

An Exploration of the Fate of the Australian and Tasmanian Ethnographic Collections brought back by the Baudin Expedition, following the 1804 French Scientific Voyage to Australia

[Australian and Tasmanian objects deposited at the Château de Malmaison]

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Introduction

Nicolas Baudin, Commander of the *Voyage de découvertes aux Terres australes*, was secretly entrusted with assembling a collection of plants and animals for the wife of the First Consul (Jouanin 2004).² The *Géographe*, the last ship to return from the Baudin expedition, reached Lorient (Morbihan) on 25 March 1804. Two months later, on 29 May, Australian and Tasmanian objects were delivered to the *Château de Malmaison*, near Paris (Hamy 1890, 38). Marie Josèphe Rose Tascher de la Pagerie, commonly known as Joséphine, wife of Bonaparte and future Empress, ruled over the estate.

¹ Translated by Cristina Savin

² Surprisingly, in his journal (transcript by J. Bonnemains, in Bonnemains *et al.*, 2000), N. Baudin, expedition leader with the rank of Captain (naval), commander of the corvette *Géographe*, makes no reference to a collection of ethnographic objects but does sometimes provide details of plant collection and capture of animals during the expedition. (Some of these live specimens were propagated in the garden and menagerie of the *Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle* [Eds: located at the *Jardin des Plantes*] and the rest were delivered to Malmaison.)

The items brought on that day joined a huge variety of other objects already stored at the château.

Research conducted by Serge Grandjean, curator at the *Musée du Louvre*, prompted Pierre Schommer, chief curator at the Malmaison museum, to note that the place was a *château-musée*, an enormous ‘cabinet of curiosities’, a concept popular in the 18th century (1964, 17). He even talks of a *capharnaïm* (a shambles), whilst referring to the topic of natural history collections—his choice of terms seems prescient. There is no systematic rigour nor typological classification; no precision regarding the geographical origin of the items; no scientific labelling nor register of entries; no inventory nor comprehensive catalogue. The objects are simply placed side by side.

The majority of the books devoted to Empress Joséphine and to Malmaison contain some chapters dedicated to the collections located at the château and there is even some mention of Joséphine’s naturalist library (Benoit 1997) and its mineralogy section (Masson 1907, 402; Chiappero 1997, 176). As for ethnography, it remains the ‘poor relation’ of the studies devoted to the collections at Malmaison (Grandjean 1964). B. Chevallier (1989, 174) embarks nevertheless on a description that, while not referenced appropriately, is not without interest. He notes that:

the storage room at Bois-Préau also shelters a good number of interesting objects of different origins, such as Chinese slippers, belts from New Caledonia, an Arab dagger, arches, arrows, spears, bludgeons, clubs, fishing nets and even a mysterious elastic sling-shot from Brazil.³

We know that some plants and animals brought back from the *Voyage de découvertes aux Terres australes* were shipped to Malmaison. On the other hand, did ethnographic collections from Oceania (including the Australian and Tasmanian objects) actually reach the château? And if so, did Joséphine really have an interest in such objects ‘used by local savages’?

This is not the only point that needs to be clarified. A certain opacity also surrounds the first quarter of the 19th century, a time of many significant historical events:

³ We can reasonably assume this text was largely inspired by the book *Inventaire après décès de l'Impératrice Joséphine à Malmaison*, published by Grandjean (1964, 256–261), in which identical details appeared.

- On 29 May 1814, Empress Joséphine dies at Malmaison.
- On 26–29 June 1815, a deposed Napoléon spends a few days at the château, then leaves.
- Two days later, on 1 July 1815, Prussian soldiers, unhappy at not finding Napoléon at Malmaison, partially vandalise the château and its saddle-room.
- In early November 1815, English cavalry troops, sent to protect the property, took part of the library at Bois-Préau as they were leaving.
- In June 1829, furniture, works of art and natural history collections that survived the pillaging were sold at public auction in Paris.

It would not be surprising if nothing had remained, at least if we were to take into account this calendar of events and the studies published thus far about the fate of the moveable contents of Joséphine's château. Ernest Hamy (1906, 33–34), a member of the *Institut de France* and, at the time, one of its experts on ethnography and the 'follow-up' to the collections brought back from the Baudin expedition, makes similar assertions.

Most facts are easily verifiable in this chronology which seems to be authentic; for others, some clarification is needed, in particular those concerning the natural history collections at Malmaison:

- The place where the 'cabinet of curiosities' is exhibited lends itself to some questioning and needs to be reviewed.
- The pillaging of the château's collections warrants special attention and correction, or at least a cautious assessment.
- The auction date raises similar questions.
- Even the collections brought back from the *Terres australes* relating to anthropological groups originating from Van Diemen's Land and New Holland and deposited, in whole or in part, at Malmaison raise some questions.

