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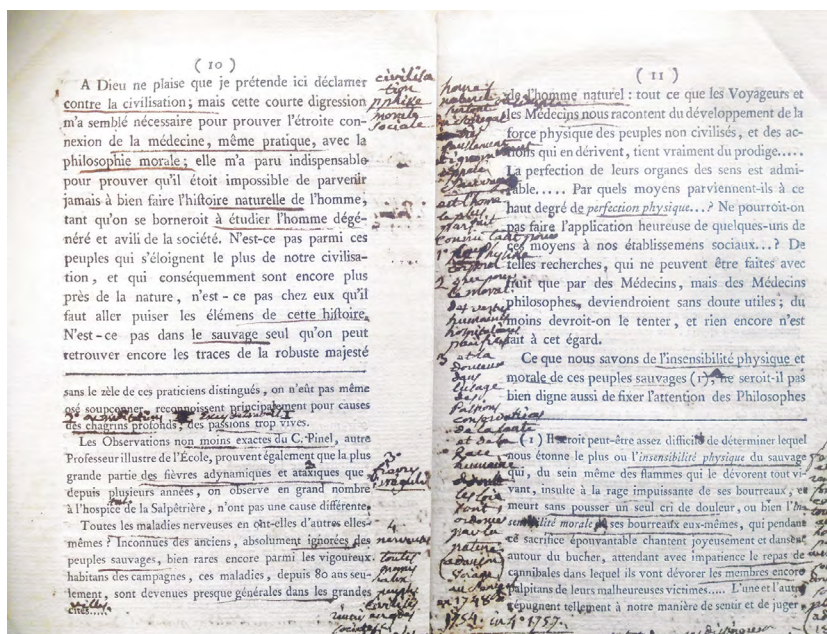
## 1800: How the ‘South Seas savages’ became ‘antique monuments’

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The Manuscripts Collection of the National Library of Australia (NLA) holds a printed copy of the quite well-known essay authored by François Péron in 1800: *Observations sur l'anthropologie, ou l'histoire naturelle de l'homme, la nécessité de s'occuper de l'avancement de cette science*.<sup>1</sup> Written specifically to achieve Péron's participation in Nicolas Baudin's expedition to the South Seas or 'Austral Lands', the paper has historically been considered the first formal discussion of the science of 'anthropology', and Péron titled 'the first official expedition anthropologist' (Chappey 2000; Copans and Jamin 1978; Hewes 1968; Stocking 1964). The NLA document (MS 4209) is unique not only as one of the rare original prints of the essay, but also because it is annotated with handwritten comments by Michel Adanson, a respected naturalist celebrated as a founder of botanical classification and member of the commission of the Institut national, coordinating the scientific program of Baudin's voyage (Figure 4.1).

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1 The full title is: *Observations sur l'anthropologie, ou l'histoire naturelle de l'homme, la nécessité de s'occuper de l'avancement de cette science, et l'importance de l'admission sur la Flotte du capitaine Baudin d'un ou de plusieurs naturalistes, spécialement chargés des recherches à faire sur cet objet*, Paris, an VIII [1800] ('Observations on anthropology or the natural history of man, the necessity to advance this science, and the importance of admitting to the fleet of Captain Baudin one or several naturalists, especially in charge of undertaking research on this topic'). NLA MS 4209, Rex Nan Kivell Collection.



**Figure 4.1. Examples of pages (pp. 10–11) of Péron's published pamphlet with annotations by his reviewer Adanson.**

Source: Photo by E. Dotte-Sarout, published with the authorisation of the NLA (MS 4209).

This manuscript is a material remain – an archaeological artefact – of the European intellectual context for the earliest formal anthropological considerations of the inhabitants of the South Seas: when Oceanians were positioned as the ‘Other’ (following Asians, Africans and Amerindians) that confronted Europeans and what it meant for them to be ‘human’ (Blanckaert 2008; Cook et al. 2013; Douglas 2008; Patou-Mathis 2011). It is a lively and concrete illustration of the epistemological debates at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries regarding the definition and study of ‘savage men’, just before they became ‘primitive men’ mirroring Europe’s own ‘prehistoric men’ – a conceptual turn that is examined in detail in this chapter.<sup>2</sup>

In the Collective Biography of Archaeology in the Pacific (CBAP) Project’s program of tracing the history of archaeological approaches in the Pacific, this specific artefact and the ideological debates inscribed on it

2 Needless to say, humanity was at this time in Europe considered under the experience and characteristics of ‘man’ by default.

can open our historiographical narrative by representing the origins of the complex relations between archaeology and Oceania. It was written a few decades before European prehistoric archaeology took the stage alongside the newly recognised classical archaeology, several more decades before Charles Darwin published *On the Origin of Species* (1859), cementing early evolutionist ideas of a universal biological-social history of humanity, and almost a century before archaeological investigations actually began in the Pacific (Spriggs, **Chapter 8**, this volume; see also Dotte-Sarout and Spriggs 2017; Howes and Spriggs 2019; Richards et al. 2019). Still, its existence is directly linked to the emergence of anthropology as a science and the interdisciplinary 'observation of man', in which the inhabitants of the South Seas played a crucial role (Douglas and Ballard 2008). By tracing the institutional, personal and intellectual context of the arguments crisscrossing this unique manuscript, I will seek to unearth the foundations on which our discipline has been built. What place was given to the past in this emergent anthropological examination of the peoples of the South Seas, and how was this past positioned in relation to European understandings of 'savage men' in 1800?

