of touchwood”, “repeating this procedure a number of times in their midst”. This “surprised them greatly”, and eventually Saint-Aignan “gave the lens to the native whom he judged most capable of using it for this purpose”, hoping, presumably, that he would adopt their superior technology to make fire.<sup>97</sup>

The British, on the other hand, did not receive such enthusiastic responses from the Port Jackson Aboriginal people when they showed them their Western belongings. The fact that the Aboriginal people ran an “indifferen[t] and unenquiring eye” over the European artworks and manufactures presented to them during tours of the British houses was often “stigmatized as proofs of their stupidity and want of reflection”. However, unlike many of the other First Fleet officers, Tench understood their indifference, arguing that such items were “artifices and contrivances” unfamiliar to the Aborigines and of no consequence to them. Observing their reactions to the sight of objects relevant to their world, such as “a collection of weapons of war” or “the skins of animals and birds”, he noticed that they “never failed to exclaim” or to “confer” with one another, wondering if the “master of that house” was a “renowned warrior, or an expert hunter”. This led Tench to conclude that, when evaluating the indigenous reaction to the things they saw, Europeans had to bear in mind the relevance of what they were looking at to their indigenous worldview.<sup>98</sup>

The visual scrutiny of the Other’s physical attributes was a common feature of such encounters, and was performed by both parties. The way in which European explorers gazed upon Aboriginal women’s bodies has been examined by a number of historians, such as Ann McGrath and

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<sup>97</sup> “D’Hesmivy d’Auribeau’s first meeting”, in Plomley and Piard-Bernier, *The General*, p. 281.

<sup>98</sup> Tench, *Sydney’s First Four Years*, pp. 281-283.

Patty O'Brien.<sup>99</sup> The question of whether or not native belles possessed modesty despite their nakedness was of particular interest, and intrigued the French and British explorers alike. Jacques-Malo La Motte du Portail, of d'Entrecasteaux's expedition, revealed the intensity with which the Europeans must have scrutinised the women. He observed that, "Naked like the men, they seemed, however, to feel a sort of shame in displaying themselves to our gaze". He noticed that they usually sat with "one of their feet serving always to hide their most secret charms", and that, "when they had to pass in front of us, they only walked with a stoop", with "the young girls even seeking to hide their breasts from view with their arms".<sup>100</sup> The French interest in the Aboriginal women perhaps led them to infer that the indigenous people were equally keen to see if there were any females amongst the strangers.

Most European explorers experienced the Aborigines' curiosity about their gender and were happy to "humour them" in their attempts to find out. Baudin described the "inspection" his men received from some Aboriginal people in Van Diemen's Land, during which they "showed them [their] chests, about which they seemed very curious". When they found that the doctor's chest was hairless, "it caused great exclamation and even greater shouts of laughter". They then passed on to the Frenchmen's legs, "and several were obliging enough to give in to this whim"; but when the Aborigines tried "to see something else" the explorers "did not think it advisable to show them".<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Ann McGrath, "The White Man's Looking Glass: Aboriginal-Colonial Gender Relations at Port Jackson", *Australian Historical Studies*, 24, 99 (1990), pp. 189-206; and Patty O'Brien, "Divine Browns and the Mighty Whiteman: Exotic primitivism and the Baudin voyage to Tasmania in 1802", *Journal of Australian Studies*, 23 (1999), pp. 13-21. For a broader perspective, see also Liz Conor, "'This striking ornament of nature': the 'native belle' in the Australian colonial scene", *Feminist Theory*, 7, 2 (2006), pp. 197-218.

<sup>100</sup> "Journal of La Motte Du Portail (*Espérance*)", in Plomley and Piard-Bernier, *The General*, p. 300.

<sup>101</sup> Baudin, *Journal*, p. 320.

While the Aborigines' confusion over the explorers' gender was usually considered entertaining, when their gaze turned to the Europeans' physical stamina and agility, possible markers of the Europeans' manliness, the explorers were not always so amused. This is illustrated by an episode that took place during the visit of the d'Entrecasteaux expedition to Van Diemen's Land, during which the explorers' bodies came under critical scrutiny from the Aborigines. The d'Entrecasteaux expedition's first extensive encounter with Aboriginal people appears from all accounts to have been a very friendly affair. On the morning of 8 February 1793, Labillardière, accompanied by the gardener Félix de La Haye and two sailors, set off by foot on a two-day excursion towards Port D'Entrecasteaux.<sup>102</sup> Even though the journey was a taxing, slow march through the "close and marshy thickets", the men still enjoyed their foray. On the first evening they slept out in the open; the next morning they encountered a group of friendly locals and spent a few enjoyable hours with them attempting to learn some of their language and observe their customs.<sup>103</sup> Notwithstanding the convivial atmosphere, the Frenchmen regretfully remembered that their ships were awaiting them, so began to bid their *adieux*. Their hosts would not let them leave on their own, however: after collecting their weapons from where they had been hidden, the Aboriginal men and some of the youths accompanied their guests back towards the coast.

During their walk, Labillardière soon became aware of the "attentions lavished on [them] by these savages": the Aboriginal men walked slowly so that the sailors could keep pace with them while marching

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<sup>102</sup> Labillardière uses the name "Port Dentrecasteaux" to refer to the D'Entrecasteaux Channel which separates Bruny Island from the south-eastern Tasmanian coast. This channel had been discovered during his earlier visit to the region in May 1792. Labillardière, *Voyage in Search of La Pérouse*, vol. II, p. 31. See also the Introduction by Edward Duyker and Maryse Duyker to Bruny d'Entrecasteaux, *Voyage to Australia and the Pacific*, p. xxvii.

<sup>103</sup> Labillardière, *Voyage in Search of La Pérouse*, vol. II, pp. 33-45.

through the unfamiliar environment, and regularly “invited [them] to sit down” to rest for “a few minutes”. Realising that the Aboriginal guides were alert to their inferior stamina and dexterity in negotiating the rough terrain, the explorers attempted to defend their masculine pride by protesting that such “marks of affectionate kindness” were unnecessary. However, the Aboriginal men ignored their attempts to shrug them off and squirm out from under their gaze, and continued to clear branches from the strangers’ path. They noticed that the explorers “could not walk on the dry grass without slipping every moment”, and even “took hold of [the Frenchmen] by the arm” to support them. His protests having gone unheeded, Labillardière eventually succumbed to this “obliging attention” and accepted the Aboriginal men’s assistance, especially when the Aborigines corrected their misguided navigation through the forest back to the harbour.<sup>104</sup> The Frenchmen were eventually able to accept the Aboriginal gaze and even profit by it.

For the British, on the other hand, this was close to impossible. When they found themselves likewise having their physical inferiorities patently observed by the Aborigines, the experience was considered much more humiliating. On 11 April 1791, a party of 21 men, which included the Governor, set out from Rose Hill with two Aboriginal guides, Colbee and Boladeree, to discover whether the Hawkesbury and Nepean rivers were the same. With the benefit of hindsight, Tench would come to admit that this expedition into the interior had been embarrassing and futile, presenting his accounts of such excursions as “more amusing in their detail, than any other”. This was clearly not the impression the British had at the time, however. After two miles, notes Tench, the terrain quickly degenerated into “steep, barren rocks” which dramatically slowed their progress as they clambered over seven miles under the 40 pound weight of their packs. In contrast to the British, the two guides “walked stoutly,

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<sup>104</sup> Labillardière, *Voyage in Search of La Pérouse*, vol. II, pp. 41-42.



appeared but little fatigued, and maintained their spirits admirably". Further, much to the chagrin of the explorers, Colbee and Boladeree also appeared to laugh mercilessly whenever they saw the British trip or stumble—"misfortunes" which, according to Tench, "much seldomer fell to their lot than to ours".<sup>105</sup>

The next day, the explorers' travails worsened, for they now had to negotiate the muddy banks of the river lined with stinging nettles. While they struggled through these obstacles, their guides "wound through them with ease" and continued to observe and comment with "merriment and derision" on their British companions' difficulties. The Britons' frustration and humiliation at their patently inferior stamina and dexterity led some to lash out verbally at the mocking natives, who would retort "in a moment", calling them "by every opprobrious name which their language afford[ed]". Finally, after five days, the British "resolved to abandon [their] pursuit and to return home". When they arrived back at Rose Hill, they found that a boat was soon due to depart for Sydney. While the Governor and his party planned to rest up and return the following day, "Colbee and Boladeree would not wait": they "insisted on going down immediately". Tench supposed that their intention was to "communicate to Baneelon and the rest of their countrymen the novelties they had seen".<sup>106</sup>

Tench assumes, optimistically perhaps, that the tales told by Colbee and Boladeree would be about the new country they saw inland, for it is just as likely that the two indigenous comedians were eager to tell the others about their fellow travellers' humiliations. They may even have given the British party a preview of the performance they might put on for Bennelong and the others when, during the expedition, the two impersonated the Europeans' feeble efforts. A few days earlier, Tench noticed that, while the British became increasingly fatigued, their "two sable

<sup>105</sup> Tench, *Sydney's First Four Years*, pp. 223-225.

<sup>106</sup> Tench, *Sydney's First Four Years*, pp. 227-234.

companions seemed rather enlivened than exhausted” by the trek. During the rest breaks, Colbee and Boladeree would “play ten thousand tricks and gambols”, but their main source of fun was derived from lampooning the Europeans’ “misfortunes, in tumbling amidst nettles, and sliding down precipices, which they mimicked with inimitable drollery”.<sup>107</sup> Tench’s description illustrates that, in contrast to Labillardière’s benevolent guides, Colbee and Boladeree were quick to mock the explorers they were ostensibly enlisted to aid. The Aboriginal gaze could therefore be just as merciless and disdainful as that of the European travellers who visited newly discovered parts of the world.

## Conclusion

Although none of the French or British explorers carried out a systematic study of Aboriginal people’s sensations similar to that suggested by Degérando, they did record myriad instances in which the opportunity arose to observe Aboriginal people sniffing, tasting, touching, listening and seeing. The British accounts tended to be curious anecdotes about the Aborigines’ reactions to the continuing presence of the strangers and their objects. The French accounts, on the other hand, were more likely to produce speculations on their sensory acuity and on the significance, to the development of their society, of their sensitivities to particular stimuli, such as rousing music and tender embraces. These variations no doubt reflect the differing primary aims of the French and British: the French expeditions were largely scientific and their interests in Aboriginal people were mainly ethnographic, whereas the British were new colonists in an unknown land, and keen to foster amicable relations with Aboriginal people as new subjects of the crown.

However, more significantly, both the French and British accounts of the Aboriginal senses provide new insights into the nature of cross-

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<sup>107</sup> Tench, *Sydney’s First Four Years*, p. 228.

cultural encounters between European explorers and indigenous peoples. As Stevens argues, “Traditional Western historiography has tended to privilege the notion of ‘discovery’ over ‘contact’ or ‘encounter’”, and has thus portrayed the West’s engagement with the New World as one of observation rather than bodily interaction between the two groups.<sup>108</sup> These French and British descriptions of the Aboriginal sensations reveal that their encounters were shaped by intimate physical contact, in which both sides were able to smell the odour of the other; experience new tastes by cooking and giving food to each other; touch, feel and poke each other’s bodies and belongings; sing, perform and listen to each other in exchanges which inspired awe, fear, camaraderie and awkwardness; and finally scrutinise each other’s material culture and technology as well as their respective bodies and physical abilities. The senses enable us to relate to the world around us; investigating the sensations of the Other is therefore an interactive, dialogic process. Thus, the explorers’ accounts of Aboriginal senses offer us new insights into the indigenous perspective on the Europeans during these early encounters, and what they made of how the Europeans smelt, felt, sounded and looked.

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# A Case of Peripheral Vision: Early Spanish and French Perceptions of the British Colony at Port Jackson

# 5

*John West-Sooby*

During the second half of the eighteenth century, the vast expanses of the Pacific Ocean became the distant stage on which various European powers played out their struggle for dominion. The Spanish had been masters of this region of the globe since Ferdinand Magellan's memorable crossing at the beginning of the sixteenth century.<sup>1</sup> A succession of Spanish ships followed in Magellan's wake, discovering in the process a number of the Pacific Ocean's island groups and, most importantly for Spain, paving the way for what would prove to be an enduring and lucrative trade route between Mexico in the east and the Philippines in the west. The renowned Manila galleons that plied this route provided Spain with considerable economic benefits. They also gave a degree of substance to the 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas and the 1529 Agreement of Saragossa that had granted Spain putative sovereignty over the Pacific. For well over two hundred years, then, and notwithstanding the occasional foray into this

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<sup>1</sup> Magellan was, of course, Portuguese, but like many of his countrymen he ended up sailing in the service of the Spanish crown.

region by privateers or state-sponsored vessels of other nations,<sup>2</sup> the Pacific Ocean remained essentially the preserve of the Spanish.

As far as the rest of Europe was concerned, this great ocean, representing roughly one third of the earth's surface, was afforded little more than peripheral status during this extended period. That situation changed dramatically over the course of the eighteenth century, as other European nations, spurred on by a variety of often intertwined motives (commercial, strategic, scientific...), began to venture into the Pacific. The British and the French in particular started to take more than a passing interest in the region, thereby creating tensions with the Spanish, and of course also adding a new chapter to the history of their own long-standing rivalry. With these three nations jockeying for position, at home and abroad, conflict was inevitable and wars indeed erupted in various parts of the globe. The century had begun with the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1714), which was prompted by concerns on the part of several European nations, most notably Britain, regarding the attempt by the French king, Louis XIV, to seize power over a divided Spain. Tensions flared once more during the Anglo-Spanish War of 1727-1729, though this produced no shift in the balance of power. The same cannot be said of the Seven Years' War (1756-1763), which pitted Great Britain against the Bourbon dynasty in France and Spain, resulting in significant gains for the British in North America and India. The French would gain revenge of sorts by helping the American colonists in their struggle against the British during the American War of Independence (1775-1783), a conflict in which Spain also played a role. There were no such direct confrontations between the three powers in the Pacific during this period, though the

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<sup>2</sup> The seventeenth-century voyage of Dutchman Abel Tasman is one such exception. It was in 1642 that he discovered and named Van Diemen's Land, in honour of the Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies who had sent him on his journey, Anthony van Diemen, before going on to discover New Zealand. Van Diemen's Land, as we know, was later re-named Tasmania to honour the navigator who had discovered it.

Nootka Sound controversy produced some signs of aggression and almost brought Spain and Britain to blows once again.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, the succession of British and French voyages that sailed into these waters from the 1760s onwards was not designed to quell tensions, and indeed heralded a growing challenge to Spain's dominion.

In this context, Whitehall's decision to establish a settlement on the east coast of Cook's New South Wales would prove to be a decisive move. Opinions are divided today regarding the primary motives for this choice of location, with historians such as K.M. Dallas, Geoffrey Blainey and, more recently, Alan Frost arguing against the traditional view that the transportation of convicts was the main reason for the decision.<sup>4</sup> For these "non-traditionalists", trade and sea power were the driving forces behind the selection of this remote location as the site for a new colony. The perspective of Britain's rivals is of no little importance in this debate. After all, the British authorities could hardly have been unaware of the potential political ramifications of their decision. The records show, on the contrary, that the strategic location of Botany Bay—within striking

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<sup>3</sup> In February 1789, Sub-Lieutenant Esteban José Martínez arrived at Nootka Sound where he seized a number of British merchant vessels. Martínez had been sent by the government in Madrid to enforce Spanish sovereignty over the region.

<sup>4</sup> Many publications have been devoted to both sides of the "Botany Bay debate". For an account of the "imperialist" or "mercantilist" point of view, see, among others: K.M. Dallas, "The First Settlements in Australia: considered in relation to sea-power in world politics", *Papers and Proceedings of the Tasmanian Historical Research Association*, 3 (1952), pp. 1-12 (republished in Ged Martin [ed.], *The Founding of Australia: The Argument About Australia's Origins* [Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1978], pp. 39-49); K.M. Dallas, *Trading Posts or Penal Colonies: the Commercial Significance of Cook's New Holland Route to the Pacific* (Hobart: Fuller's Bookshop, [1969]); Geoffrey Blainey, *The Tyranny of Distance: How Distance Shaped Australia's History* (Melbourne: Sun Books, 1966); Geoffrey Blainey, "Botany Bay or Gotham City", in Ged Martin (ed.), *The Founding of Australia*, pp. 105-114; Alan Frost, "Botany Bay: An Imperial Venture of the 1780s", *English Historical Review*, 100 (1985), pp. 309-330; Alan Frost, *Botany Bay Mirages: Illusions of Australia's Convict Beginnings* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1994); Alan Frost, *Botany Bay: The Real Story* (Melbourne: Black Inc., 2011); and Alan Frost, *The First Fleet: The Real Story* (Melbourne: Black Inc., 2011).



distance of Spain's colonies on the west coast of South America and handily positioned with respect to the rich trading centres of Asia—was in fact one of the main topics of conversation in the lead-up to the decision to found a settlement there.<sup>5</sup> And if it was apparent to William Pitt's government that a penal colony in New South Wales could be used as a base from which it could threaten Spain's possessions in the Americas, we can be certain that this possibility did not escape the attention of the House of Bourbon. Established on what was, from a European point of view, the extreme periphery of the globe, this far-flung and fragile settlement was clearly seen by all as having the potential to become a strategic new centre in its own right.

As it happens, the colony would play host to two major scientific expeditions during the early years of its existence, one Spanish, the other French. This convergence of three major European powers at such a remote location constitutes in itself a fascinating example of Port Jackson's drawing power and of its newly acquired status as an outpost of empire. More particularly, these visits offered the Spanish and the French a rare opportunity to gain first-hand knowledge of the colony and to assess its progress. Not surprisingly, members of both expeditions later compiled confidential reports for their respective governments describing the settlement and analysing its strategic potential. These reports are valuable documents, not only because they provide us with a variety of perspectives on the colony itself, but also because they offer insights into the way in which European visitors viewed the role Port Jackson might play in the struggle for dominion in the Pacific.

The two expeditions in question were somewhat different in nature. That led by Alejandro Malaspina was openly and expressly conceived from the outset as a "political and scientific voyage",<sup>6</sup> one of its main aims

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<sup>5</sup> As noted by K.M. Dallas, *Trading Posts or Penal Colonies*.

<sup>6</sup> As is indicated by the title of the official account of the expedition: Pedro de Novo

being to conduct a tour of inspection, as it were, of Spain's vast overseas empire. Malaspina's visit to Port Jackson, where the *Descubierta* and the *Atrevida* anchored for about four weeks during March and April 1793, was an integral part of his itinerary and was clearly planned with political rather than scientific purposes in mind. As he noted in the "Plan" that he proposed to the Spanish Minister for the Navy, Antonio Valdés, the "political enquiries" that would comprise the "confidential" dimension of his voyage "could include, if the Government considered it appropriate, the Russian settlements in California and the English ones at Botany Bay and the Liqueyos,<sup>7</sup> all of them places of interest whether from a commercial point of view or in the event of war."<sup>8</sup> Malaspina suggests more generally in his Plan that all Spanish voyages of exploration should have a political dimension, following the example of those organised by the French and the English. He asserts that, in addition to scientific objectives,

a voyage undertaken by Spanish navigators must necessarily involve two other objectives. One is the making of hydrographic charts covering the most remote regions of America [...]. The other is the investigation of the political status of America both in relation to Spain and to other European nations.<sup>9</sup>

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y Colson (ed.), *Viaje politico-científico alrededor del Mundo por las corbetas Descubierta y Atrevida* (Madrid, 1885). This account was not published in Spain until some 90 years after the events because Malaspina fell into political disgrace and was imprisoned on his return to Cádiz at the end of the voyage.

<sup>7</sup> The Liqueyos or Ryukyu Islands stretch south-west from the bottom of the Japanese island of Kyushu to Taiwan. There was no British settlement on these Japanese islands, but some interest had been expressed in the idea by British merchants. See Robert J. King, "A Regular and Reciprocal System of Commerce — Botany Bay, Nootka Sound, and the Isles of Japan", *The Great Circle*, 19, 1 (1997), pp. 1-29.

<sup>8</sup> This "Plan for a Scientific and Political Voyage Around the World", which Malaspina sent to the Minister with a covering letter dated 10 September 1788, has been published in English translation in Andrew David et al. (eds), *The Malaspina Expedition 1789-1794. Journal of the Voyage by Alejandro Malaspina* (London: The Hakluyt Society, 3 vols, 2001-2004), vol. I, pp. 312-315.

<sup>9</sup> Malaspina, "Plan for a Scientific and Political Voyage Around the World", pp. 312-313.

Malaspina's preoccupation with the political implications of the Pacific voyages recently undertaken by the English and the French is a recurrent theme in his correspondence with the Minister. Botany Bay and adjacent regions are of particular interest to him, as they appear to form part of a pattern of English colonisation in the Pacific. In a letter to Valdés dated 24 April 1789, for example, he muses whether "New Holland and New Zealand are to be looked at with political rather than naturalists' eyes".<sup>10</sup> There was no intimation on his part that Spain ought to establish any sort of outpost in Australasia or Oceania to counterbalance the British presence; however, the Italian born Malaspina, who had entered service in the Spanish Royal Navy in 1774, at age 20, was obviously concerned by the situation facing his adoptive country. From his point of view, the Pacific was still very much a "Spanish lake",<sup>11</sup> and the British settlement at Botany Bay was yet another affront.

In contrast, the French "Voyage of Discovery to the Southern Lands" commanded by Nicolas Baudin had no explicit political motives (despite persistent but unfounded rumours to the contrary).<sup>12</sup> This was

<sup>10</sup> Andrew David et al., *The Malaspina Expedition*, vol. I, p. 318.

<sup>11</sup> This is, of course, the title of O.H.K. Spate's memorable study: *The Spanish Lake* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1979).

<sup>12</sup> It was perhaps understandable that rumours to this effect would have circulated at the time, given the prevailing tensions between Britain and France. It is somewhat curious, however, to note that similar assertions persist even today, despite the lack of any historical evidence to support them. Roger Martin, for example, in a note he has added to his edition of François Péron's *Mémoire sur les établissements anglais de la Nouvelle Hollande*, published in the *Revue de l'Institut Napoléon* (176, 1998-1, p. 22, note 4), claims that the French Minister for Marine, Pierre Forfait, in his Private Instructions to Baudin, had expressed the view that this scientific voyage should also have a political mission, and that Baudin should "find some port, like Pondicherry in Hindustan, and hoist Bonaparte's standard on the first suitable site" (my translation). His use of quotation marks here implies that this phrase is taken directly from the Personal Instructions formulated by Minister Forfait, which were dated 29 September 1800; he fails, however, to give the bibliographical source for the document from which he purports to quote. Such a statement on Martin's part is perplexing, as the phrase does not appear in any known version of these Personal Instructions. On the other hand, it does appear in a review of

a major scientific undertaking sponsored by the Institut de France and endowed with a large contingent of savants. The visit to Port Jackson, where Baudin spent some five months during the winter and spring of 1802, did not figure in the itinerary drawn up by Count Fleurieu but was decided upon during the course of the voyage by Baudin himself, because of the need to replenish supplies and to offer his men respite and medical care.<sup>13</sup> Although this sojourn had not been planned, it ended up lasting five times longer than the scheduled visit of the Spanish nine years earlier. However, despite these differences between the two expeditions, the activities of the French and the Spanish during their stays in the colony were strikingly similar. Both expeditions conducted scientific work, though that of the French was more extensive in scope (and not just because they spent significantly more time there). Both also gathered as much information as they could on the colony, and included in their documentation detailed maps and illustrations of its principal settlements. Finally, as already noted, both visits provided the opportunity to compile confidential reports on the colony for the Spanish and French authorities respectively.

In the case of the Malaspina expedition, it is naturally enough the captain himself who took on this task. Given that the visit to Port Jackson was an integral part of the plan adopted by his government, it was indeed his duty to do so. His *Examen Politico de las Colonias Inglesas en el Mar Pacifico* (*A Political Examination of the English Colonies in the*

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the English translation of Péron's *Voyage de découvertes aux Terres Australes* published in the *Quarterly Review* (4, 7, August 1810, p. 43) and which is attributed to Sir John Barrow. It is Barrow, Second Secretary to the Admiralty, who accuses the French of having had this secret political objective and who thus seems to have contributed to the creation of an enduring myth regarding Baudin's instructions.

<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of Baudin's motives in deciding to call at Port Jackson, see Nicole Starbuck, "Nicolas Baudin. La relâche à Sydney et la deuxième campagne du *Géographe*", in Michel Jangoux (ed.), *Portés par l'air du temps: les voyages du capitaine Baudin*, special number of *Études sur le XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 38 (2010), pp. 133-142.

*Pacific*)<sup>14</sup> duly offers a description of the colony and its resources—the quality of the soil and the state of the colony’s agriculture, the British system of administration, the health and treatment of the convicts, the outbreak of smallpox among the indigenous inhabitants of the area and so on. Importantly, it also contains Malaspina’s interpretation of the reasons why England decided to establish this settlement, along with an analysis of the threat it now represented for Spanish interests in the Pacific, and his suggestion for negating that threat. His report thus offers a combination of factual information and political interpretation. It also includes some musings of a more philosophical nature (on the plight of the Aborigines, for example). This was not unusual for the times, with many an Enlightenment traveller moved to reflect in similar vein on the lives and customs of the indigenous peoples they encountered. In terms of its style, however, Malaspina’s report is somewhat less conventional. A proud man, he certainly had a sense of his own worth and in his writings was prone to verbose digressions of a reflective nature. As one of his modern translators, Carlos Novi, has observed, Malaspina, in the narrative of his voyage, “jumps without warning from the forbidding tints of a cloud formation and the prescription of down-to-earth sailing directions to the convoluted philosophical abstractions of an enlightened thinker”.<sup>15</sup> He was by all accounts a colourful figure. Above all, however, he was determined to be useful to his adoptive country and his report is written with that goal firmly in mind.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> This report, along with related documents, has been translated into English by Robert J. King and published under the title *The Secret History of the Convict Colony. Alexandro Malaspina’s Report on the British Settlement of New South Wales* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1990). All quotations from the report will be from this edition.

<sup>15</sup> Andrew David et al., *The Malaspina Expedition*, vol. I, p. xxvii.

<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately for Malaspina, his loyalty to Spain was not rewarded. When he returned from his voyage in September 1794, he immediately fell foul of the troubled internal politics in the country at that time and soon found himself sentenced to death (which at the time meant ten years and one day of imprisonment). After serving seven years of his sentence, he was released and he promptly returned to Italy.

The unforeseen nature of the Baudin expedition's visit to Port Jackson indicates that its commander, in contrast to his Spanish counterpart, had no particular orders to report on it. Clearly, though, once circumstances led him to call there, he understood that it was his duty to do so, and he therefore wrote both to the Minister for Marine and to the director of the Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle, Antoine-Laurent de Jussieu, to inform them of what he had seen. These letters were never intended to constitute a formal report, however. That cudgel was taken up by the expedition's chief zoologist, François Péron, at the behest of the Bonapartist governor of the Ile de France (Mauritius), Charles-Mathieu-Isidore Decaen, during the expedition's stopover at Port Louis on the journey home.<sup>17</sup> This was a task François Péron took on with great zeal. The indefatigable Péron was, like Malaspina, deeply suspicious of the British and considered that the establishment of the colony at Port Jackson formed part of a wider plan to squeeze the Spanish out of the Pacific. A fervent Bonapartist himself, Péron was keen to go one step further than Malaspina: he felt it was urgent for France to gain a foothold in the Pacific, and in order to do this it should take the British head-on.

On his return to France, Péron took up that initial 28 page report and expanded it to a 112 page memoir addressed to "Citizen Fourcroy, Member of the Council of State", and entitled *Mémoire sur les établissements anglais à la Nouvelle Hollande, à la Terre de Diémen et sur les Archipels du grand océan Pacifique* (*Memoir on the English Settlements in New Holland, Van Diemen's Land and the Archipelagoes of the Great Pacific Ocean*).<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> The manuscript of this initial report is held at the Bibliothèque municipale de Caen, Archives du général Decaen, vol. 92, f. 2 (14 pages recto-verso).

<sup>18</sup> The manuscript of this report, along with several related documents, is held in the Lesueur Collection (dossier 12) at the Muséum d'Histoire naturelle, Le Havre. A transcription of the *Mémoire* was published by Roger Martin in 1998 (see above, note 12). As that transcription contains some occasional gaps and problematic readings (Péron's writing is admittedly not always easy to decipher), the present analysis is based on my own transcription of the manuscript. The chapters, and their dossier numbers, are as



Péron's *Mémoire*, which represents a curious mix of anglomania and anglophobia, is divided into five chapters. In the first he provides a largely geographical and topographical description of all the British settlements in the region. His description is factual, though the tone is frequently polemical and becomes distinctly belligerent towards the end of the chapter. The second chapter offers a detailed and admiring account of the colony's administrative and economic arrangements—the rehabilitation of convicts, the attribution of land, the monetary system, the state of the settlement's agriculture and so forth. He is full of praise in this chapter for what he calls the “admirable colonisation plan of the English” (ch. 2, p. 1, r<sup>o</sup>). The three remaining chapters offer, in turn: an analysis of the political situation in the Pacific, particularly with respect to Spanish interests; a presentation of the defence capabilities of Port Jackson and of the best way of attacking the colony; and finally, Péron's recommendations on the policies and procedures that France should adopt in order to retain the colony after having taken it from the British.