In light of the above, a new approach is required and the quality and importance of the ethnographic objects brought back from the *Terres australes* and deposited at Malmaison should be determined. The next step is to clarify where the objects were kept and what was their fate.

The Malmaison estate and its natural science collections

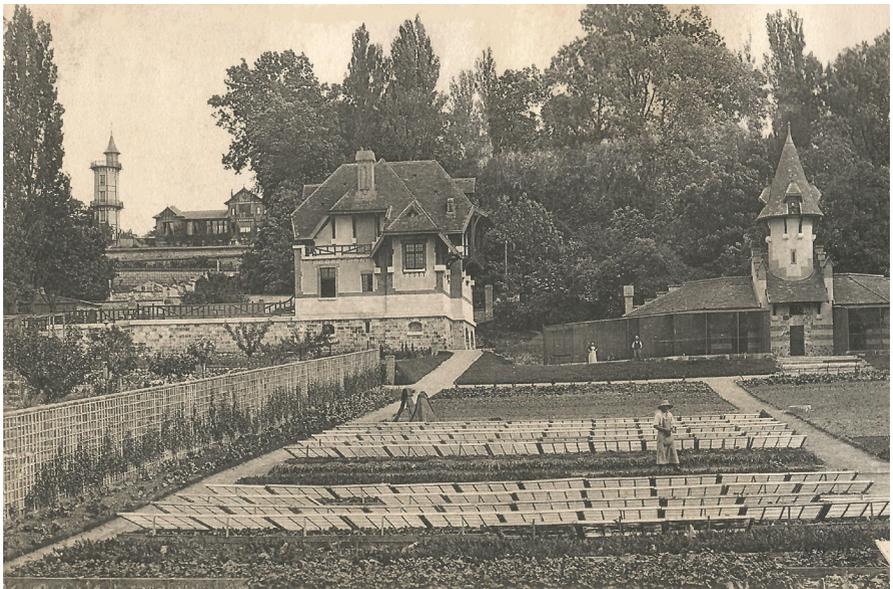
General Bonaparte acquired the *Château de Malmaison* on 21 April 1799, at the request of his wife Joséphine. At the time, the property was situated on a 70-hectare estate (Chevallier 1989, 35–50). Joséphine continued to add to the estate by purchasing nearby groves and ponds, which brought the total area to 690 hectares by 1805. The Empress Joséphine loved developing her property as much as she enjoyed shaping its parks and gardens (Arneville 1997, 100). Interior renovations of the *Château de Malmaison* after Bonaparte's departure were also numerous; however, as can be seen from the estimates and work plans, no room was assigned to the natural history collections. Thus, contrary to what is believed, the natural history and ethnographic collections added from June 1804 were not located in the castle.

Instead, these collections were relegated to the first level of a four-level square tower, the fourth floor designed in the style of a gazebo and crowned by a cupola (Chevallier 1989, 28). This place was called *La Tour*, or occasionally *Le Belvédère*⁴ and was part of a building designated as the 'steward's cottage' (Chevallier 145). The dilapidated edifice was destroyed in 1966. Little is known about this building, but this was the place where the 'cabinet of curiosities' belonging to the previous owner, Mr le Couteulx de Moley, was held. The collection was rich in corals, birds and stuffed animals, insects and some displays under glass; an inventory of the collection was drawn up when Bonaparte acquired the estate. The collection of stuffed animals was of no interest to Joséphine, who in 1808 donated it to the *Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle* in Paris;

⁴ The steward's cottage was never of much interest. Consequently, representations of *Le Belvédère* are very rare; there is a picture of a tower that could be *Le Belvédère*, reproduced by Chevallier towards the end of the 18th century (1989, fig. 19, 347). A painting, representing the *Château de Malmaison*, shows an inconspicuous view of *La Tour* in the background (oil on canvas, by Pierre-Joseph Petit, 0,385 cm by 0,555 cm, inventory n° MM. 40.47.591). This painting is also found in Grandjean's 1964 inventory, plate I, p. 295. More recent photos of *La Tour* are very rare. The only one I was able to find was a postcard, reproduced opposite, that shows *La Tour* in the background; it is an anonymous document, in terms of both the photograph and its author, produced around 1905, about a year before the destruction of the tower.

Louis Dufresne, taxidermist and curator at the Museum, was keen to take charge of the collection (Jouanin 1997d).

Following Joséphine's divorce from Bonaparte in mid-December 1809, the *Château de Malmaison* was gifted to her on 16 December, along with the parks and gardens at Malmaison and Buzenval, as well as the forests of Buttard (Masson, 1907 12). Around that time she decided to combine the château and the 17.7 hectares estate of Bois-Préau which she purchased on 29 January 1810. Bonaparte, who financed the acquisition, ordered her not to demolish the building (Chevallier 1989, 46). Masson, whose role as chronicler following the death of the Empress plays an important part later in this study, makes no mention of this purchase.



