Old Quarrels and New Approaches: Nicolas Baudin and Matthew Flinders (the Brock Lecture to the Society, June 2005)

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Geographers and historians probably have much more in common than they are prepared to admit in public. There is at least one area in which their interests coincide in a fairly obvious way, and that is exploration. For geographers, exploration is all about the processes by which humans gained a knowledge of the natural world and the various peoples that inhabit it, the very core of their discipline. And historians too have an abiding interest in the ways in which, over time, societies have extended their influence into the natural world and into the realm of other human societies.

In Australia, this close interconnection is a very obvious one. The European recording of the history of the continent which was eventually to become known as Australia has in many regards been almost inseparable from the accumulation of a knowledge of its geography. If we enter the realm of speculation and fiction we might go back further, but for our purposes we can cap it at four centuries, because it was in the year 1606 that the first European charting of Australia’s shores took place. With the commemoration of that event in 2006, both geographers and historians have been prompted to reflect on the course of Australia’s exploration, and, with the *Duyfken* achievements in mind, not just on the British contribution.

Indeed, the topic of exploration appears to be witnessing something of a boom. It is not so long ago that Tim Flannery and Jan Bassett produced popular anthologies of Australian explorations. In the area of maritime exploration alone there have been wonderful and very well received biographies of William Dampier, Matthew Flinders, George Bass, as well as books and even television documentaries on Flinders and Nicolas Baudin. And if one looks into the best-seller lists of very recent times, one finds Simon Nashti’s biography of the remarkable South Australian-born explorer-cum-war photographer-cum-author-cum-scientist-cum-proto-scientologist Hubert Wilkins.

Whatever this might be saying about the current state of the national psyche, exploration no doubt is “in”. Moreover, the evidence from other parts of the world suggests that this might be part of a much larger phenomenon, perhaps as a manifestation of a need to understand not just the present realities but also the origins and development of what we now conventionally call “globalization”.

But it was not always so. If there was an early hey-day then it was in the nineteenth century. In those times the words “explorers” and “heroes” could be mentioned in the same breath and frequently were. Even abject failure, mixed with a good dose of incompetence, as in the egregious case of Burke and Wills, could

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still be accorded heroic status. Around the time of Australia’s achievement of nationhood the praise reached its apogee, typified perhaps in the work of the historian Ernest Scott, who dedicated much of his research to the theme of exploration, publishing in 1914 a biography of Matthew Flinders which stands the test of time remarkably well. Scott’s biography, however, was written on the eve of an event which was to consign the nineteenth-century explorers to a more modest place in the fledgling nation’s sense of itself. The explorers were to a degree supplanted by the diggers, who could match the explorers in the sorts of qualities that were becoming regarded as quintessentially Australian: bravery, resourcefulness, endurance and composure in the face of overwhelming danger or even death. With Gallipoli, the diggers could even match the explorers in the heroic failure stakes. Moreover, they had some advantages over their explorer antecedents: they were Australian, and their history was fresh and soon imbued with an almost religious significance.

That is not to say that explorers wandered into oblivion, never to be heard of again. Once more, the example of Matthew Flinders is illustrative. In the 1920s there was considerable interest in him in Australia, in part because his grandson, the Egyptologist Sir William Matthew Flinders Petrie, had made a remarkable offer. He would donate his grandfather’s diaries and personal papers to the first state to erect a monument to the explorer. After a flurry of activity in various parts of the country, the prize went to New South Wales, where a monument was erected outside the Mitchell Library, which duly became the repository of an invaluable collection of Flinders’ papers. Melbourne’s monument followed suit shortly thereafter, albeit too late for the main prize, with Adelaide bringing up the rear in 1934. The statue of Flinders on Adelaide’s North Terrace was unveiled on 12 April of that year by the Governor Sir Alexander Hore-Ruthven in a ceremony attended by the explorer Sir Douglas Mawson.

During the Second World War, Flinders reached a remarkable level of popularity, not because of the work of historians or sculptors but rather due to a novel by Ernestine Hill. Its title alone might explain why. My Love Must Wait deals with the long separation of Flinders from his wife Anne, who remained in England during her husband’s long years of exploration and then imprisonment. For many Australians with loved ones serving in the Second World War, it was a story which struck a nerve. Then, in the 1960s, no fewer than three Flinders biographies appeared, by Sidney Baker, James Mack and Max Colwell, all of them essentially hagiographic in character and fulsome in their praise.

