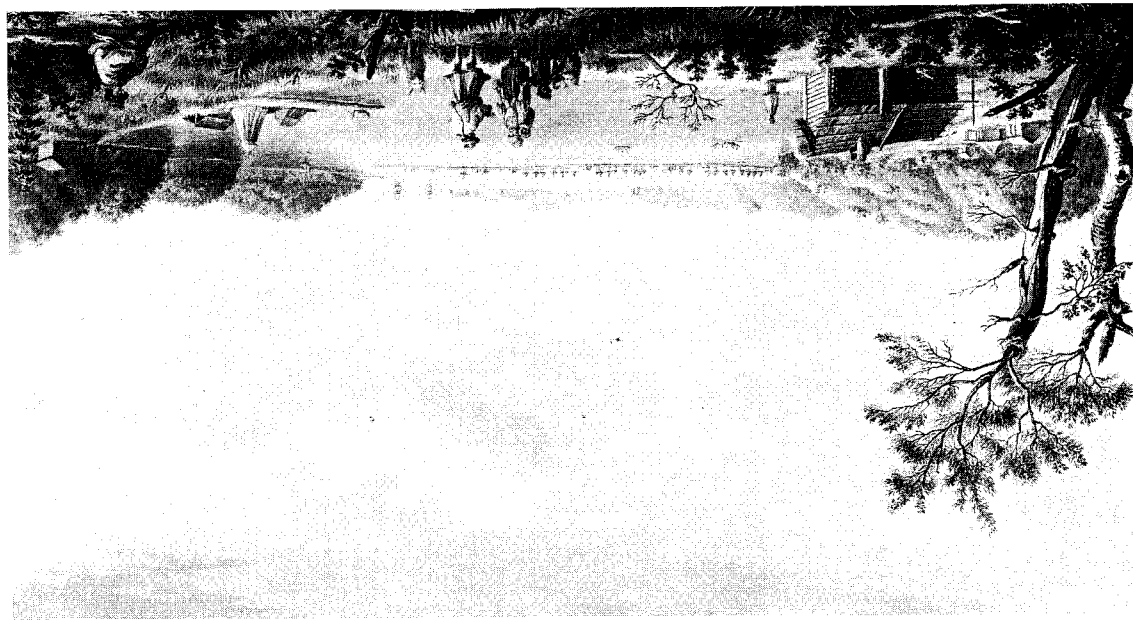


The Journal
of
Jean-François de Galaup de la Pérouse
1785-1788

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View of Petropavlovsk, Kamchatka, by Blondela. SHM 352:23.

others, our two longboats being grounded. Detailed account of this event &c.

Russia does not owe its discoveries and settlements on the coasts of eastern Tartary and of the Kamchatka peninsula to navigators. The Russians, as eager for furs as the Spanish were for gold and silver, have for many years undertaken the most lengthy and arduous of overland voyages to obtain the skins of sables, foxes and sea-otters, and being more soldiers than hunters it seemed more convenient to them to subjugate the natives and impose a tribute on them than to share the exertions of the hunt with them. They did not discover the Kamchatka peninsula until the end of the last century¹ and their first expedition against the freedom of these unfortunate inhabitants dates from 1696. Russian authority was completely and fully recognised throughout the peninsula only in 1711. All the inhabitants then accepted the conditions of a fairly light tribute which is hardly enough to meet the sovereign's costs, three hundred sables, two hundred grey or red foxes, a few sea otter skins, these represent the Crown's income in this part of Asia where it maintains about four hundred soldiers, all Cossacks or Siberians, with a very small number of officers as commanders in the different districts.

The Russian Crown has changed the form of government of this peninsula on several occasions, the one the English found in force

¹ Fedor Alexeev left with Semen Dehnev from the mouth of the Kolyma River in 1648, passed through Bering Strait and reached the coast of Kamchatka. This discovery remained largely unknown until the eighteenth century, but the name Kamchatka appeared for the first time on a 1673 map. R.H. Fisher, *Bering's Voyages: Whither and Why*, Seattle, 1977, p. 28. Luka Morozko visited the peninsula in 1696, but the first real voyage of exploration was Vladimir Atlasov's in 1697-9. His report on the fur trade and the arrival in Moscow of a Japanese he had met in Kamchatka attracted the attention of Emperor Peter I who, however, lacked the resources needed for investigating such a distant part of the world. Atlasov was provided with a few guns and an escort and set off for Kamchatka in 1707, but he was murdered by his Cossacks in 1711. Contrary to La Pérouse's opinion, Russian penetration and colonisation attempts were marked by a series of wars, especially between 1714 and 1716, and a general uprising by Kamchadals in 1731. Okhotsk was the most secure of the scattered Russian outposts, and it was from there that the *Okhota*, the only seaworthy vessel the authorities disposed of, inaugurated a direct sea route to Bolschetsk. In 1727 Bering crossed the peninsula from the west coast to the east to build the *St Gabriel* at Nizhne-Kamchatsk in which he set off in the spring of 1728 on his first voyage of exploration. As for Petropavlovsk, it was not founded until 1740.

CHAPTER XIX

Brief details on Kamischatka. Landmarks for safe entry and departure from Awaska Bay. Very strong westerly winds defeat the plan I had made to explore and survey the Kurils as far as Marikan Island. We sight land birds and ducks in 38 degrees of latitude and 146° 30' of longitude. Sailor fallen overboard from the Astrolabe whom we were unable to save &c. We cover a distance of three hundred leagues on the parallel of 37° 30' seeking a land which some claim was found by the Spanish in this latitude in 1620. We come upon several signs of land but without sighting any land although the horizon was quite clear and we spent the night with greatly reduced canvas. The sudden transition from cold to heat affects our health, all the more so because we were totally without fresh food to maintain us in a good state of health, and we find fewer fish in the sea than during our crossing from Concepcion to the Sandwich Islands where we followed much the same route from south to north. We cross the Line for the third time since our departure, and soon find in the southern hemisphere north-westerly winds which cause the sea to become very rough and did not leave us until we were in the 12 degrees near the Navigators Islands which we saw on 6 December after passing over the position assigned to Biron's Dangerous Islands whose longitude must be wrongly determined. We set our course to pass in the strait formed by Opouna Island and Léoné. Numerous canoes come out to us and we are able to barter with them. We proceed on our route towards the island of Maouna fifteen leagues west of the first of the Navigators; description of this island where we anchor on 9 December; we obtain water and visit these people in their villages where we buy a very large quantity of fruit and pigs; practices, customs, skills and practices of these islanders. The swell is so bad in this anchorage that we are forced to weigh anchor on the 10th. We find that our cable had already been half cut away on the bottom. We spend the night of the tenth to eleventh on various tacks, and Mr de L'angle sets off on the 11th at midday with 4 armed longboats to fetch water in a bay he had seen the day before, he is murdered there with 11

in 1778 only lasted until 1784. At that time Kamchatka became a province of the Okost administration which is itself a dependency of the sovereign Court or tribunal of Irkutsk.

The Bolkerets ostroc, formerly capital of Kamtschatka where Major Beem lived when the English arrived, is today simply under the command of a sergeant named Martinof. Mr Kaborof, a sub-lieutenant, commanded at St Peter and St Paul, Major Eleonof at Nisnei Kamtschatka or in the Lower Kamtschatka ostroc, and finally Verssesay or Higher Kamtschatka was under the orders of Sergeant Mamayef. These various commanders are not answerable to each other but each one directly to the governor of Okots who has appointed an officer as inspector with the rank of major to have particular charge of the Kamchadals and no doubt to protect them from possible vexations by the military government.

This preliminary sketch would give a very inadequate picture of the advantages which Russia obtains from its east Asian colonies if the reader did not know that navigations to the east of Kamtschatka towards the coasts of America followed voyages by land; those of Berings and Ticricow are known throughout Europe, but after these names, made famous by the renown gained by their expeditions and the misfortunes that ensued, there were others which added to Russia's dominions the Aleutian Islands, the groups further to the east known under the name of Onolaska and all the islands to the south of the Olaska peninsula. Finally Captain Cook's last campaign led to expeditions further to the east, but I learned in Kamtschatka that until now the natives have refused to pay the tribute or even to trade with the Russians who unfortunately were careless enough to let them know that they planned to subjugate them, and one knows how proud and jealous of their own freedom the Americans are.¹

The Russian Crown spends nothing to extend its dominions; merchants order expeditions to be fitted out at Okots where at enormous cost they build small vessels 45 to 50 feet in length with

¹ When the French called at Petropavlovsk Russian expansion was in full swing. Russian control had been established over the Aleutian Islands with outposts on Unalaska, Kodiak and Afognak. The Aleuts who lived in small villages on islands that were some distance from each other and not easy for them to reach were unable to resist Russian colonisation. On the other hand, the coastal Indians in Alaska and on the large island of Kodiak lived on a terrain where resistance was much easier to organise and they put up a fierce opposition to the Russian advance.

a single mast in the middle roughly like our cutters and sloops, with a crew of 40 or 50 men. They are all better hunters than sailors, they sail from Okots in June, usually make their way out between L'opatka Point and the first of the Kurils, set an easterly course and travel to various islands for three or four years until they have bought from the natives or killed themselves a number of otters sufficient to cover the costs of the expedition and bring the owners a profit of at least one hundred per cent on their outlay.

Russia has still not set up any establishment east of Kamtschatka; each vessel builds one in the harbour where it winters and when it leaves it either destroys it or sells it to some other vessel belonging to its own nation. The Okots government is very careful to require the captains of these sloops to have Russian sovereignty recognised by all the islanders they may call on, and they place on board each vessel a kind of customs officer whose function it is to impose and collect a tribute on behalf of the Crown. I was told that a missionary was due to leave Okots shortly to preach the faith among these inhabitants and in this way settle with spiritual goods what the Russians owe for these tributes imposed simply by the power of might.¹

It is known that furs are more profitably sold at Kiakia on the frontier between China and Russia but the extent of this trade has only been known in Europe since the publication of Mr Cox's book; the imports and exports total close on eighteen million *livres*²

¹ La Pérouse appears to have learned of the plans of Grigorii Shelikov, a merchant who hoped to obtain a charter for a trade and colonisation company and had offered as an incentive to help the Church set up a mission in the newly annexed territories. Success finally came to him in 1794, but the compensation offered by means of 'spiritual goods' was greatly delayed. Missionaries found life very hard and the help promised by Shelikov long delayed and quite inadequate. Material gains came relatively quickly, but spiritual benefits did not flow until 1820-30 See H. A. Shemitz, 'Father Veniaminov, the Enlightener of Alaska', *American Slavic and East European Review* (February 1959) and 'The Life and Works of the Most Reverend Metropolitan Innocent', *Russian Orthodox Journal* (July-October 1940).

