

FOREWORD

The current issue of *Explorations* features two articles and a note.

Professor Kenneth Dutton's study highlights the wide use of the French language in early colonial New South Wales, at least among the upper classes and free settlers. Several examples are given of early colonial governors finding it natural to receive submissions and reports in French. Professor Dutton's article concludes with an erudite discussion of quotations from French sources in the writings of Colonel Grey, a former British officer who, after fighting in the Napoleonic wars, retired to Port Macquarie and subsequently to Brisbane (as Usher of the Black Rod in the first Queensland Legislative Council), and whose writings illustrate his familiarity with French literature and French culture, as well as his ready access to French books.

Dr Patricia Hamou was recently awarded the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by the University of Sydney for a thesis on which her article is based. Both the thesis and the article are in French. Her research deals with the place of Australian Aborigines in the imagination of the French in the nineteenth century. That perception, which was strongly influenced by the purportedly scientific classification of species prevalent in the writings of the time, stands in striking contrast to the Enlightenment's cult of the "noble savage". In an alliance of a utilitarian view of the world promoted by the Industrial Revolution and a distorted idea of scientific endeavour, these taxonomies gave credence to a hierarchical concept of "race", presenting the Indigenous peoples as both genetically inferior and economically valueless. They tended to assign the lowest rank on the overall evolutionary ladder to Australian Aborigines, and the highest to the white races. The article also contains a discussion of the way in which selectively imported Aborigines and other Indigenous people were displayed throughout Europe in fairs, shows and exhibitions or represented in decontextualized photographs, with the overt intention of demonstrating their worthlessness.

Finally a more topical note deals with the bizarre claim, first voiced in 1995 in a publication by the NSW Department of Education and repeated in a report published by another NSW government agency as recently as 2006, that Lapérouse and his men killed twenty Aborigines on the very day they landed at Botany Bay, on 26 January 1788. The note aims to refute this allegation and explain its genesis.