As the historical pendulum swung yet again, however, exploration ceased to be so fashionable. Insofar as an interest in it was maintained, it was with a good dose of scepticism or at least ambivalence. Exploration, after all, was not quite as innocent as we had been led to believe at school; rather, it was part of a much larger process which produced both winners and losers in Australian history. Focus shifted from the earlier tendency to glorify exploration and settlement toward the confrontation with the indigenous experience of invasion and marginalization. This was not so much a matter of tapping into a new seam of empirical evidence; rather it was largely about reading the historical record from a new and more broadly empathetic perspective. Scholars certainly could no longer speak of explorers’ penetration of a virgin land and maintain a straight face. Even if earlier histories had tended neatly to sidestep this awkward reality, the fact that Australia was already occupied when the Europeans sought to settle it was
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incontrovertible, and, no matter how it was interpreted, had to be placed on the historical record.

In the light of this bigger, though admittedly crudely sketched meta-historical picture, the renewed interest in exploration in recent times is something of a controversy in itself. Clearly, however, we are not dealing with a pendulum swing back to the 1960s or earlier histories. The lens through which historians view the history of Australian exploration has changed; there is no way back to the contrived naivety of early historiography, though the occasional calls for simple, one-dimensional histories featuring “core values”—such as those attributed to the story of Simpson and his donkey—do give cause for concern.

Well aware that histories of exploration had a history of their own, we embarked on our own contribution to the genre with our sights firmly set on the figures of Nicolas Baudin and Matthew Flinders. In doing so, we were aware of standing on the shoulders of others, but we were also eager not merely to replicate their perspectives. Above all, we did not wish to revisit the model of the infallible explorer-hero. Moreover, we were eager to jettison the overwhelmingly British perspective of exploration which prevailed in Australia. In that regard, we were not being entirely original, since Ernest Scott had published a book on Baudin’s expedition even before turning his hand to his Flinders biography. In Scott’s world view, the French had a natural place in the European project of civilizing the world; their contribution, too, was worthy of acknowledgment. Nonetheless, within Scott’s Euro-centric scheme of Australia’s exploration, it was clear that Baudin filled a place far beneath that of the great Matthew Flinders.

To find fresh perspectives, we adopted first and foremost the principle of going back to the original sources and trying to read them as documents of their own times. In this way, we wanted to read Flinders and Baudin not as towering figures who dwarfed their contemporaries, but rather as representatives of their age who were deeply immersed in the knowledge, the mindsets, the prejudices and the colonial projects of Europeans at a particular point in history. This was not with the intention of denying them their greatness, but rather of re-humanizing them, that is, making them understandable human figures who might indeed have shaped their times but who were also strongly moulded by them.

In the case of Flinders, this meant above all going back to his two-volume account A Voyage to Terra Australis, but also to his logs, his journal, and to the reports of others, such as his botanist Robert Brown or his gardener Peter Good, or the journal of the surprisingly literate Able Seaman Samuel Smith. To return to those sources and to cite them at length is a rewarding process, not only because Flinders was a very gifted writer, but also because it helps peel back some of the layers of myth built up over two centuries.

Perhaps this can be illustrated with just one example. In so much of the explorer literature generally, and in the histories of Flinders himself, the presence of an indigenous population in Australia is largely ignored. If it is dealt with, then it is in a rather condescending or patronizing way, such as citing a passage from My Love Must Wait in which Flinders, on one of his Tom Thumb expeditions, manages to mollify an at once infantile and nefarious group of Aborigines by trimming their beards. For the most part, though, the literature on Flinders participates in what the anthropologist Professor Bill Stanner in 1968 labelled “The Great Australian Silence” or “The Cult of Disremembering”—that is, the systemic tendency in Australia to overlook the place of
Aborigines in Australian history. What one finds if one goes back to the written pages of Flinders himself is that, for him at least, there was no such silence. A Voyage to Terra Australis is full of references to indigenous people, contact with whom Flinders sought persistently. True, one sees in his quest a desire to assess the nature of their response to the arrival of Europeans, but one also sees the work of a genuinely curious and engaged mind. Flinders was something of an amateur anthropologist and linguist. He sought to record Aboriginal vocabulary and customs; he took with him on his circumnavigation an indigenous man from Sydney by the name of Bungaree to act as an intermediary, and he disapproved of the use of violence in dealing with indigenous people, even if this in practice was not always avoided. The silence of which Stanner was to speak came much later—and not to distort the legacy of Flinders' voyages, but rather to avoid the sad record of relations which set in later, when exploration, driven in good part by a genuine, scientifically founded curiosity, gave way to settlement, competition for resources, dispossession and a suffering which was disproportionately large on the side of the indigenous people. Had he had the chance later in life to visit those whom he labelled "Australians", Flinders, one suspects, would not have been greatly pleased with the course of events since his explorations.

