

# AN 1802 ABORIGINAL NECKLACE REDISCOVERED IN THE MUSÉUM D'HISTOIRE NATURELLE OF LE HAVRE

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## Introduction

On 19 October 1800, two ships, the *Géographe* and the *Naturaliste*, were preparing to put to sea at Le Havre, under the command of Nicolas Baudin. The expedition he was to lead was the fourth of the great French voyages of discovery since the middle of the eighteenth century, following Bougainville on the *Boudeuse* and the *Étoile* (1766), Lapérouse on the *Boussole* and the *Astrolabe* (1785) and d'Entrecasteaux on the *Recherche* and the *Espérance* (1791).

Apart from possible political objectives, the existence of which is still controversial, the official purpose of the expedition was to survey and map the unexplored portions of the Australian coast and to establish contact with the local populations, to examine their origins, to gain an understanding of their way of life and their language, and to describe the geology, the flora and the

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fauna of the region. In 1801, when the expedition reached the Australian coast, Baudin discovered that he had been preceded by the great British navigator Matthew Flinders. On 8 April 1802, Baudin and Flinders met and exchanged notes at what would be known as Encounter Bay (South Australia).

The two ships of the French expedition subsequently met up at Port Jackson in mid-1802 and they stayed there for approximately four and a half months. On 18 November Baudin ordered the *Naturaliste* to sail back to France, while the *Géographe*, with Baudin on board, accompanied by the schooner *Casuarina* (acquired at Port Jackson to carry excess cargo) continued the exploration of the Australian coast. On 29 April 1803 Baudin decided that it was time for both the *Géographe* and the *Casuarina* to return to France.

On the return voyage Baudin's health deteriorated rapidly: it had already been severely tested by the illness he had hidden, but borne stoically, since his appointment. Sensing his end to be near, he wrote to the Minister of the Navy: 'I remain strong enough at present to assure you that the government's wishes have been fulfilled and that this voyage will bring honour to France.' Nicolas Baudin died at the Île de France (Mauritius) on 16 September 1803. The *Naturaliste*, under the command of Captain Hamelin, entered the port of Le Havre on 7 June 1803. The *Géographe*, under the command of Pierre Bernard Milius, reached the port of Lorient on 24 March 1804. The expedition brought back to France many valuable details for cartography and more than 100,000 botanical and zoological specimens, of which more than 2,500 were unknown to European scientists.<sup>2</sup>

The items collected were promptly unloaded, but were not all treated in the same fashion. The Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle in Paris was keen to take possession of herbs and specimens preserved in spirits and they remained there meticulously preserved, but quite a different destiny awaited the ethnographic specimens. Since they were not intended for any specific scientific destination, about 160 Australian and Tasmanian ethnographic objects were offered to the Empress Joséphine in May 1804, to be displayed at the Château de Malmaison.

Joséphine died in 1814 and in 1815 Napoleon abdicated. It is generally believed that most of the items collected in Australia (including Tasmania) by members of the expedition such as Depuch, Lesueur and Péron were destroyed

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<sup>2</sup> See Horner 1988, Robichon 1991, Péron 1998, Fornasiero et al. 2004 and Jangoux 2007.

in 1815, when the looting of the Château de Malmaison occurred. The rest of the collection was scattered as a result of several public auctions. With the destruction, sale or loss of these items, only the surviving drawings of Nicolas-Martin Petit and Charles-Alexandre Lesueur allow us to form an idea of the Aboriginal weapons, tools and utensils collected in the region during the expedition.<sup>3</sup>

Between 1804 and 1815 Lesueur systematically reviewed the natural science records and the ethnographic drawings brought back from the expedition. He re-examined his landscape sketches, organised his notes, refined his drawings with reference to specimens brought back from the expedition and produced the first of the colour plates for the engravings which would subsequently illustrate the Atlas of the *Voyage de découvertes aux Terres australes* produced by his friend François Péron (Péron et al. 1824).