## The Baudin expedition

Baudin's voyage to the southern hemisphere (1800–04) has been extremely well studied since its reappraisal by historians and French studies scholars from the 1970s onward (see Sankey et al. 2004). It was the fifth French scientific voyage to the South Seas, after those of Louis-Antoine de Bougainville (1766–69 – the sole returnee to France), Louis Aleno de St Aloüarn (1771–72), Jean-François de Galaup, Comte de Lapérouse (1785–88) and Antoine Bruni d'Entrecasteaux (1791–94). Baudin – already a respected and experienced naturalist-captain – had initially designed the expedition as a circumnavigation that would have explored the South Seas from east to west (Baudin 2000:31). Citing economic, political and scientific priorities, a specific commission created by the French Government to evaluate the proposed voyage refocused it on New Holland (especially the unknown southern coasts), Van Diemen's Land, and the strait and islands between New Guinea and New Holland. The Baudin expedition, a pure product of the post-Revolution French Consulate, stands out among all the Pacific exploration voyages led by Europeans in its strong focus on scientific observations. The two ships – *Géographe* and *Naturaliste* – carried 22 savants and artists, Baudin received

instructions from the most respected French scientists of the time, and the mission brought back over 200,000 natural history specimens, including around 200 ‘art objects’ (ethnographic artefacts) (Copans and Jamin 1978; Horner 1987; Jangoux 2004).<sup>3</sup> Péron collected the latter, endeavouring to be an ‘anthropologist’ and responding to a set of instructions directly concerned with the study of ‘savage peoples’ and the ‘natural history of man’ (Copans and Jamin 1978).

## Péron’s essay on anthropology and the NLA manuscript

In July 1800 (Messidor month, year VIII of the post-revolutionary French Republican calendar), a 25-year-old medical student named François Péron was seeking support from the professors at the Paris Medical School to be selected as one of the scientists accompanying the upcoming Baudin expedition to the South Seas. He sent them the essay he had composed for his candidature, together with a letter explaining his failure at previous attempts, ‘the number of positions determined for this expedition having been filled’ (p. 14).<sup>4</sup> He argued for the need to add to the naturalists of the fleet

a few young medical doctors specifically charged with the study of man, to collect everything interesting that the various people can offer in their physical and moral relations to the climate [i.e. environment] in which they live, their mores, their habits, their diseases. (p. 2)

Péron then asked them to intervene directly with the official commission charged with selecting the scientists at the Institut national:<sup>5</sup>

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3 Historians consider this the richest collection of the time, including when compared to those brought back by Captain Cook. The small ethnographic collection comprised objects collected by the expedition in Australia and Tasmania or Timor, as well as objects donated to Péron by a collector in Australia and originally from New Zealand, Tahiti, Tonga, Samoa, Hawai’i, Cook Islands and Easter Island (Copans and Jamin 1978). Unfortunately it was entirely lost in the years following the expedition’s return to France.

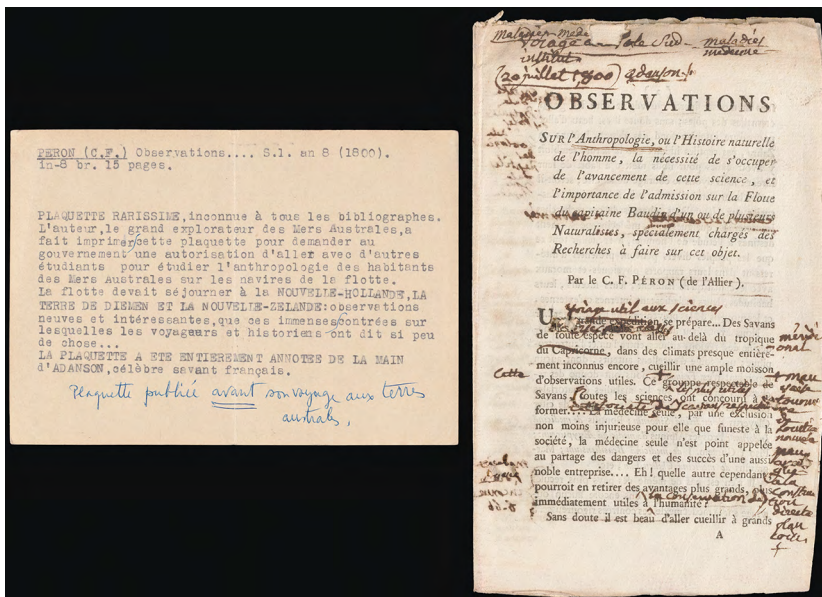
4 Translations from French are my own. Page numbers refer to the original pagination of the 1800 publication, as per the NLA manuscript.

5 The Institut national was created in 1795 during the National Convention of the French Revolution and later reorganised by Napoléon Bonaparte to centralise the former Académies Royales as specialised divisions of the institute. As such, it constituted the official scientific body of France in 1800, under the Consulate presided over by Napoléon.

#### 4. 1800: HOW THE 'SOUTH SEAS SAVAGES' BECAME 'ANTIQUE MONUMENTS'

Would not approaching the government or the National Institute make it possible, citizen professors, for you to obtain the necessary authorisation to send on board the fleet one or several young medical students, specially assigned under the title of *anthropologists* [...]? (p. 14)<sup>6</sup>

Péron's essay and letter were indeed presented at the commission of the Institut in the next few days, with the support of such respected French naturalists as Antoine-Laurent de Jussieu and Georges Henri Cuvier (also one of Péron's teachers). With the defection of previously selected naturalists, Péron was finally enlisted for the expedition under the title of zoologist, fewer than two months before it sailed. This position would effectively encompass the observation of 'savage' people.