These principles of returning to the original sources and examining them in the context of the era to which they belonged were applied also to our studies of the Baudin expedition. Indeed, as a way of subverting the prevailing Anglo-centric hierarchy of achievement which condemns the French navigator to a bit-part role, we in many regards placed Baudin ahead of Flinders. After all, his expedition commenced before that of Flinders, and in some areas of achievement the Baudin expedition had no equal. In giving a certain prominence to Baudin, we therefore hoped to correct the imbalance in perceptions of the relative merits of the two expeditions that was the legacy of Ernest Scott.

Our intention, it must be stressed, is not to single out Scott as a poor scholar and the perpetrator of all misconceptions. On the contrary, Scott needs to be acknowledged as the first serious historian to recognize the significance of the Baudin expedition in the history of Australian exploration and discovery. Moreover, as has already been mentioned, he had the great merit of returning to the original source material and interrogating it in order to compile both his biography of Flinders and his Terre Napoleon. The limitations within which he had to work were largely those of his day, given that some of the French archival material was not readily available nearly one hundred years ago, and some of the translations with which he worked are now known to have been incomplete or unreliable. Despite these constraints, Scott's study of the Baudin expedition contains many astute observations, and his assessment of some of its more controversial aspects is sometimes quite subtle. He took great pains, for example, to dispel the commonly held view that the French voyage had secret, political motives—a notion which, despite Scott's efforts, still has currency even today.

Nevertheless, his landmark portrayal of the French expedition and its commander ultimately reveals itself to be partisan and prone to embellishment. This is largely because Scott seemed only too ready to accept the observations made by the participants in the events at face value, without subjecting them to critical scrutiny. He fails to question the motives of Baudin's detractors, for example, and uses their subjective and often disparaging remarks as a basis for portraying the commander as careless and irresponsible, despite other evidence to the contrary. He is similarly unquestioning with respect to

Matthew Flinders, giving credence to his account of events without ever entertaining the prospect that, as an active participant, his view may also have been somewhat partial (in both senses of the word) and subject to various motives. In contrasting the Baudin expedition with that of Flinders, Scott also shows a penchant for dramatic hyperbole and romanticization: the crew of the Investigator, he writes, “finished the voyage [to Port Jackson] a company of bronzed, jolly, hearty sailors, fit for any service. Baudin, on the contrary, had not a single man on board who was free from disease. […] The sailors were unable to trim the sails properly; steersmen fell at the wheel; they could not walk or lift their limbs without groaning in agony. It was a plague ship that crept round to Port Jackson Heads in that month of storms.” We can only imagine what would have befallen them had Britannia not come to the rescue: “[Governor] King sent out a boat’s crew of robust blue jackets from the Investigator; and Péron records with what trembling joy the afflicted Frenchmen saw the boat approaching on that June morning. Soon the British tars climbed aboard, sails were trimmed, and the tiller was grasped by a strong hand, a brisk British officer took charge, and the ship was brought through the blue waters of Port Jackson, where, in Neutral Bay, her anchor was dropped.” The truth, as Frank Horner has pointed out, is much less dramatic.

It is not difficult to see that this kind of romanticized portrait suited the fledgling nation’s need, shortly after federation, to create its own stories and find its own heroes. In contributing his part to this process, however, Scott, through his work on Flinders and Baudin, also succumbed to the temptation to embellish his narrative. The hero would appear all the more admirable if presented alongside a villain. And the stakes would seem higher if national and personal rivalries were brought into play and given prominence. In so doing, Scott established two paradigms that have affected perceptions of Flinders and Baudin in an enduring manner: the notion that the Baudin expedition was a failure because it was “dilatory and careless” under the leadership of a commander seen as heartless and inept; and the idea that Flinders and Baudin were rivals in a race in which there could be only one winner.

