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## How Europe began to picture Melanesians

Mervyn Duffy

We live in an age when images are captured easily and transmitted quickly. We have seen, or can easily access, images of peoples far distant from our own. It was not always so. When Europeans first encountered Melanesians travel was slow and complicated and so was image reproduction. To illustrate this process this article considers the work of Léopold Verguet, one of the earliest image-makers to present the faces of Melanesia to the peoples of Europe.

Léopold Verguet (1817-1914) was a French diocesan priest who was attracted to the idea of being a missionary. He joined the Society of Mary, a Catholic congregation which had been entrusted with the task of evangelising Western Oceania, and was part of the first missionary group to go to Solomon Islands in 1845. The mission began with disaster; their leader Bishop Jean-Baptiste Epalle was killed on Santa Isabel. Verguet lived on San Cristobal for the next year, struggling to make sense of the language and suffering repeatedly from malaria. At the end of that year he shipped out to Sydney, recuperated there and travelled to visit New Zealand. Health restored, he wished to return to his missionary task, but at a place that was not malarial. He was sent to New Caledonia and arrived there in 1847 just before that mission station was attacked and sacked and one of the missionaries, Blaise Marmonton, killed. When a French military vessel arrived a month later, the Catholic missionaries withdrew from New Caledonia and returned to Sydney by way of Vanuatu. Verguet informed his religious superiors that he did not wish to continue as a missionary and he returned to work as a diocesan priest in his home diocese of Carcassonne, France.

Verguet maintained his connections with his missionary colleagues and his interest in Solomon Islands. He published in 1854 *L'Histoire de la Première Mission Catholique au Vicariat de Mélanésie* (A History of the First Catholic Mission to the Vicariate of Melanesia), including etchings made from his sketches. This was the first major book on the Catholic Mission in the Solomons, written and illustrated by an eyewitness. The engravings were of such interest that they were also published separately in a cheaper edition in the same year as *Album de Mélanésie Océanie Occidentale* (Album of Melanesia, Western Oceania). Almost thirty years later, in 1883 he published a small book entitled *Gran Archipel des Iles Salomon son Étendue sa Fertilité* (Great Archipelago of the Solomon Islands, their Extent and Fertility). Two years after he wrote a forty-page article for the *Revue d'Ethnographie* entitled "Arossi ou San-Christoval et ses habitants" (Arossi or San Cristobal and its inhabitants) both with copious illustrations. That article is considered the first sociological article published about Solomon Islands. At the age of 68 Verguet was still reflecting on his experience of living among the peoples of Solomon Islands forty years previously.

Verguet applied his artistic and practical skills to the new science of photography and became one of the pioneer photographers of France, recording the sights of the Carcassonne. He died in 1914 at the age of 97. However it is Verguet's hand-drawn images of Solomon Islanders that is of concern to this article. As the earliest such images, subsequently widely diffused through the medium of engraving, they helped establish and define for Europeans what Melaneseans looked like.

In 1832 the French explorer Dumont D'Urville categorised the peoples of the Pacific as belonging to four racial groups: Melaneseans, Micronesians, Polynesians and Malaysians.<sup>1</sup> These terms became the identifiers used for geographical areas. One organisation that used this terminology in its geographical sense was the Catholic Church; in 1844 the congregation of *Propaganda Fide*, the headquarters of Catholic missionary work, created the vicariates of Melanesia and Micronesia, ordained Jean-Baptiste Epalle as a bishop and appointed him as the first vicar apostolic of Melanesia and Micronesia. On 2 February 1845 he, and thirteen other French Marist Missionaries, set sail from London to go to Melanesia. This Vicariate included the island of New Guinea, the islands to the west of what is now West Papua, the Bismarck Archipelago, Bougainville, and the Solomon Islands.<sup>2</sup>

The group of missionaries accompanying the bishop comprised seven priests and six brothers. Epalle was an experienced missionary, having spent four years working with Bishop Pompallier in New Zealand. There he had worked with the Maori, a Polynesian people, dramatically different from the Melaneseans whom he was to encounter. One of the priests, Xavier Montrouzier, was a Sorbonne-trained naturalist and he had been asked to provide scientific reports on the islands he visited.<sup>3</sup> Another, Léopold Verguet, was a talented artist who set out equipped with art-supplies, including a sturdily bound sketchbook. The Superior General of the Marists instructed Verguet to record what he saw and to send back images to Lyons. Before leaving Paris, Verguet and Montrouzier had been enrolled in the *Société orientale* as 'corresponding members'. The Oriental Society was particularly interested in the Orient, Algeria and the French Colonies, but also discussed and published material on 'the geography, the history, the literature, the sciences, the religions, the mores and the customs of the peoples of diverse regions.' The Oriental Society operated in a similar fashion to the later American organisation: the *National Geographic Society*. They sought high-quality information about distant countries and published it in a form accessible to interested members of the general public.

