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To cite this article: Garrick Hitchcock (2017): Manuscript XXXII The Final Fate of the La Pérouse Expedition?The 1818 Account of Shaik Jumaul, A Lascar Castaway in Torres Strait, The Journal of Pacific History, DOI: [10.1080/00223344.2017.1335370](https://doi.org/10.1080/00223344.2017.1335370)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00223344.2017.1335370>



Published online: 29 Aug 2017.



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## NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

# Manuscript XXXII

## The Final Fate of the La Pérouse Expedition? *The 1818 Account of Shaik Jumaul, A Lascar Castaway in Torres Strait*

GARRICK HITCHCOCK

### ABSTRACT

The final fate of the La Pérouse expedition is a mystery. In 1788 the frigates *L'Astrolabe* and *La Boussole* were wrecked on Vanikoro in the Solomon Islands. According to Vanikoro oral history, the survivors then left, approximately six months later, in a boat which they had built. They were never seen again. This paper reports the rediscovery of an 1818 Indian newspaper article, detailing the rescue in Torres Strait of a lascar named Shaik Jumaul, a castaway for four years on Murray Island (Mer). While on Mer he saw weapons and instruments that seemed not of English manufacture. The Murray Islanders informed him that these came from the crew of a vessel wrecked nearby some three decades earlier. No European ship is known to have been lost in Torres Strait in that period. Shaik Jumaul's account points to the possibility that the La Pérouse expedition ended finally in northern Australia.

Key words: La Pérouse, exploration, shipwrecks, France, Torres Strait, Murray Island (Mer)

The question of the fate of the members of the expedition led by Jean-François de Galaup, Comte de La Pérouse, has been a source of intrigue and fascination ever

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*Acknowledgements:* I would like to thank the archivists, librarians and researchers who assisted me with this research: Brit Asmussen of the Queensland Museum, Saumitra Basu of the Indian National Science Academy, New Delhi, John Dunmore of New Zealand, Jean-Christophe Galipaud of the Institut de Recherche pour le Développement, Vanessa Mitchell of the Library of Congress, Neil Raj of The British Library, Ranjana Ray of The Asiatic Society, Kolkata and Edward Weech of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland. I would also like to thank Colin Sheehan in Brisbane and Catriona Murray in Arles for their French translations. Lastly I would like to thank Ian McNiven and the anonymous reviewers, section editors and editors for their comments and assistance.

since the frigates *L'Astrolabe* and *La Boussole* sailed out of Botany Bay on 10 March 1788, vanishing, it seemed, into the great expanse of the Pacific. In 1791 the French National Assembly commissioned Joseph-Antoine Raymond Bruni d'Entrecasteaux, in command of *La Recherche* and *L'Espérance*, to search for the overdue navigator, without success. At the guillotine on 21 January 1793, Louis XVI is said to have asked for news of La Pérouse.<sup>1</sup> The expedition's fate was only ascertained four decades later. In 1827, Captain Peter Dillon confirmed that both vessels had been wrecked during a storm on the western fringing reef of Vanikoro Island, in the Santa Cruz Group of the Solomon Islands, recovering artefacts that were later positively identified in France as belonging to the expedition vessels. Both Dillon and French explorer Jules Sébastien César Dumont d'Urville (who visited Vanikoro in 1828) were told by Vanikoro Islanders that a number of La Pérouse's crew had survived. After erecting a stockade, they spent several months building a two-masted boat, in which they then sailed away, leaving two men behind.<sup>2</sup>

In the period up to 1827, there were numerous theories and supposed sightings of wreckage, artefacts and survivors elsewhere in the southwest Pacific, but nothing conclusive about the fate of those who had set sail from Vanikoro.<sup>3</sup> Responding to Dillon's discovery, *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser* proposed that he might again be engaged to discover

further particulars of the destiny of La Perouse; since it is extremely probable, that the survivors of the two French ships, who left the Manicolo Islands [Vanikoro] in a small vessel that they had built, were a second and last time wrecked among the neighbouring islands in their new barque.<sup>4</sup>

Another observer remarked in 1833:

La Perouse's [...] ultimate destiny remains in considerable obscurity. For instance, it may be asked, was he amongst the number of those

<sup>1</sup> Jean-Christophe Galipaud and Valérie Jauneau, *Au-delà d'un naufrage: les survivants de l'expédition Lapérouse* (Paris: Marseilles: Actes-Sud/Errance/IRD, 2012), 219.