While Péron's description of Port Jackson and his analysis of its potential impact on the geo-political situation in the Pacific are not in themselves particularly remarkable—except, perhaps, for the level of detail—other aspects of his report, notably the final two chapters, certainly

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follows:

Chapter 1: General Overview of the English Settlements in the Southern Lands (dossier 12001)

Chapter 2: Administrative and Commercial State of the English Colonies in the Southern Lands (dossier 12002)

Chapter 3: Political Considerations (dossier 12005-1)

Chapter 4: Military View of the English Colonies in the Southern Lands (dossier 12006-1)

Chapter 5: On the Means of Maintaining French Possession of the Southern Colonies of England After They Have Been Conquered (dossier 12007).

When quoting from these dossiers, the chapter and the page number of the manuscript will be given, along with the indication r<sup>o</sup> (recto) or v<sup>o</sup> (verso), as Péron generally writes on both sides of the pages, which he has numbered on one side only. All translations are my own.

go beyond what might be found in other, similar documents. Nevertheless, Péron's *Mémoire* could be seen as presenting in more extreme terms the same kind of imperial gaze as that to be found in Malaspina's report. Both documents can thus be considered as examples of what Bronwen Douglas calls "an eminently metropolitan text".<sup>19</sup> A closer examination of the analysis presented by Malaspina and Péron in these reports and of the discourse they adopt will enable us to see how Port Jackson was viewed and portrayed by Britain's rivals in geographical, human, economic, political and scientific terms.

To note that Port Jackson was geographically peripheral from a European perspective is to state the obvious. Until the settlement of New Zealand, it was the most distant outpost of the British empire, indeed, of any European empire. In 1788, the voyage to Port Jackson from Europe was long and arduous, and fraught with peril. The First Fleet took eight months to complete the journey, though admittedly its progress was slowed by the time spent at various ports of call (Tenerife, Rio de Janeiro and Cape Town) and by the peculiar circumstance of having to keep so many ships together. Without these particular constraints, but similarly hampered by delays in ports of call, the Baudin expedition took seven months to travel from Le Havre to the south-western tip of Australia (Cape Leeuwin). Matthew Flinders did not have to endure such protracted delays, but still took just under four months to reach Cape Leeuwin. Over time, as navigational techniques improved, and as new routes opened up (thanks to the discovery of Bass Strait) and knowledge of prevailing winds and currents increased, travel times from the mother country to the colony certainly lessened, but Port Jackson remained for many years a very remote location. It was also peripheral, so to speak, to other English

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<sup>19</sup> Bronwen Douglas, "Slippery Word, Ambiguous Praxis: 'Race' and Late-18<sup>th</sup>-Century Voyagers in Oceania", *The Journal of Pacific History*, 41, 1 (2006), p. 27. The text Bronwen Douglas refers to in her article is not Péron's *Mémoire* but his official published account of the Baudin expedition, the *Voyage de découvertes aux Terres Australes*.

colonial peripheries. While links soon became established with Bengal and the Cape of Good Hope, for example, the journey between those colonies and the east coast of Australia still took considerable time. Its distance from the motherland was thus a defining trait of Port Jackson, and added a distinct psychological edge to the material hardships endured by the colonists.

It is no surprise to note that the remoteness of the colony from Europe is a common thread in the reports of Malaspina and Péron. In fact, at the very beginning of his report, the Spanish captain seeks to establish his credentials by presenting himself as a man who has conquered distance to gain first-hand knowledge of what he is about to present:

What follows are not simple conjectures, rumours to murmur around a Table as abundant as delicate; they are not the secret reports of a venal or unworthy Spy; they are the recent footprints of the Conqueror examined in their own Trail: it is the qualities of Man and the History of Nations, which dictate these Predictions to a Heart not infected with Egotism, to a Heart grateful to the Nation which has honoured him with her confidence, to a man finally who examined these Points at the greatest distance possible from Europe and surrounded only by the scenes of an agreeable Atmosphere, and a tranquil Sea.<sup>20</sup>

The notion that there is a “centre” from which the traveller has distanced himself is clearly illustrated here.<sup>21</sup> This personal perspective anticipates

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<sup>20</sup> King, *The Secret History of the Convict Colony*, pp. 92-93.

<sup>21</sup> The image of the European conqueror or discoverer leaving footprints on the globe that legitimise his nation’s claims to propriety is taken up further on in the text, when Malaspina expresses his indignation at Britain’s claim of possession over New South Wales and the adjacent islands of the Pacific: “those who have ridiculed for about three centuries a Papal Bull as justification of the Spanish and Portuguese possessions, do not now disdain to adopt an imaginary right over a fourth part of the Globe, a right which neither ignorance of others’ footsteps nor primacy of discovery could ever justify.” King, *The Secret History of the Convict Colony*, p. 102.

his presentation of the situation of the settlement itself, whose link to the mother country has been stretched almost to breaking point. Indeed, in his report Malaspina is at pains to highlight the difficulties created by the colony's "great distance from the Motherland"<sup>22</sup> and the considerable expenses that Britain has incurred in establishing it in such a remote location. From this he concludes that the deportation of felons cannot be the true motive behind the decision to found the settlement:

But how could the question be avoided of why on this occasion was not calculated the immense distance and Risks of the Navigation, the consequent difficulty of transporting in sufficient numbers the useful kinds of Livestock, and above all the expenses necessary for the custody and maintenance of the convicts, expenses which, contrary to all prudent speculation, must increase in proportion with the increase in strength [...]?<sup>23</sup>

In 1793, with the colony just five years old, the tyranny of distance had certainly made itself felt in these and other ways, a fact which only reinforced Malaspina's conviction that the British government had ulterior motives for establishing and maintaining it.

Port Jackson's isolation and its distance from Europe are also a leitmotif in Péron's *Mémoire*. He writes of "these distant lands" (ch. 1, p. 1), of these "vast and distant regions that had been invaded by Great Britain" (ch. 1, p. 3). The adjective "distant" is used almost every time Péron speaks of these colonies, of these shores, of this soil, of these possessions. In fact, he observes, one of the best means of defence for these colonies is "the very distance that separates them from Europe" (ch. 4, p. 1). Péron's point of reference in evoking this distance is resolutely that of the homeland, of the "métropole", as he refers to it. Symptomatic of his peripheral vision is Péron's almost systematic pairing of the term "métropole" with the word

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<sup>22</sup> King, *The Secret History of the Convict Colony*, p. 109.

<sup>23</sup> King, *The Secret History of the Convict Colony*, p. 100.

“colony”. There is a dialectical relationship in operation here, the centre gaining prestige from its distant possessions, and these far-flung colonies being defined by their relationship to the homeland. And although Péron’s focus is on Port Jackson and its relationship with London, he also uses the “métropole”-colony paradigm to refer to the connection between Lisbon and Brazil or between Madrid and the Spanish colonies on the west coast of the Americas. Péron is also alert to the tensions inherent in this relationship between the centre and the periphery, and to the risk of the bond between them being broken if the mother country should neglect its infant colony:

Any colony which, through its population and products, can achieve self-sufficiency and defend itself against all of its enemies, does, through this very fact, nurture within its bosom the hidden seed of independence. If such a colony is dependent on a home country from which it is separated by immense distances, and if this home country is remiss and oppressive and neglects to provide for her, satisfies her needs only on the most onerous terms, attempts to appropriate all of her income and to take it out of the country, the seed of independence is more common and more active. (ch. 3, p. 18)

Despite presenting this in the abstract, he is clearly referring here to Spain and her possessions, and to the vulnerable position in which the latter find themselves due to the lack of attention paid to them by Madrid. For Péron, such neglect leads to the very real danger of the peripheral territories cutting off their ties to the homeland and either establishing links with a new European centre or asserting their independence and becoming a centre in their own right. In either case, there would be a major shift in the balance of power—one that would be to the detriment of Spain and France. It is interesting to note, in this respect, that, unintentionally perhaps, Péron implies such a role for the British settlement in New South Wales by designating Port Jackson, through a kind of *mise en abîme*, as a

“métropole” for the peripheral British settlements on Van Diemen’s Land and Norfolk Island, and for those he imagines the British have established in Bass Strait and on the various Pacific islands.<sup>24</sup> The centre-periphery paradigm is clearly the lens through which all political and commercial relations are viewed.

If the colonies are peripheral, then so too are those who inhabit them often seen to have a peripheral status. This is all the more true when, as in the case of Port Jackson, the settlement is made up primarily of convicts. Their marginal status in human and social terms mirrors their geographical isolation. At the same time, they remain bound to the motherland not by any abstract concept but by the very real constraint of their servitude and by the even harsher reality of the shackles they are made to wear. The opprobrium attached to the convicts who were sent to New South Wales applied metonymically to the entire settlement. This was something that raised the ire of one of the colony’s early chroniclers, David Collins:

From the disposition to crimes and the incorrigible characters of the major part of the colonists, an odium was, from the first, illiberally thrown upon the settlement; and the word “Botany Bay” became a term of reproach that was indiscriminately cast upon every one who resided in New South Wales.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> “As we have previously remarked, the English have established different settlements in Van Diemen’s Land, in Bass Strait and in some of the islands of the Great Ocean, but since their common fate is connected to that of their metropolitan centre, Port Jackson, this is the only colony we shall discuss here.” (ch. 4, p. 1) In claiming that the British have already established settlements on the Bass Strait islands and in the Pacific, Péron may be simply speculating or expressing a personal conviction that such initiatives must have been taken since his visit to Port Jackson. But it is also plausible to suggest that he is deliberately over-stating the British presence in the region in order to convey a greater sense of urgency to the French authorities.

<sup>25</sup> David Collins, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales* (London: Cadell & Davies, 2 vols, 1798), vol. I, p. 502.



One of Malaspina's artists, Fernando Brambila, made drawings of Sydney and Parramatta that showed convicts in their chains. In deference to English sensitivities on this subject, the convicts were omitted from the versions of these sketches that were presented at the time to the acting governor, Major Francis Grose. In his report, however, Malaspina comments at some length on the plight of the convicts. His view is that those who were sent to Port Jackson were selected "with attention to their robustness and their ability, rather than to the gravity of their Crime and to the necessity of removing them from the commonwealth."<sup>26</sup> According to Malaspina, their deportation made them marginal subjects in more than just geographical terms. If they survived the journey itself, the hardships of life in the colony led to their physical deterioration. This was particularly the case when supplies from the homeland were not forthcoming. Following the loss at sea of the *Guardian* in 1789, for example, severe rationing was imposed, with the result that "The sick of the first Fleet were soon victims of a deadly scurvy, and in the Second all the abuses of badly organised measures affected them with a new and horrible mortality."<sup>27</sup> Just as scandalous for Malaspina was the fact that deportation represented a violation of individual rights, in legal and moral terms: "It was imposed as an arbitrary punishment, and its arbitrariness extended to the grave impropriety of hurting most the least guilty and the most useful for the Homeland".<sup>28</sup> In Malaspina's view, convicts were not just second-class citizens, they barely enjoyed any human or social status at all.

Péron likewise comments extensively in his *Mémoire* on the situation of the convicts. But in contrast to the Spanish captain, the French savant is not concerned with the moral question of whether or not it was just or

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<sup>26</sup> King, *The Secret History of the Convict Colony*, p. 96.

<sup>27</sup> King, *The Secret History of the Convict Colony*, p. 95.

<sup>28</sup> King, *The Secret History of the Convict Colony*, p. 96.

humane to send prisoners such as these to the other side of the world. He focuses instead on the question of rehabilitation and on the opportunities for reform that life in the colony offers. According to his observations, transportation has given these convicts the chance to reintegrate into society and regain their rights—to move from the margins back to the centre, as it were. Despite referring to them frequently as “slaves”, he waxes lyrical about the beneficial effects on the convicts of the British administration’s judicious combination of rewards and punishments.<sup>29</sup> He acknowledges the “horror” that the name of Botany Bay evokes for those in Europe, but admires the system of government by which the British set about “purifying” the population (ch. 2, p. 21). He is particularly struck by the new-found fertility of the reformed prostitutes:

What is also most remarkable about this is that prostitutes who, in their former debauched state, had no more children than do the prostitutes of our capital, prove to be extremely fertile in New Holland. (ch. 2, p. 15)

These are presumably the same prostitutes whose behaviour was described by Malaspina in his journal as being “so licentious that, in comparison, the women of Tenerife, as portrayed by Mr White in his *Journal*, would appear chaste.”<sup>30</sup> Péron even goes so far as to suggest that the union of

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<sup>29</sup> Malaspina, while much less generous in his appraisal of the treatment of the convicts, nevertheless admires, like Péron, the system of punishments and rewards adopted by the British, stating that “these measures have been so appropriate, and their implementation so proper in the prudent and active hands of Governor Phillip and Judge Advocate Mr. Collins, that it is not possible to describe the degree of Policing and Subordination to which the Colony has thus arrived at the present day as inferior.” King, *The Secret History of the Convict Colony*, p. 112. See also p. 109.

<sup>30</sup> David et al. (eds), *The Malaspina Expedition*, vol. III, p. 84. White’s *Journal* offers the following description of the women of Tenerife: “Some of the women are so abandoned and shameless that it would be doing an injustice to the prostitutes met with in the streets of London to say they are like them. The females of every degree are said to be of an amorous constitution, and addicted to intrigue, for which no houses could be better adapted than those in Teneriffe.” John White, *Journal of a Voyage to New South Wales* (London: J. Debrett, 1790), p. 56.

such marginal characters as prostitutes and highway robbers will produce offspring capable of making a respectable place for themselves in society:

It seems hardly likely that thieves, brigands and prostitutes could produce a decent generation for the future, and yet we shall see that, for the next generation, the situation is shaping up quite differently. Indeed, if we note that, in all countries, prostitutes belong to the fairest and most robust section of the population; if we note that such a profession and the various opportunities it entails necessarily produce heightened expectations, and that this is even more true of the callings of highwayman and city thief that demand strength, skill and a kind of audacity that is not the preserve of ordinary men; it must follow that, both physically and mentally, the children of such couples are not as badly off as we might think (ch. 2, p. 15)

Péron's view of these peripheral citizens and of their future reintegration into society is decidedly much more optimistic than that of Malaspina.

One other category of human beings at the periphery in Port Jackson is that of the native inhabitants. The page that Malaspina devotes to them in his report is characterised by the discourse of colonisation. Their habits and physique are all described in terms of the European norm,<sup>31</sup> and Malaspina does not find much cause for optimism with respect to their future. He acknowledges the "humane and prudent" measures the English have adopted in an attempt to "socialise" them; but despite some minor successes, they appear to Malaspina to be condemned to an ever more marginal existence. He can see no hope for them becoming "useful" members of a European-style society, which leads him to conclude that they should be even further marginalised:

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<sup>31</sup> For Malaspina, the scarcity of food has had a decisive influence "not only in the small proportions of their bodily structure, and particularly in their inferior size, but also in the absolute lack of strength which the English acknowledge after a thousand trials of every kind of Labour including even the softest." (King, *The Secret History of the Convict Colony*, p. 105)

[Their lack of strength], united to the total lack of ideas, of activeness, of shelter, of desires, and of Luxury, suffice of themselves to make not reckless the proposition that it would be better for the English to remove them from these parts, than make them useful for future mutual Prosperity [...].<sup>32</sup>

These comments stand in stark contrast to his moral outrage at the forced removal of the convicts from their homeland. The ravages created by the outbreak of smallpox among the Aborigines of Port Jackson lead him to the even more melancholy observation that, whether or not the disease existed before the arrival of Europeans, “what will be easier and sooner will be the destruction rather than the civilisation of these unhappy people.”<sup>33</sup>

As for François Péron, he makes no mention at all of the native inhabitants of Port Jackson in his *Mémoire*. It is true that he writes about them at some length in other documents—the results of his tests with the dynamometer, for example, showing the relative strengths of the Port Jackson Aborigines, the Diemenese, the Timorese, the English and the French, are presented and discussed in detail in the official account of the expedition (the *Voyage de découvertes aux Terres Australes*), and he also compiled several pages of notes on the customs and practices of the Port Jackson Aborigines. However, it is clear that for Péron there is no place for them in a report that has as its focus the business of empire. In this context, their textual exclusion by Péron could be seen to be just as devastating as Malaspina’s chilling conclusions.

Science, too, occupies only a marginal space in these reports. This does not mean, of course, that it was a marginal activity for the expeditioners during their stay in Port Jackson. Indeed, these two “political” reports were complemented by a great many scientific reports and notes that

<sup>32</sup> King, *The Secret History of the Convict Colony*, pp. 105–106.

<sup>33</sup> King, *The Secret History of the Convict Colony*, p. 106.

amply demonstrated the commitment to science of the Spanish and French visitors. Savants from both expeditions made use of their sojourn in Port Jackson to gather vast numbers of specimens and artefacts which were transported back to their respective centres for subsequent study and classification. Copious collections were thus compiled in the three branches of natural history. In addition, numerous astronomical measurements were taken and much valuable work was conducted in the emerging field of anthropology. Port Jackson's reputation as a fertile site for scientific endeavour was consequently greatly enhanced by the visits of these two European expeditions.

In both practical and conceptual terms, however, its status as a location for scientific activity remained peripheral in the sense that the actual scientific analysis of its flora, fauna and geological features was still largely conducted back in Europe. Port Jackson and the surrounding regions simply provided a wealth of specimens that could be collected and sent back "home" for study. This was as true of the colonists themselves as of their Spanish and French visitors. As Sir Joseph Banks noted in a letter to Governor King describing the good work being conducted by his agent, George Caley, "[he] has of late sent me Home many very interesting things".<sup>34</sup> It is indeed symptomatic that the scientific road from Port Jackson almost invariably led back not just to Europe but to the imposing central figure of Banks himself. The President of the Royal Society in London had become synonymous with the settlement on the other side of the world. Anyone who visited the colony with scientific intent in those early years inevitably corresponded with Banks, before, during and usually after their visit. Most also sent him specimens either out of a sense of duty or as a token of goodwill and friendship.

Given the authority of Banks on all matters pertaining to New South Wales, it was only natural that the Spanish and French voyages

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<sup>34</sup> Letter dated 29 August 1804, *Historical Records of New South Wales*, vol. V, p. 460.

would seek his blessing and correspond with him on matters of natural history. Malaspina, for example, wrote three times to Banks, in French, before the departure of his expedition from Cádiz. These letters again reveal the centrality of the European perspective in his way of talking about voyages of scientific discovery: “Man and the surface of the earth he inhabits could undergo a new examination after all the knowledge, philosophy, and truth that Europe ought to demand of this kind of expedition.”<sup>35</sup> He offers to undertake any research Banks might wish him to do, saying that he would be “delighted to be the instrument of another, observing and exploring for the whole of Europe”.<sup>36</sup> One of Malaspina’s naturalists, the Bohemian-born Tadeo Haenke, also wrote to Banks, describing the expedition’s arrival in Port Jackson, which caused him “very great joy” and “aroused great hopes of a rich harvest.”<sup>37</sup> As for the French, Banks had been made an honorary member of the Institute in Paris and corresponded regularly with its leading figures. It was to Banks that the French turned for assistance in obtaining passports for the Baudin expedition and he was subsequently kept well informed of their work. The umbilical cord between Banks and the British settlement of Port Jackson remained unsevered during this time and was irrigated by a continual flow of correspondence, along with specimens of all kinds.

Science was naturally enough one of the primary preoccupations of the Spanish and French during their sojourn in Port Jackson, but its status in the reports of Malaspina and Péron, given the political focus of these documents, remains peripheral—except, of course, when it comes

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<sup>35</sup> Letter to Banks sent from Cádiz dated 20 January 1789. Translated and published by A. Grove Day, Virginia M. Day, Iris Burke and Keast Burke, *The Spanish at Port Jackson: the visit of the corvettes Descubierta & Atrevida, 1793* (Sydney: Australian Documentary Facsimile Society, 1967), p. 34.

<sup>36</sup> Grove Day et al., *The Spanish at Port Jackson*, p. 35 (letter dated 13 July 1789).

<sup>37</sup> Letter to Banks sent from Sydney Cove dated 13 April 1793. Translated from the Latin and published by Victoria Ibáñez and Robert J. King, “A Letter from Thaddeus Haenke to Sir Joseph Banks”, *Archives of Natural History*, 23, 2 (1996), p. 258.



to the utilitarian scientific pursuits of agriculture, animal husbandry and mineral exploration, and to the trade potential they hold for the colony. And where commerce is concerned, the interests of the colony itself are once more subservient to those of the mother country. While recognising that the development of the colony's agriculture is vital to the survival of the local population, both Malaspina and Péron understand that Britain hopes one day to produce a surplus for trade that will generate a profit, thereby paying back the debt that has been incurred in establishing the settlement.

Each of them discusses at length the great store placed by the British in various agricultural products—wine and spices, for example, or the New Zealand flax—and in the development of other sources of supplies for navigation as well as for the factories back home. Malaspina, for his part, is sceptical about the capacity of the Port Jackson area to become prosperous enough for it to be profitable for the home nation, though he concedes that individuals could sustain themselves in the colony with hard work and dedication.<sup>38</sup> Between his visit in 1793 and that of Péron in 1802, however, the economic situation in the colony had evolved considerably, with the result that the Frenchman's assessment is significantly more enthusiastic. He notes the healthy numbers of livestock, for example, with special mention of the flocks of sheep. Thanks to the efforts of John Macarthur, whom King famously dubbed "the hero of the fleece",<sup>39</sup> the production of good quality wool had indeed developed at an impressive rate. By 1805, it would grow to such an extent that the governor would

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<sup>38</sup> He notes that his view and that of the other Spanish visitors "would be close to that of Captain Tench, which is, that the neighbourhood of Port Jackson would not answer ill for a Settler with a large and hardworking family, and with the means of acquiring all the Working Equipment, requiring some Land for his easier subsistence and in order to complete his days peacefully in a healthy, upright and patriarchal life; but would never be able to answer to the interests of the Nation." (King, *The Secret History of the Convict Colony*, p. 104.)

<sup>39</sup> *Historical Records of New South Wales*, vol. V, p. 672.

share Péron's optimism, confidently asserting that before long New South Wales "may save England £100,000 a year by supplying Spanish or fine wool for the home manufactories."<sup>40</sup> Once again, it is a case of husbanding resources for the benefit of the mother country.

In an interesting variation on the centre-periphery paradigm, Péron also notes that the colony has begun supplying coal to Bengal and he predicts that this will shortly become a source of wealth for the colony. The mother country may well be the ultimate beneficiary of this kind of exchange between two outposts of empire, but it is Port Jackson that is presented as reaping the direct financial rewards. Péron is especially interested in the fisheries of Bass Strait and the southern waters more generally, which had led to the creation of a triangular trade route running between Europe, Port Jackson (and adjacent waters) and China—though with Britain still very much at the apex. While his commander presciently expressed reservations about the sustainability of these sealing and whaling activities, Péron focuses in his *Mémoire* on the lucrative trade in fur and oils that is being generated and on the positive benefits it brings the colony, and thus the home country.

Overall, Péron's assessment of the colony's commercial prospects is that Port Jackson is poised not only to repay England's investment but to reward it handsomely. But he is just as enthusiastic about the prosperity he foresees for the colony itself as he is for the interests of the mother country. His attitude in this respect echoes that of Governor King himself, who, in a letter to Banks, expresses his zeal with respect to the administration of Port Jackson and pledges to devote "an unwearied attention to the present and future prosperity of the colony with due regard to the œconomy and interest of the parent state".<sup>41</sup> The "parent

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<sup>40</sup> *Historical Records of New South Wales*, vol. V, p. 673.

<sup>41</sup> Letter dated 21 July 1805, *Historical Records of New South Wales*, vol. V, p. 674.

state” is accorded due regard here, but it is the prosperity of the colony that is the focus of his attention.

Péron and Malaspina could not visit Port Jackson without also thinking of their own respective parent states. Despite their diverging assessments of the British settlement’s commercial prospects, both concur in their evaluation of its strategic potential. And these geopolitical concerns bring us back to the role that Port Jackson played as a (remote) site of contention for the nations of Europe and as an element of disturbance in the balance of power in the Pacific. The French zoologist and the Spanish captain present in their reports exactly the same analysis of the threat that this colony posed in particular for the Spanish territories along the west coast of the Americas. Indeed, this seemed to be a closely unguarded secret. Among the various reasons put forward for the establishment of a settlement at Botany Bay by James Matra and Sir George Young, the transportation of felons was just one. At the top of the list was its strategic position: it represented an ideal site for facilitating trade with other key areas such as China, the Cape of Good Hope and the Spice Islands, but more particularly for trade or war with Spanish America.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Matra’s opening sentence sets his proposal firmly within a political context: “I am going to offer an object to the consideration of our Government what [that] may in time atone for the loss of our American colonies.” Further on in his letter, he highlights the strategic significance of the location of his proposed settlement in New South Wales: “If a colony from Britain was established in that large tract of country, and if we were at war with Holland or Spain, we might very powerfully annoy either State from our new settlement. We might, with a safe and expeditious voyage, make naval incursions on Java and the other Dutch settlements; and we might with equal facility invade the coast of Spanish America, and intercept the Manilla ships, laden with the treasures of the west. This check which New South Wales would be in time of war on both those powers makes it a very important object when we view it in the chart of the world with a political eye.” (James Maria Matra’s “Proposal for Establishing a Settlement in New South Wales”, reproduced in the *Historical Records of New South Wales*, vol. II, part II, pp. 1-8.) The opening paragraph of Sir George Young’s plan likewise focuses on the strategic advantage a settlement at or near Botany Bay would offer with respect to

The Malaspina expedition was indeed motivated, at least in part, by the concern of the Spanish in this regard. The Captain-General of Chile, Ambrose Higgins, wrote to the Spanish Prime Minister in 1792 to express his anxiety:

What I fear, not without basis, is that the many colonists settled in Port Jackson are already thinking of gradually extending their colonies from that place so as to occupy the entire Pacific Ocean [...] forming a chain of possessions thanks to which they will be able to approach these coasts [of South America] and disturb in the near future our exclusive trade [...].<sup>43</sup>

Malaspina's own analysis leads him to conclude that "the transportation of the convicts constituted the means and not the object of the enterprise. The extension of Dominion, mercantile speculations, and the discovery of Mines were the real object".<sup>44</sup> The potential for inflicting some damage on a rival was a particularly significant motivating factor, according to Malaspina, who asserts that those in the colony who supported maintaining a British settlement there based their view not so much on its prospects for "opulence or for commerce, but rather on the Political prospects which [...] seldom happened to be directed as much toward self-interest, as toward another's Injury."<sup>45</sup> That other was obviously Spain, although Malaspina notes that the interests of other nations such as Holland would also suffer. Port Jackson offered the British various options for undermining the Spanish American settlements according to Malaspina's report. A military attack could quite readily be mounted from there, given the relative ease of the crossing, the healthy climate in those

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the Spanish American coast. (Sir George Young, "Plan", *Historical Records of New South Wales*, vol. II, part II, pp. 11-13.)

<sup>43</sup> Letter dated 18 October 1792, Archivo nacional de Chile, fondo de la Capitanía-General. Quoted in Ricardo Donoso, *El marqués de Osorno: don Ambrosio Higgins, 1720-1801* (Santiago: Publicaciones de la Universidad de Chile, 1941), p. 262.

<sup>44</sup> King, *The Secret History of the Convict Colony*, p. 96.

<sup>45</sup> King, *The Secret History of the Convict Colony*, p. 101.

latitudes and the weak defences of these Spanish outposts. A less violent option, though no less effective, would be for the English to engage in contraband trade with the communities on the west coast of the Americas in order to undermine Spanish dominion.

By the time Péron came to write about the situation in the Pacific and the strategic location of Port Jackson, these ideas had become commonplace. The bellicose solution he proposes, however, is radically different from the indirect, trade-based solution suggested by the Spanish captain. Whereas Malaspina recommended that Spain should take commercial advantage of the colony's shortage of supplies by establishing trade links between South America and Port Jackson—a proposal which, given Spain's claim to dominion over the Pacific, was bound to incur the displeasure of Madrid—Péron adopts a more confrontational attitude, urging his political masters to do no less than attack the colony and take it over for France. The major improvement in the colony's stocks between 1793 and 1802 is only part of the reason for this difference between the two. The Frenchman's Bonapartist spirit—Péron had served in the revolutionary army—was no doubt another contributing factor.

Be that as it may, in spite of the stark contrast between the courses of action they propose, and despite some differences in their appraisals of the colony, it is clear from their reports that Péron and Malaspina had essentially the same reading of the motives of their British hosts and rivals. It was abundantly clear to them that this small and peripheral arm of the British empire represented a clear and imminent danger for Spanish interests in particular, a danger that needed to be neutralised. Their conclusions thus bear out what James Matra had predicted in 1783 when he observed that "The place which New South Wales holds on our globe, might give it a very commanding influence in the policy of Europe."<sup>46</sup> For the representatives of all three of these major European

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<sup>46</sup> Matra, "Proposal", p. 5.

centres who converged on Port Jackson between 1788 and 1802, as for their masters back “home”, the spirit of competition and conquest was well and truly alive. In the final analysis, however, what these documents suggest, and what history has confirmed, is that there could only be one real winner. A centre may have multiple peripheries, but a periphery may ultimately only relate back to one centre.