The world was much 'larger' and more mysterious then; the 1840s were the end of the era of sailing ships, and travel-times were significantly longer than today. The wind was the motive force of the vessels which took this missionary band to their destination. Their voyage from London to Cape Town via Madeira took them 90 days at sea. It was a further 45 days to Sydney. There they chartered a 140 ton schooner, the *Marian Watson*, to take them 'to the South Sea Islands'. The islands of the Solomons were an enormously expensive place for

Europeans to reach; it required a well-resourced expedition with significant financial backing. The cost of the charter was 110 pounds sterling (2750 francs) per month plus the daily food costs and the expense of the ship's return to Sydney.<sup>4</sup> They sailed to New Caledonia, a voyage of twenty-five days and then to the Solomons (8 days). They cruised around Solomon Islands visiting Makira, Guadalcanal, Santa Isabel, and circumnavigating Malaita.

Canoes came out to their vessel from Guadalcanal, and Verguet made a pencil sketch of a face that he entitled 'Guadalcanar' – it is a handsome profile of a man with his hair pulled back and up by a band, he wears a necklace of shells, his visible earlobe is stretched around a ring of a couple of inches in diameter and he is wearing decorated pins in his nose. It is evident from Verguet's letters that he used his art as a means of communication. His subjects were usually delighted to see their portrayal and his sketches were a way of enquiring about and recording the vocabulary associated with the items he had drawn. Alongside the decorated pin he has pencilled a word that looks to be 'sumaoio' – presumably his transcription of the answer received when he pointed at the pin and looked quizzical. He intended to use his art to show Melanesia to Europe, but he also endeavoured to use art to show Europe to Melanesians. As he wrote to his father: 'Drawing is not foreign to these island-people [...]. They go into ecstasies when we show them engravings from our homelands. They express their admiration by jumping up and crying out.'<sup>5</sup>

The missionaries first made contact on land on Santa Isabel in the bay that D'Urville had named Thousand Ships Bay. They anchored in the bay and sent out a shore party that would return to the *Marian Watson* in the evening. On the third day their overtures were met with violence, several people were wounded, Bishop Epalle fatally so. Verguet perceived this as a martyrdom; Epalle had died for the cause of the gospel. So Verguet recorded the details of Epalle's wounds, the death bed, and the burial, with an eye towards future veneration of his remains. After burying their leader, the missionaries went back to Makira and started their mission in the north of that island.

Violence was to prove a constant threat to the activities of the missionaries. If they established good relations with the people of one area then the enemies of that people would consider them to be enemies as well. If any European transgressed, then any and all would be liable to retribution. Verguet recounts how one of the sailors 'took too much liberty' with the wife of a man called Orimanu. Orimanu wished to avenge the wrong done, but as the sailors usually went in armed groups, he lay in ambush and speared a missionary, Montrouzier, as he went to get water.<sup>6</sup> Montrouzier survived but required months of recuperation. In 1847 a group of three of the missionaries who travelled outside their initial contact area to Wango, a mountain on the north coast of Makira Bay, were killed and eaten.<sup>7</sup>

Tropical diseases took their toll; all the missionaries suffered from malaria. Within three years of their arrival on Makira the Europeans had two of their

number die of 'fever and exhaustion'. The cost of contact between Europeans and Melanesians was also counted in the lives lost, directly and indirectly as a consequence of those encounters. Given the virulence of contact diseases,<sup>8</sup> and the willingness of the Europeans to use firearms, more Melanesians than Europeans would have suffered ill-effects from these early encounters.