Postcard showing *La Tour* in the background.

The *Château de Bois-Préau* becomes, from now on, an annexe to the Malmaison estate. Joséphine assigns the library to the first floor of the château, and, in the ensuing chain of transformations, the cabinet of curiosities is relocated from *La Tour* to a room adjacent to the library.

The crystallographic samples, birds and mummies brought back by Bonaparte from his military expeditions in Egypt,⁵ as well as the ethnographic items brought back in 1804, end up being moved to a new setting where they are again forgotten.

It seems this move took place some time in 1810 yet the month or the day are of little importance because finally these collections were no closer to Joséphine's eyes at Bois-Préau than they were when they lay neglected at *Le Belvédère*. In fact, in 1811 she parted with a section of her ornithological collection and it was again Dufresne who supervised the transfer of this bird collection offered by the Empress to the *Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle* (Jouanin 1978, 19). As for the remainder of the collection, its destiny was henceforth sealed. Following the death of Joséphine on 29 May 1814, all objects of scientific and historical interest remained at the *Château de Bois-Préau*.

Return of expedition and unloading of collections

The *Naturaliste*, the first vessel to return from the *Voyage de découvertes aux Terres australes*, reached Le Havre on 7 June 1803. The second ship, the corvette *Géographe*, in an attempt to avoid the English blockade paralysing the French ports in the English Channel, entered the Port of Lorient on 25 March 1804. An undated sworn statement signed by Péron and Lesueur exists at the *Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle du Havre*;⁶

⁵ Dominique-Vivant Denon, who was appointed Director General of museums and head of the new *Musée Napoléon* in November 1802, was instrumental in raising her awareness and providing Joséphine with lavish advice and recommendations on antiquities (Rosenberg and Dupuy 1999). The Director did not limit his interest to monuments originating from Egypt, Persia, Greece and Rome, and to European paintings and sculptures; he also had an appreciation of ethnographic objects from Oceania, which he classified, nonetheless, for his own personal collection, without any scientific rigour and with errors of identification and origin (Jacquemin 1999; Dupuy 1999). He most likely influenced Joséphine greatly in this particular art form, instilling in her a desire to collect such objects. The return of the *Voyage de découvertes aux Terres australes* in 1804 gave her the opportunity to enrich her 'cabinet of curiosities' with original objects from Oceania.

⁶ Lesueur archives n° 22 002, itemised by J. Bonnemains, 1986, 13, who dates the declaration April 1805.

it indicates that all collections, including zoological, botanical and geological, were handed over to the *Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle* in Paris. More precise are the assertions in paragraphs 3 and 4, stating that 'all these (the collections) which were given to us personally by generous strangers and which we could have, for this reason, retained'; and furthermore, 'all these collections we acquired with our money or by trading our jackets and even our shirts, which can easily be proved by the testimony of our fellow voyagers'—these personal collections were all handed over to enrich the national collections.

What happened to the potted plants and animals collected by Péron and Lesueur and by Riédélé and Sautier, both gardeners on the *Géographe*, and Leschenault from the *Naturaliste*? These facts are well known and demonstrate the absolute necessity of satisfying the Empress's desires. Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire was in charge of supervising the operation of escorting the living species, which remained nonetheless under the political control of state officials. Thus, on the arrival of the *Naturaliste* at Le Havre, Brisseau de Mirbel, superintendent of the gardens at the *Château de Malmaison*, sent by Joséphine and recommended by Chaptal, Minister for the Interior, supervised the unloading of the live specimens intended for Malmaison. Lesueur was appointed to accompany the animals and plants all the way to Paris, and it appears that this endeavour was not without mishap (Milbert 1812). When the *Géographe* entered the Port of Lorient, de Mirbel was once again in the service of the Empress, but this time appointed by Decrès, who served as Minister for the Navy.

The story seems somewhat more complex for the ethnographic objects. According to the rules established by the Ministry for the Navy at the time the expedition to the *Terres australes* was being organised, and specified in a letter to Captain Baudin, dated 17 September 1800, all ethnographic objects obtained during the voyage must be brought back to Joséphine.

Dr Hamy (1906, 24), drawing on a letter written by Péron, made detailed notes of the contents of the unloaded crates: six crates with anthropological objects and three in which objects were mixed with birds, mammals and zoophytes. Faivre (1953, 174), also basing his observations on Péron's⁷ letter, reports that among the fifty-four crates unloaded, nine contained 206 anthropological pieces.

⁷ Previously held in the Lorient archives (BB⁴ 996).

