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Jean Fornasiero and John West-Sooby, eds., *'Roaming Freely Throughout the Universe': Nicolas Baudin's Voyage to Australia and the Pursuit of Science*. Mile End, South Australia: Wakefield Press, 2021. 341pp. Tables, figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$40.00 U.S. (pb). ISBN 9-78-1743058275.

Review by Dorinda Outram, University of Rochester.

The expedition which set out on 19 October 1800 from Le Havre to travel to the Southern Lands under the leadership of Nicolas Baudin has never been short of historians. The enormous collections of living, fossil, and dead birds, animals, and plants which entered French collections from the expedition after its return in 1804 would alone have ensured its importance. The expedition, however, was to become as notorious as it was famous. Struggles among the ships' company, and particularly between Baudin and the young naturalist François Péron, death, illness, desertion, and accusations of malfeasance and incompetence, dogged its progress through the East Indies onwards to what is now Australia and became even more public on its return. Péron, no less quarrelsome than the rest, who embarked on the voyage supported by the patronage of Georges Cuvier, wrote the official account of the expedition, and thereby established the narrative followed by most historians in the intervening 150 years.

More recently have come calls for reevaluation, and the work under review fits squarely into this trend. In the most probing paper in the collection, John Gascoigne ranges widely, and rightly points out the importance of the temporal coincidence of the integration of the Pacific into world shipping and trade with the coming into being of new forms of science at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Three of the book's fifteen chapters are concerned with questions such as the provenance and fate of the specimens collected by the expedition.[1] This makes a refreshing change from many recent secondary accounts of expeditions, where the reality of collecting is neglected at the expense of its symbolism. A well-known article by Richard Burkhardt published in 1997 retells the difficult history of the collections and their importance for Lamarck's developing theory in particular.[2] Burkhardt's work is drawn upon but not expanded in the largely taxonomic article by Michel Jangoux. Nonetheless, this article does valuably emphasize the extent to which Peron's specimens, erratically labeled, gradually became impossible to trace back to their geographical origins and thus lost their capacity to contribute to biogeography.

Nonetheless, this collection misses many opportunities to renew the field by asking simple but fundamental questions about the expedition. One omission is the history of the ships that carried the expedition. The great Pacific historian Greg Denning's classic study, *Mr. Bligh's Bad Language: Passion, Power and Theatre on the Bounty* (unmentioned in the bibliography), demonstrates the

important relationship of the architecture of the ship to the architecture of the human social capsule it carried.^[3] The Bligh mutiny is incomprehensible without knowing the dimensions and construction of the *Bounty* itself. We could have been told more about the ships of the Baudin expedition, the *Naturaliste*, the *Géographe*, and the sloop the *Casuarina*, whose names are not even mentioned in the Index.

More could also have been learned by more explicit comparison of the Baudin expedition with others which had entered the Pacific in the preceding decades, of which the three voyages by James Cook are only the most famous. Much was made by earlier historians of the Baudin expedition of the tensions in the ships' companies between naturalists and collectors on the one hand, and sailors on the other. These tensions have causes beside personality clashes and theoretical disagreements in the tight confines of a sailing vessel. Other and very obvious factors relating to a maritime expedition also played a role. Navigation and collecting inevitably clashed. Navigation required keeping the ship to time, correctly oriented to changing winds, currents, and tides. Otherwise, ships could find themselves trapped in the doldrums, or running willy-nilly into seasonal storms. Sailors had to keep the ship moving. The naturalists wanted to stay in one place, since their need was time on shore, precious days long enough for them to collect specimens of rocks, animals, and plants, so as to gain an idea of habitat. Both Joseph Banks' and the Forsters' difficulties with Cook on the first and second voyages into the Pacific stem from this incompatibility of objectives. The struggles on board the Baudin expedition were thus not unique and were not all explicable by the alleged weaknesses of the captain, or incompatibilities of temper, scientific program, and ideal of the man of science.