Verguet lived for a year on Makira among the Arosi<sup>9</sup> people of Makira Bay. According to his letters the Oné, Toro, Taroua, and Apahé were the tribes in this territory. Verguet, whom they called 'Perké', filled his sketchbook with maps, drawings of plants, birds, objects and people. At the start they are labelled by the island they come from, like the 'Guadalcanar', but later by their name and tribal connection: 'Onéataré (Arossian)'; 'Taou and Souiessi of the tribe of Loucou from the northern part of San Cristobal'; 'Hanga and Ariuvia of the tribe of Wasinparéo of Port St Marie on San Cristobal'. Subjects may have been chosen initially because of features that appeared striking or unusual to a European. Later they are being drawn because of their importance in their own culture, as for example, when Verguet draws Mahémara chief of the Oné.

Language difference is a barrier in relating to people of another culture. Verguet's sketchbook has many vocabulary lists as well as images. Learning the language in a first-contact situation, without translators present, is a major feat. Verguet's compatriot Montrouzier complained in one letter: 'You cannot imagine how difficult it is to extract words from the savages once one has used up those that apply to material objects. So although we have been here nearly two years, we have not yet been able to learn the word for "love"'.<sup>10</sup>

The juxtaposition of noun lists and pencil sketches indicates that Verguet's art played a role in his learning of the local language. His skill in drawing interested his subjects when he could not sustain a conversation, and facilitated his enquiries about vocabulary. For a missionary to accomplish his task he must communicate with the people he is sent to. Verguet used his art as an instrument of communication with the Arosi and as a tool for learning their language.

Verguet despatched collections of images back to France. The letter he sent to the Superior General of the Marists with one such collection has survived, though the set of pictures have been dispersed and lost. The letter reveals something of Verguet's interests and choice of subject matter:

My very reverend Father, I take the liberty of sending you a little roll of drawings representing several aspects of our trip. My colleagues, in their letters, will doubtless speak to you at length about the subjects of these drawings. Here, I will only give you a short explanation, numbering them in sequence, sheet by sheet.

No. 1. View of the coast of New Caledonia. I took it from Port Balade about a league from the house of Bishop Douarre. You can see that house on a slight elevation at the foot of high mountains. A little to the right you will notice on the shore between some coconut trees three native cabins. On the right of the picture there is a boat of that country. It is made of two pirogues held together by planks.

No. 2. A close-up view of Bishop Douarre's house. A: the missionaries' house; B:

stables; C: site of the chapel; D: cabin sold to the bishop by the natives; that is where we slept during our stay in New Caledonia; E: garden; F-G: river and limit of the property. The house is surrounded by pastures. The river is navigable enough for a canoe to get up to the garden. There are great advantages to such a position.

No. 3. Approximate map of Port Saint Jean-Baptiste and of Port Sainte Marie. The former was named in memory of Bishop Epalle. The map is detailed enough to dispense me from further information. I put in a corner of the drawing a map of San Cristobal Island, called Arosi by the natives. At the north-west point of the island there are two bays (ab) (bc) which are interesting because of the good dispositions of the natives. The first (ab) has a ship anchorage which is not very good. The unloading of a ship is very difficult because of the way the raging sea breaks on the shore. Midway along the bay is the Marou tribe, next to whose village is a large river. Behind the village there is enough arable land for an establishment of the missionaries. The inhabitants all along the coast (a,b,c) until Port Saint Marie are friendly toward the Europeans and they speak the same language. At Port Saint Jean-Baptiste the language is different. The natives from the coast are at war with those from the interior. The coast (bc) is full of reefs and does not have any kind of port for ships.

No. 4 The bishop, after visiting Port Saint Jean-Baptiste, said he intended to send a map to Commander Duperrey. In order to make it easy for you to comply with the wishes of His Lordship that I am including another map with the one I am sending you.

No. 5 Portrait of Mahia, chief de the Maro tribe, whom we have found to be well disposed toward us.

No. 6 Young warrior from San Cristobal. On his forehead he has a crown of seashells. His nose is pierced by a mother-of-pearl ring. The earrings and the necklace are made with dogs' teeth.

Nos. 7 and 8 Heads of some inhabitants of Guadalcanal and Isabel. The ends of their hair are whitened with lime-wash.

The following drawings, very reverend Father, portray a very sorrowful subject, the death and burial of bishop Epalle. I was afraid at first of grieving you by sending you these sketches, but I thought that you would overcome your sorrow so that you might know in detail all the circumstances of such an unexpected yet glorious death.