**Figure 4.2. First page of Péron's pamphlet showing dated signature of Adanson on top ('Travel to the South Pole, diseases, medicine. [20 July 1800] Adanson').**

Note: The accompanying label in French reads: 'extremely rare booklet, unknown to all bibliographers. The author, the grand South Seas explorer, had this booklet printed to request from the government an authorisation to join other scholars in studying the anthropology of the South Seas inhabitants aboard the ships of the fleet [...] The booklet was entirely annotated in the handwriting of Adanson, a famous French scholar.'

Source: Photo provided by the NLA (MS 4209).

6 Italics in original.

Péron's essay was published as a pamphlet, copies of which are still held in a few libraries globally. However, the one held by the NLA is unique as it is covered with comments by the highly respected eighteenth-century naturalist Michel Adanson, illustrating contemporary debates around such notions as 'natural man' and 'savage man'. It was purchased in the early twentieth century by the England-based New Zealander collector Sir Rex de Charembac Nan Kivell, evidently from a French dealer or collector who judiciously highlighted its rarity (Figure 4.2).<sup>7</sup> Its precise origins are not known. It entered the NLA collections as part of the Nan Kivell donations between 1959 and 1976.

## Péron and the anthropology of the *Société des Observateurs de l'Homme*

Péron, 'a complex and paradoxal character, intelligent and bright [...] undoubtedly presumptuous, surely ambitious' (Jangoux 2004:62), has become one of the best known members of the Baudin expedition. While studying to become a medical doctor at the Ecole de Médecine in Paris since 1797, he also attended courses offered by the professor-naturalists of the Muséum national d'histoire naturelle. These included Cuvier and Bernard Germain de Lacépède, who subsequently served as evaluators of the scientific program and personnel for Baudin's voyage, as well as early evolutionary theorists such as Jean-Baptiste Lamarck and Etienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire (Hughes 1988; on early evolutionary theories see Corsi 2011). This mixed intellectual baggage, combined with his spirited ambition, undoubtedly made him pursue the bold new idea of travelling to the other side of the world as an '*anthropologist*' in charge of studying the 'natural history of man'. 'Undeniably', he wrote, 'it is lovely to go at great expense to pick the inert moss growing under the eternal ice of the poles', but it would be just as useful to society and just as 'glorious for the French nation' to 'make new and interesting observations on these vast

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7 Rex Nan Kivell (1898–1977) is considered 'unquestionably one of the greatest benefactors in the history of the Library'. His collection of printed material, manuscripts, maps, pictures and objects, numbering several thousand items in total, focuses largely on Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific. The NLA has devoted a webpage to his life and collection, where we incidentally learn that he was also interested in archaeology and took part in excavations in England in the early twentieth century ([www.nla.gov.au/selected-library-collections/nan-kivell-collection](http://www.nla.gov.au/selected-library-collections/nan-kivell-collection)).

lands about which travellers and historians have said so little, and doctors nothing at all yet' (pp. 2–3). He then detailed what an 'anthropologist', or a 'doctor philosopher', ought to study. First:

to determine the physical nature of climate, to research and clarify its influence on the organic constitution of the people inhabiting this climate, as well as on the development of their moral and intellectual faculties, to study their dominant passions, researching their causes, to describe their occupations, their duties, their exercises; to detail finally, everything relating to their hygiene. (p. 3)

Second: 'everything that concerns medicine strictly speaking', including local traditional remedies.

Péron's definition of what 'anthropology' aims to do, despite its insistence on medical aspects, includes important references to a 'natural history of man' encompassing the study of both physical and moral (cultural) characteristics in relation to the 'climate'. This indicates an additional layer of intellectual influences in play with his medical and naturalist backgrounds. Indeed, while the Baudin expedition was in preparation and the community of French naturalists was effervescing about the opportunities of such a voyage, a new learned society created in Paris in December 1799 was actively using the expedition to promote its scientific project: the *Société des Observateurs de l'Homme* (Society of the Observers of Man), the 'world's first anthropological society' (Stocking 1964:134; see also Chappey 2000; Copans and Jamin 1978). Péron was not a member (yet) but his mentors Cuvier, Lamarck and Jussieu were, being well aware of what this new science aimed to achieve.

The Société's founder and perpetual secretary, the young scientific writer and educator Louis-François Jauffret, advocated a 'science of man' built on a holistic approach looking at the relations between physical and 'moral' (or cultural) aspects. From 1800 to 1804, in discourses synthesising the Société's anthropological project, Jauffret repeated the same general ideas: the aim of this new science was to enrich the 'natural history of man' by studying 'the origin and migrations of peoples' and 'the physical and moral characters which distinguish them', including through the collection of items of material culture such as 'their arms [weapons], their tools, their clothes, and other products of their industry' (Jauffret 1803, cited and translated in Stocking 1964:135). Human diversity was considered both geographically and historically. Historians and antiquarians were



among the members of the Société, alongside naturalists, medical doctors, moralists, linguists and philosophers: each of them could contribute to the anthropological edifice (Chappey 2000; Copans and Jamin 1978; Hughes 1988). In a context marked by the progressive emergence of a dominant physical anthropology and its associated burgeoning science of race, the Société and its broad vision of anthropology located itself within the heritage of a ‘natural history of man’ as defined by Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon (Chappey 2000). This perspective saw climates as the main factors responsible for the diversification of human varieties and cultures throughout the globe, from one common origin. It did not yet reduce differences in ‘physiognomy’ or ‘morality’ to intrinsic hereditary causes – that is, to hierarchically ranked races (Douglas 2008, 2009; Stocking 1964).