The manuscript '*États des caisses envoyées à bord du Géographe*' (Condition of crates on board the *Géographe*) mentions that, out of the fifty-three crates in dock, five contained *effets des naturels* (personal belongings of the 'natives') (*Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle du Havre*, manuscript 21 025). Pierre B. Milius, Frigate Captain and Commander of the *Géographe*, who returned the corvette to France after the death of Baudin, also provides details about the condition of the natural history objects on board; he makes the following notes on pages 62 and 63 in relation to the ethnographic objects:

- n° 1, a crate containing personal effects of the Indigenous peoples from the different places we visited
- n° 2 *idem*
- n° 3, a package *idem*
- n° 4, *idem*
- n° 5, *idem*.

After the two ships were laid-up, the landing of the goods was confirmed by two documents, one kept at the *Service historique de la Défense* (BB⁴ 997) and the other at the *Archives nationales* (JA 15-569, folio 487), reproduced elsewhere in the work of B. Daugeron (2009b, 489), which identifies (on line 15) 293 'personal effects from various peoples' brought back by the *Voyage de découvertes aux Terres australes*, but does not mention the total number of crates. It is regrettable that a comprehensive list detailing all the unloaded objects was not prepared; this would have given us a better picture of the diverse nature of these items. However, from a strict bookkeeping standpoint, we can conclude that of the total of 293 objects, if 206 were on board the *Géographe*, there must have been 87 items unloaded from the *Naturaliste*, although there is no mention of them.

The ethnographic objects thus began their journey to the *Château de Malmaison*. A key question needs to be asked here: why is it that these ethnographic items, originating from a voyage sponsored by the state, the costs of which put pressure on the national budget, did not end up at the *Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle*? The dissolution of the *Société des observateurs de l'Homme* in 1803 had permanently killed off all plans to create a museum dedicated to anthropological studies. Even before they were brought ashore, these items were considered by professors at the *Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle* as art objects rather than human artefacts;

consequently, this relegation placed these tools, weapons and utensils well outside a possible framework that would one day determine the laws for public collections (*Le statut des collections publiques*). With the exclusion of these objects from the field of museum preservation, a second [legal] step was therefore eliminated.

This new action marked the beginning of the disposal of the expedition's ethnographic stock. In April 1804, the Ministry of the Navy, under strict orders from the Empress, confirmed that a number of living animals, plants and ethnographic collections would be placed at the disposal of the *Château de Malmaison*.

Content of ethnographic collections brought back from the expedition

The expression 'effects from various peoples', recorded on the archived documents cited above, can be explained by the fact that the expedition stopped at Tenerife [the Canary Islands] and then at Timor, before continuing with its exploration of Tasmania and the south east coast of Australia, thus encountering a variety of human groups. During its return to France, the *Géographe* made some additional stopovers at the Cape of Good Hope where live animals offered by J. W. Janssens, Governor-General of the Cape of Good Hope colony, were loaded onto the vessel for the estate at Malmaison (for Madame Bonaparte's menagerie) and for the *Institut national* in Paris. Various ethnographic objects and the skeleton of a Hottentot were added to this collection.⁸ These bones correspond to the contents of crate number 26 ('skeleton from Mozambique'); Hamy (1906, 33) is perfectly clear on this subject. B. Daugeron (2009b, 539) also alludes to these human remains which are located in the anthropological hall at the *Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle* in Paris.

⁸ Based on P. B. Milius' narrative (transcribed by J. Bonnemains, 1987), the following were taken on board at the Cape of Good Hope during the return stopover (p. 57): some animals, that ended up in the park at Malmaison (a wildebeest, a zebra, a couple of ostriches, a couple of monkeys, a porcupine, an African civet...), and ethnographic objects from South Africa, described as such: four bracelets worn by notable Khoisans on the left arm; a Bushman bow and a quiver with poisonous arrows; four Khoisan spears and a 'kirry' (Khoisan for club), the head and bones of a Hottentot savage [sic]. [Eds: 'Khoisan' refers to the Hottentot and Bushmen tribes.]

According to the handwritten inventory, drawn up by Péron on 29 May 1804, just over 156 objects were chosen to be sent to the *Château de Malmaison*. Hamy records '160 and a few items' (1906, 32); Faivre writes of '150 items' (1953, 176); and Daugeron records '160 artefacts' (2009b, 539). These objects, based on my calculations, were divided up as follows: two items from the stopover at Tenerife, more than sixty items from Timor (including four artefacts offered by Mr Loffstett, governor of the island), thirty-eight objects collected in Tasmania and Australia by the expedition's scientists and finally, at least fifty-six items from Oceania, gifted by George Bass to Péron for the *Société des observateurs de l'Homme*.⁹

The imprecision of these numbers is essentially related to the fact that certain objects were not counted out individually. Several examples may have been brought back. It seems however that there is no real agreement between Péron's inventory, which lists the thirty-eight items collected in Tasmania and Australia, and the information mentioned by different naturalists in their writings and by officers of the two vessels in their logbooks. To my knowledge, no researcher has looked into it, but this unsettling point was raised by Hamy in 1906. While the main the reason for his publication was his desire to trace the collections gathered by French scientists during their exploration of the *Terres australes*, he never finalised his lists of objects and eventually focused on George Bass's Oceanic collections.