No. 9 The Bay of the Martyr, which our captain [Captain Richards] calls the Bay of the Massacre, has a good port. I put a hatchet in the place where the bishop was struck down. In front of the Opi tribe, there is a bay where a ship can be anchored. The peak E serves as an alignment to locate the bishop's burial place. At the foot of this mountain there is a small bay where a boat can land without danger, an abundant stream, a good terrain, and a people who seemed to Father Paget and me to have peaceful dispositions. This is the Alitumbala tribe.

No. 10 Scene of the fatal incident of 16 December 1845 when bishop Epalle was killed. The picture is sufficiently self-explanatory. I should only point out that I should have put many more natives in the background of the picture. When the action began, there were about fifty natives; toward the end, the number had doubled; they kept coming out of the woods.

No. 11 The wounds of bishop Epalle and those who accompanied him. The two wounds (ab) (cd) should lean a little more toward the right, especially the wound (cd). This is what Doctor Guise observed. The doctor was born in the English colonies in India. His father was English and his mother Indian. In New Caledonia he asked to remain in the mission with us, but since the bishop's death he changed his mind. He is a Catholic.

No. 12 The night before the bishop's burial. I was mistaken when I colored the cassock violet. It should be black with red buttons. The shoes are black. His bishop's ring was forgotten.

No. 13 The funeral convoy is moving toward Astrolabe Harbor. The bier is in the second canoe; it is in red cedar wood; it was not covered with a shroud so as not to attract the attention of the natives.

No. 14 Drawings which may be used to find the burial place of bishop Epalle; they are well enough explained in the picture.

No. 15 A few faces in color of natives of New Caledonia and the Solomons. In the background of the page I have drawn a few pirogues.

No. 16. View of several houses of the Oné tribe.

1. Palace of the chief. The roof is held up by 12 carved columns. They are statues embellished with all the natives' ornaments. On the back of the sheet I have drawn the head of one of these statues. There you can see quite well the kind of tattoo adopted by our natives.

2. Small house held up on stakes.

3. The most ordinary form of houses in the Oné style.

No. 17 One of the statues of the palace of Mahemara with the names of the decorations with which it is adorned.

No. 18 Copy of a drawing which I found on a beam in the palace of the chief. This design, roughly executed, represents a fight between those of the Oné tribe and the inhabitants of the mountains; the latter are called Toro. They were conquered, and those of Oné perpetuated the memory of their victory by representing it in the ornamentation of the royal palace.

No. 19 View of the establishment of the missionaries of the Society of Mary at Port Saint Marie on the island of San Cristobal (called Arosi by the natives).

No. 20. Portrait of the chief of the Oné tribe, the one closest to the mission station.<sup>11</sup>

The subject matter of the collection displays the interests and the experiences of the missionaries. Much of it is related to the violent death of their leader, Epalle. Numbers 16, 17 & 18, reveal the interest shown by Verguet in the local art. There is a real concern for mapping and describing the landscape. One portrait, number 6, is styled as the portrait of 'a warrior' – Melanesians are presented as a culture familiar with conflict. There are several portraits of named individuals and, number 15, a set of 'faces of natives'. Verguet is attempting to bring his viewers and readers face-to-face with people of Melanesia. While this collection of pictures has not survived, the sketchbook which Verguet had with him, and which he used as the basis for his artworks, is still extant in the Society of Mary General Archive in Rome.

After his year living on Makira, Verguet returned to Sydney to recuperate from malaria and exhaustion. On the ship travelling to Sydney he copied drawings made by a member of the crew, so, even though he had not visited the islands concerned, he had sketches and watercolours of Fijians and people from the Marquesas. In 1847 he had another traumatic experience on New Caledonia when the mission there was attacked. This precipitated his decision no longer to work as a missionary. He returned to France, left the religious congregation running the Oceania Mission (the Society of Mary) and re-commenced ordinary priestly ministry in his hometown of Carcassonne. He took his sketchbook and other sketches and watercolours with him.



Once a work of art exists it can be copied. Verguet demonstrated this by copying the images of others on board ship (and clearly labelling them as such). An artist can also copy his own work, and Verguet did this to respond to the fascination that his portraits evoked.