However, in 1815, disappointed by the progress (or lack thereof) of his scientific career, Lesueur decided to follow the geologist William Maclure to America. He remained there for twenty-two years. In 1837, now back in his native country, Lesueur settled at Sainte-Adresse near Le Havre, and divided his time between Paris and his home in the country. Sainte-Adresse is 3.5 kilometres from Le Havre, and there, in 1845, the mayor offered him the position of curator of the future museum (Vincent 2007). It is in this context that Lesueur donated numerous items from his collection, both Australian and American, to the new institution, and his heirs would subsequently do likewise. The various components constituting the collection of drawings, manuscript notes, studies, velums and watercolours by Lesueur, together with the works of his friend Nicolas-Martin Petit, were thoroughly researched by Ernest Hamy, the founder (in 1878) and curator until 1906 of the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro (Paris). Additional work on the collection has been done by Mme Jacqueline Bonnemains, the former curator of the Lesueur Collection in the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle du Havre, who retired in 2003.<sup>4</sup> Further, Lesueur's biography has been the subject of a new and detailed study, the first volume of which appeared in 2007 (Rinsma 2007).

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<sup>3</sup> See Jones 1988 and Horner 1987.

<sup>4</sup> See Hamy 1891, Hamy 1905, Bonnemains 1986a and Bonnemains 1988b.

## **The ethnographic collections from Oceania in the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle du Havre**

In 1847, Eugène Delessert, a wealthy young traveller, who had recently returned from a voyage to the Pacific (having visited Tahiti, the Philippines, China, Japan, New Zealand and Australia, and more specifically Sydney), brought back numerous weapons and tools he had collected during his travels or purchased in local antique and curio shops.

On his return to France he indicated to the City of Le Havre that he might dispose of some of his collection and he offered it to the Museum-Library which had been opened to the public less than a year earlier. When Delessert drew up the list of items he wished to sell, he had already included the legacy of his banker cousin Benjamin Delessert in his personal ethnographic collection. In addition to illustrated plates of herbs and botanical documents, his cousin had bought Bruny d'Entrecasteaux's ethnographic objects, which had been in the care of the botanist Jacques Julien Houtou de Labillardière. Labillardière, one of the survivors of the expedition, was determined to salvage the collections put together by the various participants.

In January 1848 the first ethnographic collection, comprising 205 items, came to the Museum-Library of Le Havre and was displayed in its galleries.

On 28 May 1857 Lesueur's heirs, Berryer and Quesney, donated to the City of Le Havre a significant quantity of material that had once belonged to Lesueur. Still extant in the city archives is the document<sup>5</sup> confirming this gift which comprised forty crates 'containing the fruits of forty years' work in many different regions, with the proviso that they be appropriately displayed in the galleries of the museum' (Oursel et al. 1858).

By 1881 the Museum had gained an enviable reputation by virtue of its zoological and palaeontological collections. At this point, the Museum left the former galleries of the Museum-Library where it had been until this time, and was moved into some court rooms no longer in use in the Place du Vieux Marché in the very centre of Le Havre.

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<sup>5</sup> Archives municipales du Havre, Fonds moderne, R2 C7 L2, 1857. ('Don au Muséum de quarante caisses ayant appartenu à M. Lesueur')

In 1890, the curator, Gustave Lennier, sought to add an ethnographic dimension to his collections. Accordingly he laid claim to certain objects that were still unsuitably stored in damp and cramped premises.

One development allowed him to realise his wish: in 1895 a trader named Louis Le Mescam, originally from Le Havre and now based in Noumea, sent several hundred objects from Oceania to the Museum in his native city. Shortly afterwards, in September 1897, a further donation of seventy-two objects from Oceania was made by Félix Faure, President of the Republic, and in September 1898 the City granted 5,000 francs towards the installation costs of the ethnographic collections in a room on the top floor of the Museum.

It was probably at this time that the forty crates containing the objects collected by Lesueur were emptied of their contents and the items catalogued. They were then distributed in various display cabinets where they would remain on public view but ignored by researchers for more than forty years.