According to Milius, the following objects were collected during encounters with Aboriginal people or during the discovery of camps in Van Diemen's Land: spears (p. 13), a necklace made of sea-shells, a ten to eleven-foot long canoe (p. 36), bones and zagayes (spears) (p. 39) (Bonnemains 1987).

Péron (1807), writes that the following were placed on board the *Géographe*: a small reed bag or dilly bag (p. 229), axes and knives (p. 243), several weapons (p. 246), a human jaw and some bones (p. 266) and a section of human bones (p. 272) (which probably corresponds to what Milius reported on page 39 of his work), engravings on bark (p. 273), a spear and a club (p. 287).

⁹ Depending on the authors, George Bass is considered explorer or surgeon (Hamy 1906, 33), navigator or captain (Copans and Jamin 1978, 2013). His biography was published by Keith Macrae Bowden in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 1, 1966.

Finally, in the second edition of the *Voyage de découvertes aux Terres australes*, completed by L. de Freycinet and dated 1824, the following items were added: a drinking vessel made of *Fucus palmatus*, a shard of granite used as a knife, a wooden spatula (p. 38), a spear and some weapons (p. 50), a spear and a club (Péron and Freycinet 1824, 138).

Some of these weapons and utensils are represented on plate number 22 of the Atlas published in 1807: a boomerang (labelled a ‘ricocheting sabre’)¹⁰, clubs of various forms, a throwing spear (also called a ‘staff’) and its thrower, a hand-spear and two vessels.¹¹ The same objects would be identically reproduced on plate number 30 of the 1824 atlas. The sea-shell necklace, collected from an Aboriginal living on the Huon river in Van Diemen’s Land, is also represented on plate XIII (Atlas of 1807, item n° 5). B. Milius mentions this fact in his account (Bonnemains 1987, 30). On the same plate, the dilly bag, referred to by Péron (1987, 229, see previous paragraph), is also represented (item n° 4).¹²

It is possible that the stone axe originating from King George Sound (item n° C13) is the one that Péron used for demonstration in talks to the professors at the Museum. The stone axe is made of granite (Péron 1998, 76) and is represented at the centre of plate 22 of the 1807 Atlas, then on plates 30 and 31 of the 1824 Atlas. It could correspond to item 2639, folio 341 of the inventory following his death (on this topic, see Grandjean 1964, 260), although the text written by Péron suggests that the demonstrations to the professors led to a partial breakage of the axe, but without damaging the resin attaching it to the handle.

¹⁰ The boomerang is quite characteristic, adorned with the engraving of an undulating mythical serpent, the representation of which is particularly clear in the drawing 16035–1, kept at the *Muséum d’Histoire Naturelle du Havre*. A reproduction can be seen in the work of Bonnemains *et al.* (1988, 88).

¹¹ These vessels and two fish-hooks are reproduced in drawing n° 16034 by Lesueur; it is kept at the Natural History Museum of Le Havre.

¹² The necklace of gastropod molluscs could have been reproduced in Lesueur’s drawing n° 18010. Several versions of the drawing of this necklace, with varying numbers of shells, have been reproduced in the work of Bonnemains *et al.* (1988, drawings n° 18009 and n° 18010 on pp. 120; and drawing n° 18110–1 on p. 121). The two containers collected at Van Diemen’s Land were drawn by Nicolas Petit (n° 18014–1 and 18014–2), and also by Ch.-A. Lesueur (n° 1811–1) and these are held in the *Muséum d’Histoire Naturelle du Havre*.

Plate 29 in the 1824 Atlas (plate corresponding to drawing n° 16036 of the Lesueur collection at the *Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle du Havre*) displays two necklaces made of kangaroo teeth, a necklace made of threaded reed segments, a string bag and a string headband. These items had not been reported as being collected nor as artefacts given to the Empress Joséphine. As for the necklace made of 'vegetal rings', of which there is likewise no mention in the scientific records of the voyage, the reader is referred to a previous article published in *Explorations* n° 53 (Vincent 2012).

It is quite surprising not to discover at least some of the items cited above, if not all, in the collection deposited at Malmaison. Some of these items did reach their destination, as attested by the ten to eleven-foot long bark catamaran (a canoe from Van Diemen's Land) that Milius mentions on page 36 of his personal logbook (see Bonnemains, 1987).¹³

A comparative analysis between the inventory drawn up by Péron on 29 May 1804 in preparation for the delivery of objects at Malmaison, and the post-death inventory prepared by M. Siterne (March 1815), permits the following conclusions:

- It is possible that the lot referenced 2632 contains hand spears and staffs (which must have lost their throwers) from Port Jackson.
- Various maces or clubs found at Port Jackson are probably included in lots 2633 and 2634.
- 'Ricocheting sabres' (boomerangs) could correspond to four items in lot 2635.
- Fish-hooks (listed by Péron as items C12) could be found in collection 2644.