Figure 1: Two Women of Fiji

The page with the watercolour portraits of two Fijian women is from Verguet's sketchbook. He copied them from someone else's depiction in 1847 while on board a French naval vessel, the 24-gun corvette *La Brillante*. The ability to draw was a valued and encouraged military skill. At some time after that, while back in France, he re-copied the left-hand figure from his own copy. The pencilled grid he used for guidance is still visible. Hence, when an artist returns from parts foreign, he can enhance his sketches, colourize them, copy his own work, or even put new material on paper working from memory. The distance of the image from the subject can be further increased when one artist copies another. At each of these stages there is the possibility of interpretation, subtle changes to the representation which say more of the artist than they do of the subject. Note, for example, the garment apparently falling off the right-hand figure. It looks unlikely to be authentic to Fiji of 1847 and is possibly from the original artist's imagination. This was a popular type of image; as Martin Sutton writes:

The charm of the women became legendary back home, even to those who could not read, through the sensational tales spread by the returning sailors. Even the rather conservative artist on board Cook's final voyage, John Webber, painted a fabulous erotic portrait of a Polynesian girl, Poedua, with her sarong pulled down to expose her breasts in friendly native greeting. Images like this excited the crowds at the major galleries and were reproduced endlessly<sup>12</sup>

Verguet's original sketches and watercolours were seen by a limited audience. Even with his making individual copies the impact on Europe would have been slight. Mechanical reproduction, engraving - an expensive process - offered a way around this barrier. Verguet wrote an account of his experiences in the Pacific, and published, in 1854 *L'histoire de la première mission catholique au vicariat de Mélanésie*, including "20 engraved designs drawn from nature". This was the first major book on Christian Mission in the Solomons, written and illustrated by an eyewitness. The engravings were of such popularity that they were published separately in a cheaper edition in the same year as *Album de Mélanésie, Océanie occidentale*.<sup>13</sup> So, for most Europeans, their first encounter with Melanesians would have been through the medium of engraving.

Verguet's twenty engravings were:

1. Belé a native of New Holland (Australian Aborigine)
2. Monument erected in honour of the French Explorer La Pérouse at Botany Bay
3. Chimanaé, native of the Isle of Pines
4. Tabbi or Talébi - a New Caledonian house
5. Native of Guadalcanal - an engraving from the earlier sketch.
6. Bishop Epalle on his deathbed
7. Sourimahé, native of Arosi
8. Raronia steering her canoe
9. Onéatare
10. Mahémara, chief of the Oné
11. Kapériéré, indigenous of New Zealand
12. A woman of New Zealand (with a baby)
13. Negat Louké, woman of New Caledonia
14. Mountains of New Caledonia, at Poebo
15. Aliki-Goa, Chief of the tribe of Goa, New Caledonia
16. Kékématé, native of Arosi
17. Native of the island of Isabel
18. House of Exile of Emperor Napoleon I on St Helena
19. Tomb of the Emperor Napoleon on St Helena
20. Map and sketch for locating the grave of Bishop Epalle

A dozen of these are images of the Vicariate of Melanesia (3, 5-10, 16, 17, 20) and a further four from New Caledonia whose indigenous people are Melanesian (4, 13-15). Verguet has included places he visited on the way to and from Solomon Islands, hence Australia, New Caledonia, New Zealand and St Helena.

The interests of a French reading public are being catered to by two images from Verguet's voyage relating to Napoleon. Even when it is an image from

Melanesia it may reflect the interests of the missionaries rather than those of the inhabitants – hence the death and burial place of Bishop Epalle feature prominently (6, 20).

These images are labelled as being '*après nature*' ('from nature') meaning they are the record of a real scene, not an imagined one or a copy of another artwork and that phrase is included in the caption of each of the printed images above except for the ones involving Bishop Epalle. Despite this there has been another step between the reality in Melanesia and the image on the paper, namely the art of the engraver. The engraver is working from Verguet's sketch but has to adapt to his medium, including having to mirror the image to ensure it will print the same way as the original. The engraver has only thin and thick lines to represent shadings, none of the gradations that a pencil sketch can capture; printer's ink is uniformly black. Some of the engravings are signed "Dumont" and there is a portrait of Verguet at the beginning signed "Dumont JS". Monsieur Dumont is a second artist involved in the process of presenting these images of Melanesia and his skills and perceptions influence the final print.