² The *livre* should not be confused with the English pound sterling. The rate of exchange fluctuated considerably in the eighteenth century. The disastrous Seven Years War saw the *livre* sink to less than a shilling or five modern pence; the French economy recovered after that, but although France was able to give substantial help to the colonists in the American War of Independence, the drain on her treasury was severe and at the time of La Pérouse's voyage financial crises followed each other in rapid succession and the *livre* was scarcely worth four modern pence. However, La Pérouse is giving an approximate figure based on information given to him by the Russians as well as on Cox's book.

a year. I was assured that twenty-five ships with crews of a thousand men, both Kamchadals and Russians or Cossacks, were involved in this navigation to the east of Kamtschatka. Being spread out from Cook River¹ as far as Bering Island, a long experience has taught them that otters hardly venture further north than latitude 60 degrees, which leads all the expeditions towards the region of the Alaska peninsula or further east, but never to Bering's Strait constantly obstructed by ice that never melts.

These vessels sometimes put in at Awatska Bay, but they always return to Okots where their owners live as do the traders who go direct to trade with the Chinese on the frontier of the two empires. As ice allows them to enter Awatska Bay at all times, Russian navigators put in there when the season is too far advanced to reach Okots before the end of September, a very wise order from the Russian empress having forbidden navigation in the Sea of Okots after this time of year when begin the storms and gales which have been the cause of very frequent shipwrecks.

Ice never extends in Awatska Bay beyond three or four hundred *toises* from the shore, and it often happens during winter that the land breeze clears the flocs which block the rivers of Paratonka and Awatska and navigation then becomes possible.² Since the winter is generally milder in Kamchatka than at Petersburg or in several provinces of the Russian empire, the Russians talk of it as we do of Provence, but the snow that surrounded us as early as the twentieth of September, the white frost covering the ground every morning at the same period, and the greenery that was as faded as in the month of January around Paris, all this told us that the winter was of a harshness the people of southern Europe could not support.

Yet, in many respects, we were less sensitive to the cold than the inhabitants of the ostroc of St Peter and St Paul, both Russians and Kamchadals. They wore the thickest furs, and the temperature inside their *isbas* where they keep their stoves continually lit was 28 to 30 degrees above freezing point; we could not breathe in such hot air, and the lieutenant was careful to open his windows each time we went into his apartment; but all these peoples have become

¹ The Cook River is Cook Inlet, a deep sound behind Kodiak Island, between the Kenai and the Alaskan peninsulas. Bering Island itself is east of Kamchatka.

² Petropavlovsk is normally closed or obstructed by ice between November and May; Okhotsk cannot be used in winter; only Vladivostok, much further south, can be used throughout the year.

accustomed to extremes; it is known that both in Europe and in Asia they take steam baths in sweating-rooms from which they emerge covered in perspiration and then go and roll in the snow. The ostroc of St Peters had two of these public baths which I went into before the fire was lit; they consist of a very low room in the middle of which stands an oven, made of dry stones, they light up like those used for baking bread; the vault of this oven is in the middle of the room and surrounded by tiers of benches for those intending to bathe, the heat is greater or lesser according to whether one is on the tier above or below the vault over which water is thrown when it has become reddened by the heat of the fire below it. This water rises up immediately as steam and causes the most abundant perspiration. The Kamchadals have copied this practice from their conquerors as they have many others and within a few years the primitive nature which distinguished them so markedly from the Russians will have been totally eliminated; today their number does not exceed four thousand souls in the whole of the peninsula although it stretches from the 51st degrees to the 63rd across a width of several degrees of longitude, so one can see that there are several square leagues per inhabitant. They cultivate none of the products of the soil and their preference for dogs over reindeer to pull their sleighs prevents them from raising pigs, sheep, young reindeer or calves because they would be devoured before they had acquired enough strength to defend themselves. Fish is the basic food of these carnivorous coursers that nevertheless cover 24 leagues in one day and get fed only when their run is over.

The reader has already noted that their method of travel is not peculiar to the Kamchadals alone and that the people of Chouta and the Tartars of Castries Bay have the same kind of teams. We were very keen to know whether the Russians had any knowledge of these various countries, and we learned from Mr Coslof himself that vessels from Okots have several times sighted the northern head of the island at the mouth of the Amur River, but they had never landed there because it lies beyond the limits of the Russian empire's settlements on this coast which end at Udskoj Ostroc,¹

¹ The Treaty of Nerchinsk of 1689 had fixed the Sino-Russian border at the Amur River and the Stanovoi Mountains. This compelled the Russians to develop a route from Yakutsk to Okotsk through many hundreds of miles of marshlands and mountain country. The effective area of Russian control extended in the south as far as Santarkije Island and Udskaia Gulf (with the inland post of Udskoje or Udskoj)

and as far as the bear islands where sable hunting is carried out extensively.

The bay at Awatska is very much like the one at Brest but is very much better on account of the quality of the bottom which is mud. Its entrance is narrower and consequently easier to defend; our lithologists and our botanists found along its shores only substances or plants that are extremely common in Europe and it seems that Steler and Krascheninikof¹ have left nothing new to be described by those who have come after them; the English too gave a very good plan of this bay in which one must be careful of two shoals to the east and the west of the entrance which leave a large channel between them for ships to enter; one is certain of avoiding them if one leaves two isolated rocks that are on the east coast open on the light signal side but leaving on the other hand, hidden by the western coast, a large rock on the port side which is less than a cable length from land. All the anchorages in this bay are equally good and one can come closer or further from the ostroc depending on one's wish to communicate often with the village.

According to Mr D'agelet's observations, Lieutenant Kaborof's house at the back of the harbour of St Peter and St Paul lies in 53^d 1 minute of latitude and 156^d 30' of longitude Paris meridian: the tide which was very regular was high at the new and the full moon at 3.30 o'clock, its height in the harbour being 4 feet. Our regulator No. 19 was observed to be losing 10 seconds a day, which differed by 2 seconds from the daily loss observed at Cavitte six months earlier.

The northerly winds which were so much in our favour when

and in the north to the shores of the East Siberian Sea. The Bear Islands lie north of the Kolyma estuary and were discovered in 1740 by Dmitri Laptev. The Russians had little reason to attempt to sail in the southern part of the Sea of Okhotsk since both China and Japan were closed to foreigners, and the furs which formed the basis of their Far Eastern trade came from the north and north-east. On Russia's advance towards the east, logistics problems presented by distance and climate, and Chinese opposition, see R. A. Pierce, *Eastward to Empire: Exploration and Conquest on the Russian Open Frontier to 1750*, Montreal, 1973; and J. R. Gibson, *Feeding the Russian Fur Trade: Provisionment of the Okhotsk Seaboard and the Kamchatka Peninsula 1659-1856*, Madison, 1966.

¹ Georg Wilhelm Steller, the naturalist of Bering's expedition, was an able geologist. His narrative has now been translated into English by M. A. Engel: *Journal of a Voyage with Bering 1741-1742*, Stanford, 1988. Stepan Petrovich Krascheninikov was the author of *Opisanie Zemli Kamchatski*, published in St. Petersburg in 1755 and available in English: E. A. P. Crownhart-Vaughan, *Explorations of Kamchatka 1735-1741*, Portland, 1972.

we left the bay forsook us two leagues from the shore; they settled in the west with a stubbornness and a strength which did not allow me to carry out the plan I had made when I left of surveying the Kurils as far as the island of Marikan. Squalls and storm followed each other so quickly that I was compelled to heave to with a storm-sail and I was driven 80 leagues from the coast. I did not attempt to struggle against these obstacles because this survey was of little importance, and I set my course to cut the 165th degree of longitude in latitude 37^d 30' where some geographers have situated a great island, rich and with a large population, discovered they say in 1620 by the Spanish; a search for this land was included in Captain Vries's instructions, and one finds a memoir with a few details on this supposed island in the fourth volume of the *Collection académique Partie Etrangere* page 158.¹

I felt that, among all the various searches that were suggested to me rather than insisted upon, this one warranted being given preference. I did not reach the parallel of 37^d 30 until midnight on the 14th; during that same day I had seen five or six small birds of the linnet species² that came and perched in our rigging and the same

¹ The *Collection académique, composée de mémoires, actes ou journaux des plus célèbres académies et sociétés littéraires étrangères* was edited by Jean Berryat and published in 13 volumes at Dijon between 1755 and 1759. The island of Rica de Oro or Rica del Plata, sometimes referred to as two islands, appeared on maps of the northern Pacific for many years. Its origin goes back to Francisco Gali who while in Macao in 1584 was told of a Portuguese vessel bound for Japan which had been driven by a storm towards an island lying far to the east, inhabited by a wealthy and friendly white race. Pedro de Unamuno sailed in search of it in 1587, without success; and Sebastián Vizcaino who sailed in 1611 from Acapulco was no luckier; but the Portuguese Joao de Gama, who left Macao in 1590 for Acapulco, claimed he had seen land to the north-east of Japan - given the erroneous longitudes that resulted from dead reckoning and guesswork in early days, this may have been one of the Kurils, unless it was simply a bank of clouds. The Dutch sent out Mattijs Quast and Abel Tasman as well as Maarten Vries in the hope of finding these mysterious islands, with the usual lack of results. The Spanish decided not to waste any more time or money on such expeditions, Philip V in particular rejecting a 1741 request by the governor of the Philippines, on the grounds that 'nothing justified this search'. However, Milet-Mureau, the editor of the printed narrative of La Pérouse's voyage, added a lengthy marginal note expressing regret at the navigator's lack of faith. In fact, the name survived into this century: Bartholomew's *Advanced Atlas of Physical and Political Geography* of 1917 has it and the *Times Survey Atlas* of 1922 shows a 'Roca de Plata' on map No. 103. See on these islands: W. L. Schurtz, *The Manila Galleon*, New York, 1959, pp. 237-8; O. H. K. Spate, *The Spanish Lake*, Canberra, 1979, pp. 106-8, 110, 112; E. Chassigneux, 'Rica de Oro et Rica del Plata', *Tsing Pao*, XXX (1933), pp. 37-84.

