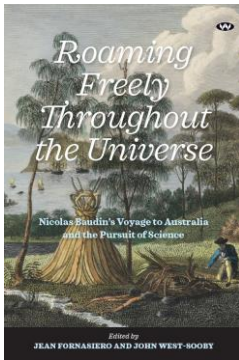


Thursday 25th August 2022 18:30-20:30h

Professor John West-Sooby (University of Adelaide)

Nicolas Baudin's Voyage to Australia and the Pursuit of Science

It is a remarkable fact that, despite the political and institutional turmoil created in France by the 1789 Revolution, successive governments found the wherewithal to organise a number of major scientific expeditions during the decade or so that followed. One of the most ambitious of these scientific ventures, in terms of both its scope and the human and material resources it mobilised, was Nicolas Baudin's voyage of discovery to the "Southern Lands" (1800-1804), which was approved and sponsored by none other than the First Consul himself, Napoleon Bonaparte.



This talk offers a fresh assessment of the scientific achievements of that voyage, and of some of the expedition's key figures. It will showcase the voyage's rich scientific bounty, notably its extraordinary natural history collections and groundbreaking anthropological work. It will then consider the scientists themselves, highlighting their often colourful reactions to the events that unfolded and, more significantly, the contrasting conceptions several of them had of their role. This lack of common purpose, it will be shown, was a principal source of the tensions that emerged during the course of the expedition. Viewed in this light, the Baudin expedition can thus be seen to exemplify the debate in France regarding the role and nature of the scientific voyager – a debate for which the exploration of Australia served as backdrop.



John West-Sooby is Emeritus Professor of French at the University of Adelaide. With Jean Fornasiero, Professor Emerita of French also at the University of Adelaide, he has worked for many years on Nicolas Baudin's voyage of discovery to Australia. Together, John and Jean have produced several books on the subject, including *Encountering Terra Australis. The Australian Voyages of Nicolas Baudin and Matthew Flinders* (with Peter Monteath, 2004/2010), *French Designs on Colonial New South Wales* (2014), *The Art of Science: Nicolas Baudin's Voyagers (1800–1803)* (with Lindl Lawton, 2016) and, most recently, *'Roaming Freely Throughout the Universe': Nicolas Baudin's Voyage to Australia and the Pursuit of Science* (2021). Jointly and separately, they have also published widely on nineteenth-century French literature and on crime fiction (French and Australian). For their work, John and Jean have been awarded the rank of Officer in the Order of the Palmes académiques by the French government. John currently has another book in preparation: an edited volume of essays on French contributions to Australian cultural life entitled *What have the French ever done for us?*

Venue: The Oxford Scholar Hotel (Level 1), 427 Swanston St, Melbourne
(RMIT University Tram Stop 7; Melbourne Central train station)

Cover charge (includes refreshments) \$25. Bookings essential (limited places): <https://www.trybooking.com/CBMYX>