It is true that the first of these “myths” was not Scott’s invention, as he was merely following the lead of the disgruntled officers and scientists who, a century before, had unfairly set out to vilify their commander and his expedition. Nevertheless, as the first historian to examine seriously these events with the benefit of one hundred years of hindsight, and drawing on a wide range of archival sources, Scott failed to grasp the opportunity of conducting a more even-handed and objective assessment, of the French expedition in particular. His work has also been highly influential. It is difficult to resist the temptation here to quote once more from Ernestine Hill, who, in the Acknowledgments section of her novel, expresses her gratitude to “the late Professor Ernest Scott, whose documentary Life of Matthew Flinders has been a storehouse of information.” Her representation of the famous encounter between Baudin and Flinders is particularly savoury. Here is how she describes the scene on the Géographe when Flinders comes aboard:

The deck of the ship was grimy, and she stank. There was a half-watch only, men covered with scurvy sores, swarthy men with matted hair and filthy clothing. Some of the sailors were cutting up dolphins. They argued in a shrill nasal whining. So hungry they were for the dolphins, they scarce took note of his coming.
Her portrait of Baudin is even less flattering:

[A carelessly-dressed officer] led them to the quarter-deck, to a suave elderly man, grey hair greasy on his brow, a face like a very old and very benevolent bloodhound, with the same bloodshot eyes. His uniform was stained and shabby [...].

"Ha! messieurs les anglais! Good efening, gentilmen."
The commodore took a slightly oblique course to usher them into his cabin, a litter of cones, charts, journals, books, dividers, his clothing hanging from half-closed drawers and chairs, smells and stains of wine, and some shrivelled plants in broken pots [...].

He smiled, and poured them a glass of very old vin de Champagne.\textsuperscript{19}

That a fictionalization of the story should paint such a fanciful caricature is one thing; it is quite another when professional writers and scholars fall into the same trap. To give but one example, Sidney J. Baker, an admirer and biographer of Flinders, published an article in 1975 whose title leaves no room for doubt as to the author's views: "A Madman in the South Seas".\textsuperscript{20}

A number of historians, especially over the last 30 years or so, have attempted to correct this perception of Baudin and his expedition.\textsuperscript{21} Following the publication in 1974 of Christine Cornell's translation of Baudin's journal,\textsuperscript{22} we have seen some landmark studies, most notably Frank Horner's meticulous account of the Baudin expedition, published in 1987,\textsuperscript{23} but also, among others, Brian Plomley's examination of the contact between The Baudin Expedition and the Tasmanian Aborigines (1983), not to mention the archival work of Jacqueline Bonnemains in France,\textsuperscript{24} the new translation into English of François Péron's account of the Baudin expedition,\textsuperscript{25} or the publications of works such as Tony Brown's Ill-Starred Captains (2000)\textsuperscript{26} and a growing list of scholarly articles by Michel Jangoux, Margaret Sankey and others.\textsuperscript{27} We ourselves have sought to add to this rehabilitation process through various publications, in particular our Encountering Terra Australis (2004).\textsuperscript{28} Yet despite all of this work, the general perception of the Baudin expedition as having been mismanaged persists.

The rivalry paradigm has proved to be equally tenacious.\textsuperscript{29} It is true that, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, France and Britain were at war in Europe and engaged more widely in a competition for geopolitical dominance. In a very general sense, then, the Flinders and Baudin expeditions, notwithstanding their altruistic claims to scientific internationalism, were undoubtedly designed to further the interests of their respective nations. It is far less obvious, however, that the two captains saw themselves as engaged in a race, nor that they considered themselves to be personal rivals. Indeed, until "bumping into" Flinders in Encounter Bay in April 1802, Baudin was unaware that a British expedition to these waters even existed. And yet this notion of a race has had enduring popular appeal, along with the attendant myth according to which parts of Australia, South Australia in particular, only just missed out on becoming French—a tantalising prospect viewed no doubt with a mix of regret and relief. Apart from the fact that it is largely inappropriate, the concept that the two captains were rivals engaged in a race inevitably implies that one would emerge victorious over the other.\textsuperscript{30} And in this case, it is, of course, Baudin who has been routinely portrayed as Flinders' unhappy rival, thereby reinforcing the myth of his incompetence. This tendency to compare Baudin unfavourably to Flinders is widespread. O.H.K. Spate refers to Flinders as Baudin's "successful English rival";\textsuperscript{31}
others continue to speak of Baudin’s “poor leadership”32 or of “French incompetence” and the “inferiority of the French charts”.33