² Not easy to identify, this bird may be the *Carduelis spinus* of Japan.

evening we saw two flights of ducks or cormorants which never go far from the shore;¹ the sky was very clear, and on each frigate look-outs were constantly on duty in the topmasts; a fairly substantial reward had been promised to the first man to sight land and this cause for rivalry was hardly necessary – each sailor was competing for the honour of being the first discoverer of a land that would bear his name, but in spite of the clearest indications of a nearby land we discovered nothing, even though the horizon stretched out as far as was possible; I assumed that this island was in the south and that the recent fierce winds that had blown from that direction had presumably driven north the small birds we had seen resting in our rigging; following this assumption I sailed south until midnight when, being exactly in 37° 30', I gave orders to steer east with very little canvas, waiting for daylight with the greatest impatience. Daylight came and we saw two more small birds. I continued east, a large turtle passed alongside that same evening; still following the same parallel in an easterly direction, we saw the next day a bird smaller than a French wren² perched on the main topsail yard and a third flight of ducks, and so each instant fed our hopes but we never had the joy of seeing them realised. During this time we experienced a misfortune that was all too real; a sailor from the *Astrolabe* fell into the sea while furling the fore topgallant and whether he was wounded by his fall or could not swim he did not reappear, and all the endeavours we made to save him were unsuccessful.³

Indications of the presence of some land continued on the 18th and 19th, even though we had made considerable progress towards the east; we daily saw flights of ducks or other shore birds; a soldier even claimed he had seen a few pieces of seaweed go past, but since

¹ The uncertainty revealed by the reference to 'ducks or cormorants' suggests a flight of small cormorants, possibly the *Phalacrocorax pelagicus* which is quite common in the northern Pacific and among the Kurils. At the time, La Pérouse was approximately in 37° 30' N and 162° 40' E. On the other hand, the uril cormorant, *Phalacrocorax urile*, is common among the Aleutian Islands. The point to be noted is that there was no land in the near vicinity, and that the presence of such birds is not a satisfactory indication of land: the ducks or cormorants could have been migrating or, more likely and as La Pérouse subsequently surmises, were victims of the recent storms who had been blown away from their usual haunts, whether the Kurils or the Aleutians.

² This is insufficient information to identify this orphan with any finality. It might have been an Unalaska wren, *Troglodytes troglodytes petrophilus*, but La Pérouse later expresses the opinion that these birds came from the south.

³ The sailor was Gilles Henry from St Brieuc, Brittany. The date was 15 October 1787.

this was only seen by one person and since it was not likely that only one packet of weed would have broken away from a nearby island, we all rejected this soldier's claim while nevertheless retaining the thought that it was very likely that there was some land close by; but hardly had we reached the 175 degrees of longitude east of Paris when all indications of nearby land disappeared; however I kept to the same route until midday on the 22nd when observations based on No. 19 showed us to be 20 minutes beyond 180 degrees, the limits I had been given for the search for this supposed land. I set course for the south in order to find calmer seas, as since leaving Kamtschatka we had continually sailed in the midst of the wildest swell; a sudden wave had even carried away our small boat which was tied up in the gangway, and had thrown on board more than a hundred barrels of water: these minor problems would hardly have been noticed if events had turned out better and we had finally come upon the island we were wearing ourselves out to discover and which surely exists in the neighbourhood of the route we followed – indications of land were too frequent and too plain for us to doubt it.¹ But I am tempted to believe that we followed too northerly a parallel, and if I had to undertake this navigation again I would sail along the 35th degrees of latitude from the 160th to the 170 degrees. This is the area where we saw most land birds, they seemed to be coming from the south and the violent gales coming from this direction had presumably driven them towards the north; the later plan of my campaign did not allow me to verify this theory by continuing toward the west the same voyage we had made towards the east. The almost constant westerly winds would not have enabled me to cover in two months the distance I had travelled in a week. I turned my attention towards the southern hemisphere in that vast field of discovery where the routes of modern navigators are continually crossing the tracks of Quiros, Mendana, Tasman &c where each one had added some island to those that were already known and where the ancient information leaves the reader quite unsatisfied. It is known that there is in this vast area of the Southern Ocean a zone of some twelve to fifteen

¹ The indications of land were more tenuous than he thought. Currents and storms can carry seaweed considerable distances and birds blown away from their home territories can survive at sea for days. The nearest land to the south of the French was Midway, which was not discovered until the next century, in 18° 13' N and 177° 22' W.

degrees from north to south and 140 degrees east to west filled with islands, which in a way are the globe's equivalent of the Milky Way in the heavens. The language and customs of the various islanders who live there are no longer unknown to us, and the observations made by the most recent travellers even allow us to hazard guesses on the origin of these people which can be linked to that of the Malays¹ just as the origin of the various colonies of the Spanish and African coasts can be to the Phoenicians. This was the archipelago through which my instructions required me to sail during the third year of our campaign.

The southern part of New Caledonia, discovered during Captain Cook's second voyage, the south coast of the land of the Orsacides of Surville,² the part of the Louisiade which Mr de Bougainville did not have the opportunity to explore but where he had been the first to sail along the south-eastern coast,³ these various geographical questions had mainly attracted the King's attention, and I was required to determine their limits and their precise latitudes and longitudes. The Society Islands, the Friendly Islands, the Hebrides &c no longer held any interest for Europe, but they offered the chance of obtaining food, and I was allowed to call there according

¹ La Pérouse is referring to the origin of the Polynesian people which has long been argued over by navigators and ethnologists. A wide range of theories have been put forward: a lost continent now sunk below the waves with the exception of a scattering of islands, American Indians migrating west from island to island, migrants or the descendants of explorers sent from as far as Egypt, and so on. South-Asiatic or Malay elements can be identified in the Polynesian race, but nothing really points to the migration of a cohesive group, whether gradual or not, as against the emergence of a distinct culture from a new racial mix in a discrete island environment. The most recent summary of current theories, with its own conclusions, will be found in K.R. Howe, *Where the Waves Fall*, Sydney, 1984.

² In October 1769 Jean-François-Marie de Surville (1717-70) discovered the northern coast of the Solomon Islands from Choiseul to San Cristobal. He was attacked after putting into Port Praslin in western Santa Ysabel, suffering several casualties among his crew, as a consequence of which he named his discovery 'Land of the Arsacides' after the Moslem Hashashin of the Levant, members of an Ismaili sect founded by Hasan ibn al-Sabbah, known as the Old Man of the Mountains, who established himself in a fortress at Alamut in 1090; members of the sect were sent out to murder Christian crusaders until the capture of Alamut by Mongol troops in 1256. J. Dummore (ed.), *The Expedition of the St Jean-Baptiste to the Pacific 1769-1770*, Cambridge, 1981, pp. 105-6.

³ In June 1768 Louis-Antoine de Bougainville (1729-1811) sailed along the southern coast of a line of islands east of New Guinea, which he named the Louisiades archipelago; he then sailed north towards the Solomon Islands. Taillemite (ed.), *Bougainville*, I, pp. 362-4.

to my needs, and it had been correctly surmised that when I left Kamtschatka I would have very little left in the way of the supplies that are nevertheless essential for the preservation of the health of sailors.

I was not able to progress south rapidly enough to avoid a gale which blew up in that area. On 23 October the sea was very rough and we were compelled to spend the night hove to with a storm-sail. The winds were very variable and the sea very disturbed until we reached the parallel of 30 degrees on 29 October, and generally everyone's health was somewhat affected by too rapid a transition from the cold to the greatest heat, but we all merely suffered slight discomforts which required none of us to keep to our beds.

On 1 November being in 26^d 30' of latitude and 185 of western longitude Paris meridian, we saw numerous birds, including curlews and plovers, species which never go far from land.¹ The weather was overcast and squally, but all parts of the horizon cleared gradually except for the south where heavy clouds remained constant which led to believe that some land might lie in that point of the compass. I sailed in this direction on the 2, 3 and 4th. We kept on seeing birds; the indications of land gradually ceased but it is quite likely that we passed fairly close to some island or shoals which we did not sight, and which chance may perhaps one day offer to some navigator. We then began to enjoy a clear sky and we were at last able to obtain lunar readings, observations we had been unable to make since our departure from Kamtschatka, they differed from those of our timekeeper No. 19 by one degree west. We also caught a few dorado² and two sharks that provided delicious meals for us because we were all reduced to salted pork which was beginning to feel the effects of a burning climate. We carried out the same distance observations on the following days and the difference remained the same; we had at last reached the tropics, the sky was becoming finer and our horizon stretched for a considerable distance; we saw no land but every day we sighted

¹ La Pérouse had now reached the neighbourhood of Midway Island. Curlews are not uncommon in these waters, particularly *Numenius tahitiensis* Gmelin and *N. madagascariensis* Linn. Among plovers we can choose between the *Pluvialis dominica fulva* and several members of the *Charadriidae* family, such as the *Charadrius dubius papuanus*. These birds do not normally go far from land, but at certain periods they migrate long distances, to Siberia or Alaska.

² The dorado is the *Coryphaena hippurus*, closely related to the dolphins.

birds one never meets far from the shore; on 4 November in 23^d 38' of latitude and 184 of longitude (according to a series of distances observed the same day)¹ we caught on board a golden plover² which was still fairly plump and could not have strayed for very long across the sea. On the 5th we cut the track of our crossing from Monterey to Macao, on the 6th that of Captain Clark from the Sandwich Islands to Kamtschatka, the birds had totally disappeared and we were very strained by a heavy easterly swell which, like the western one in the Atlantic Ocean, dominates this vast sea in which we saw neither bonito nor dorado and merely a few flying fish, our supplies of fresh food were totally exhausted and we had counted rather too much on finding fish to soften the austerity of our diet. On the 9th we passed over the southern point of the Villa-lobos Shoal³ according to the position shown for it on the chart given me by Mr de Fleurieu; I set our sails so that I would pass its latitude during daylight, but as we saw neither birds nor seaweed I am led to believe that if this reef exists it must be allocated a more western position, the Spanish having always placed their discoveries in the great ocean too close to the American coasts; the heavy seas calmed down a little at this period and the winds moderated but the sky filled with thick clouds and we had hardly reached the latitude of 10 degrees when we were assailed by

heavy rain but only during the day,¹ as the nights were very much better. The heat was stifling and the hygrometer² has never recorded a higher level of humidity since our departure from Europe; we were breathing an air that was slack and which, combined with the bad food, weakened our strength and would have almost made us unable to do any strenuous work if circumstances had required it of us; I doubled my attention to the crews' health during this period of crisis, the transition from cold to hot and damp had been too quick. I had coffee given out daily at lunch; I had the below-decks dried out and aired; rainwater was used to wash the sailors' shirts and in this way we turned to good use the rigours of the climate we were being forced to sail through, and whose effect I feared more than that of the high latitudes where we had already travelled. Nevertheless on 6 November³ we caught for the first time eight bonito which provided a good meal for the entire crew and for the officers who like me had no other food than what we had in our hold. These rains, these storms and the heavy seas came to an end on the 15th when we reached the 5th degrees of latitude, we then enjoyed the clearest of skies and sailed across the calmest of seas; a very wide horizon at sunset reassured us about our run during the night which furthermore was so clear that we would have seen dangers almost as well as in full daylight. The fine weather stayed with us beyond the Line which we crossed on 21 November for the third time since we left Brest. On each occasion we had gone 60 degrees north and south of it and the later plan of our voyage was to bring us back into the northern hemisphere only in the Atlantic Sea when we were on our way back to Europe. Nothing broke the monotony of this long crossing. We had followed a route that was more or less parallel to the one we had taken the previous year going from Easter Island to the Sandwich Islands, where we had been continually surrounded by birds and bonito which had provided us with an abundant supply of healthy food; but on the contrary a vast solitude surrounded us and the air and the

¹ The expedition was now sailing west of French Frigate Shoals and Necker Island in 23° 45' and 23° 35' respectively.