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# New Creatures Made Known: Some Animal Histories of the Baudin Expedition<sup>1</sup>

# 6

Stephanie Pfennigwerth

“Captain, if we had not been kept so long picking up shells and catching butterflies at Van Diemen’s Land, you would not have discovered the South Coast before us.”

— *Henri Freycinet to Matthew Flinders, Port Jackson, 1802*<sup>2</sup>

One of the most precious items in the collection of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery is a delicate, double-shafted feather. Placed on a cushion, overlaid with plastic and locked in a glass case, it is considered too valuable to be put on public display. This is the only confirmed feather

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this essay was published with the title “‘The mighty cassowary’: the discovery and demise of the King Island emu”, *Archives of Natural History*, 37, 1 (2010), pp. 74-90 (Edinburgh University Press: [www.euppublishing.com](http://www.euppublishing.com)).

<sup>2</sup> Matthew Flinders, *A Voyage to Terra Australis, Undertaken for the Purpose of Completing the Discovery of that Vast Country, and Prosecuted in the Years, 1801, 1802 and 1803, in His Majesty’s Ship the Investigator, and Subsequently in the Armed Vessel Porpoise and Cumberland Schooner: with an Account of the Shipwreck of the Porpoise, Arrival of the Cumberland at Mauritius, and Imprisonment of the Commander during Six Years and a Half in that Island* (Adelaide: Libraries Board of South Australia, 2 vols, 1966), vol. I, p. 193.

in Australia of *Dromaius ater*, the dwarf emu of King Island, Bass Strait, extinct in the wild since 1805.<sup>3</sup>

The feather was a gift from the Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle in Paris. The original owner of the feather was captured during Nicolas Baudin's 1800-1804 voyage of discovery to the southern lands. The owner of the original owner of the feather was at one time Madame Bonaparte, soon to be Empress Josephine. Baudin expedition naturalist François Péron documented the only detailed description of the emu's life history, and Charles-Alexandre Lesueur's illustrations are the only visual record of a living individual. This bird was at one time so valued that he and another dwarf emu appear in the medallion on the frontispiece of the *Atlas* accompanying the only State-sanctioned account of the expedition, Péron's *Voyage de découvertes aux Terres Australes* (Figure 6.1). Pecking about Malmaison's Antipodean arboretum under Madame's epicentral eye, he was zoological exotica and breeding stock, symbolic bounty from a Terres Australes collected, classified and perhaps—intellectually if not politically—controlled by the Napoleonic Empire.

“Empire” is a strong yet stratified word, multi-layered with meaning. Its most obvious definition is absolute and supreme control, a powerful group ruling over a less powerful group. It can mean dominion and, lurking within and beside that word, domination. But dominion can also mean sway, to wield influence and create an inclination toward an effect. Viewed in the light of these other definitions, animals represent a curious paradox. There are few groups with less power, and yet more power, than animals. As the medallion hints, animals are absolutely fundamental to human status; to social, political, cultural and economic identity. We humans construct animals to make meaning about ourselves; conversely, we are constructed by them. Yet animals are also a “cultural characteristic

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<sup>3</sup> R.H. Green, *Birds of Tasmania* (Launceston: Potoroo, 1989), p. 1.



Figure 6.1: Frères Lambert, engraving from an illustration by Charles-Alexandre Lesueur: *New Holland Better Known/Useful Plants Naturalised in France*. Frontispiece from the *Atlas of the Voyage de découvertes aux Terres Australes* (Paris: Imprimerie impériale, 1807).



[...] rendered nebulous by its very ubiquity”.<sup>4</sup> They are so intertwined with human functioning that we are blind to them: they hide in plain sight. Given the instrumental significance of animals in the rationale, conduct and success of a scientific expedition commanded to procure “useful animals”<sup>5</sup> for the State and “a collection of pure pleasure” for Madame Bonaparte,<sup>6</sup> the paucity of recent knowledge and writing about them is perhaps indicative of this blindness. In the case of the King Island emu, the paucity adds insult to the total and permanent injury of extinction. A bird collected by an expedition which, with its haul of “more than one hundred thousand specimens [...] made known more new creatures than all recent travelling naturalists put together”,<sup>7</sup> has been more or less forgotten.

This essay aims to begin to redress this imbalance by discussing the emus and some other animals collected by the Baudin expedition in a way traditionally used for humans: as subjects, at the centre of the narrative, rather than in their typical, default position as objects. Giving animals subject-hood need not be controversial, for, as cultural critic Erica Fudge writes: “If history traces change, whether economic, social, political,

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<sup>4</sup> John M. MacKenzie, *The Empire of Nature: Hunting, Conservation and British Imperialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> As indicated in Count Fleurieu’s instructions for Baudin: “Plan of Itinerary for Citizen Baudin”. See Christine Cornell (trans.), *The Journal of Post-Captain Nicolas Baudin, Commander-in-Chief of the Corvettes Géographe and Naturaliste, assigned by order of the Government to a Voyage of Discovery* (Adelaide: The Friends of the State Library of South Australia, 2004 [1974]), p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> As noted by the Minister of Marine, Pierre Forfait. Quoted in Frank Horner, *The French Reconnaissance: Baudin in Australia 1801-1803* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1987), p. 82.

<sup>7</sup> See Georges Cuvier, “Report Presented to the Government by the Institut de France on the Voyage of Discovery to the Southern Lands: Extract of the Proceedings of the Division of Physical and Mathematical Sciences Session of Monday 9th June 1806”, in François Péron and Louis Freycinet, *Voyage of Discovery to the Southern Lands* (Adelaide: The Friends of the State Library of South Australia, translation of the second, 1824, edition by Christine Cornell, 2 vols, 2006/2003), vol. I, pp. lv-lvi.

cultural, intellectual, then the beings that create the change would logically be central to those histories”. While animals may not be aware (in a way that humans recognise) of the changes they create, and of the impact they have on the way humans live, think and represent, Fudge believes “those changes are no less real for that”.<sup>8</sup> However, the following episodes of animal-centric history are an unusual approach to an expedition often studied for its human dynamics. This was an expedition of career officers, some upper-class yet juvenile trainees<sup>9</sup> and the *crème* of civilian *savants*, all of whom were addressed as “Citizen”, regardless of their role and their pre- or post-Revolutionary status and entitlement. Perhaps as an ironic consequence of this reform—and as Baudin’s log reveals—this was an expedition in which people were acutely aware of their place in the social and intellectual hierarchy, and who were not afraid to pull rank when it suited them.<sup>10</sup> And this was an expedition that was itself ranking and filing specimens of 2,542 animal species<sup>11</sup> previously unknown to European science, using competing and often contradictory principles of organisation based on the species’ potential for the economy as well as the Academy. It is worthwhile examining how these organisational principles in Republican natural science had material consequences for animals such as the King Island emu. It is equally beneficial to examine how issues of human status and priority in Republican scientific *expeditions* were also played out in attitudes toward King Island’s wildlife. Such analysis reveals

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<sup>8</sup> Erica Fudge, “The History of Animals”, H-Net: H-Animal Discussion Network. URL: [http://www.h-net.org/~animal/ruminations\\_fudge.html](http://www.h-net.org/~animal/ruminations_fudge.html) (accessed 2 May 2008).

<sup>9</sup> Horner, *The French Reconnaissance*, pp. 64–65, 374–376.

<sup>10</sup> Baudin was repeatedly “infuriated” by the “pomp and magnificence” of his “gentlemen” scientists (Baudin, *Journal*, p. 442) and his sea-log reveals many instances of disobedience, insolence and spite. His account of teenage midshipmen stating it was beneath them to steer the *Géographe*, despite the illness of the helmsmen, is just one classic example (Baudin, *Journal*, pp. 393–394).

<sup>11</sup> Antoine-Laurent de Jussieu, “Notice sur l’expédition à la Nouvelle-Hollande, Entreprise pour des recherches de Géographie et d’Histoire naturelle”, *Annales du Muséum national d’Histoire naturelle*, 5 (An XIII [1804]), p. 10.

that the Baudin expedition's actual and epistemic reliance on animals gave these new creatures a curiously paradoxical power. Far from being inert objects of subsidiary influence, these "specimens" suggest a rethink of a given history, and of a given definition of empire.

## Part I: Empire

The first King Island emus François Péron saw were hanging from "a sort of butcher's hook" in a sealer's hut. It was December 1802 and he and his companions, including the artist Lesueur, had been stranded by King Island's notorious weather. With the landing party's provisions long since exhausted, the sealers proved their "salvation", feeding the storm-tossed French a stew containing what Péron describes as "masses of different meats, essentially delicate and well-cooked in their own juices." Boiled in a "large cauldron" and "giving off an agreeable smell", the wombat, kangaroo and emu "provided a savoury meal, even though", he complains, "we had to eat them without bread or biscuit".<sup>12</sup>

Péron's hunger is evident in his descriptions of King Island. Indeed, it appears few local inhabitants escaped the plate. He details the tender and tasty flesh of the local kangaroos, the seabirds' eggs that were "almost as good as those of our domestic hens", and the wombat, who, he writes:

reduced by the English sealers to a state of domesticity, goes looking for food in the forests by day and returns by night to the hut which serves as its shelter. A gentle, stupid animal, it is prized for the delicacy of its flesh, which we preferred to that of all the other animals of these regions.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Péron, *Voyage*, vol. II, pp. 14-15.

<sup>13</sup> Péron, *Voyage*, vol. II, p. 12.

Historians Keith Thomas and Harriet Ritvo<sup>14</sup> discuss the human tendency to place animals in categories according to human needs and values, such as: edible/inedible; tame/wild; useful/useless. This was manifested particularly in the bestiary tradition, but Péron's epicurean assessment and Lesueur's images (see Figures 6.2 and 6.3) indicate that these demarcations extended into the early nineteenth century as well. Although Péron was at the cutting edge, as it were, of European intellectual endeavour, his activities both exemplified and undermined expeditionary agendas in which issues of economy and ecology were entangled, and "rational" science reflected the temper of the times. In his commitment to one of the expedition's Republican (and at its core, imperialist) aims—the collection of "zoological products" for "human subsistence"<sup>15</sup>—the naturalist's scientific observations exhibit a profoundly anthropocentric view of nature which, despite the advent of the Linnaean system, still manifest vestiges of ancient hierarchies. (Thomas reports that even Linnaeus "mingled his zoological descriptions with moral and aesthetic judgements".)<sup>16</sup> Ranking King Island's "products" according to their usefulness, Péron was no different from most of his contemporaries who, for "the most part", writes Ritvo, deemed that "wild animals were not even important enough to merit a moral judgement unless they somehow reflected human experience".<sup>17</sup> Animals such as the docile and dependable wombat were thus worthy of Péron's comment. Simultaneously—and this also demonstrates the unfairness of human logic—wild animals who were easily "reduced" to a domesticated state were perhaps less valued; the

<sup>14</sup> See Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500-1800* (London: Penguin, 1984), pp. 53-67; Harriet Ritvo, *The Animal Estate: the English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge [MA]: Harvard University Press, 1987), pp. 1-30; Harriet Ritvo, *The Platypus and the Mermaid, and Other Figments of the Classifying Imagination* (Cambridge [MA]: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 38-41.

<sup>15</sup> Péron, *Voyage*, vol. II, p. 12.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, p. 69.

<sup>17</sup> Ritvo, *The Animal Estate*, p. 23.



Figure 6.2: Charles-Alexandre Lesueur, “Nouvelle-Hollande: Île King. Le Wombat.” From the *Atlas of the Voyage de découvertes aux Terres Australes* (1807), Plate XXVIII.





Figure 6.3: Charles-Alexandre Lesueur, “Nouvelle-Hollande: Dasyure à Longue Queue.” From the *Atlas of the Voyage de découvertes aux Terres Australes* (1807), Plate XXXIII. Lesueur exemplifies the quolls’ presumed wickedness by depicting them tearing apart a more highly-regarded animal, a seal. Like the wombat, spotted-tail (“tiger”) quolls are now extinct on King Island.<sup>18</sup>



“gentle” wombat is so “stupid” that it returns by choice or by habit to the site of its eventual slaughter.

And what of the King Island emu? “The mighty cassowary, 5 to 7 feet tall”, writes Péron, “lays eggs the size of an ostrich’s, but more delicately flavoured; the flesh [...] half-way (so to speak) between that of the turkey-cock and that of the young pig, is truly exquisite”.<sup>19</sup> Here again, his scientific (and inaccurate<sup>20</sup>) description segues into an anthropocentric classification perpetuating established cultural values. Whether useful or useless, the animals served their function, providing Péron with sufficient specimens to equip him with the authority to interpret and effect their fate.

*“...so powerful, so gentle and so unfortunate...”*

To understand the complexities of Péron’s attitude toward the King Island emu, it is necessary first to analyse his attitude toward King Island’s population of elephant seals, and the men who hunted them. Péron’s ability to adapt his philosophy to suit his circumstances is exemplified by his attitudes to his rescuers, the sealers on King Island. There is

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<sup>18</sup> R.H. Green and J.L. Rainbird, “The Common Wombat *Vombatus ursinus* (Shaw, 1800) in Northern Tasmania — Part 2. The Bass Strait Population, *V. Ursinus ursinus*”, Records of the Queen Victoria Museum Launceston, 92 (1988), pp. 1-2; Menna E. Jones and Robert K. Rose, *Preliminary Assessment of Distribution and Habitat Associations of the Spotted-tailed Quoll (Dasyurus maculatus maculatus) and Eastern Quoll (D. viverrinus) in Tasmania to Determine Conservation and Reservation Status, Report to the Tasmania RFA Environment and Heritage Technical Committee, November 1996* (Hobart: Tasmanian Public Land Use Commission, 1997), pp. 39, 45, 48.

<sup>19</sup> Péron, *Voyage*, vol. II, p. 12.

<sup>20</sup> Péron’s use of the term “cassowary” is not incorrect; *casoar* and *émeu* were used interchangeably at this time by the French, including Cuvier, and their cross-Channel colleagues likewise used two terms indiscriminately. See Georges Cuvier, Edward Griffith, Edward Pidgeon and John Edward Gray, *The Class Aves Arranged by the Baron Cuvier, with Specific Descriptions by Edward Griffith and Edward Pidgeon* (London: Whittaker, Treacher & Co, 1829). More problematic is Péron’s confusion of the dwarf emu with the much larger emu of the Australian mainland.

something of the noble savage in his depiction of their leader, “the honest Cowper”,<sup>21</sup> his ten men, and his “woman of the Sandwich Islands [...] who served as wife and principal housekeeper”, all of whom, despite living in “wretched hovels” warmed by a “great fire, kept burning day and night with big tree trunks”, and wearing clothes made “by subjecting seal and kangaroo skins to some rough preparation”, nevertheless “enjoyed the most vigorous good health”. Péron writes: “these good men overwhelmed us with demonstrations of concern and kindness.”

Why is it that this touching hospitality [...] should almost always be shown by men whose roughness of character and miserable condition seem least to oblige them to act in this way! [...] Alas, rather than our brilliant education and philosophy, it would be more fitting to develop in us that noble and disinterested quality that gives us sympathy for another’s troubles!<sup>22</sup>

Perhaps the sealers, literally and even figuratively so close to nature, were not dissimilar, in Péron’s view, to the wild animals of which Ritvo writes, worthy of moral judgement if they somehow reflected his own experience. But Péron’s assessment changes markedly in his account of the sealers’ operations, and it is not always clear where his sympathies lie.

Péron dedicates an entire chapter of his *Voyage de découvertes aux Terres Australes* to a detailed description of King Island’s elephant seals, who, he writes, were “gentle, innocent”, “good, docile”, “intelligent, gentle”, “good”, “peaceful” and “so powerful, so gentle and so unfortunate”.<sup>23</sup>

One can wander amongst them without fear; and none of them have ever been seen to lunge at a man unless they were attacked or provoked in the most violent manner.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Cowper Point, on Sea Elephant Bay on King Island’s east coast, was named for this sealer, whose name was in fact Daniel Cooper.

<sup>22</sup> Péron, *Voyage*, vol. II, pp. 15, 16, 15, 18.

<sup>23</sup> Péron, *Voyage*, vol. II, pp. 27-54.

<sup>24</sup> Péron, *Voyage*, vol. II, pp. 38, 42, 38.

Most “gentle and peaceful” were the females who, Péron notes, “rarely meet violence with violence [...]”. If their retreat is cut off, they shake violently; an expression of despair comes into their eyes and they dissolve into tears”.<sup>25</sup> He also believed “these animals are capable of real attachment”, musing, “all [...] have so kind and gentle an expression, that I have little doubt as to the possibility, by taming them, of reproducing some of the wonders handed down to us from antiquity concerning dolphins”.<sup>26</sup> Lesueur’s drawing of the extravagantly eyelashed phocids (Figure 6.4) indulges Péron’s observations. Abandoning all pretence at the dispassionate scientific observation of wild animals, he makes the seal in the foreground return the viewers’ gaze with an easy familiarity.

Wild and charismatic, yet docile—characteristics highly ranked in the echelons of cultural classification—the animals were no match for what Péron calls “the wrath of the human race”.<sup>27</sup> According to Edward Duyker, Péron was “shocked by the environmental crime unfolding before his eyes” and, creating a “landmark in Australian ecological writing”,<sup>28</sup> was moved to remark:

Henceforth everything is changed for them [...] they will not now escape the mercantile greed which appears to have sworn the annihilation of their race. Indeed, the English have invaded these retreats, which for so long protected them; they have organised massacres everywhere, which cannot fail shortly to cause a noticeable and irreparable reduction in the population of these animals.<sup>29</sup>

While this passage does disclose a nascent environmentalism, it was more likely spurred by offences against other, somewhat opposing, sensibilities.

<sup>25</sup> Péron, *Voyage*, vol. II, p. 41.

<sup>26</sup> Péron, *Voyage*, vol. II, pp. 38, 53.

<sup>27</sup> Péron, *Voyage*, vol. II, p. 40.

<sup>28</sup> Edward Duyker, *François Péron: An Impetuous Life: Naturalist and Voyager* (Carlton, Vic.: Miegunyah Press, 2006), p. 156.

<sup>29</sup> Péron, *Voyage*, vol. II, p. 40.



Figure 6.4: Charles-Alexandre Lesueur, *Mirounga leonina* (elephant seal, King Island).

All through the chapter, Péron stresses the sealers' English nationality;<sup>30</sup> and, with the exception of one reference to "the honest Cowper",<sup>31</sup> the individual sealers are depersonalised (this word is used deliberately here). By juxtaposing the "human race" with "their [the seals'] race", and by referring to "massacres", Péron humanises already anthropomorphised animals while rendering the (in)human English, whom he had earlier depicted as noble savages, decidedly less noble. The war-like discourse (invasions and "massacres") employed by Péron further indicates that the "good men" whose kindness had hitherto "overwhelmed" the French naturalist were regarded very differently when, with "mercantile greed", they plundered resources in a manner typical of a nation that had "arrogat[ed] to herself the possession of this vast expanse of earth and sea" that included "half of New Holland" and stretched to "the coast of Peru and Chili".<sup>32</sup> Indeed, Péron bolsters his chapter with an appendix in which he details, with a taxonomic eye usually reserved for specimens, the economic and geopolitical "Advantages Gained by the English from the Seals of the Southern Seas".<sup>33</sup> His environmental ethic is also difficult to discern in his observations of the profits reaped from the sealing and fur-trading activities of France's ally:

Skilful traders, thrifty and courageous navigators, the Americans have for some years been inconvenient rivals for the English. [...] Already, complaints [...] have come from the English ship-owners; already, ways have been proposed to the government to exclude the Americans from the southern seas and thereby ruin their trade in Canton.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Although in his more positive depiction of the sealers and their camp Péron notes that at least two of Cowper's gang were in fact "Irishmen, who had been deported for their political opinions" (Péron, *Voyage*, vol. II, p. 13).

<sup>31</sup> Péron, *Voyage*, vol. II, p. 45.

<sup>32</sup> Péron, *Voyage*, vol. II, p. 4.

<sup>33</sup> Péron, *Voyage*, vol. II, pp. 47-51, 53-54.

<sup>34</sup> Péron, *Voyage*, vol. II, p. 48 (note).

Péron's outrage at "this cruel operation" by the seals' "murderers" similarly did not dissuade him from collecting "a host of species unknown in Europe" on King Island and eating more than a few of its inhabitants to test their suitability to the European palate. Moreover, it did not prevent him from observing on Kangaroo Island, some days (and pages) later, "a new species of otary" and "some other, smaller species of phocacean", the hunting of whom, he coolly calculated, "would offer valuable profits."<sup>35</sup> As Duyker points out,<sup>36</sup> since the French were the first Europeans to circumnavigate Kangaroo Island, Péron may have presumed the animals were there for his nation's taking. The matter of who took whom—and why, and how—was entirely conditional on their status, entitlement and ranking in the human and animal hierarchy.

*"...fattened easily and a great deal..."*

It is ironic that Péron writes more about the elephant seals, a species the expedition apparently did not collect—except on paper—than on the apparently equally "useful" emu they did. It is also ironic that most of what is known about the King Island emu derives from a series of second-hand observations made by a man whose closest encounter with the wild bird was in a casserole. Péron reports: "The depths of the forests harbour a great quantity of cassowaries",<sup>37</sup> but due to the weather it is unlikely he saw any living King Island emus in the wild. Instead, he prepared a thirty-three-point questionnaire and interviewed a sealer, probably Daniel Cooper, about the bird's life history. Perhaps the first study of its kind of an Australian bird, the questionnaire also reveals that Péron's memory of the "mighty cassowary"<sup>38</sup> was not necessarily accurate. Cooper's answers indicate that the bird was in fact rather stocky, standing "about 4½ feet"

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<sup>35</sup> Péron, *Voyage*, vol. II, pp. 40, 41, 11, 63.

<sup>36</sup> Duyker, *François Péron: An Impetuous Life*, p. 163.

<sup>37</sup> Péron, *Voyage*, vol. II, p. 11.

<sup>38</sup> Péron, *Voyage*, vol. II, p. 12.



tall and at most weighing “45 to 50 pounds” (1.4 m high and 23 kg); by contrast, an adult emu of mainland Australia can grow to 2 metres and weigh 50 kg.<sup>39</sup> Péron learned that the dwarf emus inhabited the secluded scrub near lagoons, emerging in the morning and evening to pick at grasses, berries, succulents and seaweed along the shoreline. They were mostly solitary, only gathering in small flocks on the beach during the breeding season. Although their eggs were sought out by snakes, rats and quolls (who also snapped up the occasional chick), the emus seemed to have enjoyed a typically insular—and insulated—life. “They swim well, but only when it is necessary”, Cooper told Péron. “They run very quickly, but [...] being too fat, run ten times less quickly than those from Port Jackson. Generally, no faster than a very good dog”. Unfortunately for the emu, very good dogs soon had the run of the island, forcing the birds to “defend themselves with their feet, like horses do”. Cooper’s own dog had “been thrown ten feet by a kick” and was “often stunned” by the force of the blows.<sup>40</sup> As domesticated animals, dogs were privileged: whatever affected them affected their human owners. Their welfare was paramount because, as Péron notes in his *Voyage*: “In order to obtain the enormous quantity of meat that they consume, the sealers use a method as simple as it is cheap. [...] [T]rained dogs [...] beat the woods by themselves and seldom fail to strangle several of these animals each day.”<sup>41</sup> He saw

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<sup>39</sup> Milne-Edwards and Oustalet write that even the height of 4½ feet “seems much too high [...] for the black [dwarf] emu. This would seem more appropriate for the common [Australian] emu”. Alphonse Milne-Edwards and Emile Oustalet, “Note sur l’éméu noir (*Dromaeus ater* V.) de l’île Decrès (Australie)”, *Bulletin du Muséum d’Histoire naturelle*, 5 (1899), p. 214 (this and subsequent quotations from this article translated for this author by Gillian von Bertouch). Balouet and Jouanin record that subfossilised tarsometatarsi (the long bone of the birds’ lower legs) found on King Island measure between 175-292 mm, confirming the emus’ small size. See Jean-Christophe Balouet and Christian Jouanin, “Systématique et origine géographique des émeus récoltés par l’expédition Baudin”, *L’Oiseau et la Revue française d’ornithologie*, 60 (1990), p. 317.

<sup>40</sup> Milne-Edwards and Oustalet, “Note sur l’éméu noir”, pp. 209-211.

<sup>41</sup> Péron, *Voyage*, vol. II, pp. 15-16.

the carnage first-hand when one of these “intelligent hunters”<sup>42</sup> was released on Kangaroo Island some days later: “it is conceivable, even, that the innocent and gentle race of kangaroos would surely be destroyed in several years by a few dogs of the kind that I am speaking of.”<sup>43</sup>

Once again Péron registers his sympathy for an “innocent and gentle race”—kangaroos this time, instead of seals—but this sympathy does not seem to extend to the equally assailable King Island emu. The questionnaire starts with the standard zoological queries, but eventually Péron makes more obvious his economic interests. “Are they likely to be fattened easily and a great deal?” he asks Cooper, who confirms the emu could be tamed and bred in captivity. The naturalist was told of uses for their grease and even whether the white of their eggs, which were “very good to eat”, coagulated when cooked: “the best way of preparing the flesh” was by roasting, but it could also be dried, salted and even smoked, and kept “as well as ham”. One can almost sense Péron’s excitement—and his acquisitive agenda—in his supplementary note: “The Emus which we are talking about here are literally swarming on King Island”.<sup>44</sup>

Cooper told him that he had already “caught or killed more than 300” birds, but it is uncertain how an island just 64 kilometres long and 27 kilometres wide could sustain “swarms” of emus who seemed to have preferred coastal habitat.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, since the sealers had been on the island six months,<sup>46</sup> this figure suggests Cooper alone killed fifty birds a month; at this rate, the eleven-man gang and Cooper’s wife could have

<sup>42</sup> Péron, *Voyage*, vol. II, p. 16.

<sup>43</sup> Péron, *Voyage*, vol. II, p. 63.

<sup>44</sup> Milne-Edwards and Oustalet, “Note sur l’émeu noir”, pp. 211–213.

<sup>45</sup> Milne-Edwards and Oustalet, “Note sur l’émeu noir”, p. 213. Exploring King Island in the same month as Péron, Surveyor-General Charles Grimes confirmed Cooper’s observations, noting that “Emews [...] are plenty on the coast—but not inland”. See Richard H. Hooper, *The King Island Story* (Sydney: Peko-Wallsend, edited by Mark Richmond, 1973), p. 24.

<sup>46</sup> John S. Cumpston, *First Visitors to Bass Strait* (Canberra: Roebuck Society, 1973), p. 46.

slaughtered up to 3,600 emus by the time of Péron's visit. However, Péron, who bewailed the massacre of the seals, does not criticise the sealers for this other sustained onslaught. Executing the expedition's instructions with "zeal and dedication",<sup>47</sup> he instead seems blinded by the possibilities. By describing the emus as "swarming" he indicates their supposed unlimited fertility and inexhaustible supply while simultaneously robbing them of individual appeal—and thus the sympathy afforded more individualised, charismatic animals. It is a cruel irony that Péron assessed the abundance of the species based on the number already killed, and that he intimated such familiarity with a cryptic, crepuscular bird that he never saw alive in the wild. And without first-hand observations of the birds and their decline, nor a clear understanding of their range restriction, he failed to infer the inevitable. The fact that his second-hand access to, and evidence of, the bird was on a sealer's terms must have also affected his perception. This perception was to prove influential.

King Island's elephant seals, by contrast, were large, mammalian, diurnal, gendered and readily accessible to humans. Their familiarity to the French was real rather than imagined and their numbers were evidently dwindling. They were the source of obvious, immediate and sizeable economic and geo-political empire, while the emus' usefulness to the French, potential rather than actual, was not tinged with the same kind of jealous urgency. Perhaps, given the expedition's competing principles of organisation, it is not surprising that in Péron's mind there also seemed to exist another, internal hierarchy: a sliding scale of economic usefulness. His questionnaire emphasises the birds' importance as a food item for "honest" working people lacking "our brilliant education and philosophy".<sup>48</sup> Like the "gentle", "stupid" wombat,<sup>49</sup> the emus could be tamed by these men and slaughtered with ease. There was no glory in

<sup>47</sup> Cuvier, "Report Presented to the Government by the Institut de France", p. lv.

<sup>48</sup> Péron, *Voyage*, vol. II, pp. 15, 18.

<sup>49</sup> Péron, *Voyage*, vol. II, p. 12.

hunting small game too fat to escape trained dogs. The emu posed no real human danger, challenge or even sport. They yielded no furs or barrelsful of oil and, perhaps most importantly, did not “dissolve into tears” like the elephant seals.<sup>50</sup> Péron’s questionnaire does more than crystallise the dual purposes of Republican natural science. It marks, with unusual precision, an exact nexus of natural and cultural history. It is a record of discovery and demise.

The emu’s demise was textual as well as literal. Péron’s lengthy questionnaire, along with his notebook entries and Lesueur’s artworks (including Figure 6.5), indicate that the King Island emu was obviously at one time a species of some interest to the French—if only because they were quite literally fuel for the commercial exploitation of the more coveted seals.<sup>51</sup> However, the questionnaire was not published in any official expedition literature. The new maritime priorities of Napoleon<sup>52</sup> and Baudin’s maligned reputation thwarted publication of the expedition’s scientific studies; besides, the post-expedition energies of Péron, dying of tuberculosis, were taken up writing his historical account of the voyage. (Bequeathed to Lesueur and eventually mislaid, the questionnaire was not

<sup>50</sup> Péron, *Voyage*, vol. II, p. 41.

