

BOOK REVIEWS

Susan Hunt and Paul Carter, *Terre Napoléon: Australia Through French Eyes 1800-1804*, published by the Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales, distributed by Bloominings Books (37 Burwood Road, Hawthorn, Victoria, 3122), \$85 Hardback ISBN 0949753815, \$45 Paperback ISBN 949753874.

In *Explorations*, No. 8 (December 1989), I reviewed Jacqueline Bonnemain's, Elliott Forsyth's and Bernard Smith's wonderful book *Baudin in Australian Waters: The Artwork of the French Voyage of Discovery to the Southern Lands 1800-1804*, (Oxford, 1988). Although I had nothing but praise for this book, I was then pessimistic enough to declare that 'Baudin's . . . name seems destined to be known by only a handful of Australians for many years to come'. Thanks to the splendid 'Terre Napoléon' exhibition, held recently in Sydney and Canberra, I have been proven delightfully wrong! The beautiful catalogue of the exhibition owes a great deal to the work of Bonnemain, Forsyth and Smith, particularly with regard to biographical and descriptive notes. Although *Terre Napoléon: Australia Through French Eyes 1800-1804* is not as rich a scholarly resource as *Baudin in Australian Waters* ..., it is a fine example of book production and the illustrations are produced to the same high standards. It is certainly more affordable.*

When Nicolas-Thomas Baudin's expedition was outfitted in Le Havre, Charles-Alexandre Lesueur (1778-1846) was attracted to the prospect of adventure in southern waters and enlisted as an assistant gunner, 4th class. But when the expedition's artists deserted at Ile de France (Mauritius), Lesueur took on the task of official artist. Together with Nicolas-Martin Petit (1777-1804), also co-opted from the lower deck, he accomplished his new role with remarkable virtuosity (see also, my review of *Les Velins de Charles-Alexandre Lesueur*, in *Explorations*, no. 16, June 1994.). Lesueur gave valuable assistance to the naturalist François Péron in gathering more than 180 000 specimens and helped him publish an account of the voyage. While Lesueur's natural history sketches remain a significant adjunct to Péron's zoological work during the expedition, Petit's sketches and watercolours of the indigenous inhabitants of Van Diemen's Land and New Holland provide a priceless ethnographic record (see for example, N. J. B. Plomley, *The Baudin Expedition and the Tasmanian Aborigines, 1802*, Blubber Head Press, Hobart, 1983).

Although Nicolas Baudin charted significant stretches of the continent's coast and ensured that his ships were brimming with botanical, zoological, geological and ethnographic treasures, his reward was ignominy. Because he died in Mauritius, in September 1803, before his expedition returned to France, he was unable to do battle with his detractors: Georges Bory de St Vincent and François Péron, whose distortions seeped into later biographies and studies. In 1987, however, Baudin

received powerful vindication through the work of the Australian historian Frank Horner (see my review of *The French Reconnaissance: Baudin in Australia 1801-1803*, in *Explorations*, No. 6, September 1988). Susan Hunt and Paul Carter, who have written the introductory essays to the catalogue, have added their voices to the hymn of acclamation. If I have a criticism of Susan Hunt's essay, it is that in listing Baudin's precursors, she does not mention Marion Dufresne's expedition (1771-72), the very first French expedition to any part of Australia and that which shattered the 14 000 year isolation of the Tasmanian Aborigines (since Tasman did not meet the indigenous inhabitants). This, however, is a minor criticism and she deserves nothing but praise for her fine curatorial work.

Susan Hunt ends her essay with the sentence: 'It is through their [French] eyes that to a surprising degree we see where and who we are'. I tend to agree with her. Indeed this catalogue, or at least its introductory essays, could have been subtitled: 'The French through Australian Eyes'. In this respect, Dr Carter's essay, although a useful overview, is at times quite provocative. On page 27, for example, he declares: 'Sharing the First Consul's view that France should command ideas exclusively its own, Péron greeted the ocean as a new empire: marine biology, a knowledge of the world's seas, would enable the French to lay siege, at least intellectually, to the land-bound sciences of the British Empire.' On what basis does Carter attribute such sentiments to Napoléon and for that matter Péron? Does he really expect us to believe that British science was land-bound in the early nineteenth century, given the pioneering marine zoology of John Ellis (c. 1705-76), Daniel Solander (1733-1782), John Hill (1707-75), Patrick Browne (1720-90) and John Hunter (1728-93), the publication of books such as Martyn's *Universal Conchologist* (4 vols, 1784), Donovan's *The Natural History of British Shells* (5 vols, 1799-1803) and *The Natural History of British Fishes* (5 vols, 1804-08), followed by J.S. Miller's *Crinoida* (1821), Charles Darwin's *Structure and Distribution of Coral Reefs* (1842) and Forbes and Hanley's *British Mollusca* (1848-53) - not to mention the achievements of ichthyologists such as Sir John Richardson (1787-1865), George Tridacant Lay (d. 1845) and Edward Turner Bennett (1797-1836)?