² This is the Pacific Golden Plover, *Pluvialis dominica fulva*. It nests in the northern hemisphere and spends the summer months in the South Pacific.

³ In November 1542, Ruy López de Villalobos (?-1546) set out with six ships from Navidad, Mexico, for the Moluccas. He sailed towards the Revilla Gigedo group, discovered a number of low islands on 25 December, and on 23 January an island he named Los Matelotes - which is very probably Faï in the Carolines. He reached Mindanao on 2 February 1543 and in August of that year he sent Bernardo de la Torre in the *San Juan de Letran* to inform the Viceroy of Mexico of his discoveries. It was Torre who came upon a very low and dangerous island in roughly 16°N which he called Abreojos, meaning 'Open your eyes' - it was probably one of the Marianas. La Pérouse crossed this latitude on 8-9 November in longitude 180°, which is approximately where it appeared on many charts of the day, including Robert de Vaugondy's map drawn for Charles de Brosses's *Histoire des navigations aux terres australes*. Spanish longitudes were however very unreliable and cartographers did not help matters by placing doubtful island discoveries rather at random, or indeed, on occasion, where they looked best on their map. If, as is now generally accepted, Abreojos is Farallon de Medinilla which lies in longitude 146°04'E, La Pérouse's comment that it should be allocated a much more westerly position on the charts is quite correct. See A. Sharp, *The Discovery of the Pacific Islands*, Oxford, 1900, pp. 29-32; *Who's Who*, pp. 247, 259-60.

¹ Bad weather prevented accurate observations of the height of the sun which were normally taken at midday. The area of ocean through which the ships were sailing at the time is quite empty.

² The hygrometer was used to calculate the humidity of the air. The term hygroscope is now used.

³ This date is a slip of the pen. On 6 November, La Pérouse had recorded that there were no bonito or dorado to be seen.

waters in this part of the globe were uninhabited. However on the 23rd we caught two sharks which provided two good meals for the crews and the same day we killed a very thin curlew which seemed very tired, we thought he might have been driven off from York Island¹ which lay about a hundred leagues from us; he was eaten at my table in a salmi and tasted hardly better than the sharks; as we advanced into the southern hemisphere, boobies, frigate birds, sea-swallows and tropic birds flew around our vessels and we saw them as advance signs of some island which we were most impatient to come upon; we were complaining about Fate which had made us travel over such a long distance since leaving Kamtschatka without making the slightest discovery.

The birds who grew to a great number once we reached the fourth degrees of latitude south continually raised our hopes of finding some land, but although the horizon was very extensive nothing appeared. To be frank we were not making much progress; the winds dropped when we were in the second degrees of latitude south and they were followed by very light airs from the north to the W.N.W. which enabled us to gain a little to the east because I was afraid we might be carried to the leeward of the Friendly Islands; during this period of calms we caught a few sharks which we preferred to the salt meats and we killed some seabirds which we ate in salmis and although they were very thin and they both tasted and smelled of fish to an unbearable extent they seemed to us (in our state of severe scarcity) almost as good as woodcocks: sea-swallows, black or totally white,² are peculiar to the South Seas and I have never seen any in the Atlantic Ocean. We shot many more of them than we did boobies and frigate birds, they flew in such numbers around our ships, especially during the night, that we were deafened by their noise and it was difficult to hold a conversation

¹ The reference to York Island can create confusion. This was the name Samuel Wallis had given to the island of Moorea in 1767. As it is situated in 17°32'S and 149°50'W, La Pérouse who at the time was in 2°47'S and 173°30'W was nowhere near it. This is really a reference to Atafu, the northernmost of the Tokelau group, in 8°33'N and 173°50'W, discovered by John Byron on 24 June 1765 and named by him Duke of York's Island. La Pérouse was closer to the Phoenix group, small islands uninhabited except for birds, that were still waiting to be discovered: La Pérouse missed them and they had to wait another half-century before making their appearance on the map.

² The white birds are probably *Gygis alba pacifica*; the black one could be *sterna fuscata*, a noisy seabird; but neither is particularly widespread in this part of the ocean.

on the upper deck, so that our fairly successful hunts provided us with some revenge for their screeching as well as a bearable meal, but they disappeared when we passed the sixth degree. The north-west to west winds, which had started around the 3rd degree of southern latitude, but very light and cloudless, then rose fiercely and did not cease until the 12th degrees; a strong westerly swell made our navigation very tiring, our ropes rotten by the damp on the Tartary coast kept on breaking and we did not replace them until the last moment in case we ran short of them; squalls, storms and rain stayed with us constantly until 10 degree 50 minutes where we arrived on second December. The winds, still blowing from the west, moderated and were no longer accompanied by rain; we carried out observations of distances which corrected the errors of our timekeepers; since our departure from Kamtschatka they seemed to have lost five minutes in time or placed us one degree fifteen minutes too far east; according to the longitudes we obtained by lunar readings which gave 189 degrees 53 minutes east of Paris we passed exactly over the position given to Biron's Dangerous Islands, as we were in their latitude, and since we did not sight any land, or the smallest indication of any proximity of it, it is obvious that a different longitude should be assigned to these islands, Commodore Biron having sailed merely with the faulty method of dead reckoning;¹ the next day 3 December we were in 11 degrees 33 minutes of latitude and 189 of longitude, according to our distances, exactly on the parallel of Quiros's Island of the Beautiful Nation² and one degree to the east; I would dearly have

¹ John Byron in the *Dolphin* discovered a group of small islands on 21 June 1765 which he called Islands of Danger; this is Pukapuka, which consists of three small islands, rocks and sandbanks, in latitude 10°53'S and longitude 168°09'W. They probably had been seen by Alvaro de Mendana in 1595 and named by him San Bernardo. La Pérouse had therefore cut the route of both these navigators during the evening of 2 December, but he was to the west of Pukapuka. Low lying and uninhabited, the little group was not easy to see, nor of much use to a navigator.

² Gente Hermosa, elegantly translated as *Isle de la Belle Nation*, had not been easy to rediscover since Quiros first came upon it in February 1606. Juan de Torquemada called it thus in his 1615 *Primera (Segunda, Tercera) parte de los veynte y uno libros Rituales y Monarchia* (Seville, 1615, 2nd edn, Madrid, 1723), but Quiros's name for it was La Peregrina – the Pilgrim, which in retrospect seems appropriate in view of the various longitudes assigned to it on different maps. Most historians identify it as Rakahanga, a low island which forms part of the Cooks, in latitude 10°02'S and longitude 161°06'W, further north than La Pérouse's reported position at the time, but the charts he had available to him showed Gente Hermosa closer to the eleventh than the tenth degree of latitude.

liked to run a few degrees west to come upon it but the winds were blowing straight from that direction. This island was too vaguely shown to look for it with such contrary winds, and I thought I should take advantage of these westerlies to reach the parallel of Bougainville's Navigators Islands¹ which is a real French discovery and where we hoped to obtain some refreshments of which our health was beginning to be in great need; we sighted the easternmost on sixth December at three o'clock in the afternoon.² We set course to approach it until eleven at night and stayed on short tacks for the rest of the night; since I planned to put in there if I could find an anchorage I passed through the channel that separates the large island and the small one which Mr de Bougainville³ had left to the south — it is narrow and hardly a league wide but it seemed safe without any dangers. We were in the pass at midday and we observed 14^d 7' one mile from the coast. At that moment the south point of the island bore from us South 36 West, thus the southern head of this island lies in 14 degrees 8 minutes and its longitude 189 (according to our timekeepers corrected by the difference we found on 5 December between the results of our No. 19 and the lunar distances).

We only saw canoes once we were in the channel; when we were to windward of the island we had seen some houses and a fairly large group of Indians seated in a circle under some coconut trees who seemed to be enjoying quite calmly the spectacle we offered them.⁴ They did not put any canoes in the water and did not follow us along the shore; this land, some two hundred toises in height, was very steep and covered with trees up to the top, among which we could make out a large number of coconut trees, the houses

¹ The Navigators of Bougainville are the Samoan Islands, originally named the Petites Cyclades by the French navigator. He sailed to the north of Rose Island and Tau and south of Tutuila, three islands actually discovered by Jacob Roggeveen in June 1722. Bougainville eventually renamed the group the Navigators Islands 'warranted on account of a dozen canoes with large sails'. Taillemite, *Bougainville*, I, pp. 334-40 and II, p. 250. The name is truly French, but the discovery was Dutch — posterity has settled the argument by keeping the Polynesian name.

² La Pérouse's longitude was 168°40'. Tau's longitude is 169°30'. The latitude is 14°15'.

³ The largest of the three is Tau, the smaller ones are Olosega and Ofu which in fact, being close to each other, often give the impression of forming only one. The strait is just over 6 miles wide.