<sup>51</sup> For example, the birds’ economic potential was noted even on Péron’s manifest of live cargo dated 25 March 1804: “Casuarius Hollandiae Novae. *Place embarked: King Island. Number of individuals: 2. This animal is indisputably one of the more invaluable of New Holland; the flesh is excellent; it is easily tamed.*” Quoted in Christian Jouanin, “Les Émeus de l’expédition Baudin”, *L’Oiseau et la Revue française d’ornithologie*, 29, 3 (1959), p. 187 (my translation). The nomenclature further demonstrates Péron’s repeated conflation of the dwarf King Island emu with the “mighty cassowary” of mainland Australia (now called *Dromaius novaehollandiae*), with which he had become familiar during the expedition’s five-month sojourn in Port Jackson in 1802. Thus, with their taxonomic difference unrecognised, the King Island emu’s scientific status was similarly imperilled. Nevertheless, I maintain that Péron’s subjective assessments had an impact equal to that of his “objective” (and erroneous) science: the birds were “invaluable”, but not invaluable enough.

<sup>52</sup> See Horner, *The French Reconnaissance*, pp. 329–335; Jean Fornasiero, Peter Monteath and John West-Sooby, *Encountering Terra Australis: the Australian Voyages of Nicolas Baudin and Matthew Flinders* (Kent Town, SA: Wakefield Press, 2004), pp. 348–350.



Figure 6.5: Charles-Alexandre Lesueur, “Nouvelle-Hollande: Île Decrès — Détails du Casoar de la Nouvelle Hollande.” From the *Atlas of the Voyage de découvertes aux Terres Australes* (1807), Plate XLI. Although Île Decrès was the name the French gave to what is now Kangaroo Island, the confusion over the emus’ provenance means the bird depicted may have in fact been from King Island.

recovered until some time between 1874 and 1884<sup>53</sup> and was first published in the *Bulletin du Muséum d'Histoire naturelle* in 1899.) Such circumstances may help to explain why, despite having scrutinised the species, Péron fails to mention in the *Voyage* that several live emus from King Island were brought on board Baudin's ship, the *Géographe*. This oversight was to wipe the bird from history, as well as zoology, for years to come.

## Part II: Influence

On 24 December 1802 Baudin collected the savants from King Island and repaid Cooper for the provisions he had supplied. "I also bought some emus or cassowaries from his men", he reports, "as well as a very tame male kangaroo and three wombats."<sup>54</sup> Baudin may also have bought at least one hunting dog from the sealers; he mentions, in any event, that one of his hunting dogs was first put to work on Kangaroo Island on 9 January 1803.<sup>55</sup> The dogs' efficacy has already been noted: Péron<sup>56</sup> records that, as well as numerous kangaroos killed for meat, 27 live kangaroos were brought aboard at Kangaroo Island for scientific and other purposes. "Amongst these ones that we hope to carry back to our country", Baudin writes, "are three females which have offspring and may prosper." The animals' umbrage was obvious: one kangaroo "tried to escape by throwing himself into the water, but fell into our hands after putting up magnificent

<sup>53</sup> Horner, *The French Reconnaissance*, p. 359.

<sup>54</sup> Baudin, *Journal*, p. 453. Here, Baudin demonstrates an unusual, Péron-like vagueness that can only be resolved by conducting an emu body count in reverse chronological order. Duyker (*François Péron: An Impetuous Life*, p. 162) believes he collected three King Island emus; I calculate four, based on the number of deaths recorded in Baudin's sea log; but Christian Jouanin's examination of Museum records suggests five were brought aboard ("Les Émeus de l'expédition Baudin", p. 183). As we will see, Baudin took great interest in the well-being of the emus and carefully noted each death at sea. The fact that he did not record the death of this fifth bird suggests the emu was predeceased, and was acquired as a skin.

<sup>55</sup> Baudin, *Journal*, p. 464.

<sup>56</sup> Péron, *Voyage*, vol. II, p. 62.



resistance.”<sup>57</sup> A litany of his fellows, on this island and on coastlines to come, were “throttled” and “severely wounded” by the dogs, trained to tear at their jugular. By the end of January 1803 two captives had died of their trauma.<sup>58</sup>

Given the gore and struggle, it is not surprising that on 31 January Baudin wrote, with almost palpable satisfaction, of the capture of “two pretty, live emus”,<sup>59</sup> another dwarf variety endemic to Kangaroo Island. Péron, keen to classify the quality if not the quantity, notes:

of all the birds that this island received as its share from Nature, the most useful to man are the cassowaries. These big animals appear to live on the island in large flocks, but because they are very agile runners and because we did not take much care in hunting them, we were only able to obtain three live ones.<sup>60</sup>

However, the *Géographe’s* engineer, Lieutenant Ronsard, confirmed in his journal that “we had only taken two which we brought aboard alive”.<sup>61</sup> The collection of these emus (and the discrepancies in their documentation) was to be instrumental in the textual erasure of their King Island counterparts.

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<sup>57</sup> Baudin, *Journal*, p. 469.

<sup>58</sup> Baudin, *Journal*, pp. 470, 471; Péron, *Voyage*, vol. II, p. 62.

<sup>59</sup> Baudin, *Journal*, p. 471.

<sup>60</sup> Péron, *Voyage*, vol. II, p. 63. The Kangaroo Island emu was “big”, but not much larger than its King Island counterpart, and just as defenceless. Although the exact date of their extinction is unknown, they had certainly disappeared before the arrival of the South Australian Company’s colonists in 1836. See R.M. O’Brien, “Family DROMAIIDAE Emus”, in Stephen Marchant and Peter Jeffrey Higgins (coordinators), *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds. Vol. I: Ratites to Ducks* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 59; Robert Montgomery Martin, *The British Colonies: Their History, Extent, Condition, and Resources* (London: London Printing and Publishing, Vol. I, Book I, 1855), p. 656.

<sup>61</sup> Ronsard, quoted in Fornasiero, Monteath and West-Sooby, *Encountering Terra Australis*, p. 236.

Relieved to have snapped up the birds which had for days eluded him, and no doubt mindful of his instructions, Baudin remarked that the Kangaroo Island emus were a “lucky capture”,<sup>62</sup> a fine prize for Madame Bonaparte. Since his was the first European expedition to circumnavigate Kangaroo Island, the emus also validated his discovery. Feathered evidence of the existence and inventory of new land, a distinctively stocky emu graces Lesueur’s cartouche in Louis Freycinet’s map of Terre Napoléon (Figures 6.6a and 6.6b). All Baudin had to do was get these lucky captures back to France alive. Unfortunately, his luck did not last.

### *Power relations*

On 4 February, “we found two of our kangaroos dead in their pens”, wrote Baudin. “I had no doubt at all of the bad weather’s being responsible, for they were completely soaked with the rain and the continuous mist that we had had for the past three days, in spite of our having been very careful to cover their pens well with good tarpaulins.”<sup>63</sup> Cabins thus became cages, as the animals’ accommodation was upgraded and the officers and *savants* were removed from their quarters. Baudin noted with grim humour the “lamentations”<sup>64</sup> and “displeasure” shown “in no uncertain way” by the “malcontents” herded into ever-decreasing spaces.<sup>65</sup> When an acting sub-lieutenant, Ransonnet, complained of having to relinquish his cabin to some kangaroos, Baudin chided him for preferring his “own comfort and a few temporary advantages to the greater success of the expedition and whatever may serve our country.”<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Baudin, *Journal*, p. 471.

<sup>63</sup> Baudin, *Journal*, p. 473.

<sup>64</sup> Baudin, *Journal*, p. 492.

<sup>65</sup> Baudin, *Journal*, p. 473.

<sup>66</sup> Baudin, *Journal*, p. 473.

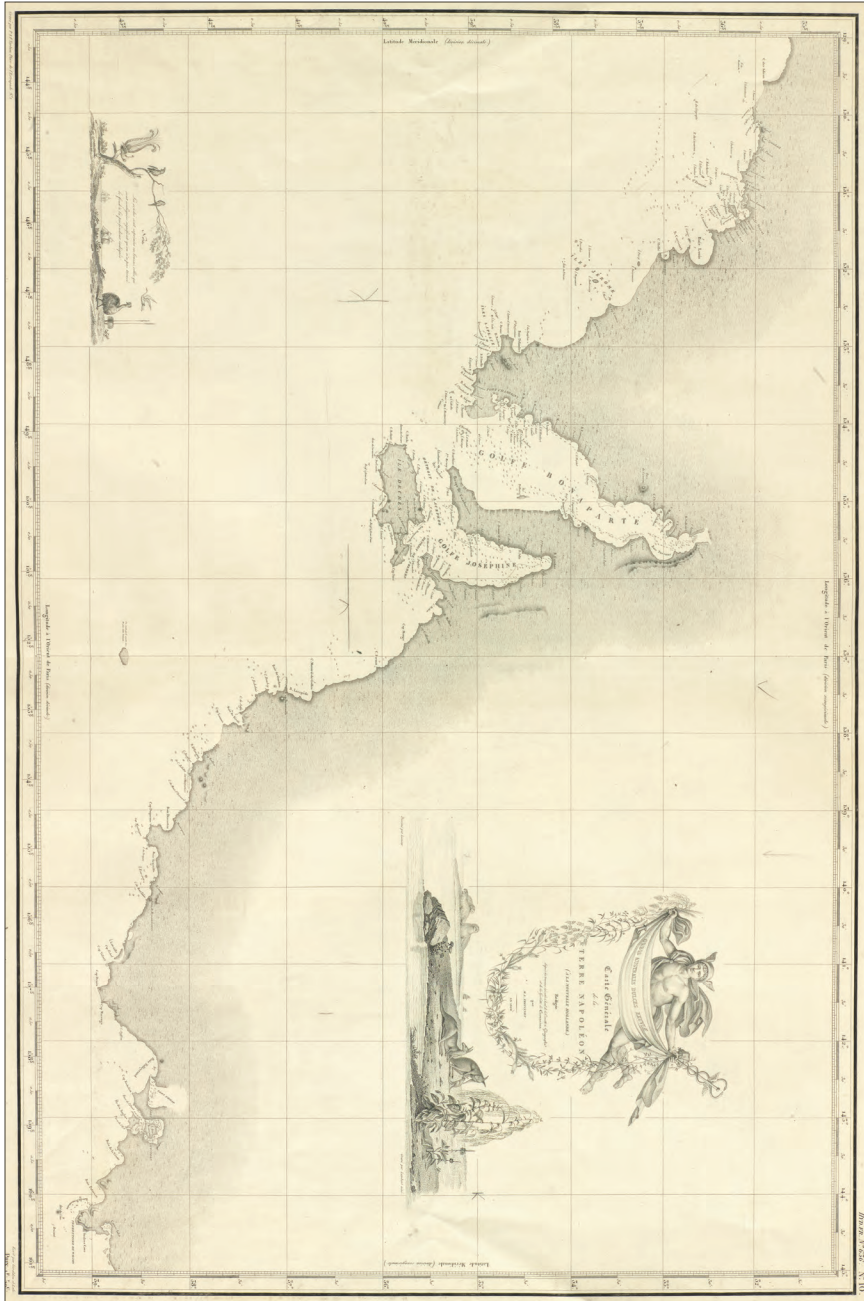


Figure 6.6a: Louis Freycinet, “Carte générale de la Terre Napoléon” (showing south-east Australia and Kangaroo Island). Engraving from the *Atlas of the Voyage de découvertes aux Terres Australes* (1811).

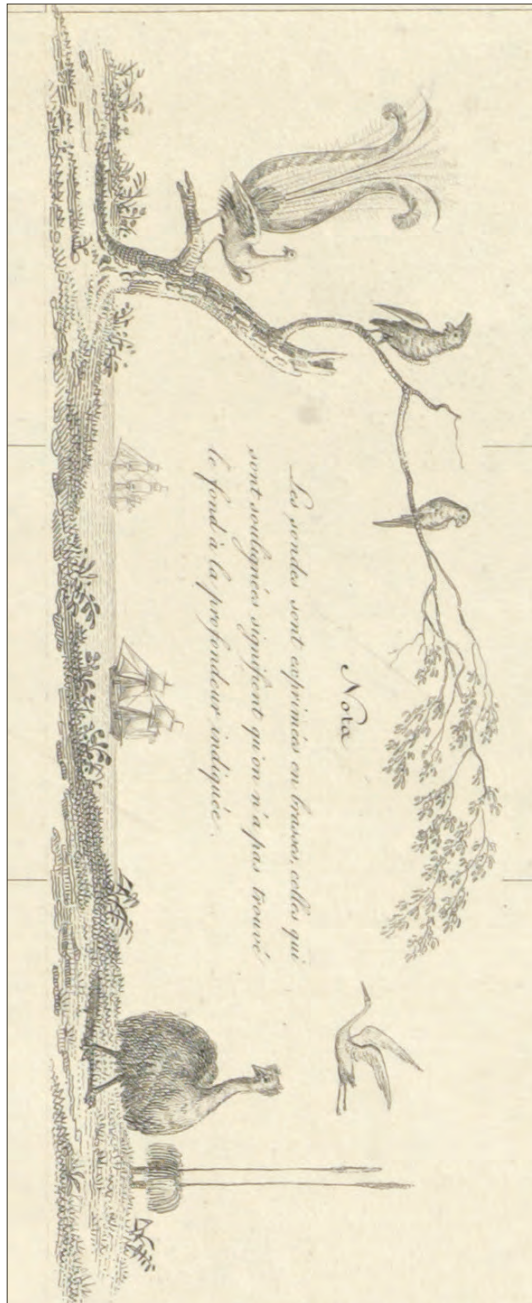


Figure 6.6b: Cartouche from Louis Freycinet, “Carte générale de la Terre Napoléon” (showing south-east Australia and Kangaroo Island). Engraving from the *Atlas of the Voyage de découvertes aux Terres Australes* (1811).

The “lamentations” continued even after the appointment of Pierre-Bernard Milius as captain after Baudin’s death in Mauritius on 16 September 1803. By the time the *Géographe* reached the port of Lorient, Brittany, *savants* and officers of all ranks (except Milius) had been crammed into the great cabin and gun-room. “This measure was not to the taste of everybody, particularly persons taught to calculate only their convenience”, Milius observed. As resentment built, he, like Baudin, was obliged to relieve officers of their duties, including the brothers Louis and Henri Freycinet and the ever-irritable Ransonnet. Milius, his health already delicate (he had previously left the expedition at Port Jackson due to illness), was admitted to hospital for 40 days soon after his arrival in France. “The hardships and pain of all kinds that I endured on this voyage led to the complete breakdown of my health”, he reported. “It is pointless to name here those responsible for all my woes.”<sup>67</sup>

The continuity of such tensions suggests that they were not based solely on poor interpersonal relations between Baudin and his men. As tables were (literally) turned, food became fodder and the men’s water rationed so that no animal went thirsty,<sup>68</sup> assumptions about human hegemony and dominion—the Linnaean conventions that established the “natural order” and informed much of the expedition’s activity—may have been similarly inverted. The physical and psychological space occupied by the growing menagerie could only have strengthened its preeminence, forcing men to reassess their place not only in the pecking order (so to speak) of the ship, but in the expedition as a whole. This must surely have contributed to the interpersonal problems on board: men who by birth or

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<sup>67</sup> Pierre-Bernard Milius, *Récit du voyage aux Terres Australes* (Le Havre: Société havraise d’études diverses, Muséum d’Histoire naturelle du Havre, transcription by Jacqueline Bonnemains and Pascale Hauguel, 1987), pp. 53, 60 (my translations). See also Horner, *The French Reconnaissance*, p. 323; Anthony J. Brown, “François Péron — A Life for Science”, Introduction to Péron, *Voyage*, vol. I, p. xxiii.

<sup>68</sup> Baudin, *Journal*, pp. 477, 560.



rank considered themselves socially elite, men with “brilliant education and philosophy”,<sup>69</sup> would not have appreciated being treated like animals. And as animals and men came into ever-increasing contact and endured similar hardships and pressures, the differences between them became still less defined. Birds that were “swarming” on King Island took on a new distinction when they were encountered on a daily, individual basis.

But when drawing attention to the shared characteristics of humans and animals, care must be taken to prevent a reversion to the default, anthropocentric viewpoint that blinds us to the subjective experiences of real animals. The blurring of spatial and other boundaries on the *Géographe* did not mean that certain power relations were no longer in force. After all, on 15 March 1803, off Dirk Hartog Island (on the western Australian coast), Baudin wrote:

We lost a kangaroo and an emu in the course of the day. It was the second time that this accident had occurred and we attributed it to the heavy movements of the ship, which [...] was thrown about in every way by the rough, uncomfortable sea. We stuffed the animals in order to preserve their skins.<sup>70</sup>

Taxidermy was certainly not to be the fate of any deceased human voyager. However, since the language of animals is unavailable to us, their story must be gleaned from human texts. It is possible to gain some insight into the emus’ experience based on the men’s reports of conditions on board.

Penned in the gangway, the birds were trapped without recourse or retreat (Figure 6.7). They suffered the torments of the ship’s rats and cockroaches, the sounds and smells of unfamiliar carnivores, the reeking men, the heaving sea.<sup>71</sup> Flung about their cage, they were probably battered

<sup>69</sup> Péron, *Voyage*, vol. II, p. 18.

<sup>70</sup> Baudin, *Journal*, p. 504.

<sup>71</sup> The *Géographe* was eventually to transport some 73 live animals back to France. See Richard W. Burkhardt, Jr, “Unpacking Baudin: Models of Scientific Practice in the Age of Lamarck”, in G. Laurent (ed.), *Jean-Baptiste Lamarck 1744-1829* (Paris: CTHS,





Figure 6.7: Charles-Alexandre Lesueur, self-portrait on board the *Géographe*. Note the birds in the cage.

and drenched—and Baudin believed they were seasick. On 2 July 1803 he reported that the weather:

had caused the ship to shake so violently that all our animals, which I so wanted to preserve to be of use to France, were greatly incommoded by it. This was particularly the case with the emus, which we had to feed by force so that they would not die of hunger.<sup>72</sup>

Conversely, Baudin almost showed signs of becoming animal: as well as preserving his specimens, he seemed intent on literally preserving his own body, of turning scientific scrutiny usually reserved for the other onto himself. He had tuberculosis, and was “spitting blood [...] so thick”, he reported, “that one would have said that it was pieces of lung coming away from my body.”<sup>73</sup> A former midshipman recalled that the captain:

collected in a jar of spirits of wine the lungs he had brought up in the course of his untold suffering, and he showed them to everyone who came to visit him. “Are the lungs indispensable to life?” he would say. “You see I no longer have any, yet I still exist.”<sup>74</sup>

With the success of the expedition reliant on the well-being of its captives, it is little wonder Baudin engages and empathises with his animals. I write “his” animals since his journal entries, with their references to “pretty emus” and the “magnificent resistance” of the (gendered) kangaroo,

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1997), p. 502, note 4. However, this inventory did not include the usual stowaways: “The cockroaches had multiplied with such fertility that the corvettes had become infested with them [...] the rats on their side had multiplied with no less success”, wrote Pierre-Roch Jurien de la Gravière, one of the younger officers. “All these animals caused a nauseating smell” enhanced by that of the shellfish left buried by the naturalists in buckets of sand “until we considered the decay of the animal sufficiently advanced”. The scurvy-stricken men too “gave out a fetid smell”, wrote medical officer Hubert-Jules Taillefer, “which, when you breathed it, seemed to attack the very root of life”. Quoted in John Dunmore, *French Explorers in the Pacific* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2 vols, 1965/1969), vol. I, pp. 40, 42.

<sup>72</sup> Baudin, *Journal*, p. 557.

<sup>73</sup> Baudin, *Journal*, p. 544.

<sup>74</sup> Charles Baudin, quoted in Horner, *The French Reconnaissance*, p. 317.

seem to indicate a subjective, emotional investment that is unexpected in the reportage of one simply doing his duty. Although he bought the King Island emus from the sealers and writes of their “use” to France, they seem more than just possessions. Wild animals on a wooden ship; Europeans in the Antipodes: both groups conceptually and materially othered, both in service—and servitude—to the Republic. Some of Baudin’s juxtapositions are written so casually that one can believe he truly felt some fraternity with his fellow travellers. On 31 July 1803 he wrote:

Our twenty sick men obtained little relief from the remedies administered to them. This was attributed to the humid and unhealthy atmosphere that had surrounded us for so long. Our quadrupeds were no less exhausted by the bad weather and the ship’s movement than we all were, and I am very afraid of losing several of them, if it continues without at least some interruption that would enable them to regain strength.<sup>75</sup>

Baudin seems to observe parallels not only between animals and humans, however. His correspondence, one of few windows onto his thoughts, also reveals an interesting slippage between different classes of animals. In a letter to his patron Jussieu, written in Timor two months earlier, he was pleased to report:

The quadrupeds, such as the kangaroos, emu and umback [wombat] are in a good state [...]; there remain ten of the former that are bigger than sheep, four of the second (emus), and only two of the latter; I also have about fifty beautiful birds of different species.<sup>76</sup>

Given Baudin’s instructions to collect appropriate candidates for acclimatisation, it is possible his comparison of kangaroos with sheep was

<sup>75</sup> Baudin, *Journal*, p. 568.

<sup>76</sup> Baudin to Jussieu, 9 Prairial Year XI (29 May 1803), quoted in Jouanin, “Live Animals of the Baudin Expedition”, in Steven Smith, *Tasmania’s French Connections: Report on the Goddard Sapin-Jaloustre Scholarship 2002* (Hobart: S.J. Smith, translated by Steven Smith, 2003), p. 64.

not based solely on size alone. But also of interest is his classification of emus as “quadrupeds”. They are quite clearly differentiated from the birds; Baudin did not, for example, write “fifty *other* beautiful birds”. His bestowal on the emus of a significance usually reserved for mammals could of course have been a slip of the pen of a dying man—the emu’s distinctive feathers can seem more like fur—or indeed acknowledgement that the birds were to be farmed like quadrupeds—another example of animal classification according to human use. But as the monsoonal winds reversed direction and the ship teetered on the edge of disorder, it seems fitting that Baudin’s emus were, in text at least, similarly inconsistent. Baudin’s concern for them, however, was not. He wrote of “giving them such attention as should have secured them a happier fate”,<sup>77</sup> and he cared enough to allow them literally (although unknowingly) to change the course of the voyage, and its outcomes.

Once the survey of Australia’s north-west coast had been completed, the expedition was to continue east to explore the Gulf of Carpentaria region across to the northeast tip of Australia.<sup>78</sup> But on 7 July 1803 Baudin set sail west, to the Île de France. His reasons were many, but his log reveals the priority he gave to the animals, the loss of which, he reasoned, “will certainly not be made up for by the slight amount of geographical knowledge that it seems we may gain”. He decided to turn the ship back, “rather than lose them all”.<sup>79</sup> He wrote:

our quadrupeds and emus were very sick. We could only attribute this to the violent and incessant movement of the heavy sea, which left them not a moment’s peace. [...] Since the emus refused to eat, we fed them by force, opening their beaks and introducing pellets of rice mash into their stomachs. We gave them, and the sick kangaroos likewise, wine and sugar; and although I was very short of these

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<sup>77</sup> Baudin, *Journal*, p. 560.

<sup>78</sup> Fleurieu quoted in Baudin, *Journal*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>79</sup> Baudin, *Journal*, p. 557.

same things for myself, I shall be very happy to have gone without them for their sake if they can help in restoring them to health.

On this day I had a worse bout of spitting blood than I had had before.<sup>80</sup>

Baudin's log thereafter is a document of despair. As the storms (and his health) worsened, his entries grew shorter, but on 19 July, somewhere in the Indian Ocean, he made the effort to note "the unpleasant experience of losing one of our emus [...]. This loss was particularly great, as we found, upon skinning it to stuff it, that it was a female. It is possible that there is not another amongst the three that remain."<sup>81</sup> Baudin's hopes for the domestication of the emus were dwindling, as were, one can guess, his hopes for personal glory. On 2 August, just five days from landfall at Île de France, another emu died and "was stuffed for the museum [...]" the second victim of the rough weather since it had been with us", he wrote. "I shall consider myself fortunate if I manage to keep the two that I still have of this species."<sup>82</sup> But the unfortunate captain himself died six weeks later.

### Part III: Aftermath

By the time the emus arrived in port at Lorient on 24 March 1804, those captured on King Island had been on the *Géographe* for fifteen months. They survived a four-month sojourn at Île de France and a three-week stopover at the Cape of Good Hope. They survived Milius' reorganisation

<sup>80</sup> Baudin, *Journal*, p. 560. Noting that "the sweetened wine given to our sick animals had done them good", Baudin had them dosed twice a day (p. 561).

<sup>81</sup> Baudin, *Journal*, p. 564.

<sup>82</sup> Baudin, *Journal*, p. 569. Of the Australian species, six kangaroos, the last two wombats and another forty-five birds died on the journey from Timor to Paris. Horner (*The French Reconnaissance*, p. 328) notes that such losses "would have distressed Baudin". Interestingly, seven pigs aboard the expedition's schooner *Casuarina*—"perhaps with a presentiment of their fate", writes Duyker (*François Péron: An Impetuous Life*, p. 198)—jumped ship in Timor. Only three were recaptured.



and rehousing of the menagerie—a process complicated by the presence of several large carnivores. They survived more than a week becalmed in the heat north of the equator. They survived eleven months at Malmaison, Josephine’s estate ten miles west of Paris, before she sent them to the Museum’s menagerie at the Jardin des Plantes. They survived Josephine, who died in 1814, and they survived their wild counterparts, driven to extinction soon after Baudin’s visit. When the last captive emu died in Paris in May 1822, the birds were gone forever.<sup>83</sup>

This presumes that a King Island emu did in fact reach France alive. The singularity of Péron’s inaccurate account of the capture of three Kangaroo Island emus, plus his apparent inability to distinguish between the dwarf emus and the larger mainland bird, gave researchers no reason to suspect the existence of another story, and another species.<sup>84</sup> In 1899, and working at the home of the collection, the Muséum national d’Histoire naturelle, Alphonse Milne-Edwards and Émile Oustalet declared that three live Kangaroo Island emus were brought to Europe;<sup>85</sup> Giglioli (1900, 1901, 1907), Mathews (1910), Brasil (1913) and Morgan and Sutton (1928) followed suit.<sup>86</sup> In 1906, Professor Balwin Spencer examined

<sup>83</sup> Horner, *The French Reconnaissance*, pp. 315, 319, 323, 324; Milius, *Récit du voyage aux Terres Australes*, pp. 53, 57, 60; Duyker, *François Péron: An Impetuous Life*, p. 208; Jouanin, “L’Impératrice Joséphine et les sciences naturelles”, in Marie-Blanche d’Arneville et al. (eds), *L’Impératrice Joséphine et les sciences naturelles: Catalogue de l’exposition du Musée national des châteaux de Malmaison et Bois-Préau, 29 mai–6 octobre 1997* (Paris: Réunion des Musées nationaux, 1997), p. 32; Jouanin, “Les Émeus de l’expédition Baudin”, pp. 180–181.

<sup>84</sup> In a letter to the Minister of Marine dated 9 Prairial Year XI (29 May 1803) Baudin indicated that, unlike Péron, he was aware that the Kangaroo Island emus were “of a species different from that of Port Jackson”. (Archives Centrales de la Marine, Paris, Ms BB4 995[5], my translation. I must thank Jean Fornasiero for bringing this document to my attention.) However, his journal entry about “the two that I still have of this species” (Baudin, *Journal*, p. 569) suggests he assumed the dwarf emus from both islands were conspecific, or that he could not tell the two apart.

<sup>85</sup> Milne-Edwards and Oustalet, “Note sur l’Émeu noir”, p. 208.

<sup>86</sup> Henry H. Giglioli, “A Third Specimen of the Extinct ‘Dromaius ater,’ Vieillot; found in the R. Zoological Museum, Florence”, *Nature*, 62, 1596 (1900), p. 102; Henry H. Giglioli,



subfossilised remains from King Island and wondered why Baudin's naturalist, having "closely catechized" the sealer Cooper, "did not secure an actual specimen".<sup>87</sup> In 1978, the Royal Australasian Ornithologists' Union confirmed the fusion (and confusion) of the two insular varieties by recommending both be called *Dromaius minor*.<sup>88</sup> It was not until 1984 that emus were specifically separated, with the Kangaroo Island emu declared *Dromaius baudinianus* in belated honour of the French commander, whose log had been published in English ten years earlier.<sup>89</sup> It was not until 1990 that Balouet and Jouanin's study of skeletal remains determined that one of the emus who lived at Malmaison was from Kangaroo Island and the other, slightly smaller than his counterpart, was from King Island.<sup>90</sup>

After nineteen years in captivity, the live dwarf emus brought to France by Baudin's expedition died within months of each other.<sup>91</sup> Birds from two worlds, temporary pets and permanent conquests, they are now birds of two times: of the past and of that peculiar perpetual present

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"On a Specimen of the Extinct *Dromæus ater* Discovered in the Royal Zoological Museum, Florence", *Ibis*, 1 (1901), pp. 1-10; Henry H. Giglioli, "On the Extinct Emeu of the Small Islands off the South Coast of Australia and Probably Tasmania", *Nature*, 75, 1953 (1907), p. 534; Gregory M. Mathews, *The Birds of Australia* (London: Witherby, 1910), vol. I; L. Brasil, "L'Émeu de l'île King", *Bulletin de la Société Linnéenne de Normandie*, 6, 6 (1913), pp. 76-97; Alexander Matheson Morgan and John Sutton, "A Critical Description of Some Recently Discovered Bones of the Extinct Kangaroo Island Emu (*Dromaius diemenianus*)", *Emu*, 28, 1 (1928), pp. 1-19.