<sup>2</sup> Dillon was told of a stay of 'plenty of moons' and 'five moons', while Dumont d'Urville's informants told him various times, of between five and seven months. Peter Dillon, *Narrative and Successful Result of a Voyage in the South Seas, Performed by Order of the Government of British India, to Ascertain the Actual Fate of La Pérouse's Expedition*, 2 vols (London: Hurst, Chance and Co., 1829), II, 160, 195; Jules Sébastien César Dumont d'Urville, *An Account in Two Volumes of Two Voyages to the South Seas by Captain (Later Rear-Admiral) Jules S-C Dumont d'Urville of the French Navy to Australia, New Zealand, Oceania 1826–1829 in the Corvette Astrolabe and to the Straits of Magellan, Chile, Oceania, South East Asia, Australia, Antarctica, New Zealand and Torres Strait 1837–1840 in the Corvettes Astrolabe and Zélée*, trans. Helen Rosenman (Carlton, VIC: Melbourne University Press, 1987), I, 226. Based on their planned itinerary, it is estimated that the vessels came to grief around June 1788. John Dunmore, *Pacific Explorer: The Life of Jean-François de La Pérouse 1741–1788* (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 1985), 300.

<sup>3</sup> See Galipaud and Jauneau, *Au-delà d'un naufrage*, Ch. 4; Jean Guillou, 'A propos du navire de secours de Lapérouse', *Bulletin de la Société d'Études Historiques de la Nouvelle-Calédonie*, 69 (1986): 59–71.

<sup>4</sup> *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, 18 Jan. 1828, 2.

who escaped from the shipwreck, and afterwards departed in the vessel which was built on the fatal shores of Maunicolo [Vanikoro]? What became of that craft? Did she founder at sea, and go down in the unfathomable depths of the Pacific? Or did her crew experience a disaster similar to that which had already overtaken them? And were they again cast away on one of the Solomon Islands, and butchered by savages, or left to die piece-meal? Or are some of them still alive there?<sup>5</sup>

Yet some years earlier, in 1818, an article appeared in the *The Madras Courier*<sup>6</sup> which pointed strongly to the final fate of the La Pérouse expedition. It was subsequently published, in full or in part, in other periodicals in Australia, England, America, Germany and France.<sup>7</sup> This article, which is reproduced below, reported how, in September 1818, the ships *Claudine* (Captain Welsh)<sup>8</sup> and *Mary* (Captain Orman) had rescued a shipwrecked lascar named Shaik Jumaul while off Murray Island (Mer),<sup>9</sup> in northeast Torres Strait (see [Map 1](#) and [Figure 1](#)). It transpired that he was a survivor from the brig *Morning Star*, wrecked near Quoin Island, north Queensland in mid-1814 en route from Port Jackson to Calcutta. Most of the crew drowned, but the master and several others made it to the refuge of Booby Island in southwest Torres Strait, with some later recovered there by a passing vessel.<sup>10</sup> Somehow, Shaik Jumaul landed on Mer, where he was cared for by the local people, and subsequently acquired fluency in the local language, Meriam Mir. A boat from the *Claudine* retrieved the castaway, who was later transferred to the *Mary*, which unlike the *Claudine* had lascars amongst its crew. Whilst on board, a

<sup>5</sup> 'Biographic sketches: La Perouse', *Chambers' Edinburgh Journal*, 1:53 (1833): 7.