In order to consecrate Flinders and his work, it has somehow been seen as necessary to denigrate Baudin and his expedition. Conversely, attempts to correct the record and redeem the reputation of Baudin are often taken to be slight on the name of Flinders. It seems as though there is no room for both to be considered as having achieved great feats, as having displayed exceptional talents and qualities, along with their flaws and failings. The case for parity of treatment is implicit in the structure of Anthony Brown’s Ill-Starred Captains, in which the narratives of the two expeditions are closely interwoven.34 It is also an argument we have attempted to champion, both in our book and in other publications.35 Not only is it inappropriate to designate a winner and a loser, but it is plausible to suggest that both Flinders and Baudin actually drew benefit from their accidental encounter off the unknown coast, and from their subsequent meetings in Port Jackson. It is well established that Matthew Flinders was a determined and ambitious young navigator, and it is not difficult to imagine that his encounter with a fellow discoverer could only have strengthened his resolve to complete the task he had set himself, with an even greater sense of purpose and urgency. For Baudin’s part, we need to remind ourselves that, while he was an experienced scientific navigator, who had a distinguished record of service in transporting plant specimens from all parts of the globe back to Europe for study, he was not himself an hydrographer and had not previously been engaged in such work. The opportunity to view the charts of such a meticulous hydrographer as Flinders, both during their meeting in Encounter Bay and later, during the sojourn in Sydney, must surely have encouraged him to think that he and his own geographers needed to redouble their efforts.

It is indeed possible to consider some of Baudin’s decisions as having been influenced by his encounters with Flinders and his cartographic work. Following their meeting in Encounter Bay, for example, Baudin pushes westward, via the north coast of Kangaroo Island and the two gulfs, with the firm intention of getting in behind the Islands of St Peter and St Francis. He had just learned that Flinders had been the first European since 1627 to gain sight of these islands, which had acquired legendary status as forming the outer limit of the known world. Flinders had just beaten him to the punch, but this only seems to have firmed Baudin’s resolve to explore these two groups of islands. For days, he doggedly persisted in this task against contrary winds and with an ailing crew, before eventually resigning himself to break off and head for Tasmania, then respite in Port Jackson. But he would return some 10 months later (February 1803), and this time succeeded in anchoring in what Flinders named Denial Bay, where Baudin conducted a thorough survey to rival that of his English counterpart. Following the stay in Sydney, where Baudin and Flinders had regular opportunities to meet and compare notes, the French commander set off with a renewed sense of hydrographic purpose. In Sydney, he had purchased a new ship, the Casuarina. With its shallower draught, it was designed to facilitate more accurate survey work closer to shore. Again, it is tempting to consider that this decision was partly motivated by the lessons learned from having seen the quality of Flinders’ work. This could also be one of the reasons why Baudin decided to return to a number of the areas he had already surveyed during the first part of his voyage: Geographe Bay, Shark Bay and vast stretches of the western Australian coast, for example. Furthermore, Baudin seemed determined to re-visit sections of the coastline that Flinders had surveyed,
in order, presumably, to do at least as well, if not better, than the Englishman: the south-east and east coast of Tasmania, for example (following their first encounter), or Kangaroo Island and the two gulls, followed by Nuyts Archipelago and King George Sound. In such a scenario of one-upmanship, neither captain should be seen as the loser. On the contrary, it seems reasonable to speculate, as the saying goes, that science was the winner on the day.

It is true that the achievements of the Baudin expedition are now beginning to receive wider recognition. But the myths endure, both for the general public and for specialist commentators. On both parts, one of the reasons for this is the reliance on secondary literature and the difficulty in obtaining access to the primary source materials, many of which, in the case of the Baudin expedition, are in French and stored away in distant archives. It is only by returning to the original documents that we can hope to achieve a more complete understanding of the two captains and their expeditions; importantly, the task of making this material more readily available is now being undertaken in a systematic manner.

Our own approach to reviewing this wealth of archival material is, we hope, another significant step in this direction. After first querying many elements that have previously been considered articles of faith—the debates about scurvy or maps, for example—we are now ourselves returning to the systematic identification and publication of primary sources, particularly for the Baudin expedition. The recent publication of Flinders' private journal\textsuperscript{36} and numerous web-based archives\textsuperscript{37} provide handsome testimony to the fact that his story is in safe hands. The Baudin expedition, having as yet few champions among French historians, is in need of more determined assistance.\textsuperscript{38} It was, however, initially well serviced in this domain, with