The editors, however, do establish the ways in which the expedition reacted to factors specific to the first decade of the nineteenth century. In 1800, it left a France still reeling from Napoleon's coup of 18 *brumaire* and returned in 1804 to a France ruled by a self-crowned emperor who seemed set on European conquest. Expeditions were low on the list of government priorities in comparison to military campaigns. The scientific community, largely funded by the state, could do little but acquiesce.

When the specimens from the Baudin expedition, living, dead, and fossil, arrived finally at Lorient in 1804, there was confusion as to their disposition, as the paper by Michel Jangoux interestingly describes. Clarity was not enhanced by the pressure placed on the Paris National Museum of Natural History to turn over specimens to Napoleon's spouse, the Empress Josephine. A wealthy Creole from Martinique, Josephine's artistic, botanical, and horticultural interests were famous. Concerned with beauty and novelty rather than science, she picked out the living giraffes and many other specimens from the expedition's collections, and insisted on their being conveyed, lost to science, to Malmaison. Thus, imperial power triumphed over natural history.

This was not the only problem facing the surviving members of the Baudin expedition. Survivors such as Hamelin and Leschenault hoped to make scientific careers in its aftermath as is well described in papers by Fornaserio and Gibbard. And here we come to the kernel of this collection. Never an easy task, career making was complicated by the debates in the scientific world as to the worth of the very field natural history in whose practice they had been risking their lives since the expedition set out. In 1807, reviewing the life and work of Alexander von Humboldt, Georges Cuvier, Professor of comparative anatomy at the Museum, and the most important scientific patron of his day, attacked Humboldt's claims to natural knowledge. Humboldt was regarded by many as a hero of science, whose travels with Aimé Bonpland in South America and

Cuba had revealed not only thousands of unknown species, but also new geophysical concepts, such as the isotherm, and mapping techniques which raised fertile new questions about biogeography and the movement of continents.[4]

In attacking Humboldt, whose public status as a hero of field science remained so undimmed at his death in 1859 that he inspired the young Charles Darwin, Cuvier was thus not taking on some easily routed neophyte. Cuvier argued that, despite all Humboldt's extraordinary travels, his science would never produce the results of Cuvier's own "cabinet" natural history among the stuffed and dried specimens of the Museum, firmly established in Paris. While a field naturalist like Humboldt might have unparalleled sights of animals and plants in their natural habitats, it was, Cuvier argued, only the cabinet naturalist who could truly compare species over their lifespans and place them in the grand structure of nature. It was only he, in his study, who could roam freely throughout the universe, as Cuvier wrote. It was only he who could substitute, for the hurried glance of the field naturalist, the steady objective gaze of the cabinet scientist that could encompass the whole order of nature.[5]

Cuvier's dominance, both as a man of science and as a patron in Napoleonic Paris, meant that his public definition of the true man of science mattered. The ideal he defined was far from Humboldt's physical encounters with jungle and mountain. True vision, Cuvier argued, was objective and maintained a distance between scientist and scientific object. That was very different from von Humboldt, who in his best-selling *Personal Narrative*, placed feelings, adventure, and color alongside his scientific results. In Cuvier's account of objectivity, there was no space for the aesthetic response to nature so beloved by the Empress, and by Humboldt, and no space for the body of the scientist so often used as a living gauge by the Prussian man of science.

It is one of the main contentions of this volume (see articles by West-Sooby and Jean Fornasiero) that this Cuvierian ideal of natural history and the natural historian was successfully asserting its dominance by the time the Baudin expedition returned to France in 1804. Cuvier certainly argued for it with one of the most powerful voices in French science, but even he acknowledged that new specimens were the lifeblood of the Museum and vital for the existence of cabinet science.[6] Field and cabinet had a relationship which was symbiotic, not oppositional. One of Cuvier's own stepsons, Alfred Duvaucel, lost his life in India as a collector for the Museum. His own brother, Frédéric Cuvier, Director of the Menagerie at the Museum, urged the importance of observing the behavior of living animals. Von Humboldt remained a hero of science, and François Péron himself, on a lesser scale, became, if hardly the inventor of the nineteenth century, as Chappey maintains, another. In fact, it might be more accurate to say that Cuvier's was but one voice, powerful, but not truly decisive in this debate, and that the debate consumed much of the rest of the nineteenth century.