Figure 2. "Guadalcanar", Sketch by Verguet



Figure 3. Printed Engraving by Dumont

Putting the original and the print side by side makes the secondary influences apparent. Tatooing (or scarification) has been added. This seems to be based on a drawing by Verguet of a man called Hanga from San Cristobal but was not worn by the man from Guadalcanal. In the sketch his hair is tied back tightly and bleached at the ends. In the print he appears bald, apart from the (now longer) solidly black plume of hair at the back of the head. The print has advanced the lower part of the face and added prominent eyebrow ridges giving a more 'primitive' appearance to the shape of the head.

The eyes are smaller, the earlobes are longer, the upper lip is broader, the pins are thicker and poke through the nose. The right hand image has become more 'savage'.

This suggests a European prejudice that imagines Melanesians as more primitive and more savage than the reality. Even assuming that the original portrayals were done with photographic accuracy there has been a clear distortion of the engravings. Europeans were not being presented with accurate images of Melanesians.

There is another factor that distorts in a different direction, which is the romantic notion prevalent in Europe of idyllic South Sea Islands, which has been called "*romantisme tropical*"<sup>14</sup> or "Pacific Romanticism."<sup>15</sup> French accounts of the discovery of Tahiti in 1768 had described it as a paradise on earth. The French explorer Louis Antoine de Bougainville (1729-1811) wrote in his journal as he departed Tahiti in April 1768 "Farewell happy and wise people, may you always remain what you are. I shall never recall without a sense of delight the brief time I spent among you and, as long as I live, I shall celebrate the happy island of Cythera. It is the new Utopia." In France there was subsequent to these reports being published a dream of heavenly Pacific islands populated by beautiful and sexually available women. I contend that the morphing of the image below shows that fantasy being extended to include Melanesia.



Figure 4. Raronia in Verguet's Sketchbook



Figure 5. Engraving of Raronia steering her canoe

When Verguet the missionary drew this sketch he seems to have been more interested in the vocabulary related to the canoe than to its surroundings. The engraver has reduced the size of the vessel, laden it with palm plants and transported it to a fantastical seascape of little islets, one of which has a solidly constructed house upon it. Raronia has acquired armbands and gained weight. Her direct stare has become a coy, downcast glance. It is significant that this fantasy is constructed around a female subject.

A Melanesian male was presented as brutish, a Melanesian female as seductive.



Figure 6: Mahemara, Chief of the Oné



MAHEMARA,  
Sas-lai d'Oné.

Figure 7: Engraving from Figure 6

A final comparison can be made where the engraver was more accurate, despite neglecting to reverse the image. In this picture we see, and Europe saw, a chief of San Cristobal sitting in a posture that was comfortable for him and staring directly and challengingly at the artist. Verguet has chosen his boundaries of the image to avoid offending the modesty of European viewers. The wisdom and authority of Mahèmara, perhaps more obvious in the sketch,

comes through in the print. This is a strong and serious individual. When Europeans looked at this publication and wondered about the people from Melanesia, this print would have given them pause for thought as they, as it were, 'met his gaze' and encountered the dignity of Mahèmara.



Figure 8: Melanesian type

*L'histoire de la première mission* and the *Album de Mélanésie Océanie occidentale* with the engravings above were published in 1854, but that was not the end of the circulation of those pictures. Almost thirty years later Verguet Figure published a small volume entitled *Gran Archipel*

*des Iles Salomon son Étendue sa Fertilité*, which had numerous engravings, including the frugal re-use of the 'Guadalcanar', 'Raronia in her canoe', and 'Negat Louké: woman of New Caledonia', although she is retitled as "*Type de mélanésienne*" – example of a Melanesian woman. By omitting her place of origin, Verguet is leading his readers Type to think of her as a Solomon Islander.

Two years later, in 1885, Verguet published a forty-page article in the prestigious *Revue d'ethnographie* entitled "Arossi ou San-Christoval et ses habitants". A different set of illustrations was used, some of them based on drawings in his sketchbook which had been made thirty years earlier, but this time the captions had the phrase "D'après un croquis de M. Verguet" – after a sketch by Verguet, rather than "after nature". In the context of a scientific journal Verguet acknowledges that the engravings are at least two steps removed from nature.