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Brian Baldwin, through the State Library of South Australia's project of the 1960s, identifying and providing microfilmed copies of much valuable documentation to researchers.\textsuperscript{39} These documents were instrumental in providing the breakthrough in Baudin studies best represented in Australia by the work of Frank Horner. However, the mostly handwritten texts contained in these archives remain notoriously difficult to read. Given the ageing of these microfilms, and considering the new opportunities provided by recent technological advances, the time has come to provide faster and more reliable access to the Baudin archives to scholars the world over. With this aim in mind, we and our collaborators mounted a successful application to the Australian Research Council for funding to compile a searchable electronic data-base for resources on the Baudin expedition.\textsuperscript{40}

The project also has links to major partner sites, including the Lesueur Collection in Le Havre, where work has already commenced on transferring the many drawings and documents to digitized format.\textsuperscript{41} Unlike the Lesueur archives, however, the Baudin Legacy project will enable access to a synthesis of the documents, as well as to transcriptions and English translations of the original documents themselves. This means scholars and others will have ready access to a rich store of materials that have been compiled, cross-checked and updated by researchers from both the sciences and the humanities and social sciences. The sheer scope of the project, and its cross-disciplinary nature, will, it is hoped, bring new light to bear on the French expedition and its explorers. Indeed, this has already commenced, with some interesting results now emerging.

Although previous scholars have been scrupulous in their verification of the archival sources at their disposal, the subject matter

is so vast and the dispersal of information so extensive that one can never exclude the possibility of finding new material or missing a point of detail. With an international team of researchers, and greater access than ever before to archives held across the world, we remain hopeful of discovering an unexpected twist in events or meeting a new character. In terms of characters, there are plenty of candidates who, if their stories could one day be told in full, might provide a key to unlocking the secrets of the commander’s shadowy existence. We are steadily compiling information on such little-known characters and we have certainly uncovered some incidents that appear to shed light on controversial aspects of the voyage.

Take, for example, the memoirs of Charles Baudin, one of the young officers on board. His story is often cited as proof of the hostility that reigned between the commander and his junior officers, for he announces in the first pages that Baudin’s arrival in Le Havre immediately put an end to the revelry among the junior officers and set the tone for the rest of the voyage. However, few seem to have made a detailed reading of his complete story, in which he reveals the extent to which the officers were divided amongst themselves. In the light of his story, it would be difficult to describe the bad feeling on board as uniquely of the commander’s doing, for he was by no means the unique object of his officers’ dislike and their own rivalries lasted well beyond the captain’s demise. We already know that there were fights on board between members of the scientific staff, and that the officers were jealous of one another’s rank and promotions, but Charles Baudin’s memoirs bring the general lack of solidarity into sharper perspective. He reports that, upon meeting one of his former companions several years after the expedition had returned to France, he was reminded of the bad blood that had characterized their past relationship and subsequently fought him in a duel, seriously wounding his adversary.

The fact that Charles Baudin survived the altercation and the disciplinary investigation that ensued, and later achieved the rank of admiral, is proof, if proof were needed, that the navy was a harsh environment and that strength and force were greatly respected. Why, then, pursue Baudin with the accusation of poor leadership when he was on occasion sarcastic or distant in his dealings with the clearly unruly bunch of young men under his command? Such details do indeed remind us of what life was like at sea in those times—and once more remind us of the importance of minute detail. Not to mention the larger items, such as the expedition’s restored herbarium and the publication in France of Baudin’s log from his previous expedition—long forgotten documents which will contribute both to the rehabilitation of Baudin and to the recognition in his native land of his role as a botanic voyager of real distinction.