<sup>87</sup> Baldwin Spencer, "The King Island Emu", *The Victorian Naturalist*, 23, 7 (1906), p. 139.

<sup>88</sup> Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union, "Recommended English Names for Australian Birds", *Emu*, 77, Supplement (1978), p. 255.

<sup>89</sup> Shane A. Parker, "The Extinct Kangaroo Island Emu, a Hitherto Unrecognised Species", *Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club*, 104, 1 (1984), p. 21. Baudin's sea log, containing his record of the King Island emus, remains unpublished in its original French. It is likely that easier access to the log would have resulted in an earlier, better understanding of the emus and of the man who cared about them.

<sup>90</sup> Balouet and Jouanin, "Systématique et origine géographique des émeus", p. 314.

<sup>91</sup> Jouanin, "Les Émeus de l'expédition Baudin", pp. 180-181.

<sup>92</sup> For further discussion of the identity of the birds in this highly encoded image (Figure 6.8), see Stephanie C. Pfennigwerth, "'The Mighty Cassowary': The Discovery and Demise of the King Island Emu", *Archives of Natural History*, 37, 1 (2010), pp. 74-90.



Figure 6.8: Charles-Alexandre Lesueur, “Nouvelle-Hollande: Ile Decrès. Casoar de la N<sup>le</sup> Hollande.” From the *Atlas of the Voyage de découvertes aux Terres Australes* (1807), Plate XXXVI.<sup>92</sup>

characteristic of museum specimens. The King Island emu featured in Lesueur's medallion now exists as a mounted skin in a cabinet far beneath the feet of visitors to the Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle, Paris. Like his feather in the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, he is considered too precious for public display. A juvenile who died on the *Géographe* stands beside him in the Paris vault; another youngster is held in the zoological museum at the University of Turin. A partial skeleton stalks the Museo Zoologico e di Storia Naturale della Specola, Florence. His replica bones are doubly false, being not only carved from wood, but "evidently copied from those of the perfect mounted skeleton in the Paris Museum"<sup>93</sup> of what is now recognised as the Kangaroo Island bird. One of his shipboard companions is lost altogether or may languish yet, mislabelled, in a private or public European collection. In Australia, the single feather, and bones and eggshells exposed by the King Island winds, are the only local proof that the emu ever existed at all.

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Henri Freycinet's remark to Matthew Flinders, reproduced at the beginning of this essay, is indicative of an attitude that animals were (and remain) mere trivialities, ranking far below human affairs—in Freycinet's case, an impediment to the far more important quest to map and make empire. But the fact that the *Géographe* was accompanied by a consort ship named the *Naturaliste* indicates that the practice of natural history (which, as we have seen, often has little to do with actual animals) is similarly a form of strategic reconnaissance. Had the mandate of the men on the *Géographe* been limited to geography, human and animal histories may

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<sup>93</sup> Giglioli, "On a Specimen", p. 8. The mounted skeleton of the Kangaroo Island emu who died in 1822 is exhibited in the Extinct and Endangered Species section of the Grande Galerie de l'Évolution, Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle, Paris. His skin is in the collection of the Muséum d'Histoire naturelle, Geneva.

have been different, possibly profoundly so. This chapter in the history of animals such as the King Island emu shows how a scientific expedition's cultural context—and conflicts—will direct what is remembered about a species, what happens to it, and why.

Yet the power does not always flow in only one direction. To be sure, the fact that Freycinet chose to ignore practical problems that impeded the expedition during its explorations in Tasmania—such as the contrary winds, the lack of water, the search for missing crew<sup>94</sup>—indicates that he may have been using collecting activities to excuse the French in the face of Flinders' more advanced progress. On the other hand, his apportioning of “blame” suggests the ways in which animals themselves—not natural history specimens but individual agents—leveraged a surprising amount of influence over the conduct and outcomes of the Baudin expedition. Their presence and their experiences on the *Géographe* were such that, for a short time at least, the usual hierarchies were challenged, as the lives of the men became entwined with the lives of their captives. Beyond the ship, the influence of animals was more subtle yet more profound. The interest of the French in the Bass Strait sealing industry, “the most considerable among the very few natural productions of this country that can be esteemed commercial”, wrote Governor Philip Gidley King,<sup>95</sup> is arguably one of the reasons why the British chased the *Géographe* to King Island in December 1802, planted the Union Jack, and then created their first settlements in strategic southern Van Diemen's Land in 1803 and 1804. Seals and sealing thus influenced the expansion of the British colony (and the thwarting of any French ambitions). And had the charting of northern Queensland continued in accordance with Baudin's itinerary, if the emus and kangaroos had not been so ill, what might the outcome have been? The extent to which the animals were knowing and deliberate

<sup>94</sup> Horner, *The French Reconnaissance*, p. 220.

<sup>95</sup> Quoted in A.G.L. Shaw, *A History of the Port Phillip District: Victoria Before Separation* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1996), p. 3.

agents of change is not the issue. What is important is the recognition that the animals *had* agency. This capacity to create action or opinion does not necessarily require conscious thought. Thus it is possible to suggest that the animals' unwitting exertion of power over humans is another form of dominion, another kind of empire.

Examining the role of animals in what are ostensibly human endeavours not only serves as a reminder of the interdependence of humans with other species. Animal-centric analyses also uncover a rich seam of alternative experience and reveal the potential for new insights into given histories. Perhaps more importantly, recovering the King Island emu's story from an expedition which allegedly "made known more new creatures"<sup>96</sup> but—as is typical in this twisting tale—contributed to their loss, as individuals and as a kind, helps to restore the bird to some sort of existence. This is a different kind of discovery, a gentle conquest in reverse; a symbolic return of a history to a creature that, once largely forgotten, is by our knowing made new again.

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<sup>96</sup> Cuvier, "Report Presented to the Government by the Institut de France", p. lvi.

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“Primitive race”, “pure race”, “brown  
race”, “every race”:  
Louis Freycinet’s Understanding of  
Human Difference in Oceania



Nicole Starbuck

On 23 April 1821, François Arago reported to the Royal Academy of the Sciences on the results of Louis Freycinet’s world voyage. His report, composed in collaboration with fellow savants Alexander von Humboldt and Georges Cuvier, among others, paid particular attention to the material that Freycinet had gathered in Oceania “on the races of men that live there, their state of civilisation, the development of diverse branches of agriculture and commerce, finally, on the causes that arrest or advance the progress of their society”.<sup>1</sup> He explained that, in order to facilitate this research, Freycinet had “provided those men who would share his work with a series of questions that addressed in a methodical manner the physical, moral and political characteristics of man”.<sup>2</sup> Arago commended

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<sup>1</sup> François Arago, “Rapport fait à l’Académie royale des sciences, le lundi 23 avril 1821, sur le Voyage autour du Monde de la corvette l’*Uranie*, commandée par M. de Freycinet”, reproduced in L. Freycinet, *Voyage autour du monde, entrepris par ordre du Roi, sous le ministère et conformément aux instructions de S. Exc. M. le vicomte du Bouchage, secrétaire d’État au département de la Marine, exécuté sur les corvettes de S. M. l’Uranie et la Physicienne, pendant les années 1817, 1818, 1819 et 1820, Historique* (Paris: Pillet Aîné, 2 vols, 1827-1839), vol. I, p. xxxvii. This and all subsequent translations from the official historical account of Freycinet’s voyage are my own.

<sup>2</sup> Arago, “Rapport fait à l’Académie”, pp. xxxvii-xxxviii.



the “advantages of this classification”, which had provided him and his scientific colleagues with extensive information on the Marianna Islands in particular: “we cannot give enough praise for this tableau”, he declared to the Academy.<sup>3</sup>

It would appear, then, that Freycinet had provided the savants in Paris with a vast amount of empirical data deemed valuable to their research on the natural history of man. Given the purposeful and systematic approach he had taken to gathering this information, Freycinet might also have had something to say regarding that main anthropological question of the day: the cause and meaning of human difference. During the time of Freycinet's voyage (1817-1820), and over the period it took for the official results of that voyage to be published (1824-1844), the way in which savants answered this question changed significantly. The environmentalist understanding of human variety and the concept of stages of civilisation, characteristic of the late Enlightenment, were gradually giving way to racial theories which, during the 1820s, began to link physical characteristics to intellect, using studies of facial angle and phrenology in particular. The theories that emerged during the 1830s and 1840s even suggested that distinct human races inherited fixed capabilities.<sup>4</sup> This path to racialist theory was neither steady nor constant. The development of the theory certainly gained pace, however, during these formative years that saw a succession of voyages to Oceania—notably those of Freycinet (1817-1820), Louis-Isidore Duperrey (1822-1825) and Jules-Sébastien-César Dumont d'Urville (1826-1829 and 1837-1840). Establishing a new scientific tradition, these voyages handed over their anthropological materials and data to laboratory scientists upon their return to Europe. However, the correlation between the outlooks and experiences of captains on the beaches of Oceania and the notions and

<sup>3</sup> Arago, “Rapport fait à l'Académie”, p. xxxviii.

<sup>4</sup> See Martin Staum, “The Paris Geographical Society constructs the Other, 1821-1850”, *Journal of Historical Geography*, 26, 2 (2000), pp. 222-238, here p. 223.

interpretations of metropolitan scientists was often tenuous. As stated, racist responses to the question of human difference were emerging gradually; monogenist beliefs long remained the norm and, although biological theories of race were developing, their validity was not yet widely accepted.

In the history of anthropology and scientific voyages, Freycinet's response to the question has been overshadowed by the earlier work of François Péron and the later publications of d'Urville. In fact, while, as Serge Tcherkétoff points out, there is a strong body of work concerning theories of human difference from 1730-1790 and from 1830-1850,<sup>5</sup> the early nineteenth-century history of these theories has received little attention. Some important studies have been carried out regarding the work of the Freycinet expedition's surgeon-naturalists Jean-René Constant Quoy and Joseph-Paul Gaimard.<sup>6</sup> Bronwen Douglas, for example, explains that Quoy and Gaimard, who based their findings on skulls collected on Rawak Island, came to the conclusion that certain characteristics of Papuans were innate, but not necessarily fixed.<sup>7</sup> Despite the clear influence of the theories of German physiologist and pioneer phrenologist Franz Joseph Gall upon the work, Douglas concludes that it nevertheless provides some evidence of an "environmentalist, albeit ambivalent, humanism" and a "catholic optimism".<sup>8</sup> Freycinet himself has received attention from Martin Staum. However, Staum concentrates on the scientific methods of study practised during the voyage and the influence of the results

<sup>5</sup> Serge Tcherkétoff, "A Long and Unfortunate Voyage Towards the 'Invention' of the Melanesia/Polynesia Distinction 1595-1832", *The Journal of Pacific Studies*, 38, 2 (2003), pp. 175-196, here p. 182.

<sup>6</sup> See Bronwen Douglas and Chris Ballard, *Foreign Bodies: Oceania and the Science of Race, 1750-1940* (Canberra: Australian National University E Press, 2008); Tcherkétoff, "A Long and Unfortunate Voyage"; Martin Staum, "The Paris Geographical Society"; and Martin Staum, *Labeling People: French Scholars on Society, Race, and Empire* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003).

<sup>7</sup> Douglas and Ballard, *Foreign Bodies*, p. 116.

<sup>8</sup> Douglas and Ballard, *Foreign Bodies*, pp. 117, 123 and 126.

on developing racial theories which, he argues, played a critical role in nineteenth-century French imperialism. He does not address the question of Freycinet's personal understanding of "race".<sup>9</sup> Indeed, there has as yet been no in-depth analysis of the part that the Freycinet expedition played in the development of nineteenth-century racial theory. This paper alone could not hope to present such an exhaustive study, but it will delve into the issue by investigating and seeking to elucidate the particular viewpoint of Louis Freycinet, commander of the *Uranie*, through an examination of the history volumes of his *Voyage autour du monde*.<sup>10</sup>

There are significant reasons why the commander's standpoint on "race" merits closer attention—not least among them the praise that his anthropological work received from some of the most eminent savants in France. Ships such as the *Uranie* were scientific instruments, as explained by Richard Sorrenson<sup>11</sup>—in fact, for the purposes of this paper, the *Uranie* was effectively an "anthropological instrument"—and of course it was Freycinet who operated this particular ship. Moreover, as commander of the expedition, he was ultimately responsible for the anthropological materials that it gathered and returned to France. As Arago mentioned, he closely directed the work of his men—men such as the naturalists Quoy and Gaimard, as well as artist Jacques Arago and midshipman Alphonse Pellion, who together produced the expedition's ethnographic illustrations. It was Freycinet who later compiled the various reports carried out by his men and wove them together with his own observations to produce the official history of the voyage. Furthermore, and this is worth noting, Freycinet had worked closely with ambitious observer of man, François

<sup>9</sup> Staum, "The Paris Geographical Society", pp. 222-238; and *Labeling People*, pp. 96, 103, 105 and 106.

<sup>10</sup> In addition to the volumes devoted to the narrative account of the voyage (labelled "historique"), several other volumes were published dealing with topics such as navigation and geography, botany, magnetism and so on.

<sup>11</sup> Richard Sorrenson, "The Ship as a Scientific Instrument in the Eighteenth Century", *Osiris*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Series, vol. 11, *Science in the Field* (1996), pp. 221-236.

Péron, whose methodology, historians agree, presaged the later theories of physical anthropology.<sup>12</sup> They had undertaken their first journey to Oceania together with the Baudin expedition, and thereafter Freycinet had spent over five years working with Péron's papers to complete and bring to publication the narrative of that voyage. Following his own expedition aboard the *Uranie*, Freycinet was moved to make certain amendments to Péron's narrative and he consequently published a second edition.<sup>13</sup> Finally, as both Douglas and Staum demonstrate, European anthropologists were to use the material he transported to France aboard the *Uranie* and the observations he subsequently published to modify their racial hierarchies.<sup>14</sup> He had indeed navigated an "anthropological instrument" through the "Sea of Islands" at a crucial period in the development of raciology.

As mentioned, however, Freycinet's views were expressed through the medium of a voyage narrative, which was intended to interest a public audience as well as to satisfy the French government and to inform the scientific community. It was not meant to be a learned treatise that proposed and defended a specific theory. Therefore the text needs to be studied systematically—that is, by analysing Freycinet's narrative style and terminology, his observations of the physical features of the people of Oceania and his assessments of their moral and intellectual

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<sup>12</sup> See Bronwen Douglas, *Foreign Bodies*, pp. 112-113; Bronwen Douglas, "Seaborne Ethnography and the Natural History of Man", *The Journal of Pacific History*, 38, 1 (2003), pp. 3-17, here p. 27; Bronwen Douglas, "Slippery Word, Ambiguous Praxis: 'Race' and Late-18<sup>th</sup>-Century Voyagers in Oceania", *The Journal of Pacific History*, 41, 1 (2006), pp. 1-29, here pp. 23-25; Margaret Sankey, "François-Auguste Péron: le mythe de l'homme sauvage et l'écriture de la science", *Cahiers de Sociologie Économique et Culturelle*, 9 juin 1988, pp. 37-46, here p. 46; George W. Stocking, "French Anthropology in 1800", *Isis*, 55, 180 (1964), pp. 134-150, here pp. 145-146; and Nicole Starbuck, *Baudin, Napoleon and the Exploration of Australia* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2013).

<sup>13</sup> François Péron and Louis Claude Freycinet, *Voyage de découvertes aux Terres Australes*, 2<sup>ème</sup> édition (Paris: Arthus Bertrand, 4 vols, 1824).

<sup>14</sup> Douglas and Ballard, *Foreign Bodies*, p. 9, and Staum, "The Paris Geographical Society", p. 225.

characteristics. It is in this way that we may draw from it a clear, overall, impression of Freycinet's attitude concerning the study of man as well as, more precisely, where this scientific voyager stood in regard to that critical ideological shift from the theory of variety within humanity to the belief in a hierarchy of distinct races.

The structure and style of his historical account certainly indicate that Freycinet took a conscientious approach to reporting on his island encounters. In his preface to the first volume of the history, perhaps recollecting the somewhat melodramatic style and the speculative digressions characteristic of François Péron's *Voyage de découvertes*,<sup>15</sup> Freycinet explained:

I have applied myself to making the style of my account simple, clear and precise; my aim is to report the facts without seeking to dazzle the reader by rash reflections or by the digressions of a vague and thoughtless imagination, persuaded that only accurate observations presented with the most clear perspective can give a precise idea of the distant lands and unfamiliar people whose distinctive character and nature one wants to describe.<sup>16</sup>

As John Dunmore points out, the captain did not entirely avoid “flights of rhetorical fancy and unfortunate purple patches” in his narrative. Overall, though, his reports are relatively objective. They are also systematic and exhaustive.<sup>17</sup> On the people of Timor, Freycinet wrote 123 pages, on those of the Papuan Islands 18, the Caroline Islands

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<sup>15</sup> Miranda Hughes argues that “Péron's account differs little, methodologically, from the literature of popular travellers' tales”. It is “laden with rhetoric”, she argues, and “although entertaining, is hardly a work of anthropology”. See Miranda Hughes, “Philosophical travellers at the ends of the earth: Baudin, Péron and the Tasmanians”, in R.W. Home (ed.), *Australian Science in the Making* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 36.

<sup>16</sup> Freycinet, *Voyage autour du monde*, vol. I, p. viii.

<sup>17</sup> John Dunmore, *French Explorers in the Pacific*, vol. II, *The Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 107.

43, the Marianna Islands 217, Hawaii 38 and Port Jackson 207. Each of these chapters comprises the following sub-sections: “Man considered as an Individual”, “Man in the Family” and “Man in Society”, within which Freycinet addressed a number of subjects. Under “Man as an Individual”, he wrote in turn about physical features, fitness and health. It is here that he also included tables of the measurements of local individuals, recorded by Gaimard. “Man in the Family” typically covers diet and cookery, clothes and ornamentation, housing, tools and family relationships. Topics addressed under “Man in Society” include social organisation, character, customs, language, religion, leisure activities, industry and government. It is clear that, in writing the historical volumes, Freycinet was acutely conscious of the instruction given to him by certain savants: “hasten to inform us of what relates to the domain of science”.<sup>18</sup>

It is no doubt also a reflection of his awareness of contemporary scientific theory and discourse that, in his narrative of the *Uranie* voyage, Freycinet used the term “race” more frequently than previous navigators had done.<sup>19</sup> That is not to say that he used it repeatedly. In his account of the people of Timor, he used the word “race” six times; the Papuan Islands, twice; the Caroline Islands, once; the Marianna Islands five times; Hawaii, once; and Port Jackson, ten times. By comparison, François Péron had used the term on seven occasions in a chapter which includes just 23 pages and concerns only the people of Van Diemen’s Land, New Holland and Timor.

It is not only the frequency but also, and most importantly, the sense in which he used this term, that is of interest. Douglas explains that, from the 1770s, “race” became the term of choice to distinguish broad groups of people according to their external, environmentally

<sup>18</sup> Freycinet, *Voyage autour du monde*, vol. I, p. vi.

<sup>19</sup> See Douglas, “Slippery Word, Ambiguous Praxis”, in regard to the use of the word “race” during the late Enlightenment period.



induced, differences. It was interchangeable with terms such as “variety” or “species”, in the sense of “kind”. In the late eighteenth century, the theories of Immanuel Kant and Johann Friedrich Blumenbach influenced a redefinition of “race”, which was soon used by some savants in France to identify and rank allegedly hereditary human types.<sup>20</sup> At the time that Freycinet was writing his *Voyage autour du monde*, though, this latter sense of the word was not universally accepted in France—Staum points out that, even during the 1840s, Humboldt was still advocating the view of the common unity of humanity while other savants claimed that the unity was certainly moral, but not physical.<sup>21</sup>

Freycinet used the word “race” to distinguish groups of people according primarily to their outward physical appearance. He concentrated on skin colour and hair but, at times, also considered the shape of the eyes and nose. Language and customs were presented as secondary factors, and do not appear to have been necessary to his designation of races. The most apt example of this approach is provided by his grouping of the people of Timor. Under the sub-title “diversity of the races”, Freycinet categorised two groups based solely on physical features: “negroes with frizzy hair, who are the true natives” and “the men who previously were their conquerors, who everything points to being of Asiatic race, who have swarthy skin and smooth hair”.<sup>22</sup> These groupings and physical descriptions are reminiscent of those presented by Péron in the *Voyage de*

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<sup>20</sup> Douglas, “Slippery Word, Ambiguous Praxis”, p. 2. See also Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *The Anthropological Treatises of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, with memoirs of him by Marx and Flourens, and an account of his Anthropological Museum by Professor R. Wagner, and The Inaugural Dissertation of John Hunter, M.D. on the Varieties of Man* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts and Green for the Anthropological Society, translated and edited by T. Bendhyshe, 1865); Immanuel Kant, “On the Different Races of Man” (1775) and “From Physical Geography”, in E.C. Eze, *Race and the Enlightenment: A Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), pp. 38-57 and 58-64.

<sup>21</sup> Staum, “The Paris Geographical Society”, p. 233.

<sup>22</sup> Freycinet, *Voyage autour du monde*, vol. I, p. 589.

*découvertes*; however, a comparison of the two accounts reveals significant differences. When Péron categorised the “races” inhabiting Timor, he gave consideration to physical characteristics, certainly, but it was each group’s supposed temperament that he focused on. Moreover, suggesting innate and fixed differences, he claimed that the “races” were “absolutely distinct” and that they “presented the observer with all the original characteristics of the ancient people to which they belong”.<sup>23</sup> Freycinet’s own account, although much lengthier and more detailed, is relatively free of essentialist terminology and even systematic comparisons. Value terms such as “well-built”, “ugly” and “pretty” are scattered throughout his descriptions of various islanders but Freycinet applies them subjectively, based on European aesthetic values and stereotypes, and without any clear hierarchical purpose.

In his chapter on the Aborigines of Port Jackson, however, Freycinet was more expansive: in Australia, he declared, there is “one single race of Aborigines who everywhere displayed identical physical and moral characteristics”.<sup>24</sup> This statement stands out amongst Freycinet’s other descriptions in his voyage account for the fact that it explicitly cites moral, as well as physical, similarity as an indicator of racial identity. However, it is not accompanied by any explanation of the reason for such apparent uniformity—be this innateness or environment. Nor does it extend to any comparisons between Australian Aborigines and other groups. Freycinet substantiated the claim only by reference to widespread customs, and when he did go on to address the physical and moral characteristics of Aborigines he focused specifically on those living in the environs of Port Jackson. Indeed, he clarified his meaning by stating that what he had observed in various parts of Australia was the “same type” of human

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<sup>23</sup> Péron, *Voyage de découvertes*, vol. I, pp. 144–145.

<sup>24</sup> Freycinet, *Voyage autour du monde*, vol. II, p. 704.

being,<sup>25</sup> which is very similar to an observation made twenty years earlier by Matthew Flinders.<sup>26</sup>

With the exception of long-established labels such as “Negro” and “Asiatic”, Freycinet did not use “race” to identify by appearance any cross-regional human varieties. Most frequently, in fact, he labelled the people he encountered by their nationality: Carolinian, Hawaiian, Marianna Islander. And, in so doing, he made an overt effort to apply what he believed to be the most historically accurate name, as demonstrated by his choice of “Marianna Islander” over “Chamorro”.<sup>27</sup> When not certain of the fairness in making generalisations in regard to the population of an entire group of islands, such as the Caroline Islands, many of which he and his men had not visited, he was careful to specify to which island’s people, exactly, he was referring.<sup>28</sup>

Freycinet’s use of the word race in this sense of nation and physical, sometimes moral, similarity, is not consistent throughout the *Voyage*. After concluding that there exists a single “race” on the continent of Australia, he appears to contradict himself when he mentions “les races australiennes”.<sup>29</sup> Perhaps he was including in this statement the Aborigines of Tasmania, whom Péron had claimed to be a race distinct from the indigenous population of the mainland.<sup>30</sup> It would not, however, have been a logical step to assume that it would be read in this sense in a narrative that does not deal directly with the Tasmanians at all, but which only mentions them as an aside on three occasions in 558 pages.<sup>31</sup> His most lengthy reference

<sup>25</sup> Freycinet, *Voyage autour du monde*, vol. II, p. 704.

<sup>26</sup> Matthew Flinders, *A Voyage to Terra Australis: Undertaken for the Purpose of Completing the Discovery of that Vast Country* (London: G. and W. Nicol, 2 vols, 1814), vol. II, p. 212.

<sup>27</sup> Freycinet, *Voyage autour du monde*, vol. II, p. 276.

<sup>28</sup> Freycinet, *Voyage autour du monde*, vol. II, p. 93.

<sup>29</sup> Freycinet, *Voyage autour du monde*, vol. II, p. 893.

<sup>30</sup> Péron, *Voyage de découvertes*, vol. I, p. 448.

<sup>31</sup> Freycinet, *Voyage autour du monde*, vol. II, pp. 1437, 738, 705.

to these people is an addendum in which he seems to subscribe to the emergent “doomed race” theory. Citing information provided to him by Catholic missionary Reverend Mr Ullathorne, who stated that the “race” of indigenous Tasmanians had been “effectively exterminated”, Freycinet predicted that the “Australian family will soon disappear” as well. His use of the word “race” here occurs alongside “tribes”, “Diemenese” and “the Aborigines of Van Diemen’s Land”.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, there is a strong likelihood that Freycinet was using the descriptor “the Australian races” in the same sense as “the Australian *tribes*”. He also used the term in reference to the English, when he categorised them as one of “the races of Europe”,<sup>33</sup> and, if we return to his list of the people living in Timor, we find the Dutch, Chinese and Portuguese colonists grouped together and labelled as one “race”.<sup>34</sup> Here, he had used it as a term simply to differentiate the colonists from the colonised. Elsewhere, he applied the word also with a mind to degrees of civilisation—for example, “the primitive race”, interchangeable with “primitive species”<sup>35</sup>—and to humanity in general: “the race of man”, in the same sense as “the human species”.<sup>36</sup> Overall, his inconsistent and imprecise use of the word demonstrates that he understood “race” as being applicable, in the fluid manner in which it had been used by eighteenth-century navigators, to such categories as type of human, nation or, even more broadly, as civilised/uncivilised.

Given the language he used, it appears that, while it was usually on the basis of physical appearance that he grouped people, Freycinet did not seek to order these “races” according to a hierarchy. The question is then: what significance did he see in the various physical characteristics he recorded? Despite his stated intention to record “the facts” alone, avoiding

<sup>32</sup> Freycinet, *Voyage autour du monde*, vol. II, pp. 1437.

<sup>33</sup> Freycinet, *Voyage autour du monde*, vol. II, p. 893.

<sup>34</sup> Freycinet, *Voyage autour du monde*, vol. I, p. 589.

<sup>35</sup> Freycinet, *Voyage autour du monde*, vol. II, pp. 278 and 309.

<sup>36</sup> Freycinet, *Voyage autour du monde*, vol. I, p. 589.

“rash reflections” or “digressions”, one would expect that the captain’s understanding of humanity would naturally have coloured his reports all the same.

His descriptions are detailed but relatively brief, and they generally aim for accuracy rather than generalisation. Many of his points can be found illustrated in the drawings by Pellion and Arago.<sup>37</sup> Typically, he summarised what he perceived to be the most common physique, with an eye for proportion and muscularity, in accordance with the European ideal. In the case of the Australian Aborigines, for example, he wrote that the bodily proportions “are chiefly characterised by largeness of the head, lack of prominence of body-muscle, and above all, inconceivably skinny arms, thighs and calves”.<sup>38</sup> He tended to point out next any apparent contradictions; he remarked, for instance, that in Australia there may be found men and women who are “well-built and strong”.<sup>39</sup> He went on to describe the hair—frizzy, smooth or woolly—sometimes recognising that there existed more than one type of hair within an islander group. Variations of skin tone within groups was pointed out as well—“there are many slight differences in hue”, he wrote of the Aborigines.<sup>40</sup> Yet the descriptors he used for skin tone are far more varied than for hair and applied less systematically: swarthy, olive, brown, dark, white, light-black, reddish-black, the colour of negroes or the coppery red of Malays. He gave particular attention to facial features, again using his impression of the European shape as a yardstick. In this context he sometimes mentioned the facial angle, as measured by Gaimard; however, he did not use these

<sup>37</sup> Jacques Arago and Alphonse Pellion, *Voyage autour du monde, entrepris par ordre du Roi, sous le Ministère et conformément aux instructions de S. Exc. M. le Vicomte du Bouchage, secrétaire d’État au département de la marine, exécuté sur les corvettes de S. M. l’Uranie et la Physicienne, pendant les années 1817, 1818, 1819 et 1820, Atlas Historique* (Paris: Pillet Ainé, 1825).

<sup>38</sup> Freycinet, *Voyage autour du monde*, vol. II, p. 707.

<sup>39</sup> Freycinet, *Voyage autour du monde*, vol. II, pp. 707-708.

<sup>40</sup> Freycinet, *Voyage autour du monde*, vol. II, p. 710.

measurements as points of comparison with other islanders or to draw conclusions about character, intelligence or degrees of civilisation.