Dr Carter is now working on a book on Jacques Cousteau and it seems that he is preparing a (post-modern?) pond of French history and science in which to splash the unfortunate (deconstructed?) captain. His essay 'Looking for Baudin' appears to be a wet run for many of his ideas about France and the sea. Unfortunately, he founders several times for lack of adequate soundings. His discussion of Mauritius in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries is a case in point. The island may be just a dot in the middle of the Indian Ocean, but, for the period in question, it has a substantial body of historical scholarship upon which to run aground (see for example the works of Henri Prentout, Huguette Ly-Tio-fane Pineo, Raymond d'Unienville, Auguste Toussaint and C. Northcote Parkinson). When Carter writes of Baudin and Flinders in Mauritius, he writes in apparent ignorance of the desperate predicament of the island colonists.

I have sympathy for Matthew Flinders: unaware of the collapse of the Peace of Amiens and in French hands, separated from his family and delayed in publishing the results of his discoveries. Nevertheless, there was a war on. French prisoners-of-war, held on stinking hulks in the Thames estuary or even on parole in Litchfield or Salisbury, did not enjoy the kind of privileges Flinders enjoyed; yet, Carter calls the governor of the Mauritius, General Mathieu Decaen, 'unsporting'. The position of Mauritius was precarious, indeed ultimately hopeless. Decaen (who was only 34 years old in 1803) had a lot to lose in terms of his own prestige and career by allowing a security risk such as a skilled British cartographer to leave the island. Military intelligence may have been a low priority for Flinders, but his formal instructions betrayed him when they were read by the French. Paul Carter writes that Flinders was 'a victim of Decaen's rabid nationalism', but gives no proof for any such pathological patriotism. In August 1810 the French defeated the British at the Battle of Grand Port - the only naval victory commemorated by Napoleon on the Arc de Triomphe. However, when the British came again, in December 1810, they came with seventy ships and ten thousand men. Mauritius fell. The stakes were high and in my heart I can't honestly say I would have acted differently to General Decaen - including reviewing intelligence, such as that gathered by Péron, to destroy British bases like Port Jackson.

I was also surprised by Dr Carter's sweeping statement that 'anti-British pirateering was all they understood in a colony that prided itself on sinking East Indiamen' (page 29). In the midst of the Indian Ocean and protracted global war, food and able-bodied men were in short supply. Baudin was in competition for these same scarce resources. With his neologism 'pirateering', Dr Carter does a great injustice to those who bravely defended and sustained the island: not by 'sinking' East Indiamen, but by capturing them. Between 1793 and 1803, the local naval squadron and eighteen armed merchantmen took more than 176 prizes. Even Flinders acknowledged their courage and skills in his letters. Privateers were not pirates; they had commissions for a stipulated length of time which controlled their conduct according to the regulations of the navy, which also obliged them to fly the French ensign. Nevertheless, they had considerable freedom 'to harm the enemy' through all 'permissible acts of war, to take and bring prisoners with their ships, arms and other things'. If the locals only understood 'sinking East Indiamen', why did some of the most intellectually cultivated members of Baudin's expedition choose to stay in Mauritius? Perhaps Dr Carter should read Auguste Toussaint's *Early Printing in the Mascarene Islands, 1767-1810* for a hint of the cultural life of the colony then. He might also care to read Flinders' own journal.