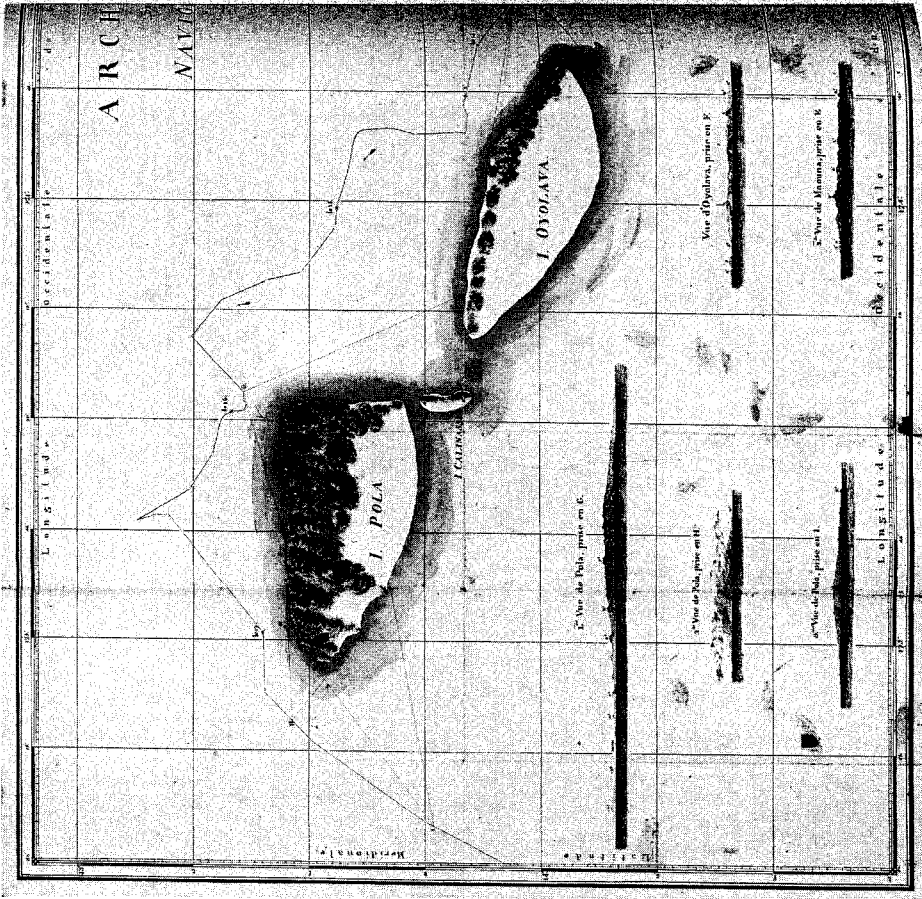
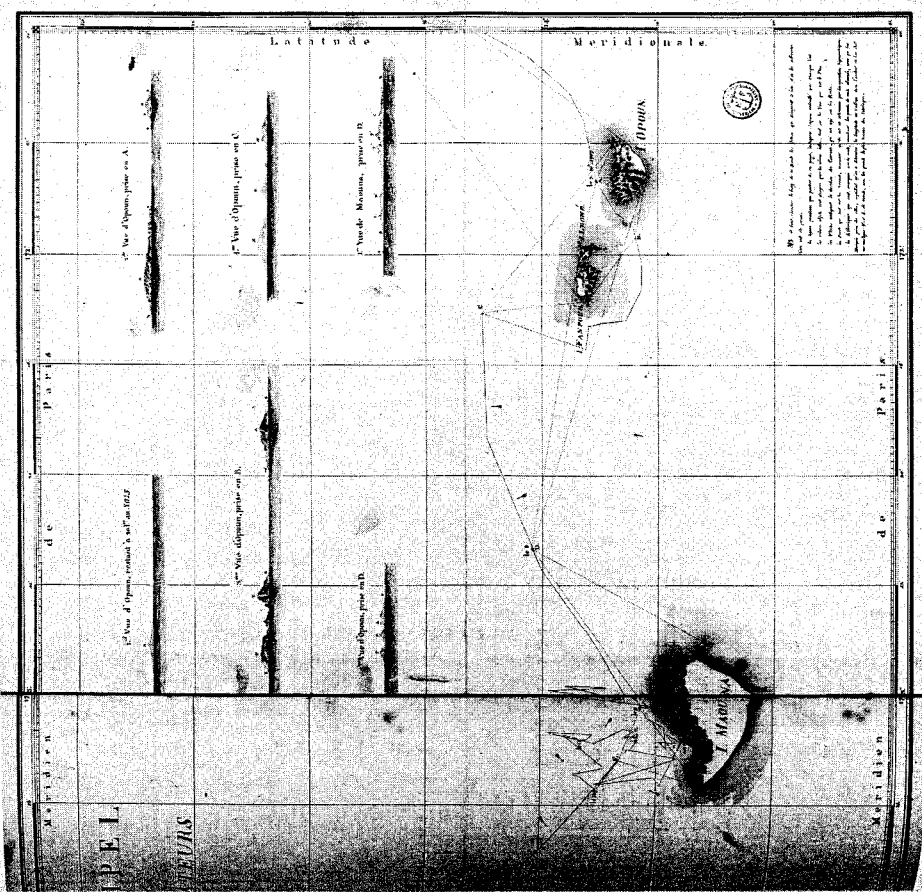
⁴ The southern point of Tau is Siufa'alele Point. There are several villages on the west coast.

were approximately half-way up where the islanders can breathe cooler air. One could see nearby a few small cleared spaces which presumably were planted with sweet potatoes or yams but overall this island did not seem very productive and anywhere else in the South Seas I would have believed it to be uninhabited; but my error would have been all the greater in that even the two small islands forming the western side of the channel through which we sailed also had inhabitants,¹ we saw five canoes leave them which joined eleven others coming from the eastern island, which after turning round our two ships several times with an appearance of deep suspicion finally decided to risk coming alongside and carry out a little barter with us, but so little that all we obtained was some twenty coconuts and two blue sultana hens.² They were like all the South Sea islanders untrustworthy in their trade and when they received payment in advance for their coconuts it was unusual for them not to row away without handing over the agreed compensation. In truth these thefts were of very minor importance and a few bead necklaces with small pieces of red cloth were hardly worth complaining about. We took several soundings in the channel, a hundred-fathom sounding-line did not reach the bottom less than a mile from the shore. We continued on our way so as to round a headland behind which we thought we could find a shelter, but the island was not of the width indicated on Mr de Bougainville's chart, on the contrary it ended in a point and its greatest diameter is at most one league. Thus we found the easterly breeze blowing along this coast which was bristling with reefs and it was obvious that we would look in vain along there for an anchorage; then we set a course outside the channel to haul along the two western islands which together are about the size of the easternmost; a channel of less than a hundred toises separates them, and at the end one can see an islet which I would have called a large rock had it not been tree-covered,³ but before rounding the two southern points of the channel we were becalmed, with a fairly heavy swell which caused me some concern lest we struck the *Astrolabe*, fortunately a

¹ One cannot venture a guess at what the population might have been at the time of La Pérouse's visit, but today there are approximately 3,000 inhabitants on the three islands that form this group, known as Manua.

² This would seem to be the Samoan water-hen, *Porphyrio porphyrio samoensis*, whose local name is *Manu'ali*.

³ The islet is Nuu, very close inshore to Ofu.



23 Navigators archipelago (Samoa). Unsigned. AN 6 JJ1:45.

few light airs soon led us out of this unpleasant situation which had made us take little notice of an elderly Indian's harangue, who was holding a branch of kava¹ in his hand and making a fairly lengthy speech. We knew through having read several accounts of voyages that this was a sign of peace, and throwing him a few pieces of cloth we answered him with the word Tayo which means friend in the idiom of several nations of the South Seas,² but we were not practised enough to be able to distinguish the words of the vocabularies we had extracted from Cook's Voyages.

When at last we reached the breeze we let out sails in order to get away from the coast and from the band of calms. All the canoes then came up to us; they progress fairly well with a sail but very poorly with paddles; these craft would not be of any use to people who were not such good swimmers as these were, they topple over at any moment and this happening surprises them and worries them less than a hat falling off does with us, they lift the submerged canoe on their shoulders and after emptying it of water get back in, quite sure that they will have to repeat the same operation within a half-hour, one's equilibrium being almost as difficult to maintain in these frail boats as an acrobat's on a tightrope. These islanders generally are tall, and their average height seemed to me to be five foot sept or eight inches.³ The colour of their skin is approximately like that of Algerians or other people of the Barbary Coast, their hair is generally long and tied back over the top of the head, their features seemed to me not very attractive: I saw only two women whose features revealed no greater delicacy, the youngest who might be 18 years of age had an awful and repulsive ulcer on one leg, several islanders had large ulcerations and it may have been the

¹ Kava is actually a drink made from the root of the Polynesian peppertree (*Piper methysticum*). La Pérouse may have been able to identify the branch being waved, although he may be using the term in the general sense of a piece of greenery imbued with a sacred or ceremonial character; however, in Vaujuas's report on the events of 11 December, the branches are clearly identified as *Piper methysticum*.

² Vocabularies provided by Cook and other navigators related to Polynesian languages and were of little value in the Samoan Islands. *Taio* in Samoan means a bird and more particularly the wedge-tailed shearwater. There are a number of words for 'friend', namely *amua*, *uo*, *soa* and *paaga*, none coming close to 'taio' which must have puzzled the elderly Samoan.

³ The comment that the Samoans at 5 ft 7 in. or 5 ft 8 in. were tall may surprise today's reader, but man's average height in the eighteenth century was appreciably less than his present-day counterpart. However, La Pérouse later meets islanders who are a couple of inches taller and, like most Samoans, very strongly built.

beginning of leprosy because I noticed two men whose legs, ulcerated and as big as their bodies, could leave no doubt about the type of sickness they had,¹ the latter approached us fearfully, but without weapons, there is every indication that they are as peaceful as the inhabitants of the Society Islands or the Friendly Islands. We thought we had taken our leave of them and felt little regret over it since they had struck us as very poor, but the wind having greatly moderated during the afternoon the same canoes, which were joined by several others, came two leagues from shore to offer new exchanges, they had gone back to the land when they left us and were coming back a little better supplied than on the first occasion. This second time we obtained five hens, several items of their clothing, six sultana hens, a small pig, but above all the most charming turtle dove we had ever seen, it was white, its head was of the most beautiful purple, its wings green and its front speckled with small red and white spot like the leaves of the anemone;² this little animal was tame, ate in your hand and from your mouth, its

¹ The grotesquely swollen legs observed on this occasion were more an indication of the presence of elephantiasis than of leprosy. However, it should be noted that the term leprosy in earlier times was applied to a number of ulcerous and deforming diseases and that leprosy was once called *Elephantiasis Graecorum*. As for the islanders' unattractive appearance, it was commented upon by Bougainville when he sailed among these islands: 'They were fairly tall, although smaller and less handsome than those from Cythère [Tahiti]. A woman who came in one of the canoes was awful.' Taillemite, *Bougainville*, I, p. 335. The point to note was that the comparison was being made with people of eastern Polynesians such as Tahitians and Hawaiians. In Tutuila, however, the women proved to be far more attractive.

² This is the multicoloured Samoan fruit dove, *Ptilinopus perouisi perouisi*. The one referred to was probably a young bird, as the head later acquires a distinctive reddish tinge. This dove was named after La Pérouse by Titian Peale, a member of the 1838-42 United States Exploring Expedition and author of volume 8 of the expedition's record, 'Mammalia and Ornithology'. The bulk of this edition was destroyed by fire and a second, much revised edition was prepared by John Cassin who quotes Peale as follows: 'La Pérouse, in the journal of his melancholy voyage, notices beautiful Doves, of various colours, when at the Navigator's Islands, in the same harbor where our first specimens were obtained, probably alluding to this very species to which we apply his name. The native name, Manu-ma, means shame, or modest bird.' J. Cassin, *United States Exploring Expedition during the years 1838, 1839, 1840, 1841, 1842, under the command of Charles Wilkes U.S.N.*, vol. VIII, Mammalogy and Ornithology, Philadelphia, 1858, p. 276. Peale's description appears on p. 195 of his 1848 edition of this book. Two other birds were named after La Pérouse: a megapode found by the 1817-20 Freycinet expedition near the Mariana Islands was named *Megapodius lapérouse lapérouse* by the naturalist and surgeon Joseph Gaimard, and the *Megapodius lapérouse senex* from the Palau Islands was so named by Hartlaub in 1867. [Information kindly obtained by Dr J.A. Bartle, Museum of New Zealand, Wellington.]

character and its plumage made it worthy of being presented to the Queen, but it was unlikely that we would succeed in keeping it until Europe where all we could bring back was its plumage which had lost all its brilliance; as the *Astrolabe* had always sailed ahead of us on this route, all the canoes had begun their trade with Mr de Langle who had bought two dogs from the Indians, which were judged very tasty.