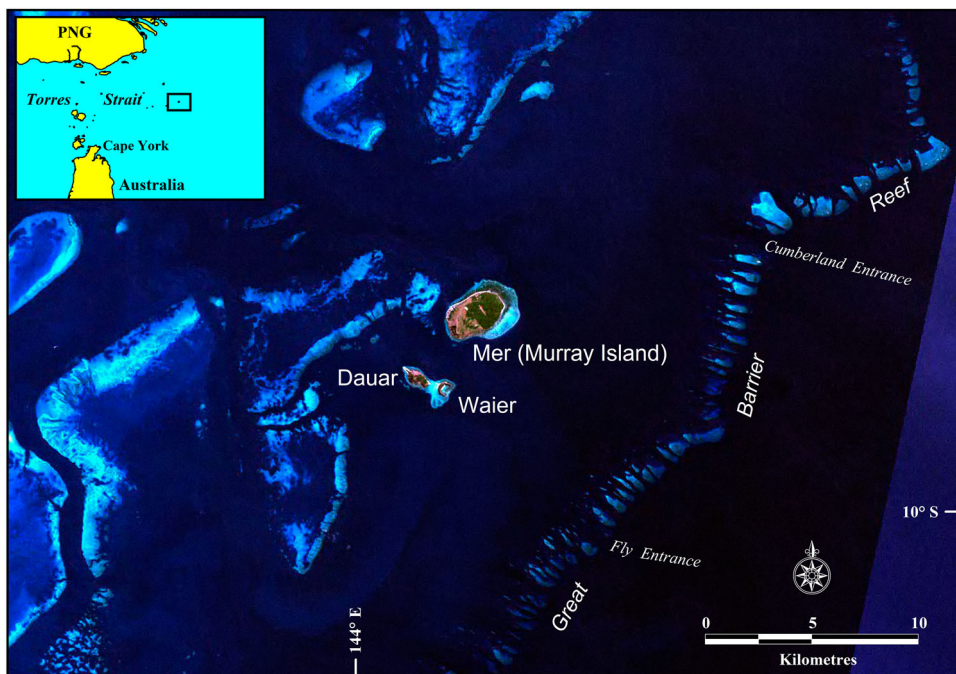
<sup>6</sup> *The Madras Courier* (Supplement), 29 Dec. 1818, 6. I thank Neil Raj of The British Library for making a digital copy of this newspaper available to me.

<sup>7</sup> These include: *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, 31 July 1819, 3; 'Nouvelles probabilités sur la mort de Lapèrouse', *Journal des Voyages, Découvertes et Navigations Modernes; ou Archives Géographiques*, Cahier 11 (Sept. 1819): 116–18; *Miscellen aus der Neuesten Ausländischen Literatur* (Jena), 21 (1819): 473–81; *The Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register of British India and its Dependencies* (London) (July 1819): 25–7; *The National Register, a Weekly Paper, Containing a Series of the Important Public Documents, and the Proceedings of Congress* (Washington City), 7:19 (8 May 1819): 298–99.

<sup>8</sup> See 'John Welsh (?–1832)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, II: 1788–1850 I–Z (Carlton, VIC: Melbourne University Press, 1967), 577.

<sup>9</sup> Murray Island (Murray's Island in some accounts) is located at 9° 55' South 144° 3' East; it is some 1,350 nautical miles west of Vanikoro. Mer is the traditional name of the island. The Murray Islands refers to this island, and neighbouring Waier and Dauar, which together comprise the territory of the Meriam people, the Meriam Le.

<sup>10</sup> *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, 19 Apr. 1815, 2; Kieran Hosty, 'Shipwrecks East of India: The Ferguson Reef Project 2013', *Signals* 103 (2013): 20–1. The convict James Laurence, a stowaway on the *Mary*, wrote that the lascars' companions were massacred on landing at Mer, which no other source attests. Rob Wills, *Alias Blind Larry: The Mostly True Memoir of James Laurence the Singing Convict* (North Melbourne, VIC: Australian Scholarly Publishing Pty Ltd, 2015), 78.



MAP 1: Torres Strait and Mer (Murray Island). Map by author.



FIGURE 1: Western part of Mer (Murray Island) and the neighbouring islands of Waier (L) and Dauar (R), 1 December 2016. Photograph by author.

Calcutta merchant, Alexander Macdonald Ritchie,<sup>11</sup> took the opportunity to record Shaik Jumaul's recollections of his time on Murray Island. This account was published

<sup>11</sup> See Suzanne Rickard, 'Lifelines from Calcutta', in James Broadbent, Suzanne Rickard and Margaret Steven (eds), *India, China, Australia: Trade and Society 1788–1850* (Glebe, NSW: Historic Houses Trust of NSW, 2003), 76, 77 n. 37, 79.

after their arrival in Calcutta in the November 1818 issue of *The Asiatic Mirror and Commercial Advertiser*, and re-published<sup>12</sup> together with a letter from the master of the *Claudine* detailing the rescue, in the 29 December issue of *The Madras Courier*.<sup>13</sup>

Shaik Jumaul's story would in itself be noteworthy, for in addition to initially appearing to be the earliest known castaway in Torres Strait, he related interesting information about the Islanders, providing the first account of aspects of their culture from someone who had lived amongst them and become fluent in their language.