And while I am on the subject of prisoners during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, it should be noted that D'Entrecasteaux's botanist did not endure 'three years in a Dutch jail in Java' (page 24) as Dr Carter asserts. Labillardière was arrested on 19 February 1794 and spent about a week in the prison of the 'Tomagon of Sourabaya'. He was then marched overland to

Samarang, arriving on 11 March 1794. When he and his companions learnt that they were to be lodged in the local hospital, they made representations to Governor van Overstraaten and were allowed to take lodgings in the centre of the town. Labillardière remained in Samarang until he and the artist Piron were moved to Batavia on 2 September. Yes, he was then held in Fort Anké, but in November 1794 the *Nathalie*, carrying Dutch prisoners-of-war for exchange, arrived under a flag of truce. Labillardière left Batavia on this vessel on 29 March 1795 and arrived in Mauritius on 18 May 1796. Thus, his actual time 'in a Dutch jail in Java' was at most a matter of months, if not weeks. It should also be stated that Labillardière's natural history collections did not actually come into Sir Joseph Banks' formal possession, rather Banks (who had brief custody of them) successfully lobbied the British government to return them to Labillardière after they had been captured on the Dutch East Indiaman *Hougly* by H.M.S. *Sceptre*.

*A special offer is available to ISFAR members: 30% off the retail price of *Terre Napoleon ...* in either paperback or hardback. Orders can be placed through the Green Book Company on their Freecall no.: 1800 646 533.

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Jill Duchess of Hamilton, *Napoleon, the Empress & the Artist: The Story of Napoleon, Josephine's Garden at Malmaison, Redouté & the Australian Plants*, Kangaroo Press, Sydney, 1999, pp 244, illustrations, appendix, bibliography, index, ISBN 0 7318 9834 7, \$59-95

This is an endearing account of the imperial couple, their residence, and the exotic (including Australian) fauna and flora established in the grounds of Malmaison and illustrated by the great botanical artist Pierre-Joseph Redouté (1759-1840). Unfortunately, endearing accounts are not always accurate or balanced accounts. I share Hamilton's admiration for Napoleon's achievements as a general, modernizer, law maker and patron of the arts and sciences. I share her respect for Napoleon's extraordinary mind and her repugnance for the reactionary Bourbon regime which followed him. And I share her delight in the history of Malmaison and the botanical treasury Josephine created there. However, one has only to shift one's gaze from the botanical paintings of Redouté to those of David, and more appropriately Goya, to be reminded of the 'other' Napoleon who stifled the democratic republican aspirations of the Revolution and bathed Europe in blood.

General Bonaparte may have rescued France from disorder and invading foreign armies, and he may have picked the crown up from the gutter with his sword, but to keep it on his head he was prepared to gamble with the lives of millions of

others. He also invaded, subjugated and plundered his neighbours. And in his orders to kidnap and execute the young Duc d'Enghien, in the fosse at Vincennes in 1804, he revealed the same ruthlessness to his perceived political opponents as did Robespierre in his execution of Danton and Desmoulins (and all the other victims of the Terror). I do not wish to suggest that *Napoleon, the Empress & the Artist* is devoid of critical comment; nevertheless, this book is essentially panegyric in tone and its author makes no mention of Napoleon's brutal repression in Spain. Even in discussing the imperial divorce, she never calls a cad a cad! Hamilton may have an excuse in focusing on Bonaparte, Beauharnais and botany, rather than battle and blood, but these days I am surprised to see any serious work on any aspect of the Premier Empire which does not take note of Pieter Geyl's (1887-1966) landmark critical study *Napoleon For and Against* (1949).

Although Napoleon may have taken to gardening at various times in his life and owned a number of multi-volume natural history titles, I remain unconvinced that he had a very serious interest in the natural sciences. His memoirs do not suggest such a passion. Yes, he surrounded himself with savants, but they tended to be mathematicians and chemists, rather than botanists and zoologists. I was also amazed at Hamilton's attribution of humility to the Emperor; she writes, for example: 'Although Napoleon was reluctant to have his name glorified, he made an exception with art and science'! The author has no trouble convincing the reader of Josephine's serious interest in plants and gardening, however, her botanical artist Redouté remains a spiritually elusive character (probably because of the limited historical sources available). Although scholarly titles and other authorities are mentioned in the text, there are no footnotes. Thus it is often difficult to determine the basis of some of the author's assertions.