Although these people's canoes were very artistically constructed and they provide evidence of these islanders' skill in working with wood, we never persuaded them to accept our axes or any iron tool and they preferred a few glass beads which could be of no practical use to them to anything we offered by way of cloth or iron; they sold us a wooden vase filled with coconut oil, which had exactly the same shape as one of our earthenware pots and which a European worker would never have believed could be made without a turning-lathe; their ropes were round and woven exactly like several of our watch-chains; their mats were very fine but their cloth inferior in respect of the colour and texture to those from Easter Island or the Sandwich Islands, moreover it would seem that they are quite rare because they were all quite naked and only sold us two pieces, we were sure that further west we would find another island, infinitely larger where we expected that we would at least find some shelter: even if there was no harbour. We put off more detailed observations until we reached that other island which according to Mr de Bougainville's chart should only be separated from the last islet that lay athwart of us at nightfall by a strait of eight leagues. After sunset I made only three or four leagues westward and stayed with light canvass on short tacks; at daybreak I was very surprised not to see any land to leeward and only sighted it at six in the morning because the channel is much wider than is shown on the chart I used as a guide and it would be desirable for the maps of a voyage which is second only to Captain Cook's in respect of its astronomical observations, and the extent and importance of its discoveries, it would I repeat be desirable for these particular charts to be drawn with greater care and on a larger scale.

We did not reach the northern point of the island¹ until five

¹ La Pérouse had now reached the island of Tutuila. As we shall see later, he became very confused over the islands' names. The north-eastern point of the island is Cape Matalula. Bougainville had sailed south-west, whereas La Pérouse proceeded to sail along the northern coast.

o'clock in the evening and as I intended to seek an anchorage I signalled to the *Astrolabe* to hug the wind in order to stay on short tacks to windward of the island during the night, and to dispose of all the following day to explore it in every detail. Although we were three leagues from land, three or four canoes came alongside that very evening, they brought us pigs and fruit which they bartered for beads, which gave us a better impression of this island's wealth. On the morning of the 9th I came closer to the land and we hauled along it half a league distant; it was surrounded by a coral reef over which the waves broke angrily but this reef almost touched the shore, and the coastline formed various small coves in front of which we could see breaks through which the canoes could pass and possibly even our boats and longboats; we could see numerous villages at the back of each little bay from which a large number of canoes had come laden with coconuts, pigs and other fruit which we bought with beads; this great abundance increased the desire I had of anchoring. We could see waterfalls coming down from the top of the mountains down to the foot of the villages. So many advantages led me not to be difficult over the anchorage, I coasted along as near as possible and at 4 o'clock having found a bank of rotted shells and a very small quantity of coral in 30 fathoms one mile from the shore we dropped anchor there, but we were tossed about by a very heavy swell driving us towards the land although the wind came from the coast.¹ We immediately lowered our boats and that same day Mr de Langle with several officers and three armed boats from the two frigates went to the nearest village, where they were received by the inhabitants in a most friendly manner; night was falling as they landed, the Indians lit a great fire to light up the assembly, they brought birds, pigs and fruit, and after staying an hour our boats returned to the ships; everyone seemed delighted with the way they had been received and our only regret was to find our vessels anchored in such a bad roadstead, where the frigates rolled as if they were out at sea even though we were sheltered from the northerly to the south-easterly

¹ There are two good harbours in Tutuila, but both are on the south coast: Pago Pago now the capital of American Samoa and one of the best harbours in the South Pacific, and Leone which is available for small vessels but seldom used. La Pérouse was unlucky in that he sailed along the north coast which is rough and precipitous with few settlements. The village, Fagasa, one can assume, is not much larger today than in his day.

winds. The calm on its own would be enough to expose us to the greatest danger if our cables were cut, and there was no possibility of sailing against a breeze of any strength coming from the north-west. We knew from the accounts of travellers who had come before us that the trade winds are not regular in these parts, and that it is as easy to sail up eastward as to go down to the west, which makes these people's navigation easier on the lee side; we had even experienced this inconsistency of the winds, and the westerlies had only left us in the twelve degrees. These thoughts gave me a very uneasy night, all the more because a storm was building up in the north, from where the winds blew fairly strongly. Fortunately the land breeze prevailed. The sun rose on a magnificent day. I decided to take advantage of the morning to explore the country, observe the inhabitants in their own homes, obtain water and sail in the afternoon, caution not allowing us to spend a second night in such an anchorage. Like me, Mr de Langle had found this anchorage too dangerous to spend a second night in. We agreed that we would sail in the afternoon, but that the morning which was very fine would be spent obtaining water and buying fruit and pigs. At break of day a hundred canoes were around the frigates with all kinds of provisions which the islanders were prepared to barter only for beads. For them these were priceless diamonds and they scorned our axes, our cloth and all our other trade goods; while part of the crew were employed holding the Indians in check and trading with them, the others were filling up our boats and longboats with empty casks to go and get the water, and our two longboats, armed, commanded by Messrs de Clonard and Colinet and those of the *Astrolabe* by Messrs de Monty and Belle-garde left at five o'clock in the morning for a bay distant about one league and to windward, a fairly convenient location because our boats, laden with water, could sail back with a quattering wind. I was following Messrs de Clonard and Monty close behind in my biscay boat and reached the shore at the same time; unfortunately Mr de L'angle decided to go in his small boat for an excursion to a second cove approximately one league from our watering place, and this pleasure-trip from which he returned delighted, enchanted by the beauty of the village he had visited, was the cause of our misfortunes. The cove towards which our lucky star made us send our longboats was pretty, large and convenient; boats and longboats stayed afloat at low tide half a pistol shot from the shore, the watering place was attractive and

easy. Messrs de Clonard and Monty established the most satisfactory order, a line of soldiers was placed between the Indians and the shore, we invited them all to sit down under the coconut trees lining the coast less than 8 *toises* from our longboats. They numbered about two hundred, with among them many women and children, each one had with him some hens, pigs, pigeons, parakeets, fruit and they all wanted to sell them at the same time, which created a little confusion.

The women, some of whom were very pretty, offered with their fruit and poultry their favours to anyone who was prepared to give them beads; soon they crossed the line of soldiers who pushed them back too weakly to stop them; their behaviour was gentle, merry and beguiling; Europeans who have sailed around the world, and especially Fenchmen, have no weapons against such attacks; they went through the ranks, the men came closer, then there was some little disorder, but Indians armed with sticks, whom we took to be chiefs, re-established order; each one returned to his post and trade began anew to the greatest satisfaction of buyers and sellers. However an event had taken place in our longboat which was a real act of hostility which I wanted to repress without any bloodshed although possibly an example was needed to impress these people who seemed to have little regard for us because they were unaware of the effect of our weapons and because their height of 5 feet 10 or 11 inches, their broad limbs whose proportions were colossal made them think that we presented little danger. Be that as it may, I did not feel that I should teach them to have a better opinion of us by punishing this Indian for his insolence; he had climbed onto the back of our longboat, picked up a mallet and struck several blows on the arms and backs of our sailors. I ordered four of the strongest to throw themselves at him and hurl him into the sea, which was immediately carried out. The other islanders seemed to disapprove of their compatriot's behaviour, calm was completely restored and in order to keep them in this happy disposition I had three pigeons bought which were thrown up in the air and shot down in front of the crowd, which seemed to instill some fear in them.¹ I expected

¹ This rough handling may have been satisfactory from the French point of view since no blood was shed, nor were any blows struck in retaliation, but if the individual was a chief the affront of hurling him into the sea in this manner may have been more serious than La Pérouse imagined.

more out of this feeling that I did from goodwill — which uncivilised man seldom displays.

While all this was going on quite peacefully, and our water casks were being filled, I thought I could walk a couple of hundred paces away to visit a charming village situated in the middle of a forest of trees that were heavy with fruit and which one could call an orchard; the houses were placed along the circumference of a circle some 150 *toises* in diameter, the centre of which was empty forming a wide public place covered with the finest grass; the trees shading it and the houses preserved a delightful freshness; women, children, old men had accompanied me, they all pressed me to enter their houses, and stretched out the finest and freshest mats on the ground beneath their roofs, made of a selection of little pebbles and raised about two feet above the ground to protect them from the damp; I went into the best hut which presumably belonged to the chief and I was extremely surprised to find a vast latticed room as well and indeed better made than any in the environs of Paris. The best architect could not have given a more elegant curve to the two ends of the ellipse ending this hut, a row of columns five feet from each other ran along the edge, these columns were only tree trunks very elaborately worked between which the Indians had placed some fine mats that could be raised or lowered with ropes like our roller-blinds and arranged with the utmost skill like fish scales, the rest of the house was covered with coconut-tree leaves.

What imagination could conjure up the happiness one would find in such an enchanting site, a climate requiring no form of dress; bread-fruit trees, coconuts, bananas, guavas, oranges, &c growing quite naturally offered these fortunate inhabitants a pleasant and healthy nourishment; hens, pigs and dogs living on surplus fruit allowing them to vary their diet. They had such wealth and so few needs that they scorned our iron tools and our cloth, and wanted only beads — with a surfeit of real goods they hankered only after frivolities.

They had sold on our market over two hundred wood-pigeons as tame as puppies, that wanted to eat only from one's hands; they had also bartered the most charming turtledoves and parakeets as tame as the pigeons,¹ and we commented that these islanders are

¹ *Columbidae* are common in the Samoas. The *lupe* or Pacific pigeon, *Ducula pacifica pacifica*, is still common in Tutuila, but the white-chested pigeon, *Columba vitiensis castaneiceps*, is now much more scarce. The parakeets were *sega vao*, or blue-crowned lory, *Vini australis* Gmelin.

the happiest inhabitants of the earth, they spend their days in idleness surrounded by their wives and have no other care than to adorn themselves, to tame birds and, like the first man, to pick fruit growing above their heads without any effort on their part. We saw no weapons, but their bodies were covered with scars which was evidence that they were often warring or quarrelling and their features indicated a ferocity one did not see in the women's appearance; Nature no doubt had left this mark to warn that, in spite of all the academies that crown the philosophers' paradoxes,¹ man in an almost savage state and living in anarchy is a more malevolent being than the wolves and tigers of the forests; this first visit took place without any incident likely to have serious consequences, I learned however that there had been a few private quarrels which a great prudence had brought to nought. Stones had been thrown at Mr Rollin, our senior surgeon; an islander pretending to admire a sword belonging to Mr Moneron had tried to snatch it from him and getting only the sheath had fled terrified at the sight of the naked blade, dropping the scabbard. All in all I realised that they were very turbulent and not very much under their chiefs' control,² but I was expecting to leave in the afternoon and was glad that I had attached no importance to the minor injustices we had suffered. At about midday I returned to the ship in my biscay boat and the longboats followed very close behind. I had some difficulty in getting alongside because the canoes were surrounding our two

¹ This is a dig at the Dijon Academy which in 1749 had organised a competition for an essay 'On whether the progress of the sciences and the arts has contributed to the corruption or the improvement of morals'. It was won by Jean-Jacques Rousseau with a *Discours* which made him famous and crystallised for him his feeling that man was originally virtuous, free and happy, but had become corrupted by society, and that in order to restore mankind to some measure of happiness a return to some more natural state was essential. This was followed by a second *Discours* on the origin of inequality. The phrase was deleted by Milet-Mureau in his printed version of the narrative. The ongoing debate on Rousseauism (towards which La Pérouse felt little sympathy) is discussed in Michèle Duchet, *Anthropologie et histoire au siècle des lumières*, Paris, 1971, and Taillemite, *Bougainville*, I, pp. 45-57 has provided an analysis of another navigator's reaction, Bougainville, to the reality of 'natural man' in a Pacific Islands environment.