However, not all that is to be discovered is strictly new. One should not cease to be vigilant about verifying even those facts that appear to have been noted and then checked against the original source time and time again. However, many Australian historians have relied on the assistance of translators for access to original documents, which means that they are not necessarily equipped to pick out a vital error or a missing element, or to be attuned to the subtleties of irony or other stylistic devices—a vital element when it comes to appreciating the dry humour of Nicolas Baudin, which, as we point out in *Encountering Terra Australis*, almost amounted to the quintessentially Australian sense of humour. The translations of many of the Baudin expedition archives which were originally made by Mme Hélouis for Ernest Scott are now a little outdated in terms of their gravity and use of formal language. Although conscientiously made and an invaluable tool, these transcripts are already nearly a century old and they cannot contain, therefore, all...
that is of interest to contemporary scholars, especially since many a document has come to light since the Héloïse translations were made. Of these new documents, the vast majority have not been translated. Secondly, even scholars as meticulous as Frank Horner could occasionally sanction a misreading that perpetuates a myth about Baudin, when the reality is much more banal. To give a single example, take the case of the journal of Anselme Riedlé, the gardener on board the *Géographe*. It must first be said that this journal is something of a nightmare for the translator, since Riedlé’s spelling of French was completely phonetic and the misspelled words he used often corresponded to two or three words run together. While it is perfectly good French, once deciphered, it is at first glance so unrecognizable in terms of written French that, before translating it, one must read it out loud. In one passage, Horner refers to Riedlé’s running battle with Baudin about being allocated a sufficient quantity of water to keep his plants alive. This anecdote, related in Riedlé’s journal—that is, by one of Baudin’s closest companions and most ardent defenders—seems, by virtue of that fact, to add fuel to the rumour of Baudin’s hostility to his scientists and to their pursuit of their work. An independent reading of Riedlé’s journal confirms, however, that there has been an error in translating the terminology relating to naval rank. The correct reading reveals that Riedlé’s quarrel is not with Baudin at all, but with his second-in-command, the troublesome officer Le Bas de Sainte-Croix, who seemed intent on causing mutiny in Timor and whom Baudin forced with intelligence and subtlety to abandon the voyage. This correction also removes one of the key arguments used when denigrating Baudin as an enemy of science. Viewed in its true light, this episode becomes a far more characteristic example of the relationship between Baudin and Riedlé, who had volunteered to accompany his captain to New Holland after their first successful scientific voyage to the West Indies, and who was also spirited in his defence of Baudin’s actions in Mauritius. Had Baudin not stood up to the Mauritian authorities and skilfully outmanoeuvred them, the scientific voyage, according to Riedlé, would have come to an abrupt end there and then. Riedlé was clearly not about to label his old scientific companion an enemy of his work or an enemy of science itself, and his journal thus regains its coherence when one small misreading is corrected.

The small errors and oversights can thus be influential, but clearly not as influential as the major acts of falsification to which the Baudin records have been subjected. But here again the primary sources have been invaluable, for they still bear the marks of the rewriting of history to Baudin’s detriment. In a recently published study, our scientific colleague, Michel Jangoux, has convincingly shown how François Péron, the expedition’s zoologist, not only rewrote the story of the expedition to cast Baudin in a bad light, but also falsified some of its results. Up till now, Péron’s reputation as a scientist was not in question, even though his reputation as the expedition’s historian and narrator has been roundly criticized in recent years. However, it is difficult to justify his professional ethics in one case at least. As one of his handwritten manuscripts shows, he has crossed out the name of Maugé, one of the scientists close to Baudin who had died during the expedition, and replaced it with the name of his own friend, the young artist Lesueur, in order to give the impression that it was Lesueur who had discovered a new species and not Maugé. In attempting to boost by fraud the reputation of Lesueur as a scientist, Péron revealed the very process by which he intended to attain the ascendancy over Baudin: by crossing out the original records and replacing them with a story that was more to his liking and to his advantage.
Péron had clearly not counted on the fact that his own records would be piously preserved by Lesueur and that they would eventually be used to show that his ultimate quarrel was not so much with Baudin as with History itself, a quarrel that the mendacious may initially win, but, with the help of historians, they may also eventually lose. And it is in this quarrel that we now intend to have our say.

In conclusion, we hope to have shown that, in our approach to deciphering the records of French and British exploration for today's audience, we have tried to distance ourselves from the old paradigms deriving from colonial rivalries that in turn engendered polarized viewpoints of the achievements of Matthew Flinders and Nicolas Baudin. Not only is each man's story on its own worthy of both popular and academic scrutiny, but each story is as interesting as a chapter in the history of exploration and of science as it is as melodrama, however colourful and stirring these cautionary tales may be.

Secondly, after putting aside the politics of rivalry, we have set ourselves the new task of reading the primary sources with an impartial gaze—while at the same time comparing our findings with those of other scholars from vastly different horizons, as befits a subject that demands the input of historians, geographers, scientists, art historians, anthropologists, bibliographers and many more. At times the task has seemed far too daunting, especially when, in the early days, we were told by one distinguished colleague that this truly was old history and that there was nothing new to be found. However, we remembered that Frank Horner had said that, in his day, Ernest Scott was considered to have pronounced the definitive words on both Flinders and Baudin. Horner persevered regardless. We would also like to think that, with the renewed interest in deciphering the records of the intertwined history of French and British exploration of Australia, not only are we putting aside the old quarrels that once impeded our understanding of our multicultural history, but we are on the verge of engaging in new debates that will eventually lead to even more discoveries about ourselves, our past and our future.