What the example of Léopold Verguet and the images from his sketchbook show us is that the production and transmission of images in the nineteenth century was fraught with difficulties. In Melanesia the difficulties were distance, language, expense, violence and disease. In Europe the barriers to accurate perception were the expense of engraving, the loss of colour and tone, copyist errors, and, more significantly, the distortions introduced by prejudice or commercial interest. The romanticism of the period meant that people of the tropics and the islands of the Pacific were expected to be either primitive brutes or innocent nymphs.

Increasing contact, easier travel, photography, documentaries, trade and tourism were to erode these barriers, but first impressions are often remarkably enduring.

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<sup>1</sup> D'Urville, J.-S. B.-C. S. D., Ollivier, I., de Biran, A., & Clark, G. (2003). On the Islands of the Great Ocean. *The Journal of Pacific History*, 38(2), 163–174. doi:10.1080/0022334032000120512.

<sup>2</sup> For a more detailed exposition of the boundaries of the Vicariate of Melanesia, Ralph Wiltgen, *The Founding of the Roman Catholic Church in Oceania 1825 to 1850*, (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1979), 290.

<sup>3</sup> Laracy, HM. Xavier Montrouzier: a missionary in Melanesia. In Davidson, J.W. and D. Scarr (eds), *Pacific Islands Portraits*. (Canberra, Australian National University Press, 1973), 127–145.

<sup>4</sup> This would have amounted to the equivalent in modern terms of over US\$100,000.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Girard, ed., *Lettres reçues d'Océanie par l'administration générale des pères maristes pendant le généralat de Jean-Claude Colin, Textes revus, corrigés et ajoutés, 1836 – 1854*, (Paris, Karthala – Rome, Société de Marie, ten volumes, 2009 and 2010), vol 4, 336, doc. 518, 24 June and 24 July 1846, Verguet, Arossi (San Cristobal), to his father. English translation by Charles Girard.

<sup>6</sup> Girard, *Lettres reçues d'Océanie*, vol. 4, 59, doc. 457, 5 January – 28 February 1846, Verguet, San Cristobal, to Colin.

<sup>7</sup> Girard, *Lettres reçues d'Océanie*, vol 5, doc. 674, 13 October 1847, Xavier Montrouzier to his brother. "The Reverend Fathers Paget and Jacquet accompanied by our dear Brother Hyacinthe, left Makira on 20th April about 5 o'clock in the morning and headed towards the village of the Toro, whose evil plans they were not aware of and on whose territory they had been well received not long before. At 9 o'clock I saw a native pass in front of the house shouting out in fear: Matématé, matématé! And soon after I learned that the two Fathers and the Brother had actually been massacred by the mountain dwellers." Hugh Laracy, Xavier Montrouzier in J.W. Davidson and D. Scarr, ed., *Pacific Island Portraits*, (Wellington / Auckland: AH & AW Reed, 1973), 133.

<sup>8</sup> Venereal and epidemic diseases that did not exist in Melanesia prior to European contact. See Anne Salmond. *Bligh: William Bligh in the South Seas* (Auckland: Penguin, 2011), 69, 162, 195, 352.

<sup>9</sup> Arosi is the modern spelling of the name given to the language and the people. Verguet usually wrote it as "Arossi" and it appears in that form in some direct citations from him in this article.

<sup>10</sup> Girard, *Lettres reçues d'Océanie*, vol. 5, 381, doc. 644, 19 July 1847 - Xavier Montrouzier to his brother, Henri Montrouzier, SJ. English translation by Mary Williamson.

<sup>11</sup> Girard, *Lettres reçues d'Océanie*, vol. 4, 59, doc. 457, 5 January – 28 February 1846, Verguet to Colin. English translation by Charles Girard.

<sup>12</sup> Martin Sutton, *Strangers in Paradise: Adventurers and Dreamers in the South Seas* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1995), 13.

<sup>13</sup> This work with all of the images can be seen on Google Books at <http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=HA5PAQAAIAAJ>.

<sup>14</sup> Araujo, A. L. (2004). *Romantisme tropical: Les illustrations de la relation de voyage "Deux Années au Brésil" (1862) de François-Auguste Biard (1799–1882)*. (Order No. NQ92561, Université Laval (Canada)). ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/305085584?accountid=9851>. (305085584).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Alexander Bolyanatz, *Pacific Romanticism: Tahiti and the European Imagination*, (Westport: Praeger, 2004). Anne Salmond, *Aphrodite's Island: The European Discovery of Tahiti* (Auckland: Penguin NZ / Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).