Almost contemporaneously to Péron’s pamphlet, a suite of other essays on ‘the science of man’, which became fundamental in the history of anthropology, were produced by members of the Société des Observateurs de l’Homme.<sup>8</sup> The Institut national, in charge of coordinating the scientific work of the expedition, commissioned instructions from various savants to guide Baudin in directing the work of his scientists (Anderson 2001; Baudin 2000; Horner 1987; Hughes 1988). Of the five instructions relating to anthropology originally written, three are still known: the *Considération sur les diverses méthodes à suivre dans l’observation des peuples sauvages* (‘Considerations on the Diverse Methods to Follow in the Observation of Savage Peoples’) by philosopher Joseph Marie Degérando, recognised as the very first ethnological field guide and remarkable in its description of what would later become known as the ‘participant observation’ method; the *Note instructive sur les recherches à faire relativement aux différences anatomiques des diverses races d’hommes* (‘Instructive Note on the Researches to be Carried out Relative to the Anatomical Differences between the Diverse Races of Men’) by Cuvier, cementing the foundations of nineteenth-century physical anthropology; and an essay now known as *Mémoire sur l’établissement d’un muséum anthropologique* (‘Essay on the Establishment of an Anthropological Museum’) by Jauffret, which detailed items that should be collected to serve the science of anthropology and deposited in the museum envisioned by the Société (all texts reprinted in Copans and Jamin 1978).

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8 Péron’s essay was read at the Medical School on 18 July 1800, and on 20 July in front of the commission for the Baudin expedition. Those of Degérando, Cuvier and Jauffret were presented to the commission in August, the month when Péron was finally selected to the fleet.



Taken together, these texts show how the multidisciplinary new science of man aimed at surveying, observing and understanding the diversity of humankind to better grasp its essence and history. Towards this aim, the prospects offered by a voyage to the South Seas, with so many different 'savage people', was exhilarating.

As other scholars have shown, Péron had also clearly been influenced by reading accounts of exploration voyages and the 'Rousseauist' vision of 'noble savages' constructed throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Douglas 2013; Jones 1992; Konishi 2013; Stocking 1964). Describing the 'high degree of physical perfection' of these 'noble savages' and relating it to their 'lack of civilisation', he marvelled at the possibility of finding, 'in the savage only', 'traces of the robust majesty of the natural man' (p. 10). Adanson's criticisms of the young anthropologist's ideas would crystallise especially around these notions. At this point, the complexities of debates around the connections that could be drawn between the history of humankind and the ways of life or physical characteristics of 'savages' become apparent.

To better grasp these subtleties, it is important to refer to the *Encyclopédie* (1751–72), the main reference for eighteenth-century French knowledge. The entry on '*espèce humaine*' ('human species') by Denis Diderot (1765:344) described different varieties of man, including a series of 'savage peoples', according to their geographical distribution.<sup>9</sup> Referring to the '*Histoire Naturelle de Buffon et d'Aubanton*', Diderot concluded: 'there hence was originally only one race of men, which having multiplied and spread over the surface of the globe, produced over time all the varieties that we have just mentioned' (Diderot 1765:348). A specific definition appears under '*Sauvages*' ('savages'), classified under 'Modern History': 'barbarous people living without laws, order, [or] religion, and who have no permanent habitation' (Jaucourt 1765a:729). Another, geographical, definition differentiated 'savage peoples and barbarous peoples', the former living in 'small dispersed nations' while 'barbarians often unite' (Jaucourt

9 In this overview (written before Bougainville's voyage) of the people of the known world, 'going from one pole to the other', Diderot referred to only two Pacific populations: the inhabitants of the Marianas or 'Ladrones Islands', where the 'men are very tall, very robust and very crude; they live only on roots, fruits and fish, and yet reach extreme old age'; and the 'Papuaans', 'as black as the *Caffres* [of South Africa], with woolly hair, a meager and ugly face', but with 'blond and white men' among them (Diderot 1765:345). The physical strength/lack of civilisation correlation found in Péron's text is present here, as well as the perplexity of finding in the same 'climate' people judged as white (usually with positive attributes) and others as black (usually with negative attributes) – a problem that Pacific Islands would continue to pose to European savants (see Di Piazza 2021; Douglas and Ballard 2008).

1765a:729). Both ideas imply the contemporary concept of a ladder of human social improvement from ‘rudeness’ to ‘civilisation’ (epitomised in Europeans) (Douglas 2014:109–113). By contrast, ‘natural man’,<sup>10</sup> going back to Charles-Louis de Montesquieu’s idea of ‘man in a state of nature’, stood as an ideological hypothesis. This was man driven only by the laws of nature, ‘before the establishment of societies’ (Jaucourt 1765b:46) – a consideration prompting studies of ‘feral children’ (*enfants sauvages*), the only ones seen to truly represent ‘man’ outside society. How close to ‘natural men’ were the various ‘savage men’ that Europeans had encountered by 1800 remained a matter of subjective opinion, as exemplified by the NLA manuscript. The answer to this question was related to the degree to which so-called ‘savage people’ could be seen to represent *ancient* states of humanity.