As I am working on a biography of the French naturalist Labillardière (the author of the first published flora of New Holland), I would dearly love to know the source of Hamilton's statement that 'Labillardière personally planted *Eucalyptus globulus* at Malmaison in 1805 (page 20)'. Similarly, Hamilton mentions the various editions of the translation of Labillardière's *Relation* (1800). It is a pity, however, that she does not give details of the Russian edition she alludes to. In his *Bibliography of Australia*, John Ferguson listed three English editions and two German language editions (one published in Hanover, the other in Vienna). Hamilton, however, refers to only one German edition. Furthermore, I was very surprised to read Hamilton's declaration that Labillardière 'came from a noble Normandy family', that his 'parents had a large estate', and that he was related to Talleyrand's mistress Madame de Flahaut Comtesse de la Billardière (page 77). As a result of archival research in Labillardière's birthplace Alençon, I can write with conviction that Labillardière was the ninth of fourteen children born to Michel Jacques Houtou, sieur de La Billardière, a lace merchant (and town clerk), and his wife Madeleine, a lacemaker. The location of the family landholding, 'La Billardière', remains uncertain. In the département of Orne, of which Alençon is

capital, there are seven other known communes in which one can find the locative name 'La Billardière'. The name also appears in other parts of Normandy. The bourgeois Houtou family had no connection with the noble Flahaut family, even though both owned properties with the same name, and the naturalist Labillardière was no aristocrat as is suggested in the caption to his portrait on page 81.

The author of *Napoleon, the Empress & the Artist* also has a tendency to elevate the status of Félix Delahaye (1767-1829) gardener on d'Entrecasteaux's expedition and, from 1805, chief gardener at Malmaison. She often writes of Labillardière and Delahaye as if they were an equal twosome and of the Abbé Louis Ventenat's status (1765-1794), as simply their chaplain (see for example page 21). The fact is, Delahaye, for all his talents was very much subordinate to Labillardière. On an annual salary of 1000 livres plus 400 livres for equipment, Delahaye was not accommodated as one of the savants and did not dine with the officers of d'Entrecasteaux's expedition. Nevertheless, aside from collecting seeds, he did make a personal collection of 2,699 dried and numbered plant specimens under Labillardière's guidance. It would seem that the Abbé Ventenat (according to his final letter to his brother, Pierre-Etienne, later conservateur at Malmaison), assisted Labillardière during his scientific excursions and made a joint natural history collection with him. Louis Ventenat died in Port Louis hospital, Mauritius, in August 1794, before he could produce any published work. Labillardière is known to have sent Pierre-Etienne Ventenat specimens of Australian plants collected during his voyage with d'Entrecasteaux. They formed part of the 'Herbier Malmaison' and thus the 'Herbier Ventenat' now preserved in Geneva.

Having examined a specimen of *Chorizema ilicifolia* in the 'Herbier Ventenat' in Geneva and having searched successfully for it in its natural habitat in Esperance, I was immediately interested in Hamilton's arguments regarding the etymology of the generic name of this beautiful Western Australian plant. On page 156 she writes: 'So great had been his [Labillardière's] joy when he stumbled across a spring that he celebrated the occasion by naming a plant he found growing there *Chorizema ilicifolia* - in Greek, *choros* meaning "dance" and *zema*, "drink"'. This same etymological argument was aired by Thomas Hart in an article in the *Victorian Naturalist* in January 1954. Hart, however, offered an alternative and far more convincing explanation which was also proposed by the great Dutch botanical historian Frans Stafleu (1921-97) in the introductory essay to the facsimile edition of Labillardière's flora. Hart and Stafleu suggested that Labillardière, using unconventional ellipsis, created a short euphonious name reminiscent of an outstanding characteristic of the plant (rather than an incident associated with its discovery). Since *Chorizema* has a pea flower bearing separate stamens, they argued that its generic name was derived from *chorizo* (I separate) and *nema* (filament). Hamilton, however, is entitled to her opinion.