But it was what the castaway told his rescuers about an earlier shipwreck that was most intriguing, shedding light on the possible final fate of the survivors from Vanikoro. Shaik Jumaul noted that he had seen navigational aids and weapons on several islands, and upon enquiry, was told that a ship had been wrecked on a nearby reef three decades earlier,<sup>14</sup> with all crew subsequently killed, save a young boy who was spared and adopted into the community, who himself went missing some years later.

It was immediately suspected by those who heard this story that it must refer to members of the La Pérouse expedition.<sup>15</sup>

This article then fades out of sight. In almost every book published subsequently about La Pérouse, the fate of the Vanikoro escape vessel is given little

<sup>12</sup> It is not clear if *The Madras Courier* re-published the entire report from *The Asiatic Mirror*, or an excerpt. Attempts to locate this issue have not been successful, despite searches at numerous institutions including The British Library and Library of Congress. Various issues of *The Asiatic Mirror* from 1818 held by the National Library of India are in fragments and illegible. I thank Saumitra Basu and Ranjana Ray for this information and their efforts to find a copy within India.

<sup>13</sup> The article appears in the Supplement section of this issue, on page 6. On page 8 (Additional Supplement) are the sailing directions, the route of the *Claudine* and *Mary*. The directions were almost certainly provided by John Welsh, captain of the *Claudine*, who actively promoted his sailing directions in Torres Strait, through the passage he discovered and named after his vessel, the Claudine Passage. For example, he lent his 1818 and 1820 logs to a Hobart newspaper, encouraging their publication. *Hobart Town Gazette*, 23 Dec. 1826, 4. Extracts from the logbook of his 1820 voyage to Murray Island were also published in India the following year. 'Observations and Discoveries in the South Pacific Ocean', *The Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register for British India and its Dependencies*, 11:64 (Apr. 1821): 342–45; this reproduces his log exactly, see John Welsh, 'Ships Claudine & Hastings. 1820', Sir Thomas Makdougall Brisbane, papers, 1818–1849 (Sydney, Mitchell Library), ML MSS. 419/2 Item 8. I have not been able to locate a chart showing Claudine Passage, but from Welsh's description it is probably one of the entrances through the Great Barrier Reef running west-northwest, just south of Cumberland Passage (see [Map 1](#)).

<sup>14</sup> This, then, is the earliest known shipwreck in Torres Strait, and eastern Australia. Previously, it was thought to be the 350-ton *Mersey*, lost in Torres Strait in 1804, although little is known about this incident. Allan McInnes, 'Dangers and difficulties of the Torres Strait and inner route', *Journal of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland* 10:4 (1979): 154; Ian Nicholson, *Via Torres Strait: A Maritime History of the Torres Strait Route and the Ship's Post Office at Booby Island* (Yaroomba, QLD: Ian Nicholson on behalf of the Roebuck Series, 1996), 34.

<sup>15</sup> Of the various periodicals that reproduced the story, only the *Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register* does not mention La Pérouse.



attention. The outcome, accepted by many, is that arrived at by Dumont d'Urville, who had orders to search for La Pérouse on his first voyage of the Pacific: they must have been wrecked elsewhere in the Solomon Islands.<sup>16</sup> Others think it likely the escape vessel never made it beyond the Vanikoro lagoon, having been attacked by locals in canoes.<sup>17</sup> For others, it is a 'mystery that will never be solved'.<sup>18</sup>

I have only located two publications that make reference to the Shaik Jumaul account. The first is Jean-Christophe Galipaud and Valérie Jauneau's 2012 book devoted to the Vanikoro survivors, *Au-delà d'un naufrage: les survivants de l'expédition Lapérouse* [*Beyond a shipwreck: the survivors of the La Pérouse expedition*]. In a chapter discussing how rumours and theories intensified in the years after La Pérouse went missing, the newspaper article is dismissed as a garbled story, mixing several earlier accounts, and hence having little credibility.<sup>19</sup>

In 1837 Hyacinthe de Bougainville considered the matter of La Pérouse's final fate in some detail, as an appendix in his book of his own voyage of exploration.<sup>20</sup> He noted Dumont d'Urville's 1833 hypothesis on the route of the survivors:

I shall speculate that in my opinion they must have steered towards New Ireland to reach the Moluccas or the Philippines, along the route of Carteret or Bougainville. At the time it was the only route that offered any chance of survival for such a frail craft, as poorly equipped as the one constructed at Vanikoro must have been; for it must be presumed that the French had been badly weakened by fever and their fights with the natives. I will even venture so far as

<sup>16</sup> Dumont d'Urville, *An Account in Two Volumes*, I, 239.