## Adanson and the ‘simple men’

On 20 July 1800, a 73-year-old philosopher-naturalist, elected member of the Institut national, Michel Adanson, was evaluating the candidature of a young medical student who had received the support of the Medical School’s professors and some of his own fellow naturalists, including his long-time friend Antoine-Laurent de Jussieu. By that time, Adanson was reaching the end of his life and attending his last meetings at the Institut (Nicolas 1963). Like Péron, Adanson’s long scientific career had been shaped by a voyage undertaken when he was still a young aspiring naturalist 20 years of age, spending five years in Senegal (Carteret 2012; Nicolas 1963). He returned with a remarkable natural history collection and a new vision for a universal understanding of the natural realm, based on a holistic combinatory method of classification (Carteret 2012). He built on this experience and collection all his life, assembling the largest botanical herbarium kept in the Muséum by the end of the eighteenth century, and establishing a method of classification that ‘realised the perfect synthesis between “linneism” [taxonomic classification according to Carl von Linné/Carolus Linnaeus] and “buffonism”’ (Carteret 2012:6), illustrated in his landmark botanical volume *Famille des plantes* (1763–64) (Nicolas 1963).

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10 The texts discussed here use the expression *l’homme naturel* rather than *le naturel*, which would be the equivalent to the English term ‘native’.

However, as a self-described philosopher, his ambitions were truly encyclopaedic and included the observation of man. His understanding of non-European peoples had primarily been formed during his five years in Senegal. There he had lived and made friends in traditional villages, learned Wolof, collected grammatical lists and taken notes on the local culture and social organisation (Carteret 2012; Nicolas 1963). He had returned with the realisation that 'the Negroes of Senegal are as finely made, the women as beautiful [...] as in any other countries of the world'; that, contrary to common prejudices, 'their intellect is acute, salient'; and, finally, that they too 'esteem themselves above all other colours', since 'they are of the most beautiful ebony black' (Adanson 1845:55).<sup>11</sup> His positive 'anthropological' experience and his universal system of knowledge organisation saw him profess, during a course of public lectures in 1772, the (orthodox Buffonian) idea that 'there is on the surface of the globe only one human species, experiencing diverse variations relative to the different climates' (Adanson 1845:53). However, he added:

savage man exists nowhere and the human species has never existed without a form of family [...] The state of man in pure nature is an unknown state; it is the savage living in the desert, but living in family, knowing his children, known by them, using speech and making himself understood. Such are the inhabitants of New Holland. (1845:60)

Still, the complex representations of humanity at this time<sup>12</sup> are made tangible in Adanson's earlier citation (without acknowledgement) of the notorious opinion given by the English privateer William Dampier (1697:464–470) about the 'inhabitants of New Holland'.<sup>13</sup> In his lecture on 'the History of Man', Adanson cited them as 'maybe the most miserable people in the world and those amongst humans approaching most closely to the brutes'. He based this judgement on criteria similar to those listed by the *Encyclopédie* to distinguish 'savages' from 'civilised' people, that is, the (perceived) lack of complex social structure, permanent habitation, clothes, and cultivation or agriculture (Adanson 1845:59). Adanson's

11 From his 1772 course (maybe at the Jardin du roi preceding the Muséum national d'histoire naturelle) published in 1845, see bibliography.

12 Alexander Cook, Ned Curthoys and Shino Konishi talk about how 'during the Enlightenment the concept of "humanity" is best understood not as a shared intellectual supposition [...] but as a field of conflict' (2013:3).

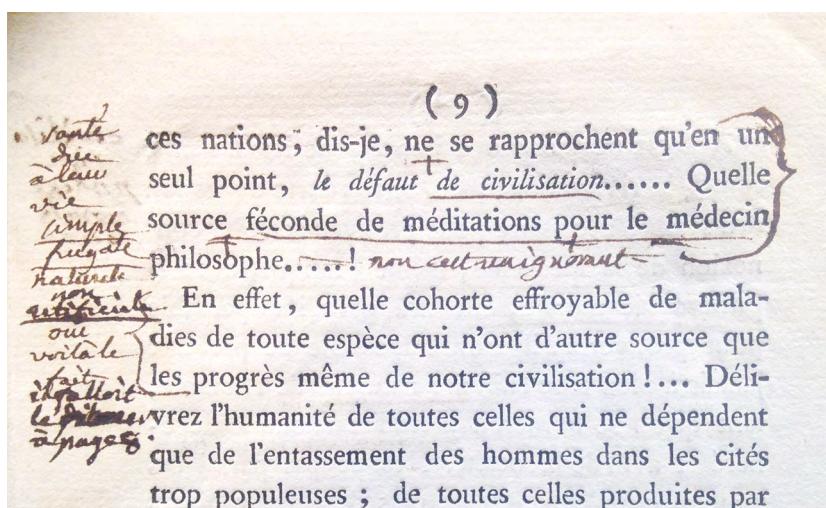
13 I am grateful to Bronwen Douglas for pointing out this fact and remarking that such borrowing of ideas was probably done through Buffon's own use of Dampier's declarations.

conclusion that ‘savage man’, like ‘natural man’, had never really existed in the history of mankind is qualified by the assumption that a simpler form of humanity was actually represented in the faraway lands dispersed in the South Seas.