In *Napoleon, the Empress & the Artist* it is also asserted that Labillardière's *Novae Hollandiae plantarum specimen* 'is the first book published after settlement in which the continent is referred to as Australia . . . Matthew Flinders, who is usually acknowledged as the first person to coin the name Australia, used the word in correspondence but did not actually publish it until ten years later, in 1814' (page 24). It seems to me that the question of who first used the name 'Australia' after settlement is immaterial. Who used it first would seem to me to be a more important question. Although the Alexandrian geographer Claudius Ptolemy (c. 90-168 A.D.) referred to the unknown southern land as 'Terra Austratis Incognita' nearly two thousand years ago and many after him employed the Latin adjective *australis* (southern, from *auster* the south wind) to describe the continent, it seems that the Portuguese-born Spanish explorer Pedro Fernandez de Quiros (1565-1615) was the first to employ a noun 'Austrialia', derived from this adjective, when he discovered Espiritu Santo (Vanuatu) in 1606 and thought it part of the great southland. Yet, Quiros' spelling with its extra 'I' is still not as strikingly familiar to the modern reader as the 'Australia' of the account of Jacob Le Maire's and Willem Schouten's voyage *Spiegel der Australische Navigatie* (Amsterdam, 1622) which has just been republished in a facsimile edition by the Australian National Maritime Museum. I have said as much in the introductory essay.

I was a little frustrated by the manner in which the narrative in this book has been broken up with report-like subheadings. These are often all the more obvious because of the double columns of text so characteristic of Kangaroo Press books. *Napoleon, the Empress & the Artist* contains many interesting illustration captions, but a good many of them end with the unexplained (contributor's?) initials 'D.R.' Furthermore, the title page carries Hamilton's name, but also the names of the author of the preface (Bernard Chevallier), the foreword (Bernard Smith) and the editor (Anne Savage). It is not unusual, these days, for the name of a publisher's desk editor to appear on a colophon, but the appearance of Savage's name on the title page and among the cataloguing-in-publication details, is unusual. Be that as it may, this book contains a number of editorial lapses. All historians have their oversights, indeed Hamilton has been kind enough to point out errors in my own work. She may care to note that on page 37 she implies the French republic was declared on September 1791. On page 84 we are told it was in August 1792 and on page 233 we are finally given the correct month and year (September 1792) but not the date: the 21st. On page 94 we are given the very interesting list of European nations which have ruling families descended from Josephine. However, Portugal, one of the countries listed, has not had a 'sovereign' since it was declared a republic in 1910. It should also be mentioned that Alexandre de Beauharnais, Josephine's first husband (the sole father of her children and thus also the ancestor of many present day European monarchs), was the secretary, rather than the president of the National Assembly at the time of Louis XVI's flight to Varennes (page 56).

In his foreword, Bernard Smith writes that this book is 'packed with surprises. How many of us knew that the young Napoleon when a cadet at military college applied to join the La Pérouse expedition to the Pacific?' The fact is, Napoléon's attempt to join La Pérouse's expedition is not new. I first read of it in John Dunmore's biography *Pacific Explorer* (see my review in *Explorations*, No. 7, December 1988, pp. 27-28), and I doubt if it escaped the attention of the seven other biographers of La Pérouse this past century.

I had other differences of opinion with Hamilton with regard to the course of the Revolution and the campaign in Egypt and the so-called imprisonment of Rossel in England, which would take too long to discuss in this review. However, I feel I must address her sweeping statement that 'Neither Captain Cook, a farm labourer's son, nor Matthew Flinders, the son of a doctor, would have got a post in the old French navy (page 181)'. Undoubtedly commoners had no prospect of reaching senior naval ranks, in the 'Royale', however, they could become *officiers bleus* i.e. naval officers, largely recruited from the merchant marine, who held intermediate grades and wore a uniform of *garny bleu* to distinguish them from noble *officiers rouges* (red officers). Despite the contempt of the rest of the officer corps, which had hitherto been the exclusive preserve of the aristocracy, the *officiers bleus* sometimes exercised independent command. This was usually in unglamorous convoy escorts during wartime, as happened to Marc-Joseph Marion Dufresne who later led the first French expedition to any part of Australia. Other *officiers bleus* participated in major French voyages, as junior officers, such as Josselin Le Corre who served under Bougainville and then Marion (see my article in *Explorations*, No. 13, December 1992). For a more detailed examination of this subject, see Jacques Aman's *Les officiers bleus dans la marine française au XVIIIe siècle*, Geneva, 1976.

In summary, *Napoleon, the Empress & the Artist* is likely to have enduring value as an accessible source of reproductions of Redouté's superb coloured illustrations of Australian plants and as a useful account of how many of these plants came to be grown and studied in France. Hamilton does not pretend to offer the most recent taxonomic revisions associated with the plants illustrated. This is always a difficult task. Hopefully some of the errors in the text can be addressed in any future edition.

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