References


13. We have not entered into a discussion here of Nicolas Baudin’s attitudes towards indigenous peoples simply because these have not been subjected to the type of misrepresentation that can affect our understanding of Matthew Flinders’ views. The neglect of Baudin’s writings until the late 20th century has meant that the French commander’s particularly enlightened ideas regarding the colonization process and its effect on indigenous peoples do not have to be disengaged from decades of outdated commentary. Consequently, in recent years, Baudin’s contribution to debate on the plight of the Tasmanian Aborigines has been fully recognized by anthropologists and historians. For a comparison of the attitudes of Baudin and Flinders, see “The Clash of Cultures”, ch. 18 of *Encountering Terra Australis*, op. cit.; for a full discussion of Baudin’s views, see, for example, Jean Fornasiero and John West-Sooby, “Taming the Unknown: Representation of Terra Australis by the Baudin Expedition 1801-1803”, in A. Chittleborough, G. Dooley, B. Glover & R. Hosking (eds), *Alas for the Pelicans! Flinders, Baudin and beyond. Essays and Poems*, Kent Town: Wakefield Press, 2002, pp. 59-80.


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19. Ibid., p. 251.


29. In a recent study of Péron, the extent of whose misrepresentations of his commander are now clear, Edward Duyker nonetheless persists with a largely negative depiction of Baudin, and thus continues to situate the expedition within the paradigm of rivalry, albeit internecine rivalry rather than Anglo-French. See E. Duyker, François Péron, *An Impetuous Life: Naturalist and Voyager*, Carlton (Vic.): Miegunyah Press, 2006.

30. The sub-title of Klaus Toft’s book, based on the rivalry paradigm, is eloquent: “Flinders vs Baudin: the race between Matthew Flinders and Nicolas Baudin to discover the fabled passage through the middle of Australia”.


37. See, for example, the Flinders Papers at the Greenwich National Maritime Museum: (http://www.nmm.ac.uk/flinders) and James Fairfax Matthew Flinders Electronic Archive at the State Library of New South Wales: (http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/flinders/).

38. René Bouvier and Edouard Maynial, Une aventure dans les mers australes: l’expédition du commandant Baudin (1800-1803), Paris: Mercure de France, 1947; Jean-Paul Faivre, L’Expansion française dans le Pacifique de 1800 à 1842, Paris: Nouvelles éditions latines, 1953, and Jacqueline Bonnemains have pioneered Baudin studies in France and, although there are now a number of French scientists and historians taking an interest in the expedition and its results, there is as yet no major centre in the French University system that is specialized in this area of research. There is, however, an encouraging sign of change, with the imminent publication in France of a catalogue of Lesueur’s works and a major biography of this artist who accompanied the Baudin expedition.

39. In France, sources were identified by Brian Baldwin and made available on microfilm through this project, which was sponsored by the State Library of South Australia and the French Government. See B. Baldwin, “French Sources for South Australian History”, Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of South Australia, 64, 1962-1963, pp. 23-37. Through the Australian Joint Copying project, much British archival material was also made available to Australian libraries; it led to the identification and reproduction of resources related to both the Flinders and Baudin expeditions; the project was conducted for some years by Phyllis Mander-Jones (http://nla.gov.au/nla.ms-ms5652).

40. For a description of the project (the Baudin Legacy) and a list of its collaborators, see the web site that will eventually house all of the archival and bibliographical resources relating to the expedition: http://setis.library.usyd.edu.au/baudin/index.html.

41. To consult the catalogue of the Lesueur Collection at the Musée d’histoire naturelle du Havre and to view those of the images and
documents that have begun to be posted on the site, see: http://www.ville-lehavre.fr/delia-CMS/dossier/index/article_id-2342/ext-1/first_article_id-2337/plus-1/topic_id-247/inventaire-de-la-collection.html.


43. Ibid., p. 110.

44. Ibid., p. 119.

45. We refer to the work in progress of one of the chief investigators of the Baudin Legacy project, Michel Jangoux.

46. Riedlé, *Journal*, Bibliothèque centrale, Muséum national d’histoire naturelle, Paris, ms 1688, p. 65. Riedlé mentions that it is the “capitaine de frégate” (Le Bas), not the “capitaine de vaisseau” (Baudin) with whom he argued over water for his plants.