The last pre-war curator of the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle du Havre retired in April 1939 and the Museum was closed from the beginning of the Second World War (1940). A new curator, André Maury, was appointed in March 1941. Faced with the threat of the destruction of the collections, he organised the removal of some of the Museum's most valuable scientific treasures. In view of the situation and more particularly of the ill-will of the occupying forces, he was obliged to restrict his selection to a very limited number of objects. His attention was particularly drawn to items of African and Oceanic ethnography (Maury 1950, 11–12 and Maury 1979, 23).

Between 12 January and 5 March 1942 André Maury removed a variety of small objects of special scientific interest from their display cabinets, among them exhibits from the cabinet numbered 1034-1035.<sup>6</sup> He finally succeeded in having six crates of items relocated, representing fewer than 300 ethnographic items. These crates were transported to the basement of the Priory of Graville, away from the city.

On the night of 5 September 1944, more than 1,800 tonnes of bombs fell on the city centre. The Museum did not escape destruction. The ruined

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<sup>6</sup> Archives du Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle du Havre, inventaire manuscrit, janvier–mars 1942, M. Maury, conservateur. ('Sélection et mise en caisse des collections ethnographiques')

building now had only four walls and the remains of the monumental staircase, and the collections that had remained on the site had been burnt.

Accordingly, of the thousands of ethnographic items the Le Havre Museum had featured in its display cabinets, only a few hundred have survived. Among these the only ones known to have originated in Australia were those that had apparently belonged to the Delessert collection. Consequently, scholars specialising in the early history of French-Australian relations came to assume that no ethnographic items dating from the Baudin expedition have come down to us.

From 1949, the Curator, concentrating on the collections of ethnography that had been saved, organised various exhibitions in premises under the control of the Le Havre municipality, such as those in January 1949, December 1954 and November 1962.

In 1965 Marie-Charlotte Laroche of the Musée de l'Homme in Paris visited Le Havre as part of a national tour of inspection to draw up an inventory of ethnographic material from Oceania held in French provincial museums. She catalogued 150 objects originating in New Caledonia, the New Hebrides, Vanikoro, the Caroline Islands, the Marquesas Islands, New Zealand and Australia (Laroche 1966). Weaponry, such as boomerangs and shields from the Delessert collection, was included in her study.

In 1973, a re-built Museum made it possible for visitors to see these fine collections in a new environment: the institution was now placed under the scientific responsibility of André Maury as curator with Gérard Breton as director responsible for administration. From December 1974, the ethnographic collection which had escaped ruin found a new home in a room on the top floor of the Museum. The collection remained there until the end of 1982, when it was packed in boxes and stored in a basement.

In November 1984 the stored items barely escaped total destruction from a storm and the resulting floods. Faced with the risk of the continued deterioration of the items that had been soaked by the flood, the director, Gérard Breton, entrusted to me the task of cleaning and labelling these objects (Vincent 2012). Once dried, cleaned, labelled and catalogued, they were kept in an air-conditioned room that formed part of a former fort, the Fort de Tourneville, where storage space was available for items from the Museum. At last the collection was located in a place more suitable for its preservation.

## Context of the discovery of the necklace and a hypothesis on its origins

During the spring of 2005, in the course of a partial relocation of the ethnographical collections, a necklace consisting of a number of segments of vegetal nature caught my attention. This item still had its identifying label attached (see Figure 1). It shows that the necklace had belonged to Lesueur. Handwritten in black ink, the label reads as follows:

Necklace of reed segments. Gift of M<sup>r</sup> Lesueur. New Caledonia.

It shows no catalogue number, nor is the date of the inclusion of the item in the collection mentioned. However, the very existence of the label was enough to arouse my interest, since, as a result of the war and numerous relocations, ethnographic items still bearing their original identification labels were extremely rare in the Museum's collections.