A representation of these sea-shell fish-hooks can be found on the left-hand side of plate number 22 of the 1807 Atlas, then on plate 30 of the 1824 Atlas; these are the only examples of objects deposited in the Empress's collection at Malmaison being verified prior to Joséphine's death.

¹³ This canoe is reproduced on several plates by N. Petit (n°s 18004, 18006, but also by Ch. A. Lesueur, plate n° 18009) held at the *Muséum d'histoire naturelle du Havre*. While the canoe was a large, even bulky, piece of about 3.5 metres, it is not mentioned in the post-death inventory (March 1815). Could this indicate that the canoe was soon damaged or destroyed after being handed over to the Empress?

At this stage of the investigation, an interim hypothesis is that the objects described above could be the only items collected by scientists on the Baudin expedition to have survived the trials and tribulations of the expedition, the transfers in the two landing ports, the transport, the various relocations between the annexes of the Malmaison estate and the pillage of the estate by foreign armed forces in 1815.

The hypothetical pillage of the collections: their actual dispersal

According to Faivre (1953, 175), Copans and Jamin (1978, 195 and following pages) and later B. Daugeron (2009a, 46) all of the Aboriginal objects brought back from Australia at the beginning of the 19th century would have been destroyed or stolen during the looting of the *Château de Malmaison* in 1815. Bernard Chevallier (1964, 182) indicates that on Saturday 1 July 1815 Prussian troops twice invaded the estate before taking over the stables the following day. Even if the castle and the stables were raided by the soldiers, there was no indication that Bois-Préau was plundered.

To protect the property, princess Hortense, Joséphine's daughter, obtained, from 5 July 1815, Lord Wellington's permission to have stationed two cavalry squads led by Lord Somerset who thereafter resided at Bois-Préau, and Lord Combermere, who resided at Malmaison with his spouse. According to Chevallier's own assessment (1964, 184) the presence of the British cavalry quickly turned into an 'occupation' and the troops didn't leave the estates until November of the same year. The question is, were Lord Somerset and his troops respectful towards the contents of Bois-Préau during those four months they were in charge?

The answer is no, because a quarter or a third of the books in the library were stolen by the soldiers who were stationed on the estate. But there is no indication that the ethnographic collection suffered the same fate. A search in the ethnographic collection held at the British Museum in London (https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/search.aspx) revealed that Lord Somerset did not donate any Australian ethnographic objects, which he might have obtained during his stay at Bois-Préau.

From August, transactions were negotiated with several high-profile people who were living there or passing through. Certain paintings, sculptures or even plants changed hands and this, according to Chevallier, was the beginning of the dissipation of Joséphine's collection. He writes:

the menagerie is scattered in September 1815; the silverware is purchased at the end of the same year by a Viennese banker; around the same time, Soulange sells privately and at auction, with the help of the bookseller Mongie, what is left of the library at Bois-Préau... .

In 1816 the estate was made available for lease. The following year, Prince Eugène furnished his palace in Munich with objects from Malmaison. And in April 1818, a sale of furniture was considered, but could not be organised at short notice. In this transactional madness, ethnographic objects meant so little that even their very existence was lost during the movement of goods from the estate. Were these ethnographic collections, in their entirety or in part, still present in one or other of the estate's properties during the great public sales?

Masson (1907, 406) was the first to provide some clues about a possible sale of certain goods which may have included some ethnographic objects. Alluding to the sales of June and July 1829, he opened the door for Hamy to become overenthusiastic. Hamy verified that the Bertin collection did not include any items from the Baudin expedition—particularly the Oceanic section offered by Bass—and he was satisfied with Masson's assertion, without conducting further research.

However, there is another lead, quietly revealed by Grandjean in 1959 (p. 195).¹⁴ It concerns the sale organised during the spring of 1819. A seven-page sale catalogue carried the following explicit heading:¹⁵

¹⁴ This article could be a brief summary of a work published by the author in the same year. However, despite the precise bibliographic references (1959, 32 pages) and apparent good faith (although the publisher was not named), this piece of work cannot be located. I searched for it, without any luck, in the archives of the British Library in London, the main libraries in France, the French National Archives and the French National Library in Paris. It is possible that there may be some confusion around the complete issue (n° IV–V of November 1959) and the article published in the same issue of the review.

¹⁵ Serge Grandjean notes that he was able to consult the only known copy of this sale catalogue, which is available at the British Library in London. I found it there myself, with reference number 562.e.42 (20). A fruitless search in the archives of the French National Library and National Archives confirms the unique character of this document.

Sale notice

of a very beautiful, large and diverse collection of antique and modern art objects, marble statues, pillars, vases, tables, fireplaces, mosaics, engraved stones; objects of curiosity, of natural history, lithography and mineralogy; furniture and luxurious finery for women.