With this complex and volatile intellectual context in mind, we can start to understand the dialogue inscribed on the NLA’s MS 4209 between Cuvier’s young protégé, defending the new science of anthropology in post-revolutionary France, and the old naturalist-turned-philosopher still aiming at the all-encompassing encyclopaedic knowledge of the world developed during the Enlightenment.

On the manuscript, Adanson summarised the content on the sides (for instance, on p. 3, the countries to be visited). He sometimes made corrections to the writing style (for example, correcting ‘a grand expedition’ to ‘a voyage useful to the sciences’, p. 1), and increasingly expressed his opposition to the terms and ideas relating to the notions of ‘savage’ and ‘natural’ men. Indeed, on page 3 he underlined the word ‘savage’ and changed Péron’s description ‘closer to nature than we are’ for ‘less distant from nature than we are’. Where Péron described his research question as addressing the relationship between lack of civilisation and ‘physical perfection’ in ‘savage people’, Adanson reworded this to ‘unfailing health of simple people’ (p. 7). The change from ‘savage’ to ‘simple’ is clearer a few pages down (p. 9). Péron reviewed the varieties of the different ‘savage people’ known in the world who showed remarkable physical and moral strength, demonstrating that they lived under a great diversity of environmental conditions, so that the main factor for their superior health had to be ‘the lack of civilisation’. Adanson reacted with irritation: ‘no he is ignorant’, and noted in the margin that ‘health [is] due to their simple life, frugal, natural, non-artificial’ (Figure 4.3).

When Péron continued his meditations as a ‘doctor philosopher’ by arguing that ‘the very progress of our civilisation’ was the main source for ‘the appalling accumulation of all sorts of sicknesses’ faced in Europe, Adanson exclaimed: ‘yes here is the fact that should have been said on page 8’.



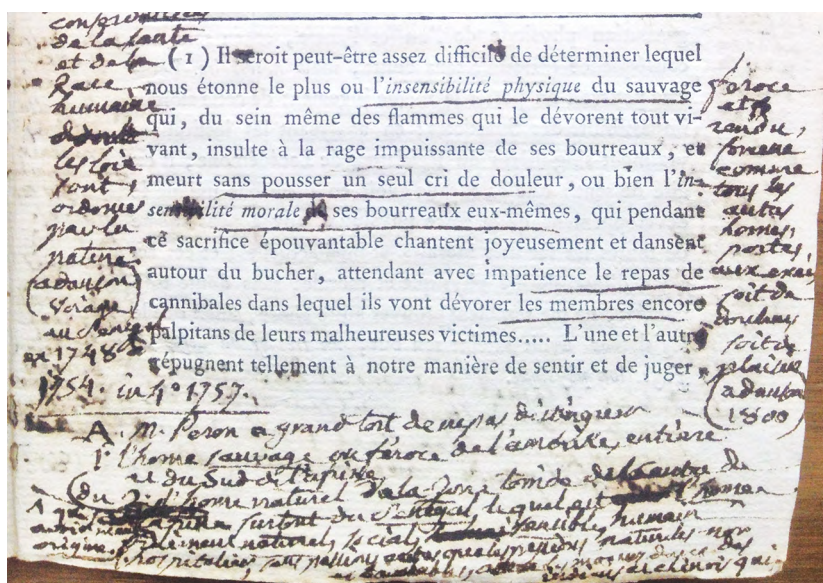
**Figure 4.3. Adanson's comments on Péron's pamphlet, p. 9: 'no he is ignorant'.**

Source: Photo by E. Dotte-Sarout, published with the authorisation of the NLA (MS 4209).

Adanson's handwriting on page 11 is frequently unreadable but it is possible to decipher his further discussion of the ideas of 'natural man' and 'savage man', specifying 'robust man' and summarising Péron's criteria for perfection (Figures 4.1 and 4.4). He commented that the insensitive 'savage men' described by Péron in a cannibal-feast fantasy were 'ferocious and rendered ferocious like any other man who is brought to excess either from pain or pleasure'. This series of remarks finished with a reference to his own volume '(Adanson 1757)', attached to the annotation: 'composition of health and of the human race, the laws of which are ordained by nature' (Figure 4.4). The reference prefaces Adanson's critique of Péron's lexical strategies, which manages only to compound the confusion surrounding a deeply subjective terminology:

M. Péron is very wrong not to distinguish 1. savage or ferocious man of America in entirety and the South of Africa from 2. natural man of the Torrid Zone of the centre of Africa, especially of Senegal, who is [...] natural, social, sensitive, human, hospitable [...]

Adanson delivered a sharp final judgement at the end of Péron's letter for his candidature to Baudin's voyage: 'This appeal aiming to force a new choice is inadmissible'.



**Figure 4.4. Adanson's comments on Péron's pamphlet, p. 11: 'M. Péron is wrong not to distinguish the savage [...] from the natural man'.**

Source: Photo by E. Dotte-Sarout, published with the authorisation of the NLA (MS 4209).