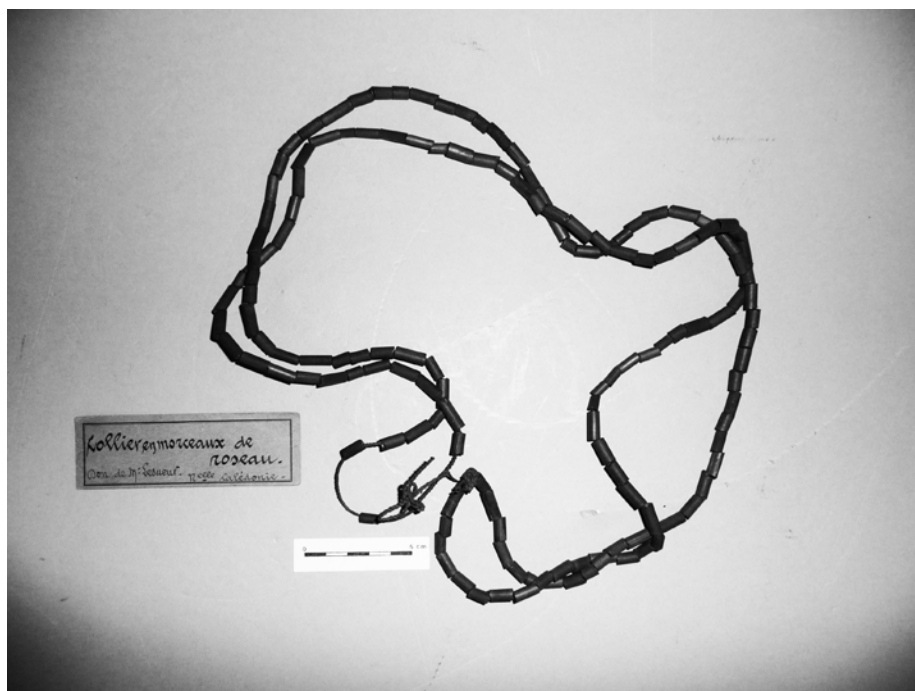


Figure 1

My hypothesis was that, notwithstanding the New Caledonian provenance claimed on the label, this necklace was in fact collected by Lesueur during the Baudin expedition's 1802 sojourn at Port Jackson.

The archives of the Le Havre Museum having been destroyed during the Second World War, it was difficult to verify the donation of the object; on the other hand, the item was of great scholarly interest if its historical origin could be confirmed.

The scrutiny and reconciliation of the rare pieces of information on the history of the Museum's former collections took me two years. A study of the inventory drawn up by the City of Le Havre at the time of acquiring the Delessert ethnographic collection in 1848 eventually led me to conclude that this necklace could not have come from the Delessert collection (nor from its Bruny d'Entrecasteaux component).<sup>7</sup>

In 2008, an investigation of the drawings of Nicolas-Martin Petit, in particular those portraying Aborigines wearing necklaces, led me to embark on further archival research. I then put forward the hypothesis that the necklace came into the Museum on 28 May 1857, when the forty crates of the Lesueur collection were donated to the City of Le Havre by Lesueur's heirs Berryer and Quesney. Contrary to their wishes, their ancestor's collected objects, including the necklace now the subject of this inquiry, were excluded from the Museum's displays and remained stacked in crates.

Paradoxically, the reason for the new interest taken in Lesueur's forgotten items but also for the error in identifying the provenance of the necklace was the arrival within a short period of time (1895–1897) of a great number of objects from Oceania, donated by Louis Le Mescam and Félix Faure. Indeed, it is easy to understand how the curator, or his deputy, busy as they were with recording details of several hundred objects from New Caledonia, automatically wrote 'New Caledonia' on the label, thereby making an error in the provenance of the item, but not in the name of the donor, who, fortunately indeed, was recorded as M<sup>r</sup> Lesueur. This necklace was then placed in display case n° 1034-1035, where it would remain for four decades.

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<sup>7</sup> Archives municipales du Havre, Fonds moderne, R2 C7 L5, chemise 4, 1848. ('Vente de la collection E. Delessert à la Ville du Havre')

## Description of the Lesueur necklace

The necklace consists of two long strands of closely-twisted two-ply twine made of fibres of vegetal origin (see Figure 2). The two strands are tied together at both ends. The segments of reed stems are extremely fragile and, being naturally hollow, are threaded on to each strand.

- Number of strands making up the necklace: 2
- Number of segments of vegetal stem per strand: 73
- Total number of segments of vegetal stem: 146
- Diameter of segments of vegetal stem: 0.55 cm
- Length of segments of vegetal stem: from 0.6 to 2.8 cm
- Total length of the necklace: 178 cm (not including the thread required to produce knots).