All from the Château and Gallery M[...]

Originally intended to begin on Monday 15 March and to be conducted over the following days at 16 Rue Louis-le-Grand, Paris, (auctioneer Maître Lacoste), following a public exhibition between 11 and 14 March, the sale was postponed until Wednesday 24 March.

A statement at the beginning of the catalogue indicated:

To accommodate the wishes of the owner of this beautiful and extensive collection, for the sale of which we are responsible, this sale notice only includes a brief description of principal items in each category of art objects and curiosities. As the exhibition will be open four days before the sale gentlemen buyers will have the opportunity to examine and admire the entire collection during this period.

It is an understatement to say that the catalogue contains virtually no specific information about the ethnographic objects. Page 5 merely notes:

various collections of art objects and curiosities [lot 25] comprising a large number of natural history objects, curiosities of Chinese origin, costumes and weapons from savages [sic], two mummies, feather paintings, stuffed birds, sea-shells, etc.

It seems reasonable to assume it was on this occasion that the ethnographic objects from the Baudin expedition, lost amongst the myriad of objects of varied origins, were sold in batches or individually.¹⁶ I had thought that Baron Dominique-Vivant Denon, who was Joséphine's former science adviser,

¹⁶ At the sale of 24 March 1819 a description of the two mummies (a man and a woman) from Joséphine's cabinet, as well as numerous fragile ethnographic items, and even the 'glass cages' in which birds were kept, matches the inventory of March 1815 which followed the Empress's death, and confirms that the collections of curiosities had not been entirely vandalised, contrary to what was previously thought.

could have taken advantage of the sale to enrich his own private collection with Oceanic, Australian and Tasmanian objects, with which he was familiar, having seen them arrive at Malmaison in 1804. The study of this component within his own ethnographic collection shows that this is not a priori the case (Jacquemin 1999, 433–434).

A visual check, based on the numerical inventory of 1476 Australian items kept in the reserves of the *Musée du quai Branly*, has revealed that, despite the presence of ancient objects from the *Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle*, the *Musée de l'Homme* and the prestigious collections of Montefiore, H.-P. Vayson de Pradenne and F. Mouton, there is no mention of any historical item coming from Joséphine's former cabinet of curiosities. The prospect of locating at least one item seems to be even more remote now, with this apparent complete disappearance of the items gathered during the Baudin expedition and deposited at Malmaison. At this stage of the research, it appears that, apart from two known objects (which had never been deposited at Malmaison), the entire ethnographic collection from the *Voyage de découvertes aux Terres australes* is lost forever.¹⁷

Some final remarks

Shortly after the unloading of the scientific material brought back from the expedition, Lelièvre, a member of the Mining Board at the *Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle*, requested permission to examine the items collected by Depuch, the expedition's mineralogist.

It seems however that there are some discrepancies in relation to the right of inspection. Hamy notes that a closer look at the minutes of meetings held on 2, 16 and 23 May 1804 reveals that, following their examination,

¹⁷ For the time being, there is nothing to confirm, as suggested by E. Hamy, that the small Indigenous flute collected by Ch.-A. Lesueur, was given to the *Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle du Havre*. It is possible that, if in fact the flute was gifted to the city by Lesueur's nephew, the item was destroyed during the September 1944 bombing of the museum. The Aboriginal necklace held at the Museum at Le Havre is now well known and was the subject of an article in the *Explorations* (Vincent 2012). Another object that may have come from the Baudin expedition and to which R. Boulay draws attention (2007, 5), is a bamboo case belonging to the old F. E. Paris collection (1806–1893) and currently kept at the *Musée des Beaux-Arts et d'Archéologie*, Besançon.

the items were lost to science (1891, 603). According to B. Daugeron, the councillor did not receive permission to consult the crate. What was in crate n° 6, the crate in question? Mineralogical specimens? Ethnographic items? Or perhaps a combination of the two?

In terms of the document (JA 15-103) kept at the National Archives, cited by B. Daugeron (2009b, p. 537), it appears that the crate mostly contained ethnographic objects collected by field mineralogists. However, in the absence of a clear inventory of its contents, it is very difficult to be sure. What happened to those objects? Were they returned for inclusion in the imperial collection?

Despite the interest shown by some scientists, Lelièvre in particular, in ethnographic objects from other cultures, natural historians' awareness of the human sciences can be out of touch with the rich reality of the field. When the expedition returned, these scientists offered the ethnographic objects to the imperial collector for safe-keeping, thus contributing to their invisibility. This 'missed opportunity', with the lack of recognition from an institution devoted to ethnography, led B. Daugeron (2009b, 536) to conclude with every good reason that 'the human artefacts from the expedition became the toys of the Empress Joséphine at Malmaison, before disappearing without a trace'.