<sup>17</sup> This is the opinion of La Pérouse researchers Reece Discombe and Raymond de Brossard. Brossard cited and trans. by H. Rosenman, in Dumont d'Urville, *An Account in Two Volumes*, I, 301; Russell C. Shelton, *From Hudson Bay to Botany Bay: The Lost Frigates of Lapérouse* (Toronto: NC Press, 1987), 202–4, 207.

<sup>18</sup> John Dunmore, trans. and ed., *The Journal of Jean-François de Galaup de la Pérouse 1785–1788*, 2 vols (London: Hakluyt Society, 1994–5), I, ccxxviii. Similarly, on the occasion of the bicentenary of his visit to New South Wales, a Lapérouse Museum publication asks 'Was the "small boat" they had built to escape stripped of its equipment and perhaps set adrift? Or, did they manage to leave Vanikoro only to die from starvation? Two hundred years have passed [...] and the fate of La Perouse and his crew still remains one of the great unsolved mysteries of the sea.' *Laperouse Museum* (Sydney: Laperouse Museum, 1988), 15.

<sup>19</sup> Galipaud and Jauneau, *Au-delà d'un naufrage*, 226. It is difficult to understand how they can describe this as an unreliable account. The Indian sailor's story was translated and recorded immediately following his rescue. Not aware, it seems, of an 1825 letter by Ritchie about the cast-away (see below), they miss an important point: that the lascar, an employee of the British East India Company, recognised that the artefacts he saw were not of English manufacture. That they believe the account refers to another shipwreck is evident from their map on pages 248–49, where the objects seen by Shaik Jumaul are described as 'from a shipwreck of 1790'.

<sup>20</sup> Hyacinthe Yves Philippe Potentien de Bougainville, *Journal de la navigation autour du globe de la frégate la Thétis et de la corvette l'Espérance pendant les années 1824, 1825 et 1826* (Paris: Arthus Bertrand, 1837), 699–704.

to say that it will be on the west coast of the Solomon Islands that some indication of their passage will be found at some later date.<sup>21</sup>

Dumont d'Urville went on to note how reports of sightings in the Solomon Islands, in 1797 and 1811, of apparent wreckage and Islanders in possession of European materials, influenced his view:

I concluded from all this that the hapless Frenchmen who had escaped from the first disaster had been lost a second time on one of the reefs in the area known as Indian Bay, between Capes Disappointment and Satisfaction [...] As I was prejudiced in favour of this idea, on leaving Vanikoro my intention was to explore Ndeni, Tinakula, Pirleni, Taumako, then to head towards Indian Bay and to search as carefully as possible to see if there actually existed in those parts some vestiges or some memories of the passage of the Frenchmen.<sup>22</sup>

For Bougainville, Torres Strait, especially the northern part of the Great Barrier Reef near Murray Island, was much more likely to have been fatal to the Vanikoro escape vessel than the Solomon Islands, noting that the shortest route to the Moluccas was through the Strait, which La Pérouse had intended to transit after completing his exploration of the southwest Pacific.<sup>23</sup> He defers to Dumont d'Urville as probably being the first to consider this, citing a letter he wrote to the Naval Ministry from Hobart, dated 4 January 1828 (the eve of his departure for Vanikoro) in which he stated his intention to later explore Torres Strait in search of survivors:

My route will be directed firstly to the Bay of Islands, in New Zealand [...] From there I shall make my way to Tucopia, without my being distracted in any way, without my stopping anywhere. We will be before this island at the beginning of February; a month will be devoted to assiduous searches which we will carry out there, also at the Malicolo [Vanikoro] islands, for the slightest traces of M la Pérouse. Finally I shall make every effort to return to Port Jackson, there to undertake the necessary repairs to the corvette and to take on new vital provisions. If, as I well fear, the winds from the S E prevent me in that, I shall decide to go into the Torres Strait; there

<sup>21</sup> Dumont d'Urville, *An Account in Two Volumes*, I, 239.

<sup>22</sup> Dumont d'Urville, *An Account in Two Volumes*, I, 239–40. Dumont d'Urville then explained that due to his crew being debilitated by fever, he was not able to prosecute the investigations he planned, and sailed on to Guam. A similar situation – a crew wracked by disease – beset Dillon during his time at Vanikoro. *Ibid.*, 232–4, 240; Dillon, *Narrative and Successful Result of a Voyage*, II, 309–10.