² Some modern commentators have pointed to what they see as the friendliness of the Samoans during this first day, and have assumed that the French must have committed some breach of etiquette or some act of hostility which resulted in the attack on Langle and his men. These comments on the turbulence of the islanders and La Pérouse's attempts to conciliate them and impress on them the dangerous superiority of European weapons give a different impression.

frigates and our market was still full. I had put Mr Boutin in charge of the frigate when I went ashore and had left it to him to make the arrangements he considered appropriate by allowing a few islanders to come on board or totally preventing it according to the circumstances. I found on the quarter-deck seven or eight Indians, the eldest of whom was presented to me as being a chief. Mr Boutin told me that he could have prevented them from climbing up only by giving the order to fire on them, that when they compared their physical strength with ours they laughed at our threats and mocked our sentries, and that knowing my principles of moderation he had not wanted to resort to violent means which however was the only way to keep them in check. He added moreover that since the chief had come aboard the other islanders who had preceded him were much quieter and less insolent. I gave a great number of presents to this chief and showed him the utmost friendliness; then, wishing to give a high opinion of our power, I had several pistol shots fired in front of him which went through wooden planks, we shot pigeons with muskets; it seemed to me that the effect of our weapons did not make much of an impression on him and that he believed them only good for killing birds. Our longboats arrived, laden with water, and I had all arrangements made in order to set sail and take advantage of the light land breeze which promised to give us enough time to get away a little from the coast. At the same time Mr de Langle came back from his excursion. He advised me that he had landed in a small harbour ideal for boats, at the foot of a charming village and by a cascade of the clearest water; as he went past he had given instructions to his ship to make ready to sail. Like me he felt the need to do so, but he insisted most vehemently that we should remain tacking within a league of the coast and obtain a few boatloads of water before leaving this island; however strongly I argued that we had no need for it, he had adopted Captain Cook's views and believed that fresh water was preferable to what we had in our holds and as a few members of his crew had small symptoms of scurvy, he thought that we owed it to them to provide every means of relief.

This island furthermore could not be compared to any other in respect of the abundance of food, the two frigates together had already bought more than five hundred pigs, plus hens, pigeons and great quantities of fruit, and all this had only cost us a few glass beads. I felt that these arguments were valid, but a secret sense of

foreboding prevented me from accepting them, I told him that I found these islanders too turbulent to send ashore boats and longboats which could not be assisted by our ships' guns, that our moderation had inspired little respect for us on the part of these Indians who were colossi and looked only at our physical strength which was inferior to theirs; nothing could shake Mr de Langle's obstinacy and he added that my own would make me responsible for the progress of the scurvy that was beginning to manifest itself with some severity, he added that the port he had been to was a hundred times more convenient than the one where we had obtained our water, begging me to place him at the head of the first expedition, and that he undertook to be back on board with all the boats and the water within three hours. Mr de Langle was a man of such excellent judgement and of such ability that these considerations above everything else finally caused my own will to bow to his, and I promised him that we would stay on short tacks during the night and would send the next day our two longboats and two boats ashore armed as he considered appropriate and that everything would be placed under his orders. Events proved that it was time we left — raising the anchor we found one of the strands of our cable cut through by the coral and if we had spent two hours more at this anchorage it would have been cut through.¹

As we did not get under sail until four in the afternoon it was too late to think of sending our longboats ashore and we put off their departure until the next day; the night was stormy and the winds, changing constantly, made me decide to go about three leagues from the coast. At dawn the dead calm prevented me from sailing up to it, it was only at 9 o'clock that a light breeze rose from the N.E. which enabled me to near the coast from which at eleven o'clock I was only a short league away and I then sent my longboat and my launch commanded by Messrs Boutin and Mouton to the *Astrolabe* to place themselves at Mr de Langle's disposal. All those who showed any sign of scurvy were sent with them together with six armed soldiers led by the master-at-arms, and about twenty barrels shared between the two craft. Messrs de Lamanon and Colinet, who were sick, formed part of the 28 people who left the *Boussole*, and Mr Vaujuas, who was convalescing, went with Mr de Langle in his launch. Mr Gobien, garde de la marine, was in charge

¹ A ship's cable usually consisted of three strands.

and Messrs la Martinière, l'Avau and Father Receveur were among the thirty-three people from the *Astrolabe*. Altogether the expedition comprised 61 individuals, which number included the elite of our crews. Mr de Langle had had six swivel-guns set up, had taken muskets and swords and I had broadly left him to decide what he needed for his safety. Being quite confident that we had not been involved in anything which might have caused these people to harbour any grudges, the great number of canoes surrounding us out at sea, the feeling of gaiety and trust which reigned in the markets where the abundance of supplies was such that they could perhaps not be compared to any mentioned by navigators, everything tended to increase his feeling of safety and I must admit that my own confidence could not be greater, but sending boats ashore that could not be protected or even seen from the ships, in the middle of such a large crowd, ran counter to my principles unless it was absolutely necessary; the longboats left the *Astrolabe* at half past twelve and in less than three-quarters of an hour they had arrived at the watering place. Imagine the surprise of all the officers, of Mr de Langle himself, when they found, instead of a superb bay, a small cove full of corals into which one could only enter by a tortuous channel less than 25 feet in width where the waves broke as on a bar and when they were inside there was not three feet of water,¹ the longboats ran aground and the boats stayed afloat only because they were hauled by hand to the pass entrance a fair distance from the shore; unhappily Mr de Langle had investigated this bay at high tide, he did not expect that the tide rose in these islands by five or six feet. He could hardly believe his eyes, his first reaction was to turn back and no doubt go to the bay where we had already obtained water and which had every advantage, but the peaceful and gentle appearance of the people waiting for him on the shore with an enormous quantity of fruit and pigs, the large number of women and children he noticed among the islanders who take good care to drive them away when they harbour hostile intentions, and finally his destiny which was driving him inexorably towards his destruction, all these conditions together drove away his first cautious thoughts which an unthinkable fate prevented him from following, and he landed the water casks of the four craft with the

¹ A'au Bay is still referred to as Massacre Bay. It lies just over a mile south-west of Fagasa Bay. Practically the whole of this coast is steep and rocky.

utmost feeling of confidence; on land his soldiers established the most orderly conditions possible, they made a hedge that cleared a free space for our workers; but soon this early calm came to an end, several of the canoes which had sold their supplies to our ships came back to land and all landed in the watering cove so that it gradually filled up; instead of 200 inhabitants, including the women and children Mr de l'angle had found when he arrived at one thirty, there were a thousand or twelve hundred by three o'clock. The number of canoes trading with us in the morning had been so great that we hardly noticed that it had lessened during the afternoon, on the contrary I rejoiced at keeping them occupied with the ships in the hope that our longboats would be less bothered. I was quite wrong and Mr de L'angle's situation was becoming more troublesome by the minute; nevertheless he managed with the help of Messrs Vaujuas, Boutin, Colinet and Gobien to load his water barrels but the bay was almost drained out, and there was no hope of getting his longboats afloat before four o'clock in the afternoon. However he got into them with his officers and his detachment and took up a position forward with his musket and his fusiliers, issuing orders to all of them not to fire until he gave instructions, and he was already feeling all too well that it would soon be necessary, already stones were flying and these Indians who had water only up to their knees were surrounding the longboats less than a *toise* away; the soldiers who had re-embarked no longer being able to contain them; if the fear of starting the hostilities and possibly being accused in Europe of barbarous behaviour had not prevented Mr de L'angle from killing twenty or thirty Indians with muskets or swivel-guns, he would certainly have driven this multitude away but he was confident that he could keep them in check without any blood being shed and he fell victim of his humaneness; soon a hail of stones thrown from a distance of five or six feet with the power of a sling hit almost all those who were in the longboat.¹ Mr de Langle had only time to fire his two shots, he was knocked over and unfortunately fell on the port side of the longboat, where there were more than two hundred Indians who massacred him with clubs and stones and when he was dead tied one of his arms to

¹ Every navigator who was at the receiving end of stones hurled by Samoans and Tongans commented on the dexterity and strength shown by their attackers; La Pérouse's own phrase, *jetter des pierres*, 'to throw stones', hardly does justice to the men of A'au Bay.

one of the longboat's thole-pin presumably to profit from his remains. The *Boussolé's* longboat commanded by Mr Boutin had grounded two *toises* from the *Astrolabe's* and parallel to it, leaving a small passage where there were no Indians and by which all our wounded who were lucky enough not to fall on the offside escaped and reached our boats which luckily had remained afloat under the command of Messrs de Vaujuas and Mouton and were consequently able to save 49 out of the 61 men who made up the expedition. Mr Boutin who was in charge of my longboat had modelled all his movements, all his actions on those of Mr de L'angle; his water casks, his detachment, all his people had been embarked at the same time and arranged in the same way, he himself occupied the same position at the bow and although he was worried about the poor outcome of Mr de Langle's moderation he did not allow himself and his detachment to fire until his commanding officer had done so. It can be expected that at a distance of four or five paces each shot must have killed an Indian, but there was no time to reload.¹ Mr Boutin was knocked over like Mr de Langle, fortunately he fell between the two longboats. In less than five minutes there was not a single Frenchman left in either of the grounded boats, all those who escaped by swimming to the two boats had received over ten wounds, almost all head wounds; those who had the misfortune of being knocked over on the side of the Indians were finished off immediately with clubs and the thirst for loot was such that after capturing the longboats and climbing in, three or four hundred of them, breaking up the thwarts and everything else to look for the riches they thought we had, none of the islanders took much further notice of our boats and gave enough time for Messrs de Vaujuas and Mouton to save everyone and ensure that none remained within the Indians' power apart from those who had been massacred and killed in the water with their

¹ Muskets (the French term was *fusil*, or flintlock musket) took twenty to thirty seconds to reload, depending on the soldier's skill, or to be precise 19.51 seconds under test conditions with a 1 in 6 misfire rate: D. Shineberg, 'Guns and Men in Melanesia', *Journal of Pacific History*, VI (1971), p. 76. See also K. R. Howe, 'Firearms and Indigenous Warfare', *Journal of Pacific History*, IX (1974), pp. 21-38. They had nothing in common with the modern rapid-fire rifle. Once the shot was fired, the soldier or sailor was at the mercy of the islanders who were running at him with clubs or spears which they handled with great dexterity and precision. Cook's death occurred under similar circumstances to Langle's and for much the same reason: once they had fired their first shot, the English were effectively disarmed for half a minute and, worse still, preoccupied with trying to reload.