Such a harsh review did not prevent the young and ambitious 'anthropologist' from leaving for the South Seas. Péron sailed anyway, under the more orthodox and general title of 'zoologist', and lived his own field experience, travelling along the axis of theory to praxis (Douglas 2013). The contingencies of this experience and his concentration on physical measurement outlined in Cuvier's 'anthropology' instructions would, however, make him disavow the very ideas defended in his 1800 pamphlet. Péron returned with the certitude that 'savages' were living proof that lack of civilisation did not equate to the moral and physical perfection he had earlier attributed to an idealised 'natural man', but on the contrary were positioned on the lower levels of the 'grading of the social state' – to which he associated negative physical attributes (Péron 1807:446, 452, 471; see also Douglas 2009, 2014:145–148; Hughes 1988; Jones 1992; Konishi 2013). His overall grading includes several South Seas populations, most of whom he had not encountered, starting with the savages of Van Diemen's Land at the first and lowest grade, followed by those of New Holland, New Guinea, New Zealand and the 'Great Southern Ocean', then by the people of Timor and the Moluccas (Péron 1807:452).



Péron's change of view is exemplary of how, around 1800, the 'savages' of the South Seas were displaced from being men closer to the *essence* of humanity – whether as 'natural men' or 'simpler' men – to being men closer to the *lower levels* of humanity.<sup>14</sup> Such bending of perspectives around 'the natural history of man' and the place of 'savages' within it also tipped their position from essentially *timeless* members of humankind to *antiquities* of the history of humankind. In both cases, anthropological interest in the ancient past of the South Seas remained seriously limited.

## **Artefacts, the ancient past and the 'savage people' of the South Seas in 1800: Confused heritages for Pacific archaeology**

Dégérando's *Considération* includes a famous passage, frequently but unevenly cited:

The philosophical traveller sailing to the extremities of the Earth, traverses in effect the sequence of the ages: he travels into the past; each step he makes takes him one century back. Those unknown islands that he reaches are for him the cradle of human society. These people despised by our ignorant arrogance reveal themselves to him as antique and majestic monuments from the origin of times. (reprinted in Copans and Jamin 1978:131)<sup>15</sup>

In this passage, arguing for the need to undertake a serious 'study of man', Dégérando explained why the observation of 'savage people' was of the utmost importance to anthropology. Less altered by the effects of civilisation, they could enable a better observation of the 'very principles' of human existence. In particular, they could provide 'the necessary material to compose an exact grading of the diverse degrees of civilisation' or 'ages of human society'. In these populations, he argued, 'the generations having only slightly affected each other, we would in a way be transported to the first epochs of our own history'.

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14 George W. Stocking Jr (1964) famously described how Péron's writings embodied the intellectual shift from the Enlightenment's volatile ideas around the notions of humanity to the nineteenth-century rigid evolutionist frame of thought. Jean-Luc Chappey (2014) suggested that Péron's perspectives were symptomatic of the early anthropological gaze refusing the 'co-temporality' of 'savages' and 'civilised' men.

15 My translation.



As authors Rhys Jones, Bronwen Douglas and Shino Konishi have shown in relation to Oceania, these perspectives were inscribed in the intellectual context that had developed a history of human progress at least since Montesquieu. The latter had already proposed in the mid-eighteenth century a scale of social complexity based on subsistence practice modes, from the simplest hunters to complex societies centred on trade, via the stages of pastoralism and agriculture. Subsequent 'stadial' theorists in France and Scotland historicised Montesquieu's coexisting subsistence–legal modes as successive stages of human development. These conjectural histories were based on 'comparative observations' of the various peoples so far encountered by Europeans, in particular in the Americas, and not yet on any 'archaeological' scheme of thought.

By 1800, the field of archaeology was centred around monumental proofs of antiquities supported by historical texts. Classical archaeology was beginning to be recognised as an academic field morphing out of antiquarianism, while Napoleon's military and scientific campaign to Egypt (1798–99) served as the beginnings of Egyptology, soon spreading to Assyriology (Schnapp 1993, 2002; Trigger 2006). Some of these new approaches to the past – focusing not just on ancient objects or inscriptions but also on excavations and an understanding of artefacts' provenance – had sometimes been applied in parts of the New World where monumental remains were visible (e.g. Mexico, see Schnapp 2002). However, as the European scientific imagination quickly seized on the people of newly discovered regions of the world to populate its self-centred universal history of mankind, the past of these new lands remained constrained to questions of migrations and origins (see also Douglas 2008, 2009; Patou-Mathis 2011).<sup>16</sup>

Just as the 'savages' of these new regions were not afforded any ancient past that could be linked to antiquities, it remained difficult to link non-historical antiquities found in Europe with 'savages' of an ancient past, mainly because of 'the barrier which so frightened Cuvier between human and divine history' (Schnapp 2002:139). There had been early identifications of 'thunderstones' as knapped flints, hinting at the existence of ancient men living a life akin to those of the 'savages' of the Americas – an interpretation defended in France by Antoine de Jussieu (uncle of Antoine-Laurent) in 1723. In 1800 precisely, an essay written by John

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16 See also Di Piazza (2021) for a detailed discussion of questions around Oceanian and especially Polynesian origins and migrations in the early nineteenth century.

Frere and presented at the Society of Antiquaries of London in 1797 was published in their periodical *Archaeologia*. It stated that 'flint weapons' found in strata carefully documented and containing unknown bones were 'evidently weapons of war, fabricated by a people who had not the use of metals' (Frere 1800). Nevertheless, these ideas were largely ignored by contemporaries (Schnapp 2002; Trigger 2006).

It is clear that in this intellectual context, it was difficult to perceive the relationships between South Seas 'savages', Europeans and the ancient past in any other way than the two-dimensional perspective constraining the early anthropological imagination. When European scientists departed for the South Seas in 1800, the diversity of humanity through history and geography was flattened onto a single plane. The questions asked sought traceable links between these elements in relation to a history of humankind that claimed to be universal but was in effect constructed from a Eurocentric viewpoint. The third dimension, allowing for an interrogation of the ancient past of the 'savages' themselves, was missing.

