



# *ANZAAB Aspects of Book Collecting*

## **Collecting Early French voyages to Australia**

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**Background:** Although the importance of French voyages to Australian and Pacific waters has always been well understood, recent years have seen a real reappraisal of their importance and their published voyage accounts have become keenly sought by collectors. The French voyage accounts are particularly prized as rich sources of natural history, whether it is the ethnographic portraits from the Baudin voyage of 1800-1804, or the beautifully detailed folio atlases of Freycinet, Duperrey, or Dumont-Durville.

**Range:** Most collections begin with La Perouse, the great tragic figure of Pacific voyaging, best known to Australian audiences for his visit to Botany Bay a mere six days after the arrival of the First Fleet. However, there are many other important explorers in their own right, including a wealth of material relating to Cook's contemporary Bougainville, especially regarding Tahiti, the most important destination for all eighteenth-century exploration in the Pacific. Collectors may also like to concentrate on one voyage, and for an Australian audience there is a natural tendency to be most interested in d'Entrecasteaux, Baudin, and Freycinet, each of whom spent a considerable time on the Australian coast in the early years after the first European settlement. A fascinating offshoot, and a collecting field in its own right, are the many seventeenth and early-eighteenth century fanciful voyages to la Terre Australe, a genre which had a distinct influence on European imagining of the region.

**Availability:** The eighteenth-century voyage accounts of Bougainville, La Perouse and d'Entrecasteaux (who was dispatched by the French government to search for La Perouse) are beautiful sets of books, and not uncommonly seen. Copies in the best possible condition are desirable.

**Price-range:** Good sets of the eighteenth-century voyages are perhaps the most readily available, and as with all books, condition is the significant factor in terms of price. A fine set of La Perouse, to give one salient example, would fetch in the region of A\$35,000, or even more. Contemporary English-language editions are significantly cheaper. Intriguingly, it is the early- to mid-nineteenth century voyage accounts that are the rarest. Not only are these later accounts beautiful sets of books, their long and involved publishing history means that they are only infrequently seen complete. Ideal sets of these works will fetch several hundred thousand dollars. However, it is possible to build wonderful collections without necessarily going to such expense: Bougainville, early French voyages to the Pacific, and Tahiti all seem to be relatively overlooked in the current market.

**Footnote:** The standard introduction remains the excellent *French Explorers in the Pacific* by John Dunmore (2 volumes, 1965-1969, and readily available). The bibliographical nuances of these sets can be complicated. La Perouse is well served by McLaren's *Lapérouse in the Pacific*, and for voyages that visited Hawaii (Freycinet, for example), Forbes' *Hawaiian National Biography* is an excellent guide. Ferguson's *Bibliography of Australia* also remains a standard reference, and many of the books feature in the famous Hill collection of Pacific voyages.