Following these descriptions, Freycinet always provided tables that listed the results of comprehensive bodily measurements carried out by Gaimard. This was not a new approach to the study of man. In fact, included in Freycinet's *Voyage* is a very similar table of measurements compiled by Matthew Flinders two decades earlier.<sup>41</sup> However, the records of previous voyagers had not been anywhere near as comprehensive or as methodical in this regard as were those made by Freycinet's men. Freycinet made no inferences based on these results, just as with the facial angles, but he did point out that they were unreliable—certain subjects, he explained, were “far from co-operative and would not keep still”.<sup>42</sup> He treated Gaimard's dynamometer tests in the same way, pointing out that the results were low for some individuals because they were reluctant to use the machine. On the use of these figures, he stated: “the reader will [...] have points of comparison and will also be able to make analogies between the different figures in the tables. There is no need to consider further such a simple matter”.<sup>43</sup> His attitude is in stark contrast to that taken previously by Péron, who used dynamometer testing in order to rank races according to strength and degrees of civilisation.<sup>44</sup> For his part, Freycinet demonstrated no interest in establishing a “racial” hierarchy; in fact, he describes such a variety of characteristics within each group and such problems with measuring individuals' features and strength that, had he tried, any significant comparisons or assessments would have been rather difficult to make.

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<sup>41</sup> Freycinet, *Voyage autour du monde*, vol. II, p. 711.

<sup>42</sup> Freycinet, *Voyage autour du monde*, vol. II, p. 708.

<sup>43</sup> Freycinet, *Voyage autour du monde*, vol. II, p. 712.

<sup>44</sup> Péron, *Voyage de découvertes*, vol. I, pp. 448–484. See also Starbuck, *Baudin, Napoleon and the Exploration of Australia*.



Through all chapters of the *Voyage* relating to the “natural history of Man”, Freycinet turned repeatedly to the possible influence—on physical appearance, customs and local materials—of migrations and contact between the peoples of different regions. This is evident particularly in his report on the people of the Marianna Islands, in which he regretted the “degeneration” of the “indigenous race” or “pure race”—a result, he explained, of the increasing populations of Spanish colonists and *métis*, of Filipinos and their descendants, of mulatos and of Hawaiians and Caroline Islanders.<sup>45</sup> “During the gathering of diverse tribes in Guam in 1699”, he remarks, “all became entangled, men and languages”.<sup>46</sup> His regret is indicative of a belief in what is referred to in anthropology as the “zero point”. As Greg Dening explains, the “zero point” has been commonly believed to have marked “the dividing moment between a Before, when an indigenous culture was in its pure form, and an After of the encounter, when it was somehow adulterated. The zero point was a dividing line between authentic and inauthentic culture”.<sup>47</sup> Accordingly, Freycinet repeatedly made a point of distinguishing between the “primitive”, “original” or “aboriginal” people of the pre-colonial or pre-transmigrational era, without any mention of cultural change during that time, and the multicultural, multi-“racial”, populations that he encountered during his voyage. His accounts privileged the indigenous cultures, providing lengthy descriptions based largely on second-hand verbal reports as well as the writings of missionaries and colonists. However, this is not to suggest that he took no interest in the effects of encounter. Indeed, he tended overall to highlight the commonalities shared by islander groups at least as clearly as he did the differences that separated them. In regard to the Papuan Islanders, he made some comparisons with Malays, and wrote:

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<sup>45</sup> Freycinet, *Voyage autour du monde*, vol. II, p. 277.

<sup>46</sup> Freycinet, *Voyage autour du monde*, vol. II, p. 365.

<sup>47</sup> Greg Dening, *Beach Crossings: Voyaging Across Times, Cultures and Self* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), p. 51.

“the differences that we have signalled have no doubt been multiplied by the alliances and the inseparable cross-breeding resulting from the union of these men as a common people, but their origin must be attributed to the diversity of the primitive races”.<sup>48</sup> Freycinet did not attempt, through these observations, to fit his subjects into broader human categories, such as those already proposed in metropolitan treatises or like those that fellow voyager Dumont d’Urville would later propound (Melanesian and Polynesian),<sup>49</sup> even though his reports may well have contributed to later endeavours of that kind.

One of the key questions, in determining Freycinet’s position on the theory of “race”, is whether or not he saw a connection between physical and mental characteristics. Although, as mentioned above, taking measurements of anthropological subjects was not an entirely new practice, certain theories had developed by the time of Freycinet’s voyage, and strengthened during the 1820s when he published the first volumes of his narrative. These theories linked some of these measurements directly to intellectual capacity and, consequently, to the potential for advancement towards a more “civilised” state. In his instructions to the members of the Baudin expedition, Georges Cuvier had strongly recommended the use of facial angle measurements for assessing the moral and intellectual faculties of the “various races” the Frenchmen would encounter. He declared: “experience seems to correspond with theory in regard to the relation between the perfection of the spirit and the beauty of the face”.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Freycinet, *Voyage autour du monde*, vol. II, p. 48.

<sup>49</sup> Jules-Sébastien-César Dumont d’Urville, “On the Islands of the Great Ocean”, translated by I. Ollivier, A. de Biran and G. Clark, *The Journal of Pacific History*, 38, 2 (2003), pp. 163-174.

<sup>50</sup> Georges Cuvier, “Note instructive sur les recherches à faire relativement aux différences anatomiques des diverses races d’hommes”, reproduced in Jean Copans and Jean Jamin, *Aux origines de l’anthropologie française: les mémoires de la Société des Observateurs de l’Homme en l’an VIII* (Paris: Le Sycomore, 1978), p. 69 (my translation). For further detail concerning Cuvier’s theories about human difference and racial hierarchy, see Georges Cuvier, *Le Règne animal distribué d’après son organisation*, (Paris: Déterville,

In the 1820s, Franz Joseph Gall developed craniology, which was also believed to be effective in determining intelligence—intelligence which Gall thought could be improved, Staum explains, under the civilising tutelage of Europeans.<sup>51</sup> Other physical features also came to be linked to, even sometimes taken as indicators of, alleged intellectual capacity as well as temperament. In the 1830s, after navigating the South Pacific for the second time, d'Urville was to classify what he called the Melanesian race, with its “more or less black skin” and “curly, fuzzy, or sometimes even woolly hair”, as possessing “aptitudes” and “intelligence” that he believed were “largely inferior to those of the copper-skinned race”.<sup>52</sup>

Freycinet did make generalisations about the character—that is, the temperament and, less often, intelligence—of regional groups. However, these assessments were based generally on his own observations of their skills in industry and commerce rather than on stereotypes. For instance, although some of his descriptions of physical features were based on what he described as “Negro”, or less frequently “Asiatic”, characteristics, he did not do the same in regard to personality or intellectual capacity. Similarly, despite his interest in the consequences of migrations and inter-regional contact, he made no claims, based on observation, that such circumstances had produced specific character traits that could be traced back to a particular racial origin. In describing the character of the Papuan Islanders, who he believed were the products of “cross-breeding”, he did not project onto them the stereotypical characteristics of any of the peoples—such as the Malays—whose heritage they were believed to share. Instead, he simply described his personal perception of the Papuans’ temperament, and even refuted the popular claim that these people were cannibals. He stated:

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1817), vol. I.

<sup>51</sup> Staum, “The Paris Geographical Society”, p. 223.

<sup>52</sup> D’Urville, “On the Islands of the Great Ocean”, p. 169.

this assertion presupposes a degree of cruelty and barbarity of which our islanders of Waigeo do not seem capable. Though intelligent, and even clever, timidity and fearfulness are the dominant nuances of their character. Nothing has warranted in us a belief that they could be inclined to do harm or to deceive; on the contrary, they have shown themselves to be good and hospitable; and in one important circumstance, when they could have taken advantage of our confidence, we had occasion to be grateful for their good faith.<sup>53</sup>

The one occasion on which Freycinet did imply that the character traits of a particular group could predominate over those of another, through the process of miscegenation, was when he wrote about the Marianna Islanders. Here he raised the theory put forward by Jesuit missionaries Charles Le Gobien and Pedro Murillo Verlade according to which the “proud and haughty” character of these people might prove that they had been in contact with Japanese mariners.<sup>54</sup> However, despite his assertion that this question merited further investigation, Freycinet made it clear that he and his men in no way sought “to determine here from which country the population of the Mariannas had first originated” and that, indeed, “our task must be restricted to gathering precise facts that might furnish the field of anthropography with useful material”.<sup>55</sup> Taking into consideration the nature of the language and the observations prevalent throughout his anthropological reports, it is likely that Le Gobien’s theory was one that Freycinet did not feel compelled, or perhaps qualified, to address.

In his own observations, there is no sign that the captain subscribed to developing theories of innate character traits or undeveloped, even limited,

<sup>53</sup> Freycinet, *Voyage autour du monde*, vol. II, p. 52.

<sup>54</sup> Freycinet, *Voyage autour du monde*, vol. II, p. 276. Freycinet references the following texts: C. Le Gobien, *Histoire des Isles Marianes; nouvellement converties à la religion chrestienne* (Paris: Nicolas Pépie, 1700), and P. Murillo Velarde, *Historia de la provincia Philipinas de la Campaña de Jesus* (Manila: Imprenta de la Compañía de Jesus, 1749).

<sup>55</sup> Freycinet, *Voyage autour du monde*, vol. II, p. 276.

intellect, that could be either assumed on the basis of race or identified by physical features. Just as in regard to physical characteristics, when describing temperament or intelligence, Freycinet does not systematically use essentialised terms such as “innate” or “hereditary” nor rank people on the basis of alleged intelligence or barbarity with words like “inferior” or “superior”. Terms of the first type do occur occasionally, however, in those sections which draw heavily on anecdotes and historical accounts: the Port Jackson Aborigines, he states, are “naturally friendly” and “essentially not fierce”.<sup>56</sup> The way in which he uses these terms does not appear to relate to biological theory any more than did Baudin’s, who, as Miranda Hughes points out, once commented that Indigenous Tasmanians were “essentially primitive natural men”.<sup>57</sup> Similarly, Freycinet did not connect character to physical features such as facial angle, skin-tone or cranial shape; yet on more than one occasion he did make assumptions about peoples’ temperament based on a general impression of their faces and of their demeanour. Reporting his encounter with a group of Caroline Islanders, he wrote: “their bearing indicated more confidence than fear [...], their features radiated kindness”.<sup>58</sup> Perhaps Freycinet had been influenced by the nascent “science” of physiognomy. However, if we compare such remarks to observations made some years earlier by Péron, we see that those made by Freycinet are fairly offhand and more indicative of an attempt to describe what he had seen—assuming that the signs to be read through body language had universal meanings—than to classify, categorically, an entire people. By contrast, Péron had written on the Aborigines of Tasmania: “in all individuals [...] their look always has something sinister and savage in it, and I strongly believe that basically their character corresponds with the expression on their features”.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Freycinet, *Voyage autour du monde*, vol. II, p. 735.

<sup>57</sup> M. Hughes, “Philosophical travellers”, p. 44.

<sup>58</sup> Freycinet, *Voyage autour du monde*, vol. II, p. 97.

<sup>59</sup> Quoted in Hughes, “Philosophical travellers”, p. 32.

Freycinet's approach to assessing character was shaped more by an imperialistic perspective than scientific method. As Nicholas Thomas notes, one of the points on which European voyagers had long been inclined to base their judgements of indigenous people was their treatment of foreigners—they tended to equate the willingness of peoples to establish a relationship with their visitors with a desire to engage in trade.<sup>60</sup> Freycinet was no exception. His direct observations of temperament place particular emphasis on how the men and women of each region welcomed, assisted and traded with him and his men. All the same, his reports include too few comparisons and reflections to indicate that this was a deliberate approach. Indeed, it clearly was only a result of his general outlook—an outlook typical of a naval captain of Freycinet's time. When d'Urville later wrote about the hospitality that Pacific islanders showed to Europeans, as Thomas explains,<sup>61</sup> he used his observations and especially his reading of earlier voyage narratives to classify the groups and ultimately to support his notion of a racial divide between hospitable Polynesians and inhospitable Melanesians.<sup>62</sup> By contrast, Freycinet only drew one direct comparison, which was based solely on his own experience, and that was between the people of two island groups, rather than two broad regions.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, his assessments were almost always positive—if somewhat condescending at times. If Freycinet was looking actively for anything at all while he compiled his observations, it was for the potential for Europeans to build relationships with the Islanders—in an imperial context, certainly, but as fellow human

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<sup>60</sup> Nicholas Thomas, *In Oceania: Visions, Artifacts, Histories* (London: Duke University Press, 1997), p. 148.

<sup>61</sup> Thomas, *In Oceania*, p. 148.

<sup>62</sup> D'Urville, "On the Islands of the Great Ocean", p. 169.

<sup>63</sup> Based on his observations of how they conducted trade with the French, Freycinet compared the temperament of the Caroline Islanders favourably to that of the men of Gebe Island. See *Voyage autour du monde*, vol. II, pp. 70 and 97.



beings nonetheless—rather than for evidence of a hierarchical ordering of human varieties.

A similarly humanistic and empirical approach was taken to the subject of intellectual capacity. Freycinet's evaluations of intelligence were made in reference to what he had observed or otherwise learned of peoples' skills. And interestingly, it was not sophistication, measured against European standards, in areas such as government, social organisation or religious practices that he used for this purpose—though he did describe such systems in detail. It was most often practical lifestyle skills such as navigation and boat-building or survival in the bush.<sup>64</sup> When describing his first encounter with men from the Caroline Islands, for instance, Freycinet remarked: "We spent quite some time admiring the beauty of these men, the astonishing perfection of their boats and the dexterity with which they manoeuvred them, irrefutable evidence of their skill, of their intelligence".<sup>65</sup> He was particularly impressed by the ability of one Caroline Islander who, while visiting the Frenchmen aboard the *Uranie*, was able to communicate that the ship was in no danger of being grounded as the sea was at least 20 fathoms deep where they sailed.<sup>66</sup> Direct comments such as these, in regard to intelligence, are infrequent and brief. As Joseph-Marie Degérando, pioneer of the discipline of anthropology, had in 1800 advised travellers, including members of the Baudin expedition, to do,<sup>67</sup> Freycinet focused on gathering information and ventured few judgements. Those judgements he did venture to make, however, were usually sympathetic. He presented his readers with details concerning the ways in which intelligence was demonstrated by the various

<sup>64</sup> See, for example, Freycinet, *Voyage autour du monde*, vol. II, pp. 70, 71 and 716-717.

<sup>65</sup> Freycinet, *Voyage autour du monde*, vol. II, p. 70.

<sup>66</sup> Freycinet, *Voyage autour du monde*, vol. II, p. 71.

<sup>67</sup> Joseph-Marie Degérando, "Considerations on the Various Methods to Follow in the Observation of Savage Peoples", in F.C.T. Moore (translator and editor), *The Observation of Savage Peoples by Joseph-Marie Degérando* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), pp. 67-68, 71 and 81.

people he encountered rather than systematically classifying, comparing or ranking levels of intellectual capacity. There is only one exception. In his chapter on Timor, Freycinet reported that “the negroes” of the mountain region were “of an intelligence considerably inferior to that of the rest of the inhabitants”.<sup>68</sup> The racist tone of this passage is distinctly at odds with Freycinet’s other remarks on the mental characteristics of Pacific Islanders, and can no doubt be explained by the fact that it was based heavily upon the writings of Péron, whose views, as noted, were on the cusp of nineteenth-century physical anthropology, and of Scotsman John Crawford, who believed that originally distinct races were differentiated by character and intellectual capacity.<sup>69</sup> Through Freycinet’s eyes, it was not in fact degrees of intelligence that differentiated the peoples of Oceania but degrees of cultural sophistication.

In fact, there is no pattern in the *Voyage*, as there would later be in d’Urville’s report, of negative character traits being attributed to the people who least resembled Europeans in their physical features or, conversely, of positive character traits being attributed to people deemed relatively handsome. Freycinet’s most lengthy digression relates to why, in his opinion, the Aborigines of south-eastern Australia had resisted being “civilised” by the English. These indigenous Australians were the only people whose physical appearance he severely denigrated, yet he vehemently disputed the notion that they were intellectually incapable of advancement, and gave several examples of the “Australians’ aptitude for

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<sup>68</sup> Freycinet, *Voyage autour du monde*, vol. I, p. 521.

<sup>69</sup> In referencing his sources, Freycinet here provides the following details: Péron, *Voyage de découvertes*, and John Crawford, *History of the Indian Archipelago: Containing an Account of the Manners, Arts, Languages, Religions, Institutions and Commerce of its Inhabitants* (Edinburgh: Archibald Constable and Co, 1820), vol. I. On Crawford’s view of racial difference, see, for example, pages 44–46 of *History of the Indian Archipelago*. For a discussion of this view, see Chis Ballard, “‘Oceanic Negroes’: British Anthropology of Papuans, 1820–1869”, in Douglas and Ballard, *Foreign Bodies*, pp. 167–172.

civilisation".<sup>70</sup> He argues that cultural differences had led them simply to choose not to adopt European ways and that, in fact, he had observed that their intellectual capacity was in no way limited or inferior to that of any other group.<sup>71</sup>

Rather than adopting hardline racist beliefs he took a stance that, as Staum points out, clearly indicates empathy and cultural relativism.<sup>72</sup> In fact, his humanistic assessment of how colonisation had impacted on the Aborigines of Port Jackson recalls the attitude of his previous commander, Nicolas Baudin, who in 1802 declared to the then governor of New South Wales, Philip Gidley King: "[the Aborigines] are still but children of nature and only as little civilised as your highlanders of Scotland or our peasants of Brittany".<sup>73</sup> However, while Baudin had famously argued that there was "little justice or even fairness on the part of Europeans in seizing, in the name of their government, a land which when first seen was inhabited by men", a land "that belongs to them and is where they were born", Freycinet, for his part, staunchly supported the civilising imperative of European colonisation. His assertions about the intelligence of the Australian Aborigines were presented squarely within this context, and when, as mentioned above, he delved into the question of why the civilising efforts of the English colonists were not working, Freycinet focused on ways in which the task could be better approached by colonisers rather than on the supposed inherent capabilities or limitations of the colonised.

If at times, like many navigators before him, Freycinet described certain personality traits as natural, as pointed out earlier, he also

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<sup>70</sup> Freycinet, *Voyage autour du monde*, vol. II, p. 897.

<sup>71</sup> Freycinet, *Voyage autour du monde*, vol. II, pp. 895-898.

<sup>72</sup> Staum, "The Paris Geographical Society", p. 228.

<sup>73</sup> See letter from Nicolas Baudin to Philip Gidley King, written at Elephant Bay, King Island, 24 December 1802, in Frank Murcot Bladen, *Historical Records of New South Wales*, vol. V, p. 826. See also Starbuck, *Baudin, Napoleon and the Exploration of Australia*.

attributed them regularly to circumstantial factors. On the subject of the Port Jackson Aborigines, he wrote that it was their contact with English convicts and the colonists' practice of using alcohol or tobacco to pay for their services that "induced" in them "slothful habits".<sup>74</sup> Overall, though, he was clearly undecided about the degree to which innate character traits, in comparison with factors such as lifestyle, culture, climate and cross-cultural contact, influenced the behaviour of peoples, and he tended to cite both internal and external factors as possibilities. When reporting on the purportedly common occurrence of infanticide in Hawaii, for example, he claimed that this "revolting barbarism" was not only attributable to a desire to "avoid extra mouths to feed" but also to "laziness".<sup>75</sup> Moral outrage pervades Freycinet's writing at this point; it leads him to downplay the material motivations that influenced this practice and even to refer to the mothers involved as "unnatural women" who "allow themselves to perform an act that puts them below beasts".<sup>76</sup> Nevertheless, his reference to such acts as "sacrifices", which "almost never happen in well-to-do families",<sup>77</sup> does indicate an assumption that behaviour is influenced predominantly by circumstantial factors.

In all, Freycinet's understanding of human difference was ambivalent and, correspondingly, his manner of dealing with it, cautious. He ordered his men to carry out thorough measurements of individuals encountered in Oceania, and he published those results in his narrative; he also published the report by Quoy and Gaimard which expressed views based on phrenology;<sup>78</sup> however, there is no indication

<sup>74</sup> Freycinet, *Voyage autour du monde*, vol. II, pp. 903-904.

<sup>75</sup> Freycinet, *Voyage autour du monde*, vol. II, pp. 586-587.

<sup>76</sup> Freycinet, *Voyage autour du monde*, vol. II, p. 587.

<sup>77</sup> Freycinet, *Voyage autour du monde*, vol. II, p. 587.

<sup>78</sup> Though attributed to Quoy and Gaimard, this report was actually authored by Quoy alone. See Bronwen Douglas, "L'idée de 'race' et l'expérience sur le terrain au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle: science, action indigène et vacillations d'un naturaliste français en Océanie", *Revue d'Histoire des Sciences Humaines*, 21 (2009), pp. 175-209, here p. 182.

from his own pen that he subscribed to the theories that drove these methods. He did demonstrate a belief that human groups were separated by inherited, physical characteristics, with infrequent reference to possible environmental influences. In regard to innate moral character, Freycinet made passing reference only to imprecise attributes and not to specific behavioural traits. Intelligence, in his view, was not markedly or significantly varied and he recognised that the ways in which it was demonstrated were relative to culture and lifestyle. Moreover, the groups he refers to as “races” were often identifiable just as much by social class or place of origin as by appearance or character and he did not attempt to rank them according to a human, as opposed to a social, hierarchy. Instead, he perceived them vaguely in terms of stages of civilisation. In his role as commander of the expedition, Freycinet clearly focused less on interpretation of the observations and materials before him than on diligently gathering comprehensive information for the savants in Paris, according to contemporary methods of anthropological inquiry.

Indeed, his “studies of man” are largely a reflection not only of his view of humanity but also of the way in which he saw himself as a scientific captain in a new age of scientific voyaging. The voyage of the *Uranie* was the first to represent the nineteenth-century shift from field to laboratory science. As Richard W. Burkhardt explains, by the 1820s, the French scientific community increasingly assumed that the data gathered during maritime expeditions should be studied by metropolitan scientists rather than travelling naturalists.<sup>79</sup> Ships such as the *Uranie* were certainly scientific instruments, but they were no longer floating laboratories. This, in fact, is what Freycinet had wanted for his expedition. Perhaps influenced to some extent by the increasing ascendancy of laboratory-based science but, undoubtedly, more strongly influenced by his previous experience

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<sup>79</sup> Richard W. Burkhardt, “Naturalists’ Practices and Nature’s Empire: Paris and the Platypus, 1815-1833”, *Pacific Science*, 55, 4 (2001), pp. 327-342.

with the Baudin expedition, he had requested only naval staff—no scientific gentleman—for his own voyage. Nevertheless, although eager to break with tradition and to adopt new methods, Freycinet demonstrated an understanding of humanity that was still strongly influenced by Enlightenment thinking. It is important to remember that his only previous expedition in Oceania, under Nicolas Baudin, is that which is often represented as the archetypal Enlightenment voyage. Baudin and his naturalists had sought an encyclopaedic knowledge of the natural world beyond their two ships, the *Géographe* and the *Naturaliste*, and, while they carried specific instructions from Georges Cuvier concerning comparative anatomical investigations, their views of indigenous peoples were more in line overall with the philosophical theory of Joseph-Marie Degérando.<sup>80</sup> Moreover, as mentioned earlier, Freycinet had not only spent four years at sea with the Baudin expedition but had also devoted several years to publishing the results of the voyage after its return to France. Those days, weeks and months were spent immersed not only in the papers of Péron, a student of Cuvier, but also in the journals of his captain, Baudin—whose humanist outlook was, as certain comparisons have signalled, rather similar to that of Freycinet. While by no means untouched by recent developments in the field of anthropology, Freycinet effectively stepped from the Baudin expedition to his own Oceanic voyage, embracing the opportunity to satisfy the impatient ambition that had characterised his captainship of the *Casuarina* and taking with him a combination of pioneering methods and Enlightenment ideologies. The result was the style of comprehensive, historical, studies of Oceanic peoples that has been examined here. However, this style marked only a transitional moment in the reporting of voyage anthropology. Dumont d'Urville later criticised Freycinet's narrative approach at some length;<sup>81</sup>

<sup>80</sup> On this subject, see Starbuck, *Baudin, Napoleon and the Exploration of Australia*.

<sup>81</sup> Dumont d'Urville, *Voyage de la corvette l'Astrolabe exécuté par ordre du Roi, pendant les années 1826-1827-1828-1829, sous le commandement de M. J. Dumont d'Urville, capitaine de*



and indeed, subsequent voyage accounts were to relegate the most detailed observations of Oceanic peoples to their zoological and then to their anthropological volumes—a further step in the development of racial “science”.

If, for its part, the historical account of Freycinet's *Voyage autour du monde* represents a rigorous use of developing methods in physical anthropology, it certainly also indicates some resistance on Freycinet's part to the theories that connected these methods to judgements about character and intellect as well as, correspondingly, to the racist classifications that were beginning to be formed. Indicating, simultaneously, his belief in variety within the human race and his respect for developing methodologies, his reports illuminate the complex tensions that existed in early anthropology as science moved from the field to the laboratory. While scientific ships were expected to act as instruments of the modern metropolitan scientist, voyagers' Enlightenment understandings of humanity were slow to change; as exemplified by Freycinet's reports from the *Uranie* voyage, these enduring understandings continued to give humanistic meanings to anthropological data at the same time that laboratory scientists were developing the science of race. Indeed, as raciology developed apace during the 1830s, Freycinet himself came to the conclusion, concerning the Aborigines of Port Jackson, that “every race doubtless has particular qualities and failings which are characteristic, but it is the slow and steady passage of time [...] that can be hoped to modify these people eventually, and finally draw them from their forests and civilise them”.<sup>82</sup>

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*vaisseau, Histoire du Voyage* (Paris: J. Tastu, 5 vols, 1830-1835), vol. I, pp. xxx-xxxii.

<sup>82</sup> Freycinet, *Voyage autour du monde*, vol. II, p. 907.

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Imperial Eyes on the Pacific Prize:  
French Visions of a Perfect Penal Colony  
in the South Seas



*Jacqueline Dutton*

When European eyes first gazed on the island jewels of the Pacific, there was no way of predicting the role that such territories might play in the future imperial chess game between the British and the French. Ferdinand Magellan's circumnavigation of the globe may have provided naming rights for the largest of the Earth's oceanic divisions, but the peaceful ocean seemed almost entirely empty to him. Apparently deceived by the unfortunate location and lack of water on the tiny atolls of the Disappointment Islands, it was only the western island of Guam that caught his attention on that historic voyage. Subsequent Spanish forays by Mendaña de Neira into the South Seas discovered the Gilbert and Ellice Islands, the Solomon Islands and the Marquesas towards the end of the sixteenth century. Some decades later, in 1643, the Dutchman Abel Tasman sighted the Tongan archipelago and Fiji Islands. The prizes of the Pacific were, however, yet to be claimed.

It was the eighteenth century that brought the British and the French into the Pacific, with the discovery of Tahiti by Samuel Wallis in 1767. A year later, Louis-Antoine de Bougainville's arrival launched a torrent



of utopian depictions of the island paradise, which was represented as Thomas More's ideal republic and the New Cythera:

To describe correctly what we witnessed, one would need Fénelon's pen, to depict it, Albani's or Boucher's brush. [...] Farewell happy and wise people, may you always remain what you are. I shall never recall without a sense of delight the brief time I spent among you and, as long as I live, I shall celebrate the happy island of Cythera. It is the true Utopia.<sup>1</sup>

Thus began the vision of the South Seas as a paradise, perpetuated in French representations of the Pacific ranging from Diderot's *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville* to Gauguin's pictorial evocations of the island's beauties.

While the French staked their claim on Tahiti, the British were taking possession of Australia. In a rather less imaginative description of the largest island in the Pacific, Captain Cook exploded the myth of the Great South Land, and thus began the vision of Australia as a perfect penal colony for the British.<sup>2</sup>

The confluence of these two visions foregrounding French and British colonial projects in the Pacific—the first a paradise, the second a prison—is significant for the study of intercultural ideologies in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century imperialism. Although the paradise and the prison may appear as opposing tropes, they share many attributes, such as insularity and order.<sup>3</sup> According to many French explorers,

<sup>1</sup> John Dunmore (translator and editor), *The Pacific Journal of Louis-Antoine de Bougainville 1767-1768* (London: The Hakluyt Society, 2002), pp. 73, 74.

<sup>2</sup> Captain James Cook's descriptions of Botany Bay are much more factual than the evocative and speculative French portrayals of paradise in the Pacific. See, for example, *The Voyages of Captain James Cook* (London: W. Smith, 2 vols, 1842), vol. I, pp. 209-210.