In conclusion, this volume is an opportunity to gain a new view of the Baudin expedition. Essays which carefully examine Peron's surviving manuscripts are crucial to this task (Sankey; Baglione and Cremière). Though it could use maps (it does not contain any) the volume does offer a wealth of detail. But it prompts this reviewer to ask the simple question: what is a voyage? Further: does the Baudin expedition really begin with the ships' weighing anchor in 1800 and end when they enter the harbor at Lorient in 1804? Or does it end when the specimens reach the Museum? Or with the diffusion of the theories based on them? Does European chronology, dates such as 1800 and 1804, have any weight in the indigenous chronology of the Pacific Island worlds so

intelligently plundered by Baudin and his men? Only the lucid and thoughtful essay by Nicole Starbuck begins to answer this final question with discussions of race and imperialism. It is placed at the very end of the volume, and as such, offers directions for further thought and research.

LIST OF ESSAYS

Jean Fornasiero, “Nicolas Baudin, François Péron and the Changing of the Guard”

John West-Sooby, “Constructing the Scientific Voyager”

John Gascoigne, “The Pacific as a Laboratory for Natural History”

Jean-Luc Chappey, “François Péron and the Invention of the Nineteenth Century”

Gabrielle Baglione and Cédric Cremière, “The Manuscripts of François Péron in the Natural History Museum of Le Havre”

Margaret Sankey, “The Journals of François Péron and the *Voyage de découvertes aux Terres Australes*”

Stephanie Pfennigwerth, “The Products and Perils of François Péron”

Michel Jangoux, “An Episode from the Baudin Expedition to the Southern Lands: The Return of the *Naturaliste* to France”

Michel Jangoux, “The Unpublished Reports of Jean-Baptiste Lamarck and the Fate of the Invertebrate Collection from the Southern Lands”

Philippa Horton, Justin J.F.A. Jansen, and Andrew Black, “François Péron as an Ornithologist: Identifying his ‘New’ Bird Species from the Baudin Expedition”

Justin J.F.J. Jansen, “François Péron’s Notes on the Albatross”

Jean Fornasiero, “Jacques Félix Emmanuel Hamelin: A Reluctant Scientific Voyager?”

Paul Gibbard, “A Scientific Voyager in Limbo: Theodore Leschenault’s Return to Imperial France”

John West-Sooby, “An Emotional Voyager: Stanislas Levillain (1774–1801), Trainee Zoologist on the Baudin Expedition”

Nicole Starbuck, “Louis Freycinet at Port Jackson: ‘Race’, Colonialism and the figure of the French Scientific Traveler”

NOTES

[1] Articles, models of careful scholarship, by Jansen, Horton et al., and Jangoux.

[2] Richard W. Burkhardt, Jr., “Unpacking Baudin: Models of scientific practice in the age of Lamarck,” in *Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, 1744–1829*, ed. Goulven Laurent, (Paris: Éditions du Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques, 1997), pp. 497-514.

[3] Greg Denning, *Mr. Bligh’s Bad Language: Passion, Power and Theatre on the Bounty* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

[4] See Stephanie Pfennigwerth’s perceptive paper in this volume for the similar image of Péron as a hero of field natural history.

[5] For Cuvier and Humboldt, see Dorinda Outram, *Vocation and Authority in Post-Revolutionary French Science: Georges Cuvier* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984; reissue, London and New York: Routledge, 2022).

[6] Burkhardt, “Unpacking Baudin,” p. 501.

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