<sup>23</sup> In a letter sent to France from Botany Bay, La Pérouse advised that after exploring various islands in the southwest Pacific, 'at the end of July [1788] I shall pass between New Guinea and New Holland, by a different channel from that of the Endeavour, provided, however, that such a one exist'. Jean-François de Galaup La Perouse, *A Voyage round the World, in the Years 1785, 1786, 1787, and 1788*, by J.F.G. La Perouse (London: Printed for J. Johnson, 1789), III, 364.



I will visit the *Murray Islands*, where it would appear that those who tried to make for Europe in the vessel constructed with the debris of vessels, had perished and I shall reach the Moluccas in July or in the month of August [my emphasis].<sup>24</sup>

Bougainville's view was no doubt arrived at in part, by an 1825 letter, reproduced below, from Alexander Macdonald Ritchie in Sydney, who detailed the recovery and his interview of the shipwrecked lascar, Shaik Jumaul. In this letter, Ritchie refers to his *Asiatic Mirror* article.<sup>25</sup> Further, while in Sydney in 1825, Bougainville met with the Governor, who discussed with him 'French clocks and [...] the weapons which Mr Ritchie claims to have seen a few years before in Torres Strait'.<sup>26</sup>

I have found no reference to Bougainville's theory, in any book, English or French, on La Pérouse.<sup>27</sup> The only serious mention of Torres Strait seems to be Alain Barres' 1983 article, detailing potential routes of the escape vessel, which concludes that it must surely have been the preferred option.<sup>28</sup>

A key question that arises is why Dumont d'Urville changed his original opinion about – and plans to travel to – Torres Strait. In Hobart in January 1828, having just learned of Dillon's discoveries,<sup>29</sup> and carefully considering the pros and cons of diverting to Vanikoro, given the hostility of many Hobart residents towards Dillon – considered by many there a crank adventurer – he decided to set sail to

<sup>24</sup> J.S.C. Dumont d'Urville, 'Nouvelles de la corvette du Roi *l'Astrolabe*, en voyage autour de monde', *Annales maritimes et coloniales*, 1828, II, Part 2, 321–25.

<sup>25</sup> Bougainville apparently had not seen the earlier newspaper articles, nor *The Asiatic Mirror* account. That Ritchie discussed this matter with, and sent his letter to du Camper, captain of *L'Espérance*, rather than Bougainville, may be due to the fact that Ritchie was angry with Bougainville's romantic involvement with his wife. See M.S. Rivière, trans. and ed., *The Governor's Noble Guest: Hyacinthe de Bougainville's Account of Port Jackson, 1825* (Carlton, VIC: Melbourne University Press, 1999), 34. There are several slight differences between *The Madras Courier* article and Ritchie's letter, e.g. the former indicates that the man disappeared in a canoe with two girls and does not mention anything of the provenance of the artefacts, while his letter says it was his wife in the canoe, refers to impressions on the buttons of the clothing, and notes that the lascar recognised the muskets and swords as 'differently made from english' [original emphasis].

<sup>26</sup> Rivière, *The Governor's Noble Guest*, 114. This occurred on board the *LEspérance* on 30 Aug. Ritchie had not seen the artefacts himself.

<sup>27</sup> This search has not been exhaustive; the literature on La Pérouse is extensive and ever-expanding; see Ian F. Maclaren, *Laperouse in the Pacific, including Searches by d'Entrecasteaux, Dillon, Dumont d'Urville: An Annotated Bibliography* (Parkville, VIC: University of Melbourne Library, 1993); also Association Salomon, *Le mystère Lapérouse: ou le rêve inachevé d'un roi* (Paris: Conti, 2008), 361–96; and the bibliography at the La Pérouse website created by the late Alain Conan, 'La collection La Pérouse: un trésor national'. Available online at <http://www.collection-laperouse.fr/fr/bibliographie> (accessed 16 Apr. 2017).

<sup>28</sup> Alain Barres, 'L'hypothétique bateau de secours de Lapérouse', *Bulletin de la Société d'Études Historiques de la Nouvelle-Calédonie*, 57 (1983): 9–12.