Figure 2

The fibres of the two-ply twine comprising the centre thread of the necklace are of dark red-brown colour; the segments of vegetal stem are gold-brown in colour.

To verify my hypothesis regarding the origin of the necklace, I submitted photographs to several experts. I first consulted Dr Beth Gott, an ethnobotanist at the School of Biological Sciences at Monash University in Melbourne, who is an expert on plants used by Aborigines. She indicated to me that, as far as can be judged from the photographs, the vegetal segments, which are very smooth, resemble those of the flower-bearing stem of reeds (*Phragmites australis*), a species often used by Aborigines for such necklaces.

I also consulted Rebecca Conway, a curator in ethnography at the Macleay Museum in the University of Sydney, who likewise noted the similarity between the Lesueur necklace and Aboriginal items she had had the opportunity to see: she also was of the opinion that the necklace is made of the common reed (*Phragmites australis*).

As suggested by Rebecca Conway, I then submitted the photographs to Dr Val Attenbrow, Principal Research Scientist in the Anthropology Unit of the Australian Museum in Sydney. She confirmed the great similarity between the Lesueur necklace and the old Aboriginal necklaces (for example in the Roth Collection in the Australian Museum) made from segments of vegetal material, in particular stems of *Phragmites australis*. Val Attenbrow was surprised by the dark colour of the vegetal material used in making the necklace. (Beth Gott had hypothesised that the red-brown colour might be the result of the application of a colouring agent, or of the necklace rubbing against the wearer's skin.)

Finally, Jill Hasell, Curatorial Assistant, Pacific and Australian Collections, Department of Africa, Oceania and America, British Museum, having seen the photographs of the necklace, wrote to me: 'I think you are correct in thinking that the necklace is from Australia, and it will be very interesting if it was collected as early as you think it may have been.'<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> It is to be hoped that, when circumstances permit, a closer physical examination (i.e. microscopic and chemical analysis of the reed segments) will confirm my hypothesis.

## Iconography of the French expedition

Field notes, personal documents and journals written by members of the expedition, as well as the log-books kept by the commanders of the two ships, the *Géographe* and the *Naturaliste*, provide an invaluable record of the voyage.

However, as far as the necklaces are concerned, the greatest wealth of information comes from the drawings and plates reproduced in the two editions of the Atlas of François Péron's *Voyage de découvertes aux Terres australes* (Péron et al. 1824).