This is illustrated in Jauffret's synthesis of the scientific project of the Société des Observateurs de l'Homme.<sup>17</sup> The research to be conducted by those specialised in 'history and antiquities' was associated with that assigned to voyagers studying the 'mores and traditions of the various peoples' (Jauffret 1909:479). Both were needed to advance the field of what Jauffret highlighted as 'comparative anthropology', documenting the diversity of humanity relative to 'the varieties of the human species, as well as the mores and traditions of the ancient and modern peoples' (Jauffret 1909:480, 482). In a grand world tour, the Société would explore 'the various parts of the ancient world', seeking 'the traces of humanity's greatness even in the ruins attesting to its vacuity'. It would then 'try to disentangle the origin and different migrations of the peoples' so that 'while its voyager members will reveal the different nations living today on the surface of the globe, its historian members will reveal those that once flourished there' (Jauffret 1909:480).

This aim was to be pursued by the scientific *observation* of facts (i.e. antiquities on the one side and savage people on the other) but also through the *collection* of specific items. The latter were destined to fill

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17 This essay was presented in 1801, under the title *Introduction aux Mémoires de la Société des Observateurs de l'Homme*, and was published in 1909 in the *Mémoires de la Société d'anthropologie de Paris*.

the Muséum anthropologique planned by the Société, a project revealed in a set of instructions written by Jauffret for the Baudin expedition (Copans and Jamin 1978).<sup>18</sup> In this essay, Jauffret discussed ‘which objects, which productions, which monuments [...] can be displayed in a collection uniquely dedicated to the progress and study of the science of man’ (Copans and Jamin 1978:189). The items listed and the different aspects of the social and cultural features to be studied all relate to the ethnographic present. It is tempting to relate this project to that of the Muséum des Antiques, which was formalised in 1795 but struggled to become a reality and was being abandoned by 1800. The plan for the Muséum des Antiques was based on a comparative approach aiming to display together the antiquities and exotica amassed during the Revolution from ancient royal and private collections (Daugeron 2009). Aubin-Louis Millin de Grandmaison, the first professor of archaeology in France,<sup>19</sup> had led the structuring of this new museum organised under the French Convention. In 1799, he had also become a member of the Société des Observateurs de l’Homme (Copans and Jamin 1978). The comparative ambition of the Muséum des Antiques, as stated by Millin and his co-curator André Barthélemy de Courcay, strongly echoes the ideas developed by Jauffret in his *Introduction aux Mémoires de la Société des Observateurs de l’Homme*:

Considering the remoteness of places [to be] like the remoteness of times, it [the Convention] expected us to gather everything facilitating knowledge of the manners and customs of ancient and distant nations.<sup>20</sup>

Even the material culture of the South Seas (and any other) ‘savages’ could not be related to a native history or antiquity: it was to be positioned on the two-dimensional stage of human diversity as an instrument of

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18 This essay was reproduced in Baudin’s journals (2000) (see also the English translation published in 1974 by Christine Cornell). The text has been known as *Mémoire sur l’établissement d’un muséum anthropologique*; however, the beginning of the essay is missing and the original is unknown.

19 In 1795, during the National Convention’s reorganisation of the new French Republic, Millin became simultaneously director of the Cabinet des Médailles at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, curator of the new Muséum des Antiques and professor in charge of giving lectures on ‘the science of figurative antiquity’ or ‘archaeology’ (*archéologie*). He defined *archéologie* as the science comprising the study of ‘ancient mores and traditions’, together with the study of ancient monuments – strictly speaking, the discipline of ‘antiquity’ (or *archéographie*) (Millin 1796, as cited in Lehoux 2017, my translation from French).

20 Letter to the professors of the Muséum national d’histoire naturelle, 1795, as cited in Daugeron (2009:156 note 58). My translation from French.

'*anthropologie comparée*'. Ancient objects were restricted to 'the ancient world'; in Oceania one could merely expect to find *exotica*, and the only *antiquities* to be encountered were the inhabitants themselves.

The multifaceted anthropological approach developed around 1800 in France, amplified by Baudin's voyage to the South Seas, did not survive the hegemony of physical anthropology and the science of race established during the nineteenth century. This moment in time was nonetheless important in interweaving a relationship between archaeology and Oceanians: it set in motion the altered positioning of the Indigenous people of the Pacific by European savants, from 'savage men' embodying the original essence of humanity to 'primitive men' illustrating European prehistory – always without an archaeological past of their own. Cultural anthropology only re-emerged at the end of the nineteenth century, this time contemporaneously to a structured prehistoric archaeology that would quickly spread its methods and questions from Europe to the Pacific. Again, however, it remained difficult for early Pacific archaeologists to imagine an archaeological past directly linked to people perceived as 'primitive men' (Dotte-Sarout 2017; Richards et al. 2019). The weight of a partially unrecognised intellectual heritage going back to the symbolic date of 1800 long tended to deviate the archaeological narrative of the region towards stories of migrations and origins (influenced by 'essentialized historic racial categories'<sup>21</sup>), rather than the investigation of the distinct – and still universally human – long-term history of the Indigenous people of Oceania.

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21 As expressed by Ricardo Ventura Santos and Bronwen Douglas (2020).

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