<sup>3</sup> Michel Foucault's seminal work on incarceration, *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison* (1975), relates the prison to utopian paradigms, especially in analysing Jeremy Bentham's idealised panopticon.

historians and intellectuals writing at the time on the British settlement of Australia, the prospects for this new penal colony in terms of empire building and expiation for the convicts were a utopian dream come true.<sup>4</sup>

However, it still took a long time for the French to shift their gaze from their Polynesian interests and to enact plans to develop a French penal colony in the Pacific. This was undoubtedly due to the intervention of another utopian initiative in French exploration in the Pacific: the scientific mission. In recent work on French voyages to the South Seas during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, much has been made of the seemingly benign nature of these scientific expeditions. In *Voyages to the South Seas: In Search of Terres Australes*, Danielle Clode underscores the fact that the French were not guided by imperial orders to claim lands for France.<sup>5</sup> Colin Dyer is equally adamant that the French had no such colonial enterprises in mind in his work *The French Explorers and the Aboriginal Australians 1772-1839*: “French explorers in Australia in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries were neither few nor far between. They came and they saw, but they made no attempt to conquer”.<sup>6</sup> And it is the scientific mission that is privileged over political tensions in the voyages of Nicolas Baudin and Matthew Flinders examined in *Encountering Terra Australis: The Australian Voyages of Nicolas Baudin and Matthew Flinders* by Jean Fornasiero, Peter Monteath and John West-Sooby.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> For more detail on this imagining of the perfect penal colony, see my study entitled “Expiation in the Antipodes: A Utopian Endeavour for the French”, in John West-Sooby (ed.), *Nowhere is Perfect: French and Francophone Utopias/Dystopias* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008), pp. 15-24.

<sup>5</sup> Danielle Clode, *Voyages to the South Seas: In Search of Terres Australes* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 2007).

<sup>6</sup> Colin Dyer, *The French Explorers and the Aboriginal Australians 1772-1839* (St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 2005), p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Jean Fornasiero, Peter Monteath and John West-Sooby, *Encountering Terra Australis: The Australian Voyages of Nicolas Baudin and Matthew Flinders* (Kent Town, SA: Wakefield Press, 2004).

The fact-finding missions and scientific projects led by La Pérouse, Bruni d'Entrecasteaux, Nicolas Baudin, Louis de Freycinet, Louis-Isidore Duperrey and Hyacinthe de Bougainville appeared to minimise any intent or attempt to colonise any parts of Australia. Instead, it was cartographic, geographical, geological, botanical, biological and anthropological information about the newly discovered southern continent that was sought, in order to develop the foundations of knowledge in a revolutionary era dedicated to the new religion of science.

The search for knowledge in unexplored parts of the globe was, however, not necessarily a neutral enterprise. In her seminal study of travel writing and transculturation, *Imperial Eyes*, Mary Louise Pratt designates the natural history project as “anti-conquest” in that it became meaningful specifically in contrast with an earlier imperial and pre-bourgeois, European expansionist presence:

Claiming no transformative potential whatsoever, it differed sharply from overtly imperial articulations of conquest, conversion, territorial appropriation and enslavement. The system created [...] a utopian, innocent vision of European global authority, which I refer to as *anti-conquest* [...].<sup>8</sup>

Pratt suggests that, in reality, the scientific project was simply an alibi for imperialism and engendered an ideological dialectic between colonial, scientific and commercial voyages: “Here is to be found a utopian image of a European bourgeois subject simultaneously innocent and imperial, asserting a harmless hegemonic vision that installs no apparatus of domination”.<sup>9</sup> The savants who travelled to the unknown ends of the earth therefore represented an idealised ambition to gather knowledge that nevertheless constituted an avenue for exploitation.

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<sup>8</sup> Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London/New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 38.

<sup>9</sup> Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 33.

French perspectives on the Pacific are thus saturated with utopian tropes on three different levels: the island paradise, the ideal prison and the scientific “anti-conquest”. Each facet of this hybrid projected image exercised an influence on the others, resulting in an intertwined tangle of idealised perceptions. Some aspects of the scientific “anti-conquest” project, which has been the subject of several detailed studies in recent years, will find their way into this present essay via the writings of François Péron and Nicolas Baudin; however, the main focus for the following study will be the dichotomy of the paradise-prison. I will seek in particular to elucidate the main threads that led to the projection of the perfect penal colony in the French imaginary of the Pacific. Drawing on the convincing arguments made by a State Councillor of the Committee for the Navy and Colonies, M. Forestier, I will trace the development of the plan for such a penal colony from the initial period of enthusiasm through to the point of its founding, in New Caledonia. This essay will, further, identify the utopian elements relating to the site for the perfect penal colony that establish Australia as the ultimate model for the French, and determine the extent to which French imperial eyes were blinded by the apparent success of the British.

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Even before the British had claimed Australia for settlement as a penal colony, the influential French historian of explorations, Charles de Brosses, was already extolling the virtues of the faraway continent as an ideal destination for deporting “demi-citoyens” in 1756.<sup>10</sup> While Cook annexed the east coast of Australia for the British empire, Saint-Allouarn made the first French claim on Western Australian soil in 1772, producing

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<sup>10</sup> Charles de Brosses, *Histoire des navigations aux terres australes* (Amsterdam: N. Israël, 1967), p. 40.

echoes of a Canadian-style sharing of imperial spoils.<sup>11</sup> Saint-Allouarn's untimely death meant that no further attention was paid to the ephemeral French territory until early in the nineteenth century. And although the French legal system had long recognised the possibility of sentencing criminals to deportation, to Louisiana, for example,<sup>12</sup> and French Guiana,<sup>13</sup> there was little room for action in the Antipodes at this stage.

La Pérouse headed the next major French expedition in this direction (1785-1788), but given his explicit disdain for claiming lands for the King, he may have thwarted any such colonial desires for France in the Pacific: "Although the French are the first to have stepped onto the island of *Mowee* [Maui] in recent times, I did not take possession of it in the King's name. This European practice is too utterly ridiculous".<sup>14</sup> Had the French discovered the east coast of Australia before Cook, one might wonder nevertheless whether such a stance would have held. Be that as it may, with d'Entrecasteaux following in La Pérouse's wake—both literally and ideologically—the French were no further advanced in terms of establishing a penal colony, although great strides had been made with respect to scientific discoveries and collections.

By this time, reports of the nascent British penal colony in Australia had begun to filter through to France, but articles published in

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<sup>11</sup> Leslie R. Marchant, "The French Colonization Committee's Plan to Settle Western Australia", *Papers of the Conference on The French Connection with Australia* (University of New South Wales, 1983), p. 6.

<sup>12</sup> The early years of the Regency saw the deportation of unsavoury brigands to Louisiana, as famously depicted in the Abbé Prévost's *Manon Lescaut* (1731).

<sup>13</sup> Colin Forster's important research on the history of France's penal colonies provides further information on early ventures as well as the Australian experience. In his *France and Botany Bay: The Lure of a Penal Colony* (Carlton South, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1996), pp. 14-18, he presents a brief summary of Forestier's memoir and of his role in the debate regarding the establishment of a French penal colony.

<sup>14</sup> John Dunmore (translator and editor), *The Journal of Jean-François de Galaup de la Pérouse 1785-1788* (London: The Hakluyt Society, 2 vols, 1994/1995), vol. I, p. 88.

*Le Moniteur* did little to recommend the experiment.<sup>15</sup> After the storming of the Bastille, it had become patently clear that penitentiary reform was necessary, though the way forward was yet to be decided. The revolutionary reform of the *Code pénal* in 1791 formalised conditions for deportation as a punishment for recidivism, and subsequent laws voted on the subject made explicit recommendation for transportation to Madagascar or to French Guiana for the political prisoners of the Revolution, including refractory members of the clergy.<sup>16</sup> Several such prisoners were deported, but the material difficulties in organising transportation to the French penal colonies presented a significant obstacle to carrying out the sentence.

Despite the fact that it had legislative support, deportation thus became a logistical nightmare. It was in this context that first-hand reports were published by a French explorer who took up De Brosses's lead—François Péron—and whose enthusiasm for the British penal colony experiment in Australia was without bounds:

There, are assembled those fearsome brigands who, for so long, were the terror of their country's government. Driven forth from the bosom of European society, relegated to the furthest corner of the world, placed from the first moment of their exile between the certainty of punishment and the hope of a happier future, constantly under surveillance as inflexible as it is vigilant, they have been compelled to shed their antisocial ways.<sup>17</sup>

Péron's captain, Nicolas Baudin, was rather more critical of the penal colony in his letter to Governor Philip Gidley King, questioning the

<sup>15</sup> Marchant, "The French Colonization Committee's Plan to Settle Western Australia", p. 7.

<sup>16</sup> For more detailed information on this period, see Louis-José Barbançon, *L'Archipel des forçats: Histoire du bagne de Nouvelle-Calédonie (1863-1931)* (Lille: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2003), pp. 32-33.

<sup>17</sup> François Péron, *Voyage of Discovery to the Southern Lands* (Adelaide: The Friends of the State Library of South Australia, translated by Christine Cornell, 2 vols, 2006/2003), vol. I, p. 299.



wisdom and authority of those who took lands from the indigenous peoples to serve the needs of their corrupt “civilisation”:

This kind of language is no doubt not that of a politician, but it at least makes sense in practical terms; and if this principle had been generally adopted you would not have had to form a colony of men branded by the law and made criminals through the fault of a government which has neglected them and abandoned them to themselves. It thus follows that not only do you have an injustice to reproach yourself with, in seizing their land, but you have also transported to a land where the crimes and diseases of Europeans were unknown everything that could retard the progress of civilisation, and that was used as a pretext by your government, etc.<sup>18</sup>

The conflicting views of the ardent rivals—Baudin and Péron—were a premonitory sign of how judgements of the British penal colony would be polarised in the ensuing years. After the sentence of deportation was suspended in 1802 due to lack of maritime means, the debate was reignited thanks to Péron’s *Mémoire sur les établissements anglais à la Nouvelle Hollande, à la Terre de Diémen et dans les archipels du grand océan Pacifique* (*Memoir on the English Settlements in New Holland, Van Diemen’s Land and the Archipelagos of the Great Pacific Ocean*), seemingly written between 1803 and 1808 or 1810, and addressed to “Citizen Fourcroy, Member of the Council of State”, who was later named Minister of Marine and the Colonies.<sup>19</sup>

It was in 1810 that the *Code pénal* finally enshrined deportation as a sentence for political offenders, but the courts continued to send them

<sup>18</sup> Letter from Commodore Baudin to Governor King, Elephant Cove [Sea Elephant Bay], 3 Nivose Year 11 [24 December 1802]. *Historical Records of New South Wales*, vol. V, pp. 826-830.

<sup>19</sup> These dates were deduced by Roger Martin, whose edition of the previously unpublished *Mémoire*, appeared in the *Revue de l’Institut Napoléon*, no. 176, 1998-1.

to state prisons rather than into the clutches of an ill-administered penal colony. From 1791 to 1815, the penal colony rhetoric bore little resemblance to reality. Almost every figure of public importance had an opinion on deportation, with attitudes ranging from Robespierre's readiness to dump the contagious pests far away from France, to Danton's reticence with respect to poisoning the New World, and Napoleon's desire to purge France of its impurities and create both free settler and penal colonies.<sup>20</sup> But there was no consensus or true leadership on the issue.

The Restoration of the Bourbon monarchy in 1815 provided momentum for the movement towards deportation. Serious discussions on the question of a penal colony came to the fore within a general climate of discontent and socio-political flux. The nefarious effects of industrialisation and the rural exodus were swelling the cities to unprecedented proportions and the crime rate was increasing exponentially. Overcrowded prisons and problems of recidivism were major concerns for social reformers and philanthropists, as well as for government representatives, from civil servants to elected officials. Added to the urgent need for better management of crime and punishment was the requirement to deport a new wave of political prisoners sentenced after the Restoration. The underlying inadequacies of post-Napoleonic France were also becoming more and more problematic. Having lost much of the status it had gained as an imperial superpower through the Napoleonic wars, and bereft of means to conquer anew with underfunded naval forces whose every maritime move was keenly watched by the British, France found itself in a vulnerable social, political and financial position. The time was ripe for action with respect to deportation, but the methods of transportation and the location for the penal colony were still unclear.

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<sup>20</sup> Marchant, "The French Colonization Committee's Plan to Settle Western Australia", p. 8.

Inspiration arrived in 1816 in the form of a fifty-page memoir, composed by M. Forestier, a State Councillor of the Committee for the Navy and the Colonies. After some preliminary discussion mooting the idea of a penal colony, this document set out the issues to be considered in the search for a French penal colony. It represents the first step towards a detailed and thorough examination of the diverse conditions upon which the founding of a penal colony might depend. As such, it represents a founding text that establishes the essence of the penal colony project for France. Forestier's contribution strives to clarify the questions and challenges to be faced, and presents the Australian experiment as a perfect model on which to base future efforts.

This text will be analysed here in order to identify the idealised aspects relating to the site of the projected penal colony. Although scholars in utopian studies may not agree on definitions of utopia, there is some consensus regarding the basic categories and essential traits of a traditional utopia.<sup>21</sup> The site offers perhaps the most obvious indicators of a project's utopian characteristics.<sup>22</sup> A typical utopian site would feature geographical or topographical isolation, either on a faraway island or surrounded by forests, walls, desert or some other natural or artificial barrier protecting it from outside influences and attacks.<sup>23</sup> The corollary of this isolation is a long voyage or, in some circumstances, a dream or altered mental state, that allows access to this otherwise closed and restricted

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<sup>21</sup> See, for example: Maïté Clavel, "La Haine de l'utopie", *Cahiers Internationaux de Sociologie*, 77 (1984), p. 364; Raymond Ruyer, *L'Utopie et les utopies* (Paris: PUF, 1950), pp. 41-54; Jean Servier, *Histoire de l'utopie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991), pp. 319-387; and Raymond Trousson's *D'Utopie et d'utopistes* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1998), pp. 39-146.

<sup>22</sup> Jean-Yves Lacroix, *L'Utopie: Philosophie de la Nouvelle Terre* (Paris: Bordas, 1994), p. 63; Servier, *Histoire de l'utopie*, p. 327.

<sup>23</sup> See Claude-Gilbert Dubois, *Problèmes de l'utopie* (Paris: Archives des lettres modernes, 1968), pp. 24-25; Louis Marin, *Utopiques: jeux d'espaces* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1973), p. 137; Jean-Jacques Wunenburger, "La Topographie insulaire des utopies ou la profanation du jardin d'Éden", *Cahiers Internationaux de Symbolisme*, 40-41 (1980), pp. 139-151.

sanctum, asylum or, of course, prison.<sup>24</sup> References to insularity and to the distance to be travelled abound in Forestier's fundamental exhortation to establish a penal colony, as do reports of the desirable destination.

In the introductory paragraphs to his 1816 text, Forestier presented the case for deportation as a *fait accompli* that had only to be put into practice:

As for the punishment of deportation, it exists in law but not in deed [...]. It is therefore clear that we must follow the example of England and found a deportation colony. Justice, morality and politics are calling out for this to be done, and when so many interests tend towards the same goal, we must hasten to satisfy them.<sup>25</sup>

The main thrust of the document was therefore to convince his readers to define the destination and the practical and political regime to which the penal colony should adhere. Forestier described, naturally enough, the ideal location for a penal colony in terms of its exclusion from other societies and influences:

A sufficiently close proximity so that the expense incurred by the transportation of the condemned and of the things that will be useful to their settlement should not be excessive; and yet its distance should be sufficiently great that this will be an obstacle not only to their return, but also to communication with them, given that easy and frequent contact would not be without danger.

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<sup>24</sup> The space of incarceration as a negative utopia has been studied extensively in literary contexts (Françoise Sylvos, *Nerval et l'antimonde: Discours et figures de l'utopie, 1826-1855* [Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997]), as well as in cultural histories (Éric Fougère, *Île-prison: Bagne et déportation* [Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002]).

<sup>25</sup> "Quant à la peine de la déportation, elle existe bien de droit mais non de fait [...]. Il est donc évident qu'il faut suivre l'exemple de l'Angleterre et fonder une Colonie de déportation. La justice, la morale et la Politique réclament cet établissement, et lorsque tant d'intérêts tendent au même but, on doit se hâter de les satisfaire." M. Forestier, *Mémoire sur le choix d'un lieu de déportation*, 14 octobre 1816, Centre des Archives d'Outre-Mer (AOM), Aix-en-Provence, Série Colonies H, Carton H1. Except where otherwise indicated, translations from French sources are my own.

A circumscribed location, isolated, distant from both national and foreign colonial settlements where the deported could find means of escape, or else a favourable occasion for creating trouble, the germ of which already exists in the new world.

A salubrious climate and a fertile soil that would guarantee the survival of the deported and the necessary resources to relieve their situation.<sup>26</sup>

After insisting on the requirement of distance from the heart of French society, to preserve its integrity, Forestier announced the need to relocate the prisoners to a place that could support not just the life, but also the well-being of the new population. Despite their criminal condition, their future prospects were still an important consideration and should lead to productive work and settlement of the colony, following in the footsteps of the British:

The hope of making deportation beneficial for both the State and the condemned, by taking advantage of their work and industriousness to form a colonial settlement. Let us simply say that the English took on this dual project [deportation colony and free settler emigration] when they founded their settlements in New Holland. Therefore, the more we investigate the details of the important question that occupies us, the more we will have occasion to pay homage to the excellence of their system of colonisation.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> “Une proximité assez grande pour que les frais de transport des condamnés et des choses utiles à leur établissement ne soient pas excessifs; Et cependant un éloignement assez considérable pour mettre obstacle, non seulement à leur retour, mais encore à des communications avec eux, dont la facilité et la fréquence ne seraient pas sans danger. Un lieu circonscrit, isolé, éloigné des établissements coloniaux, soit Nationaux, soit Étrangers où les déportés pourraient trouver des moyens d'évasion, ou bien occasion favorable de faire naître des troubles, dont le germe existe déjà dans le nouveau monde. Un climat salubre et un sol fertile qui assurent la vie des déportés et les ressources nécessaires pour alléger leur situation.” Forestier, *Mémoire*.

<sup>27</sup> “L'espoir de faire tourner la déportation au profit de l'État et des Condamnés, en tirant parti de leur travail et de leur industrie pour former un établissement colonial.

In examining the possibilities for establishing a French penal colony in the currently available French territories, the three potential sites on Forestier's list were quickly ruled out: French Guiana had too many problems with indigenous issues and slavery; Senegal's indigenous population was more malleable but the climate was too fierce; it was unclear whether Madagascar was actually a French territory or whether it had passed to the British, along with their possession of Mauritius in 1810.<sup>28</sup>

Questions regarding life and order in the ideal penal colony were then evoked by Forestier. Explicitly inspired by Péron's laudatory reports of the British experience in Australia,<sup>29</sup> Forestier saw deportation as a panacea for the social ills affecting men, women and children, resulting in equality for all in the new penal colony:

not only will legislation be improved by the suppression of forced-labour camps and of temporary detention, but the prostitutes who corrupt girls in their youth, the orphans who are victims of debauchery and poverty, all the men who are driven to despair by disorder and misery will find under a new sky compensation for the wrongs of Nature or of fortune, together with the means that hard work produces.<sup>30</sup>

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Nous dirions seulement que les Anglais se sont proposés ce double projet [colonie de déportation et d'émigration libre], lorsqu'ils ont fondé leurs établissements de la nouvelle Hollande: Aussi plus nous pénétrons dans les détails de l'importante question qui nous occupe, plus nous aurons occasion de rendre hommage à l'excellence de leur système de colonisation." Forestier, *Mémoire*.

<sup>28</sup> Repeated attempts by the French to establish a colony on Madagascar during the eighteenth century were unsuccessful, with only one outlying island being claimed by the early nineteenth century: Ile Sainte Marie. The British took possession of Mauritius as well as the Seychelles and Reunion (Bourbon) Island in 1810, but the latter was returned to French rule under the 1814 Treaty of Paris. These exchanges of imperial power in the region during the Napoleonic wars contributed to confusion regarding sovereignty of Madagascar.

<sup>29</sup> Péron, *Voyage*, vol. I, pp. 299-300.

<sup>30</sup> "[...] non seulement la législation s'améliorera par la suppression des Bagnes et de la



Finishing his *Mémoire* with a flourish of pride in his utopian reverie, Forestier aligned himself politically with the ideals of the monarchy, in the knowledge that his document represented the first real discussion paper on the practical questions related to deportation from France: “For all that, if it is a dream like that of universal peace, it is at least the dream of a decent Frenchman devoted to his King and country”.<sup>31</sup>

Forestier obviously stirred up real ardour for action, as he went on to participate in a Commission of ten specialists on deportation that was set up in January 1819 to formulate recommendations for the government. Four meetings were held between 6 and 17 February 1819 to discuss questions such as whether it was indeed reasonable to substitute transportation for forced labour and, if so, where. In the minutes of the 17 February meeting, it is stated that: “M. Forestier then develops the idea of founding a settlement of condemned men and women in King George Sound in New Holland”, and that “the Commission, struck by the advantages that New Holland offers, settles on this idea and invites M. Forestier to draw up a memoir on this proposal”.<sup>32</sup>

Clearly, the site is of paramount importance to imagining a penal colony. Forestier had held nothing back in praise of the Australian ideal in his first report to the Commission, dated 10 February 1819:

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détention temporaire, mais les prostituées qui corrompent la jeunesse des filles; mais les orphelins victimes du libertinage ou de l'indigence; mais tous les hommes que le désordre et la misère poussent au désespoir trouveront sous un nouveau ciel avec les ressources que procure le travail, la réparation des torts de la Nature ou de la fortune”. Forestier, *Mémoire*.

<sup>31</sup> “Au demeurant, si c'est un rêve comme celui de la Paix universelle, c'est du moins le rêve d'un bon français dévoué à son Roi et à Sa Patrie”. Forestier, *Mémoire*.

<sup>32</sup> “M. Forestier développe alors l'idée de fonder un établissement de condamnés hommes et femmes au Port du Roi George dans la Nouvelle Hollande [...]. La Commission, frappée des avantages qu'offre la Nouvelle Hollande, s'arrête à cette idée et invite M. Forestier à rédiger un mémoire sur ce projet”. *Extrait des Procès-verbaux*, 17 février 1819, AOM, Carton H1.

In support of these arguments I cite the example provided by the English. In all parts of the world and in all latitudes, they have immense colonies whose population is far from sufficient to meet their needs and projects; everywhere there are public works and uncultivated lands that call out for workers; and yet, struck no doubt by the fears that I myself feel, and not wishing to compromise the existence of their possessions, they condemn their convicts to certain death; they have taken these wretches six thousand leagues away to a virgin land where there is not a single edible fruit, not a single vegetable, not a single animal that might be of use to man, where the Aborigines could be of no assistance to them, where everything, in short, remained to be created. But their primary goal has been achieved; they have found a locality which is favourable to the habits, the way of life and the health of Europeans; and this thought does as much honour to their prudence as to their humanity.<sup>33</sup>

Highlighting the correspondence between the existing British example constructed on a *tabula rasa* and the utopian ideal of creating an entirely new society, Forestier recognised that the identification of a suitable site was the fundamental prerequisite for realising the project for a penal colony. Such was his passion to find France a place in “New Holland” that he focused his attention on King George Sound in south-western Australia, brushing aside the eyewitness accounts of d’Entrecasteaux,

<sup>33</sup> “J’invoque à l’appui de ces raisonnements l’exemple des Anglais: Ils ont dans toutes les parties du monde et sous tous les parallèles, des colonies immenses, leur population est bien loin de suffire à leurs besoins et à leurs projets, partout ils ont des travaux publics ou des terres incultes qui demandent des bras; et cependant frappés sans doute par les craintes que j’éprouve moi-même et ne voulant pas compromettre l’existence de leurs possessions, ils vouent leurs convicts à une mort certaine, ils ont porté ces misérables à 6 mille lieues de distance, dans une contrée vierge, où il n’existe pas un fruit comestible, pas une plante potagère, pas un animal qui puisse servir à l’homme, où les aborigènes [sic] ne pouvaient leur prêter du secours, où tout enfin était à créer. Mais leur but principal a été rempli; ils ont trouvé une localité qui se prête aux habitudes, à la manière de vivre, à la santé des Européens; et cette pensée fait honneur à leur prudence autant qu’à leur humanité.” Forestier, *Premier rapport à la Commission*, 10 février 1819, AOM, Carton H1.

Baudin and Freycinet that presented some hesitations as to the availability of water and the fertility of the soil in the area. He preferred to dwell on Captain George Vancouver's optimistic attempt to plant European plants in the arid earth during the first English landing at King George Sound in 1791, and questioned the judgement of previous explorers:

We can even see that the latter was not as dogmatic in his views as the French navigator [Freycinet] regarding the lack of fertility of the soil, since he had confidently planted vegetable seeds, vegetables and even grape vines. It is true that no traces of these plants have been found, but in the intervening ten years, the rampant nature of the vegetation and perhaps also the ignorant curiosity of the natives will have wiped out these first attempts. We must also note that the remarks made by those who explore New Holland have always been primarily focused on hydrography rather than topography, and that these explorers have likely judged the quality of the earth in the hinterland by the sterile rocks and sandy dunes that nature has created as a defensive boundary for this vast continent.<sup>34</sup>

Forestier was convinced, without real justification, that this would be the right place for a French penal colony: "In any event, I am convinced that we must find a place that is healthy, fertile and [...] free of danger in order to found the main colony".<sup>35</sup> His sole guarantee was the success of

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<sup>34</sup> "On voit même que ce dernier n'avait pas eu des idées aussi absolues que le navigateur français [Freycinet] sur le peu de fécondité du sol, puisqu'il avait confié à la terre des graines potagères, des légumes et même des plantes de vigne. Il est vrai que l'on n'a pas retrouvé de traces de cette plantation, mais dix années d'intervalle, une végétation fougueuse et peut-être aussi l'ignorante curiosité des indigènes auront anéantie ces premiers essais. On doit observer également que les remarques faites par les explorateurs de la nouvelle Hollande ont toujours eu pour objet principal l'hydrographie plutôt que la topographie, et qu'ils auront jugé de la qualité des terres intérieures par les rochers stériles et les dunes sablonneuses que la nature a données pour limite et pour défense à ce vaste continent." Forestier, *Premier rapport à la Commission*.

<sup>35</sup> "Quoi qu'il en soit, je suis convaincu qu'on doit trouver un lieu sain, fertile et [...] exempt de dangers pour y fonder la colonie principale". Forestier, *Premier rapport à la Commission*.

the British in Australia. The desire to emulate the British experience as closely as possible is evident in Forestier's evocation of the Norfolk Island regime:

but in order to give the final touch to the system so successfully adopted by England, we must also seek at some distance from the principal town an island or at least an isolated land that would be easy to protect and where we could transport those convicts who deserved to be subjected to a second stage of deportation.<sup>36</sup>

His final word reinforced the utopian nature of his dreaming: "Moreover, it is not by remaining disengaged that we will be able to relieve ourselves of a pressing problem and undertake successful commercial activities. A government's existence is not fleeting like that of individuals, and you have to take risks in order to succeed".<sup>37</sup>

Even more determined to achieve a French penal colony in Western Australia in his second report to the Commission in March 1819, Forestier detailed how the French should take possession of the region and how the convicts should be transported. He went on to wax lyrical about the planned penal colony to be established by the French in south-western Australia (the Swan Valley). It bore all the features of a new world, a "nouvelle Patrie", in which the convicts could expiate their crimes far from those who witnessed them. In the following passage, he imagined how the French government might react to the Commission's plans for a penal colony in Australia:

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<sup>36</sup> "[...] mais afin de compléter [sic] le système si heureusement adopté par l'Angleterre, il faut encore chercher à quelque distance du Chef Lieu une île ou du moins une terre circonscrite et dont la garde soit facile, où l'on puisse transporter ceux des convicts qui mériteraient de subir un second degré de déportation". Forestier, *Premier rapport à la Commission*.

<sup>37</sup> "Au surplus, ce n'est pas en nous tenant dans l'inertie que nous pourrions nous délivrer d'un mal qui nous presse et réaliser d'heureuses spéculations. Un Gouvernement n'a pas comme des individus une existence passagère et il faut savoir tenter pour réussir". Forestier, *Premier rapport à la Commission*.

It will soon settle on its plans for the fort and for the buildings that will need to be contained therein; on its plans for the town, for the locations to be set aside for cultivation and even for the land concessions that will be granted either to free settlers or to emancipated convicts. It is then that the time will be ripe to notify other maritime powers of the act of possession over this new French territory, to prepare the expedition that will carry the founders of the settlement, and to put in place the particular laws that will govern the new colony.<sup>38</sup>

With the utopian site thus selected, and justified with more energy and verve (yet less evidence) than any other aspect of the penal colony, questions regarding the sentence duration and type of labour were treated in rather less detail. The main aim now was to claim south-western Australia for the French.

French imperial eyes focused on the prize that they perceived to be theirs for the taking, not in the Pacific, but on the Indian Ocean side of Australia. François Étienne Rosily Mesros, director of the French Hydrographic Office, whose influence on maritime missions was significant,<sup>39</sup> decided to act on the reports of the Commission. In accordance with his instructions, Louis Isidore Duperrey was sent in 1822 on an expedition to Australia with the explicit aim of surveying the Swan River region and King George Sound so as to gauge their suitability for the projected penal colony. After numerous delays en route, his decision

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<sup>38</sup> “Bientôt il arrêtera les plans du fort et des édifices qu’il devra renfermer; de la ville, des emplacements destinés aux cultures et même des concessions de terres qui seront faites, soit aux colons libres, soit aux convicts libérés. C’est alors que le moment sera venu de notifier aux puissances maritimes la prise de possession du territoire devenu français, de s’occuper des préparatifs de l’expédition qui portera les fondateurs de l’établissement et de provoquer les lois exceptionnelles qui régiront la nouvelle Colonie.” Forestier, *Deuxième rapport à la Commission*, mars 1819, AOM Carton H1.