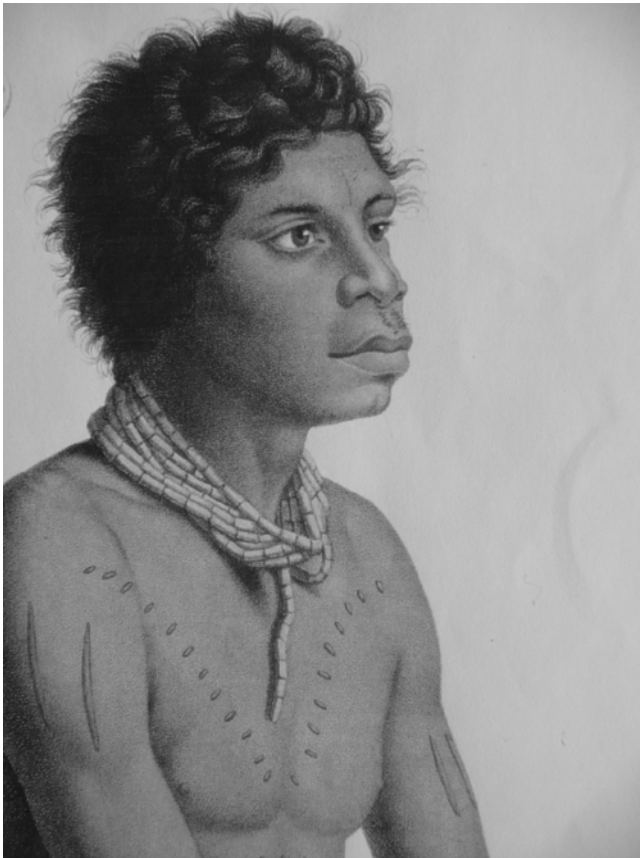


Figure 3

Plate 22 features a portrait of Bedgi-Bedgi, a young Aboriginal drawn in 1802 by Nicolas-Martin Petit (Péron et al. 1824, Atlas Plate 22). In the collection of the Le Havre Museum it appears as a pastel, charcoal, ink and pencil drawing (29.5 cm x 24.5 cm).<sup>9</sup> It was reproduced both in the 1988 Bonnemains, Forsyth and Smith volume of selected artistic work from the expedition and in Val Attenbrow's book on *Sydney's Aboriginal Past* (Bonnemains et al. 1988, 117 and Attenbrow 2010, 109). The caption of the illustration indicates that Bedgi-Bedgi belonged to the Gwea-Gal clan and consequently came from the Kurnell peninsula at Botany Bay. The Aborigine represented in this portrait displays a necklace comparable with that of Bata (see below) and the one brought back by Lesueur. The engraving of Bedgi-Bedgi is reproduced here (Figure 3).

Another portrait, of Bata of Port Jackson, is a watercolour (20.5 cm x 19 cm), probably painted by Jean-Bernard Milius, second lieutenant on the *Naturaliste*. There is also a pastel version of the same portrait by Nicolas-Martin Petit (Bonnemains 1987, plate 20).<sup>10</sup> The authorisation to print is recorded with the engraving (29.5 cm x 24.5 cm) under n° 20 041-1 in the Lesueur Collection in the Museum at Le Havre. Bata wears a necklace made of rings of vegetal material very similar to the item from the Lesueur collection.

Finally, a drawing by Lesueur, which was the source of B. Roger's engraving published in the Atlas by Péron and Freycinet (Péron et al. 1824, plate 29), shows a long necklace of vegetal material, from New South Wales. This necklace is also reminiscent of the Lesueur collection item, even though the number of reed segments is greater in the drawing than in the Le Havre specimen. A version of this plate is reproduced in the 1988 Bonnemains, Forsyth and Smith volume. It matches the unpublished engraving numbered plate 47, by Testard, after a drawing by Lesueur, which was not ready at the time of the printing of the volume by the Imprimerie Langlois and was therefore not included, together with some other engravings left out for the same reason (Bonnemains et al. 1988a, 89).

Lesueur was no doubt struck by the ornamental quality of these reed necklaces made by Aborigines who, in the eyes of the voyagers, lived in dire poverty. This was probably one of the reasons why he collected a specimen

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<sup>9</sup> See Bonnemains 2000, 12.

<sup>10</sup> Also reproduced in Bonnemains 1989, plate 35.

some time between June and November 1802 during the *Géographe*'s sojourn at Port Jackson. Wishing to represent it accurately, Lesueur is likely to have set aside the necklace with the items in his own personal collection after his return to France. My hypothesis is that Lesueur had kept the necklace with the intention of using it as a model for the portrayal of the ornament shown on Plate 29 in the second edition of Péron's Atlas (Péron et al. 1824).<sup>11</sup>

A number of factors leads one to wonder whether the necklace could have been collected by Nicolas-Martin Petit rather than Lesueur. Petit, a specialist in ethnographic drawing, portrays Aborigines in a way that is, as it were, a snapshot. He does not indulge in a close study of objects; rather, he treats them as elements in the total ethnographic picture. Lesueur, for his part, specialised in a scrupulously accurate and indeed timeless (non-contextual) representation of his subjects, requiring a model he could handle, work on and scrutinise at leisure. Comparative analyses of the techniques adopted by these artists had been carried out and published previously.<sup>12</sup> His specific technique of representation made it necessary for Lesueur, more than for his friend Petit, to collect objects and specimens to use as models. The necklace of reed segments was no exception to this: the presence of this small Aboriginal ornament in his personal collection is merely one further example illustrating Lesueur's approach.