*Patow Patow*¹ after being knocked down by the stones. Our boats which until then had been firing at the islanders and must have killed several had no other thought in mind than throwing the water casks overboard in order to make room for everyone, they had spent almost all their ammunition and retreating was not without difficulty with so many people seriously wounded, stretched out on the thwarts and impeding the movement of the oars, and we owe the safety of the 49 members of the two crews to Mr Vaujuas's sagacity, and the good order he maintained, and to the punctual manner in which Mr Boutin who commanded the *Boussolé's* longboat carried out his instructions. Mr Colinet was found unconscious lying across the canoe's mooring rope, with one arm smashed, a finger broken and two head wounds; Mr L'avau, senior surgeon on the *Astrolabe*, so badly wounded that he had to be trepanned, swam unaided up to the two boats, as did Mr de La Martinière and Father Receveur who received a severely bruised eye; Messrs de Langle and Lamanon remained on the battlefield where they were massacred with unparalleled barbarity as well as Mr Talin, the *Boussolé's* master-at-arms and three other soldiers, four sailors and two servants, twelve people in all on which the Indians satisfied their rage with such a fury that each was clubbed over a hundred times after they died. Mr Gobien who was in charge of the *Astrolabe's* longboat under Mr de Langle's orders although seriously wounded did not abandon the longboat until he found himself alone in it, after using up his ammunition he jumped into the water on the side of the small channel created by the two longboats which as I have already stated was not taken over by the Indians and escaped to the boats. The *Astrolabe's* was so overloaded that it grounded, which gave the islanders the idea of still disrupting their retreat and they went in large numbers towards the reefs at the entrance, which of necessity one had to pass at a distance of ten feet. The little ammunition left was spent on these latter, and the boats finally came out of this lair which on account of its situation and the barbarity of the inhabitants was more frightful than a den of tigers and lions.

¹ *Patu* is a largely Maori term used to describe a flat hand-held weapon, usually with a thin cutting edge, made of greenstone, whalebone or a similar material. La Pérouse presumably obtained the term from the accounts of Cook's voyages, in which they are usually spelled *patoo patoo*. Similar weapons existed in the Samoan Islands: this one may be a *fa'alautilaga*, a double-headed hand-axe.

They arrived on board the two frigates at five in the evening and we learned of this awful event. At that moment we had a hundred canoes surrounding us, selling provisions with a feeling of security that proved they were not the accomplices of this perfidious action, but they were the brothers, the children and the compatriots of these barbarous murderers, and I must admit that I needed all my powers of reasoning to stop me from giving way to anger, to the rage that burned inside me, and prevent our crews from killing them. They had already jumped to the guns and the weapons, but I halted these movements which however were quite forgivable and I had a single gun fired with a load of powder to warn the canoes to leave; one small craft sent from the coast no doubt told them of the betrayal and in less than an hour no canoe remained in sight; one Indian who was on my frigate's quarter-deck when our boat arrived was arrested by my orders and put in irons, and the next day having come closer to the coast I allowed him to jump into the sea, the sense of security with which he had come on board my frigate being clear evidence of his innocence. My first plan was to order a second expedition to avenge our unfortunate companions, to destroy that village entirely, and recapture the remnants of our longboats; I went towards the coast to seek an anchorage, but all I found was the same coral bottom with a swell rolling towards the land and breaking on the reefs like on those of the *Chaussée des Saints*.¹ The cove where the massacre had taken place was moreover very deep and narrow, it was impossible to approach it within a gunshot and Mr Boutin, although seriously wounded and bedridden, remained clear-headed and pointed out to me that the terrain was such that I would risk losing a number of men to no purpose and that if my boats were unlucky enough to become grounded it was very likely that not one man would survive, the trees which almost touched the edge of the sea providing a shelter for the Indians from our muskets and leaving our French if we landed any ashore exposed to their stones which they threw with such skill and strength that they had the same effect as our bullets and had the advantage over our musket shots of following each other much more quickly. Mr de Vaujuas shared exactly the same

¹ The pass between the two small islands of Les Saintes, of the island of Guadeloupe in the West Indies. La Pérouse was present at the 'Bataille des Saintes' against Admiral Rodney in April 1782 when he escorted the French warship *Zélée* to safety through dangerous rock-strewn waters.

opinion but I did not want to accept it until I had completely satisfied myself of the impossibility of anchoring our vessels within gunshot of the village; I spent two days tacking in front of the bay; I still could see the remains of our longboats on the sand around which there was an immense crowd of Indians, but—what will sound incredible—five or six canoes came from the coast with pigeons, coconuts and pigs to offer to barter with us; I was time and again forced to contain my anger in order not to send them to the bottom, these Indians knew nothing about our weapons other than the effect of our muskets and they believed that as was the case with their stones which could reach no further than thirty feet, they in their turn could not be hit from that distance and they remained fearlessly fifty *toises* from our vessels, offering us coconuts, bananas and pigs; our gestures urged them not to come any nearer and they spent thus a good hour of the afternoon of 12 December. They soon added jeers to their offers to barter provisions, and as they did not know the effect of our guns, and I could see more canoes leaving the shore and realised that I would soon be forced to alter my principles of moderation I had a gun fired in the midst of these craft. My orders were carried out so precisely that the cannonball caused the water to splash over these canoes which immediately made for the land and we did not see another one during the whole day, the others which had left the coast joining those who were returning from the sea: I felt sadness at having to leave such a tragic place and leave behind the massacred corpses of our unfortunate companions. I had lost, through the most frightful act of treachery, my best friend, my friend of 30 years, a man full of wit, wisdom and knowledge, and certainly one of the best officers in any European navy. His humanity had brought about his death and if he had dared to allow himself to fire on the first Indians who went into the water to surround his longboats he would have saved himself, Mr de Lamanon and ten other victims of the Indian ferocity.¹ Twenty individuals from the two frigates were seriously wounded, so that we had 32 men fewer and our two longboats, the only rowing craft that were capturable of taking in addition to their crews a fairly large number of armed men in order to carry out a landing. These issues determined my later conduct, the slightest setback would have forced me to burn one of the two frigates to man the other one and I would have had to abandon my campaign;

¹ For a discussion of the possible causes of the Samoan attack, see Introduction.

I did have a longboat ready to be assembled at my next place of call, and if all that was needed to ease my anger was the massacre of a few Indians I had the opportunity to destroy, send to the bottom of the sea and break up a hundred canoes in which there were more than five hundred people, but I was afraid to attack the wrong victims and the call of my conscience saved their lives. Those who will think back to the Captain Cook catastrophe must not forget that his ships were at anchor in Karakakoa Bay, that their guns made them the masters of the seashore and that they could establish control by threatening to destroy the canoes left on the shore as well as the villages lining the coast;¹ we on the contrary were away from the coast out of the range of our guns and forced to get away from the coast when we feared the calms, a strong swell bearing us towards the reefs where we might of course have anchored with steel hawsers, but the village would have been beyond gun range and the swell alone would have been enough to cut the cable at the hawse-hole and place the frigates in the greatest danger; I exhausted all possibilities before leaving this fatal island, and it was proved to me that it was impossible to anchor, that the expedition would be foolhardy if the frigates could not assist and success pointless since we were only too certain that not one man remained alive in Indian hands, that they had smashed up and beached the longboats and that we had means enough on board to replace them. Consequently I set sail on the 14th for the third island which I could see in the W $\frac{1}{4}$ NW and which Mr de Bougainville had also sighted only from the topmasts because the bad weather had driven him away from it. It is separated from Mahouana Island by a strait of nine leagues;² the

¹ James Cook was murdered at Kealakekua Bay, Hawaii, on 14 February 1779. The circumstances were different in that relations between the English and the Hawaiians had clearly worsened and Cook tried to recapture a cutter stolen by the islanders. But the hail of stones that fell upon the English party and the general confusion which followed was later paralleled in the attack on Langle and his men. Historians, as J.C. Beaglehole pointed out in 'The Case of the Needleless Death', in *The Historian as Detective*, New York, 1969, ed. Robert W. Winks, face the problem of reconstructing situations on the basis of records left by witnesses and participants who are no more and whose accounts differ, and who, as Maurice de Brossard pointed out in *Momana océan cruel*, Paris, 1966, belonged to totally different cultures (see especially his pp. 13-14 and 321-34).

² The island is Upolu, separated from Tutuila by a strait of some 50 miles. It forms part of Western Samoa, whereas Tutuila is part of American Samoa. Bougainville's reference to Upolu occurs in his journal entry of 4 May 1768: 'From the topmasts we saw another land bearing WNW and NW $\frac{1}{4}$ W, high land.' Taillemite, *Bougainville*, I, p. 336.

Indians had given us the names of the ten islands that make up their archipelago. They had roughly sketched them on paper and, although we were convinced that one could hardly rely on the map they had drawn, we could not doubt that there existed a kind of confederation¹ between these ten islands, very well known to each other, and that there was a great deal of communication between them, and the subsequent discoveries we made since that time leave us in no doubt that this island group is larger, as well populated and as abundant in foodstuffs as is the Society archipelago; it is more than likely that one would find some excellent anchoring places, but having no longboats and in view of the state of tension of our crews I decided that I would land only at Botany Bay in New Holland where I proposed to build the longboat I had on board. But for the advancement of geography I felt that I ought to explore the various islands I would come upon, accurately determine their latitude and longitude, communicate with these people through their canoes which, laden with foodstuffs, travel two or three leagues from the coast to trade with vessels, and I left to others the task of writing their history which like that of all barbarous people is of slight interest. A 24-hour stay with an account of our misfortunes is sufficient to describe their atrocious ways, their crafts and the products of one of the most beautiful countries in the world; but before continuing the narrative of our route along the islands of this archipelago I feel that I should offer to public scrutiny the account given by Mr de Vaujuas who took charge of the retreat although he had gone ashore only because he was convalescing and was not on duty; the circumstances gave him back his strength, he made the best arrangements possible and left the bay only after he had satisfied himself that not one Frenchman remained within the Indians' power.

'On Tuesday eleventh of December at eleven in the morning, the Count de la Pérouse sent his longboat and his boat loaded with water casks with a detachment of armed soldiers under the command of Mr de Langle to whom in the morning he had sent Mr

¹ Confederation is hardly an appropriate term. Samoan society had no unified political structure. Even the islands were split into tribal and sub-tribal groups between which alliances were made and unmade under the influence of chiefs and village assemblies. Language and culture, together with kinship, established a form of unity between the islands, maintained by frequent communications - hence the name 'Navigators' - even though the outcome was as much war as trade.