<sup>39</sup> Marchant, “The French Colonization Committee’s Plan to Settle Western Australia”, p. 9.

to bypass the western Australian coast in order to continue around to Port Jackson in 1824 remains one of the pivotal choices that may have determined the fate of French colonisation in the region. All the more devastating for the proponents of a penal colony in western Australia was the fact that Hyacinthe de Bougainville also failed to follow orders to investigate the potential of the designated area due to short supplies and contrary winds. Furthermore, he demonstrated no signs of regret for this failure.<sup>40</sup> Unlike Péron, he saw the penal colony of Port Jackson as an ambiguous undertaking rather than as an unmitigated success.<sup>41</sup>

In his 1826–1829 voyage, Dumont d’Urville did stop in western Australia, and his impressions were very favourable:

Taking all this into consideration, I then thought that it would be difficult to come upon a more favourable place to found a colony, so I am continually amazed that the British have not already done so, especially when I reflected that this point was admirably situated [...]. From the examination I have made of the French River [Kalgan River] and of all the land around the port, I also concluded that, should a colony be established in King George Sound, no site would be more suitable for the town than where we had our observatory. In effect, it brings together all the desirable features in such a case; good water, plenty of wood, easy to defend, a shore accessible for any boat in any weather and perfectly safe mooring for ships, whether in the outer road or right in the channel of Princess Harbour. The first extensive cultivation and large plantations would

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<sup>40</sup> Hyacinthe de Bougainville, *Journal de navigation autour du globe de “la Thétis” et de “l’Espérance” pendant les années 1824, 1825 et 1826* (Paris: Arthus et Bertrand, 2 vols, 1837), vol. I, p. 426.

<sup>41</sup> See also Marc Serge Rivière’s study of Bougainville’s reaction to the penal colony in “Distant Echoes of the Enlightenment: Private and Public Observations on Convict Life by Baudin’s Disgraced Officer, Hyacinthe de Bougainville (1825)”, *Australian Journal of French Studies*, 41, 2 (2004), pp. 171–185.



be along the French River and communication with the main town would be direct and very easy by water. The singularly abundant fishing would provide the colonists with an enormous resource in the early days of settlement. And lastly, there is no doubt that after a few years the produce of the soil in cereals as well as livestock would be amply sufficient for their consumption.<sup>42</sup>

However, as Dumont d'Urville did not return to France until 1829, and his report to the government was more critical of the Australian penal colony than encouraging, his utopian descriptions of King George Sound and the Swan River were ineffectual and redundant in the scheme of things.<sup>43</sup>

Foiled in their attempts to reconnoitre their preferred site properly and to claim it in order to create their own version of the British penal colony, the French persisted nonetheless in projecting their utopian imaginings onto western Australia by commissioning another lengthy plan from Jules de Blossville, who had sailed with Duperrey and observed the convict settlements on the Pacific shores of Australia. This document contains a close scrutiny of the inner workings of the British penal colonies and provides a more balanced assessment of the practical investments of time and money needed in order to achieve the desired results:

Immense forests have been transformed into fertile fields; sixty thousand inhabitants live there in affluence, trade takes care of the surplus harvests and of various valuable commodities, ships arrive each day from all points of the globe, cities are being erected, roads are established heading in all directions, public vehicles, wagons

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<sup>42</sup> Dumont d'Urville, *An Account in Two Volumes of Two Voyages to the South Seas* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, translated and edited by Helen Rosenman, 2 vols, 1987), vol. I, pp. 37–38.

<sup>43</sup> Dumont d'Urville, *Observations sur le lieu le plus convenable pour former un établissement dans la mer Pacifique*, Archives Nationales de France, série Marine BB4/1002. Cited in Rivière, "Distant Echoes of the Enlightenment", p. 176.

and elegant carriages travel along them, and forty years have not elapsed since the first settlers landed on these shores.<sup>44</sup>

As expected, the south-western coastal areas of Australia were considered the most favourable site for French colonisation. However, between composing the document written in March and compiling the next text in December of 1828, Blosseville realised that the moment for action had been lost, and that it would be necessary to divert French attention to other sites for inspiration:

In my first memoir on the settlement of convicts I indicated a position in New Holland which, because of its geographical location and its indigenous population, seemed to combine all the conditions necessary for the success of such an important undertaking. I announced that it would be impossible to find the same facilities, the same elements of success, anywhere else on the entire surface of the globe. I ended by insisting on the obligation to act promptly in order to avoid competition, and unfortunately there was good reason for this. My fears have become reality: the English, following the visit of the corvette *Astrolabe* to King George Sound, suspected there was a plan for occupation and soon the flag of Great Britain waved over Leeuwin Land and Edels Land. For more than twenty years, the Swan River had been brought to the attention of the government; plans had not yet come to fruition when the steps taken by New [South] Wales put an end to that procrastination. The position of the new settlements is now judged to be so favourable that their prosperity is already a source of concern for the English,

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<sup>44</sup> “Des forêts immenses ont été converties en champs fertiles; soixante mille habitants y trouvent l’abondance, le commerce s’empare de l’excès des récoltes et de plusieurs denrées précieuses, des navires arrivent chaque jour de tous les points du globe, des cités s’élèvent, des routes sont établies dans toutes les directions, des voitures publiques, des chariots et des équipages élégants les parcourent et quarante ans ne se sont pas écoulés depuis que les premiers colons ont abordé sur les rivages.” Jules de Blosseville, *Projet d’une colonie pénale sur la côte S.O. de la Nouvelle Hollande*, March 1826. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, NAF Ms 6785.

who see in it the ruin of Port Jackson. Regrets are pointless; there remains one last resource for us, and I intend to draw attention to New Zealand.<sup>45</sup>

Thus ended the dream of a French penal colony on Australian soil; but the founding inspiration of the British model was enough to encourage new hopes for a French “Botany Bay” elsewhere in the Pacific. The primordial importance of the site had been firmly established with reference to Australia and this point of reference remained relevant throughout subsequent searches for a suitable colony in the Pacific.

The debates that waxed and waned between 1828 and 1848 have been well documented by Colin Forster in *France and Botany Bay*. Opinions were greatly divided: Barbé-Marbois’s attack on deportation was countered by Ernest de Blosseville’s seminal history of Australia as a penal colony and apologia for a French Botany Bay. This led to the great parliamentary debate of 1831 and produced several more commentaries for (Ginouvier, Castéra) and against (Pilorgerie) deportation.<sup>46</sup> Interventions by Alexis

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<sup>45</sup> “Dans mon premier mémoire sur la colonisation des condamnés j’indiquais un point de la nouvelle hollande qui par sa position géographique et sa population indigène, semblait réunir toutes les conditions exigées pour la réussite d’une entreprise aussi importante. J’annonçais que sur la surface entière du globe il serait impossible de trouver ailleurs les mêmes facilités, les mêmes éléments de succès. Je finissais par insister sur l’obligation d’agir avec promptitude pour éviter la concurrence et malheureusement ce n’était pas sans raison. Mes craintes se sont réalisées, les anglais après le passage de la corvette l’astrolabe au port du Roi George, ont soupçonné un projet d’occupation et bientôt le pavillon de la grande Bretagne a flotté sur la terre de Leeuwin et sur celle d’Edels. Depuis plus de vingt ans la rivière des cygnes avait été signalée à l’attention du gouvernement, les projets n’étaient pas encore mûris, lorsque la mesure de la nouvelle galles a mis fin à cette temporisation. La position des nouveaux établissements est jugée maintenant si favorable que leur prospérité inquiète déjà les anglais qui y voient la ruine du Port Jackson. Les regrets sont inutiles, il nous reste encore une ressource et je vais appeler l’attention à la Nouvelle Zélande.” *Projet d’une colonie pénale à la nouvelle zélande*, December 1828. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, NAF Ms 6785.

<sup>46</sup> Barbé-Marbois, *Observations sur les votes de quarante-un conseils généraux de département concernant la déportation des forçats libérés* (Paris: Chez Sautelet et Compagnie, 1828); Ernest de Blosseville, *Histoire de la colonisation pénale et des établissements de l’Angleterre en*

de Tocqueville on the subject were undoubtedly influential, given his central mission to reform the penitentiary system in France, modelled on American experience. In an appendix to *Du système pénitentiaire aux États-Unis, et de son application en France* (1833) entitled “Des Colonies pénales”, Tocqueville and Beaumont reiterated the qualities sought in a penal colony, and which were found in the Australian model. These qualities coincided with those enumerated for the ideal utopian site, but became, in the critics’ eyes, ammunition for a counter-argument:

The first condition for a penal colony is that it be separated by an immense distance from the home country. It is necessary that the prisoner should feel that he has been dispatched to another world, that he should feel *obliged* to create for himself an entire new future in the place he inhabits, and that all hope of return should appear illusory. And how could that illusion not come to trouble the imagination of the exile? The Botany Bay deportee, separated from England by the entire diameter of the globe, still seeks to find his way back to his country against insurmountable perils. In vain his new country offers him peace and comfort; he thinks only of rushing headlong back to the misery of the old world.<sup>47</sup>

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*Australie* (Évreux: Auguste Hérissey, 1859), p. 258; T. Ginouvier, *Le Botany-Bay français ou colonisation des condamnés aux peines afflictives et infamantes, et des forçats libérés* (Paris: Charles Béchét, 1826); M. Castéra, *Proposition de déporter désormais hors de la France continentale tous les forçats libérés et quelques repris de justice, faite aux Chambres législatives, Annales maritimes et coloniales*, Partie non officielle, 1<sup>ère</sup> partie, 1839, pp. 413-422; Jules de la Pilorgerie, *Histoire de Botany Bay. État présent des colonies pénales de l’Angleterre, dans l’Australie. Ou Examen des effets de la déportation, considérée comme moyen de colonisation* (Paris: Paulin, 1836).

<sup>47</sup> “La première condition d’une colonie pénale est d’être séparée par une immense étendue de la métropole. Il est nécessaire que le détenu se sente jeté dans un autre monde; qu’il soit *obligé* de se créer tout un nouvel avenir dans le lieu qu’il habite, et que l’espérance du retour apparaisse à ses yeux comme une chimère. Et combien encore cette chimère ne viendra-t-elle pas troubler l’imagination de l’exilé? Le déporté de Botany-Bay, séparé de l’Angleterre par tout le diamètre du globe, cherche encore à se frayer un chemin vers son pays à travers les périls insurmontables. En vain, sa nouvelle patrie lui offre-t-elle dans son sein la tranquillité et l’aisance; il ne songe qu’à se replonger en courant dans les

On the other hand, they argued that the perfect penal colony established by the British was too attractive to criminals: “In fact, for many Englishmen, deportation is little more than a form of emigration to the southern lands undertaken at the expense of the State”.<sup>48</sup> Like British detractors of the penal colony, such as Sir William Molesworth and the Benthamites, Tocqueville and Beaumont demonstrated their opposition to this apparently soft option for offenders.<sup>49</sup> Although the second edition of *Du système pénitentiaire* (1836) offered a blatant promotion of penitentiary reform over penal colonies, the first edition was still anchored in current transportationist debates. It emphasised that the relative success of the Australian experience of transportation was due to its ideal location and immense expenditure. However, “the place that we are describing has been found by England”.<sup>50</sup> Tocqueville and Beaumont went on to describe the site in truly utopian terms:

Good fortune suggested this place to the English fifty years ago. The continent is immense, and consequently the future has no limits, the ports are spacious, ports of call are guaranteed, the land is fertile and uninhabited, the climate is European, everything was combined there, and this privileged place was situated in the antipodes.<sup>51</sup>

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misères de l’ancien monde.” Gustave de Beaumont and Alexis de Tocqueville, *Du système pénitentiaire aux États-Unis et de son application en France: Suivi d’un appendice sur les colonies pénales et de notes statistiques* (Paris: H. Fournier jeune, 1833), pp. 234–235.

<sup>48</sup> “A vrai dire, pour beaucoup d’Anglais, la déportation n’est guère autre chose qu’une émigration aux terres australes entreprise aux frais de l’État”. Beaumont & Tocqueville, *Du système pénitentiaire*, p. 243.

<sup>49</sup> For a detailed discussion of the debates around penal colonies and penitentiaries, see John Hirst, *Convict Society and its Enemies: A History of Early New South Wales* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1983).

<sup>50</sup> “[...] le lieu que nous décrivons a été trouvé par l’Angleterre”. Beaumont & Tocqueville, *Du système pénitentiaire*, p. 237.

<sup>51</sup> “Ce lieu, la fortune l’indiquait aux Anglais il y a cinquante ans. Continent immense et par conséquent avenir sans bornes, ports spacieux, relâches assurées, terre féconde et inhabitée, climat de l’Europe, tout s’y trouvait réuni et le lieu privilégié était placé aux antipodes.” Beaumont & Tocqueville, *Du système pénitentiaire*, p. 256.

According to Tocqueville and Beaumont, it was therefore not a feasible option for the French, who had no suitable destination, nor the funds to set up a penal colony: “As for us, we readily admit that we can see no place that France could take over. The world no longer seems vacant to us, all sites appear to be occupied”.<sup>52</sup>

A *tabula rasa*, a land deemed unoccupied—the contested state of *terra nullius*—was what the French were seeking, but the British had claimed before them the last apparently available space. Faced with this reality, and the powerful resistance of the promoters of penitentiary reform, those in favour of founding a French penal colony were hindered in their progress toward the utopian goal. However, they were ready to relaunch their campaign when Napoleon III was elected president of the Second Republic in 1848. Initially, deportation was reinstated to send political insurgents to both Algeria and Guiana, but neither destination would be set up as a penal colony, although Guiana had been seriously considered, along with the Marquesas and the Falkland Islands. A more propitious site had to be located before deportation would reappear at the top of the French political agenda.

What happened to turn French imperial eyes onto New Caledonia? Cook had discovered the islands in 1774 and found them rather unappealing, though the “Caledonians” were quite friendly and of a gentle disposition. It was d’Entrecasteaux’s description of the indigenous inhabitants almost twenty years later—in 1792—that rendered New Caledonia an utterly undesirable destination. Reports of warring tribes and cannibalism kept the French, and most others, at bay for nearly sixty years: “The few resources this island offers, the reefs that surround it, the ferocity of its

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<sup>52</sup> “Quant à nous, nous avouons sans difficulté que nous n’apercevons nulle part le lieu dont pourrait s’emparer la France. Le monde ne nous semble plus vacant, toutes les places nous y paraissent occupées”. Beaumont & Tocqueville, *Du système pénitentiaire*, p. 255.



inhabitants, the difficulty of collecting water there, even though it is in abundant supply, everything conspires to keep navigators away”.<sup>53</sup>

Renewed vigour for colonial expansion under the July Monarchy saw the French presence in the Pacific extend to take possession of the Marquesas in 1842 and establish Tahiti as a protectorate in 1844. Missions were also sent to the Gambier and Tuamotu Islands, and to Wallis and Futuna. In 1843, a military corvette, the *Bucéphale*, commanded by Captain Julien Laferrière, secretly disembarked Monseigneur Guillaume Douarre and his company, the first six Marist missionaries in New Caledonia, but the French flag was not yet officially planted. The growing French interests and possessions in the Pacific were a response to the British domination of this region, especially after the 1840 annexation of New Zealand, which put an end to French dreams of a colony at Akaroa.<sup>54</sup> The London Missionary Society was systematically sending its people out to the islands and had even sent some recently converted Samoans to New Caledonia in 1841.<sup>55</sup> News in Sydney of the discovery of sandalwood brought an influx of traders in 1846-1847, and the potential for annexation of New Caledonia by the British became more likely through trade with Australia than through evangelisation. Monseigneur Douarre’s return to France in 1848 and his predictions of Protestant domination of New Caledonia impressed upon the Foreign Minister, François Guizot, the need for immediate action to secure French authority.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> “Le peu de ressources qu’offre cette île, les écueils dont elle est environnée, la férocité des habitants, la difficulté d’y faire de l’eau, quoiqu’elle soit assez abondante, tout cela est fait pour éloigner les navigateurs”. E. de Rossel, *Le Voyage de Dentrecasteaux, envoyé à la recherche de La Pérouse* (Paris: Imprimerie impériale, 2 vols, 1808), vol. I, p. 358.

<sup>54</sup> See Peter Tremewan, *French Akaroa: An Attempt to Colonise Southern New Zealand* (Christchurch: University of Canterbury, with the assistance of the Historical Branch of the Department of Internal Affairs, 1990).

<sup>55</sup> Isabelle Merle, *Expériences coloniales: La Nouvelle-Calédonie (1853-1920)* (Paris: Éditions Belin, 1995), p. 34.

<sup>56</sup> Merle, *Expériences coloniales*, p. 37.

Napoleon III's rise to power was timely, and his often-cited speech to the Assembly on 12 November 1850 made clear his intentions:

Six thousand convicts locked up in prisons burden the budget with an enormous cost, they become more and more depraved and threaten Society incessantly. It seems possible to make the sentence of forced labour more effective, more edifying, less costly and more humane by harnessing it to the progress of French colonisation.<sup>57</sup>

Finally, the confluence of colonial impetus and social disintegration put the penal colony at the top of the French agenda, and by the time Napoleon III was consecrated Emperor in 1852, the scene was set for action.

The Mackau Commission set up in February 1851 to study the possibilities for transportation to a penal colony voted for New Caledonia as the perfect location, though Guiana became the default destination when the legislation to sentence convicts to hard labour in penal colonies was passed in March 1852, prior to the official annexation of New Caledonia by Rear Admiral Auguste Febvrier-Despointes on 24 September 1853.

The utopian site for a perfect French penal colony had been identified and the report from the corvette the *Alcème*, sent to survey the site in 1850-1851, transformed the image of the islands from "Calédonie noire" to "Calédonie rose".<sup>58</sup> New Caledonia was a "grande terre" in the Pacific, with outlying islands like the Île des Pins. This geographical configuration mirrored precisely that of Australia and Norfolk Island, emphasising the potential for the two-tier rehabilitation process admired by Forestier, by

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<sup>57</sup> "Six mille condamnés enfermés dans les bagnes grèvent le budget d'une charge énorme, se dépravent de plus en plus et menacent incessamment la Société. Il semble possible de rendre la peine des travaux forcés plus efficace, plus moralisatrice, moins dispendieuse et plus humaine en l'utilisant au progrès de la colonisation française." Published in *Le Moniteur*, 13 November 1850. Cited in Barbançon, *L'Archipel des forçats*, p. 68.

<sup>58</sup> Michel Reuillard, *Les Saint-Simoniens et la tentation coloniale: les explorations africaines et le gouvernement néo-calédonien de Charles Guillain (1808-1875)* (Paris, L'Harmattan, 1995), p. 250.

which recidivists or anti-social convicts were transported from Australia to Norfolk Island. The rhetoric exalts the new French possession as a multifaceted jewel, with multiple advantages: military (“Situating only a few days travel from the English settlements, on the Indian route, the geographical position of this island designates it as a military location of the greatest importance”); commercial (“destined by its climate to produce all the colonial produce that India exports to Oceania, she would take from that country [India] a trade that its distance would not allow it to conduct in competition with her”); religious (“New Caledonia could in turn become the centre of a solid empire from which Catholic missionaries would likewise spread throughout all of central Oceania”); and penitentiary (“it offers a particularly powerful advantage to any government that might wish to create a penal settlement [...]. New Caledonia is more suitable than any other country for a settlement of this type and the Île des Pins [...] could serve as the site for a trial”).<sup>59</sup> An idyllic portrait of the island, with its fertile terrain for running livestock and growing crops of all kinds, and a rich supply of wood and stones for building everything from homes to mills on the waterfalls, was also painted in Hamelin’s 1857 *Rapport à l’empereur*.<sup>60</sup>

But the real utopianism comes through the vision and action of Charles Guillain, who was nominated as first governor of New Caledonia in late 1859 and proceeded to articulate his project for the penal colony in his *Essai de colonisation pénale à la Nouvelle-Calédonie*, submitted on 9 July 1861.<sup>61</sup> This lengthy document detailed every aspect of his plan, including general views of the Melanesian inhabitants and how they should be treated, building plans, and social, commercial and justice

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<sup>59</sup> “Voyages de terre et de mer; géographie; campagne de l’*Alcmène* en Océanie, 1850-1851”, *Nouvelles Annales de la Marine et des Colonies*, septembre 1854, pp. 184-186. Cited in Reuillard, *Les Saint-Simoniens*, pp. 251-253.

<sup>60</sup> Reuillard, *Les Saint-Simoniens*, pp. 263-264.

<sup>61</sup> Reuillard, *Les Saint-Simoniens*, p. 271.

services. He was named governor at the end of 1861 and left for New Caledonia in early 1862. His arrival at Port-de-France (Noumea) on 8 June 1862 put an end to military rule of the island. *Le Moniteur de la Nouvelle-Calédonie* announced his coming like that of a saviour: “the entire town was immediately astir; people knew that the vessel that had been signalled carried on board Governor Guillain, and with him the legitimate hope of a better future for New Caledonia”.<sup>62</sup>

From the beginning of his term, Guillain’s speeches were infused with utopian sentiment, calling for solidarity among all men instead of prejudices, and his first contacts with the indigenous peoples—with the Touaourou and Unia tribes of Yaté, in the south-east of the island—were uneventful. It was, however, a short-lived entente, as the colonial administration had its eyes on Yaté for a new settlement, and a minor infraction by members of Chief Kanack Damé’s tribe was the only excuse needed to confiscate their lands and disperse the Touaourou and Unia peoples. Ironically, this first act of dispossession under Guillain’s administration was the basis for his most ambitious utopian project: the Phalanstery of Yaté.

Many of the records regarding the conception and organisation of this community have been lost,<sup>63</sup> leaving a gaping hole in the understanding of a project that reflects the hybrid utopianism of a Saint-Simonian who applied his theories under a Fourierist banner.<sup>64</sup> Joël Dauphiné’s

<sup>62</sup> “[...] la ville entière fut aussitôt sur pied; on savait que le bâtiment signalé portait à son bord Monsieur le Gouverneur Guillain et avec lui, le légitime espoir d’un avenir meilleur pour la Nouvelle-Calédonie”. *Le Moniteur de la Nouvelle-Calédonie*, no 141, dimanche 8 juin 1862.

<sup>63</sup> Reuillard notes that carton 151 of the New Caledonia files entitled “Société Agricole de Yaté” was declared missing from the Archives de la Rue Oudinot on 23 November 1978. Reuillard, *Les Saint-Simoniens*, p. 461.

<sup>64</sup> Among the best-known utopian socialists of the nineteenth century, Count Henri de Saint-Simon and Charles Fourier represented two opposing movements in terms of their ideals and followers. Charles Guillain aligned himself with the Saint-Simoniens, embracing their focus on science and industry as the new order for progress, yet adopted

slim publication on the short-lived association of workers who formed an agricultural cooperative in Yaté, together with about a dozen pages in Michel Reuillard's work on Charles Guillain, constitute the most comprehensive studies of the utopian experiment.<sup>65</sup>

Well before the first fleet of convicts arrived on the *Iphigénie* on 9 May 1864, the arrival of the frigate *Sibylle* in Port-de-France on 5 November 1863 brought almost one hundred new immigrants of which twenty were to inaugurate the phalanstery devised by Guillain in Yaté. This community did not adhere to Fourierist modes of passionate attraction, but to the politico-economic theories of Saint-Simon, which included abolishing class divides and unity of labour. It was financially and administratively set up by the government and the initial participants were briefed by Guillain in a stirring speech on the day of their departure for Yaté:

You are the emulators of agricultural cooperation in New Caledonia: success will soon inspire others to emulate you and, in a few years, groups of new associates will cover the coastline of our fine colony! Go forth, pioneers of cooperative organisation in New Caledonia [...]. Go! The colony sends its best wishes with you and urges you to be brave! It knows that your success will be the starting point for great expansion.<sup>66</sup>

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Charles Fourier's terminology to name his agricultural project a "phalanstery".

<sup>65</sup> Joël Dauphiné, *Yaté de 1840 à 1870: Les Débuts de la présence européenne et l'expérience d'un phalanstère* (Nouméa: Centre Territorial de Recherche et de Documentation Pédagogiques, 1989); Reuillard, *Les Saint-Simoniens*, pp. 458-473.

<sup>66</sup> "Vous êtes les imitateurs de l'association agricole en Nouvelle-Calédonie: le succès vous donnera bientôt des émules et, en peu d'années, des groupes de nouveaux associés couvriront le littoral de notre belle colonie! Allez-donc, pionniers de l'association en Nouvelle-Calédonie [...]. Allez! La colonie vous accompagne de ses vœux et vous crie courage! Elle sait que votre réussite doit être pour elle le point de départ d'un immense développement." *Le Moniteur de la Nouvelle-Calédonie*, no 225, dimanche 17 janvier 1864 (nouvelles locales: la "société agricole de Yaté"). Cited in Reuillard, *Les Saint-Simoniens*, p. 467.

Such noble ambitions were dashed almost immediately when, a week after arriving in Yaté, a fire destroyed their camp and provisions. Although these were replaced by the administration and three new members joined the community, the social experiment was a dismal failure and the embittered members dispersed after only a year, miserable, demoralised and in debt. Dauphiné's assessment of the experiment is truly depressing. He declares that it was a catastrophe for the people involved—both the settlers and the Kanaks, whose land was lost in the process—an economic fiasco and a psychological defeat.<sup>67</sup> He cites the lack of experience, training and enthusiasm of the participants, the tropical climate and unsuitable lands for farming, and the absence of support from the missionaries or even Guillain himself, who did not visit the phalanstery once it had been established.

In spite of this early and expensive setback, Guillain remained a utopian visionary throughout his period as governor of New Caledonia, encouraging farming cooperatives amongst settlers and indigenous communities alike. Whether or not his projects were suited to the environment seemed irrelevant, as so much of the rhetoric surrounding the French penal colony bore little relation to reality.

The Pacific prize that the French had their eyes on turned out to be as problematic in terms of its humanistic outcomes as the British penal colonies in Australia were during their lifetime. Viewed from that perspective, one might say that the French were successful in their attempts to recreate “le génie britannique” and managed to engender almost as many antagonisms between classes and races as were experienced in Australia. In one area, though—indigenous affairs—the French record cannot compare to the British. The Kanak represent around half the current population of New Caledonia and, even if they are faced with social, political and economic problems similar to those experienced in other indigenous communities

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<sup>67</sup> Dauphiné, *Yaté de 1840 à 1870*, pp. 37-38.



in the Pacific region, they did not suffer the same fate as many indigenous Australians at the hands of the British colonial.

Predictions of Kanak extinction in the late nineteenth century may have seemed aligned with strategies undertaken by the British to wipe out or breed out indigenous Australians, judging from geographer Augustin Bernard's infamous prediction: "It is beyond doubt that that the natives of New Caledonia are disappearing, and that it will soon be necessary to speak of them in the past tense".<sup>68</sup> The work of missionary turned ethnographer Maurice Leenhardt in New Caledonia was instrumental in changing the Administration's attitude to the Kanak, as has been meticulously documented in James Clifford's study of Leenhardt.<sup>69</sup> Contradicting the slow genocide foretold by those in power, Leenhardt persisted in educating the Kanak and fighting for their right to a continuing existence, as well as quality of life. The growing indigenous population in New Caledonia is testament to the fact that they will not disappear and are working towards greater social, political and economic parity with the other populations who now share their country.

The inversion of France's utopian dream of a perfect penal colony in the Pacific, which ended up being a dystopian nightmare for both the deportees and the indigenous populations, demonstrates the failure of an enterprise that was grounded in an idealised representation of the British experience. If there had been more positive intercultural exchange between Guillaïn and the Kanak from the inception of the phalanstery at Yaté, there may have been a more successful relationship on which to base future collaboration between the cultures in contact. And if the French had paid more attention to the Kanak experience, as Leenhardt was still trying to

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<sup>68</sup> "Il est hors de doute que les indigènes de la Nouvelle-Calédonie sont en voie de disparaître, et qu'il faudra bientôt parler d'eux au passé". Cited in Alban Bensa, *Nouvelle Calédonie: Vers l'émancipation* (Paris: Découvertes Gallimard, 1990), pp. 93-94.

<sup>69</sup> James Clifford, *Person and Myth: Maurice Leenhardt in the Melanesian World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

encourage them to do in the early twentieth century, the New Caledonian site may well have fulfilled France's expectations for a burgeoning new colony in the Pacific. The current situation in New Caledonia is, however, a long way from the utopian dream of a phalanstery at Yaté. The dichotomy of the paradise-prison has become ingrained in the history of the islands of New Caledonia. Tourist brochures still vaunt a holiday destination that fulfils dreams of faraway isolation, natural beauty and "friendly natives", corresponding to the nineteenth-century French projection of an island paradise in the Pacific. The realisation of the ideal prison was rather more ephemeral, if indeed this vision ever was realised, but the pretence was maintained until 1897, when deportation finally ceased after 22,000 deportees had participated in the penal colony experiment. Amongst the French failures in the Pacific, one error stands out as more historically significant than the others: the fact that the French were wrong about the extinction of Kanak peoples remains the most positive outcome of the penal colony experience. French imperial eyes were dazzled by the British penal colony in Australia and so looked towards their own Pacific prize. Thankfully their appropriating gaze was not as devastating to the Kanak as the British hold on indigenous Australians. In the current era, postcolonial eyes have their own utopian visions for the Pacific. Rather than ideal prisons, they see communities of equality, justice and hope.

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