## Comparison with other items in the collection

At this stage of our investigation, a comparison with Australian necklaces held in collections of various Museums in Europe and Australia became necessary.

Several scientific institutions were contacted. Online catalogues were also searched, including those of the Museum of Ethnography, Geneva and Neufchâtel, Switzerland, the British Museum in London, the Quai Branly Museum in Paris and the Australian Museum in Sydney.

This investigation revealed that Australian and international ethnographic collections hold few Aboriginal necklaces collected in the nineteenth century. The place of origin of those that have been identified tends

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<sup>11</sup> This engraving is also reproduced in Fornasiero et al. 2004, 355 and Attenbrow 2010, 108.

<sup>12</sup> See Breton 1978, Bonnemains 1986b and Bonnemains 1989.

to be the Northern Territory<sup>13</sup> or Central Australia<sup>14</sup>. It also became clear that surviving historical necklaces made of strung reed segments are very rare.<sup>15</sup> More common are necklaces made of shark vertebrae, shells, Asclepiadaceae syn. Apocynaceae stalks and gumnuts from eucalyptus trees or seeds from *Abrus precatorius* (Crab's eye, Gidgee Gidgee, Jequirity).

I will take two specific nineteenth century examples, both held in the collections of the British Museum and recorded on its website.<sup>16</sup> One is from Port Phillip Bay, made of dark reed and resembling the Lesueur necklace.

The other is from Port Jackson and it lends itself to a useful comparison with the Lesueur item. It belongs to the former Arley Castle Collection which was donated to the British Museum as part of the Henry Christy Collection. A discussion of the Arley Castle Collection and this particular necklace appeared in a general survey published by J.V.S. Megaw (Megaw 1993). A careful reading of the notes, labels and original documents concerning this necklace suggests that the inclusion of this item in the former Arley Castle Collection must be regarded with some caution,<sup>17</sup> but we know that the collection does contain other noteworthy objects such as boomerangs, clubs and bags. In his study Megaw highlights the great similarity between the stitches of the bags in the Arley Castle Collection and the stitches of the bags drawn by Lesueur for the second edition of the Atlas of Péron's and Freycinet's *Voyage de découvertes aux Terres australes* (Megaw 1993, 35).

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<sup>13</sup> Musée du Quai Branly, ancienne collection de M. Montefiore, item n° 71.1903.14.11 et n° 71.1903.14.14.1-2; Musée d'ethnographie, Geneva, n° ETHOC 025728 or n° ETHOC 025727; Australian Museum, Sydney, Roth Collection, n° E.14478 (Cape Bedford), n° E.14485 (Cape Grafton).

<sup>14</sup> Musée d'ethnographie, Geneva, n° ETHOC 013628 or n° ETHOC 009377.

<sup>15</sup> Musée du Quai Branly, Montefiore Collection, n° 71.1903.14.11 and n° 71.1903.14.14.1-2; Australian Museum, Sydney, Roth Collection, n° E.14479, E.14480, E.14481 and E.14482 (Atherton); n° E.14475, n° 14476 and n° E.14477 (Bloomfield River).

<sup>16</sup> They can be seen via the following link: [http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search\\_the\\_collection\\_database/museum\\_number\\_search.asp](http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database/museum_number_search.asp)

Once on the site, select 'Search by Museum number' and insert the following reference numbers, successively:

Oc1847,0413,4 (Port Phillip Bay, date of donation 1847)

Oc.1892 (Port Jackson, acquired 1860–1869)

<sup>17</sup> Personal communication from J. Hasell, April 2012.

## Conclusion

All things considered, there are very few objects surviving from the Baudin expedition that allow us to assess the diversity of the culture of the Aborigines of Australia, their way of life, their weapons and their implements. There are some handwritten notes, a ship's log, some sketches and drawings and a limited number of objects represented on plates published in the Atlas of Péron's *Voyage de découvertes aux Terres australes*. These are of inestimable value, especially concerning the Tasmanian Aborigines, and have been discussed in at least two publications (Plomley 1983 and Dyer 2005).