Conclusion

The question asked in the introduction of this study, concerning Joséphine's interest in the content of her cabinet of curiosities, is partly answered in Masson's writings (1907, 398):

and she was attached in the same way to 'curiosities' as she was to 'curiosity' itself, as they said in those days: not that she loved these things, nor that she had any knowledge of them, nor even that she took any interest in them—she loved to tell stories about the objects she possessed and then make a point of more or less repeating them—but, above all, collecting was fashionable when she was younger, and she had been told it was the thing to do, and then they were rare, expensive and priceless; that was enough.

It seems that, in the creation of an ethnographic collection from Australia and Tasmania, there was no genuine motivation on Joséphine's part to study

and value such a collection, merely a desire to possess it, quickly forgetting that its real significance lay in its intrinsic scientific and soon-to-be historical value, perhaps because the concept of time escaped her as well.

But the whimsical and superficial Joséphine was not the only person to display a lack of interest in this collection. It began with the wrecked plans for the *Musée des Antiquités*, established in 1795 and defunct shortly after that date (Daugeron 2009a, 44; Daugeron 2009c, 144). From 1803, by abandoning the very idea of an anthropological museum, the scientists at the *Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle* rejected the study of the 'other'; this was expressed in the end by a lack of interest in distant cultures and hence, the dismissal, in the midst of a general apathy, of any element of philosophical or political reflection on another culture. This could but lead to the destruction of physical evidence brought back from the expedition. As B. Daugeron himself said (2009b, 523) 'the collections resulting from the two expeditions were forgotten and even the memory of their origins was expunged'.

The abandonment of a new concept for a museum in France—an ethnographic museum—is, to some extent, paralleled by the lack of correlation between the objects collected during the expedition and the list of crates effectively stored in the two vessels. The question is whether these objects that appear to be missing completely were in fact stolen, destroyed, diverted, left behind in some warehouse, gifted without leaving a trace, kept by a scientist or simply mislaid by negligence? It is difficult to address all of these questions because possible clues have been lost; wars and pillage, the passage of time, have erased, if not blurred beyond distinction, any possible traces still legible.

Many shortcomings have been attributed to François Péron, in particular his difficult personality which led to the deterioration of his relationship with Captain Baudin. He himself recognised his shortcomings, but did nothing to correct them. The failure of the mission is partly attributed to him. However, in addition to the account of the expedition, he wrote *Voyage de découvertes*¹⁸ with a view to publication and we are indebted to him for the rigorous way he attempted to draw up a list of the ethnographic objects to be sent to Joséphine. It must be agreed that, until there is evidence to the contrary, his is the only description we have on the topic that allows for

¹⁸ *Voyage de découvertes* may be read at <http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks12/1203691h.html>.

an evaluation of the importance of the collections unloaded from the two vessels upon their arrival in France.

This collection of thirty-eight Tasmanian and Australian objects was not numerically as important as expected. They were largely overtaken by the Oceanic collections brought back by George Bass from Tonga, Samoa, Hawaii and Tahiti. It is very likely that this crushing numerical supremacy of Oceanic objects, coupled with their undeniable artistic quality, made Ernest Théodore Hamy lose sight of the objective he had envisaged in his 1906 study *Collections anthropologiques et ethnographiques du voyage de découvertes aux Terres Australes (1801–1804)*.

Amazingly, neither the impressive collection gifted by Bass, nor the objects collected by scientists aboard the Baudin expedition, seem to have survived the vicissitudes of time. And yet, during the 1819 spring sale, remarkable ethnographic items from Joséphine's collection were certainly acquired by enlightened and passionate amateurs. Could it be possible, therefore, that historic artefacts from the Baudin expedition may still actually be preserved, more or less anonymously, in private or public collections today?

Le Havre, France

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Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, Le Havre

Lesueur

- Letter ref. 22002: declaration signed by Péron and Lesueur
- Manuscript n° 21: merchandise in the hold of the *Géographe*
- Drawing n° 16034: two baskets and a pair of fish-hooks
- Drawing n° 16035–1: boomerang, club, spears
- Drawing n° 16036: necklaces, bag and spears
- Drawing n° 18004: catamaran and spears from Van Diemen's Land (by Nicolas Petit)
- Drawing n° 18005: catamaran and spears from Van Diemen's Land (in colour, by Nicolas Petit)
- Drawing n° 18006: catamaran and spears from Van Diemen's Land (in colour, by Nicolas Petit)
- Drawing n° 18009: two crossed spears, a club, a canoe, a necklace, a vase from Van Diemen's Land.
- Drawing n° 18014–1: a shelter and two containers.
- Drawing n° 18014–2: a shelter and two containers (in colour, signed by Nicolas Petit)
- Drawing n° 18010: shell necklace and a shell from Van Diemen's Land.
- Drawing n° 18011–1: shell necklace, two crossed spears, two vases, two clubs, from Van Diemen's Land.

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