Although there used to be a commonly accepted notion that the French of the Baudin expedition had shown little interest in the Aborigines they encountered during their sojourn at Port Jackson, research undertaken by Rhys Jones on ethnographic drawings made in Sydney indicates the opposite (Jones 1988), and data analysed by Margaret Sankey and her colleagues confirm these conclusions (Sankey 2004a and Sankey et al. 2004b). The acquisition of our necklace must have taken place precisely in the context of these contacts between the Aborigines of Port Jackson and the scientists of the Baudin expedition.

How, why, in exchange for what, with which specific Aboriginal?

It is unlikely that these questions can ever be answered. However, 210 years after that encounter, this Aboriginal necklace brought to France by Lesueur in 1804 has become an item of great scientific, emotional and historical interest, and has at last been identified in a way that it now has acquired the status it has always been entitled to due to its provenance.

At the time of the publication of this study, this necklace, acquired by an explorer whose identity we know with certainty, is possibly the sole artefact surviving from the Baudin expedition, and still to be seen today.

Artist and naturalist Charles-Alexandre Lesueur kept this necklace with items in his personal collection as a model for his drawings, but having spent the years 1815 to 1837 in North America with geologist William Maclure, he failed to surrender it to one of the appropriate government agencies, as he should have, when he finished with it. This object remained in one of Lesueur's crates until after his death. It is therefore not a lack of awareness of its ethnographic importance, but rather the vagaries of history that are responsible for it remaining neglected for so long. As for the meanderings of its itinerary,

these are paradoxically the reason for its miraculous survival until our day. But its journey has been marked by long periods of hibernation and oblivion, alternating with occasional moments of recognition.

This item, which was collected for scientific purposes at some time between June and November 1802 around Port Jackson, may well be one of the oldest Australian ethnographic objects to find its way to France. Normally it should have come to rest in a display cabinet of the Muséum anthropologique de Paris, an institution planned by Jean-François Jauffret under the auspices of the Société des Observateurs de l'Homme (established in 1799), but which was never to see the light of day, since the Society was dissolved in 1804 (Coppans et al. 1978, 21 and Daugeron 2009, 536).

This is how the ethnographic objects from the Baudin expedition found their way to the Château de Malmaison, together with the plants (*Metrosideros*, *Melaleuca*, *Leptospermum*, *Eucalyptus*) and the live animals such as the dwarf emus, kangaroos, tortoises, parrots (*Psittacides*) and black swans which had always been intended for Empress Joséphine (Horner 1987).

As chance would have it, the necklace was not included among the objects handed over to Joséphine in 1804. Lesueur must have kept it to use it as a model for his drawings, but it was then forgotten at the bottom of a crate for more than four decades. The gift of forty crates by Lesueur's nephews of items collected during his voyages of exploration was the next stage, a very important one, in the history of its itinerary. Then, another forty years would elapse before the Lesueur necklace would be exhibited in a glass cabinet, where it remained half-forgotten for a further forty years.

The Second World War almost marked the end of this last surviving object from the Baudin expedition. In spite of its intrinsic interest, the necklace was again neglected and, as a result, went unnoticed for more than sixty years, until, in 2005, my attention was drawn to this small object on a shelf with its identifying label.

Until now it was unknown to historians of the voyages of discovery and to specialists of Charles-Alexandre Lesueur. Its existence was ignored by scholars both in France and in Australia, and it was never included in French national heritage inventories. What value, what importance can be ascribed to such an object? The question must be put.

From this point on, it is essential that a scientific and administrative procedure be undertaken. The drawings, velums, sketches and written accounts

by Nicolas-Martin Petit and Charles Alexandre Lesueur are considered national treasures and are kept in secure storage. Similarly, this necklace, whose provenance and history have just been traced, must be brought to the attention of the interregional scientific acquisitions committee responsible for the collections of French Museums, so that henceforth it can enjoy the level of protection appropriate to its provenance, history and current accommodation.

This study highlights the benefit of preserving in museum collections items that may at first sight appear modest or indeed insignificant, offering no obvious scientific interest, but which, in the light of careful research, may prove to be of considerable historical value. The significance of such items enhances the reputation of the institution that inherits the task, and above all the duty, of preserving them.

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