<sup>29</sup> He had read, on New Year's Day 1828, of Dillon's discoveries in Vanikoro in *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, 5 Dec. 1827, 2. Dumont d'Urville, *An Account in Two Volumes*, I, 177.

find out for himself.<sup>30</sup> One of the people he met in Hobart who thought little of Dillon was Captain Welsh. In his book of his voyage, Dumont d'Urville notes that Welsh 'gave me some useful information and very kindly entrusted me with his sea logs to get from them certain passages useful for the navigation of Torres Strait'.<sup>31</sup> But he makes no mention of the lascar, or the possibility of La Pérouse's crew reaching Murray Island. It is hard to believe that he would not have been told of the lascar by Welsh, who rescued him, and who almost certainly wrote the letter that was published in *The Madras Courier*. Although mention of La Pérouse is found in the excerpt from *The Asiatic Mirror* article written by Ritchie, who had transcribed Shaik Jumaul's account while aboard the *Mary*, it must surely be the case that the lascar's information became known to Welsh either later during the voyage, or following the arrival of the vessels in India. Furthermore, it appears to have been well known in Hobart: in a *Hobart Town Gazette* article in 1826, mentioning Welsh's several visits to Murray Island, his rescue of the lascar, and his suggestion that it would make an ideal penal settlement and refuge for shipwrecked mariners, it is later stated that:

It is worthy to remark that several nautical instruments, which had belonged to La Perouse were found among the natives of Murray's island, and it is probable that that renowned navigator perished on the coast.<sup>32</sup>

Unfortunately Welsh's 1818 log appears lost.<sup>33</sup> The 1820 log includes an account of his second visit to Mer, where the Islanders enquired after their friend Shaik Jumaul.<sup>34</sup> Dumont d'Urville's letter to the Naval Ministry, later published in *Annales Maritimes et Coloniales*, and cited by Bougainville, shows that he must have had some knowledge of Shaik Jumaul's rescue and account of an earlier shipwreck on Murray Island.

Dumont d'Urville, like most of his crew, was almost entirely debilitated by illness at Vanikoro. This appears to have led him to believe that any survivors on

<sup>30</sup> Dumont d'Urville, *An Account in Two Volumes*, I, 171, 174–5, 177.

<sup>31</sup> That is, Welsh's logs from his voyages in the *Claudine* through Torres Strait in 1818 and 1820. Dumont d'Urville, *An Account in Two Volumes*, I, 173.

<sup>32</sup> *Hobart Town Gazette*, 30 Dec. 1826, 2. It should also be noted that while in Hobart Dumont d'Urville was visited by Dr Ross, the publisher and editor of this newspaper, in company with Captain Welsh; *Ibid*.

<sup>33</sup> Ian Nicholson, *Log of Logs: A Catalogue of Logs, Journals, Shipboard Diaries, Letters, and All Forms of Voyage Narratives, 1788 to 1988, for Australia and New Zealand, and Surrounding Oceans*, 3 vols (Yaroomba, QLD: Ian Nicholson with the Australian Association for Maritime History, 1990), I, 111.

<sup>34</sup> When Captain Welsh in the *Claudine*, in company with the *Marquis Hastings*, visited Murray Island on 30 May 1820 – the first actual landing on the island by Europeans – he remarked: 'I immediately recognized the men who had given protection to the lascar I had taken from them, when here in September 1818; and on my mentioning his name (Jumell), it was immediately made known to all the natives, who vociferated "Jumell, Jumell," and expressed great pleasure at seeing me again, particularly those who had been his protector.' Welsh, 'Observations and Discoveries in the South Pacific Ocean', 342–45.'

that island, likewise sick, and further emaciated and under siege by the local population, must surely have constructed a poor vessel, and thus could not have entertained a transit through the treacherous waters of Torres Strait.<sup>35</sup> Rather, they must have sailed around the north of New Guinea, in an attempt to reach the Moluccas or the Philippines, but no doubt did not get far, and were wrecked elsewhere in the Solomons.<sup>36</sup>

Dumont d'Urville would only enter Torres Strait years later, in 1840, during his second voyage to the Pacific. Here, both ships were almost lost, ironically, on the reef adjoining Tudu (Warrior Island) (see Figure 2),<sup>37</sup> where Shaik Jumaul had years earlier seen a gold watch from the 18th-century shipwreck. Strangely, although Dumont d'Urville visited Darnley Island, he did not visit nearby Murray Island.<sup>38</sup>

Had Dumont d'Urville gone to Murray Island as originally planned, and conducted the sort of interviews and researches with respect to La Pérouse that he undertook at Vanikoro, the final fate of the French survivors may well have been settled.<sup>39</sup> Dumont d'Urville had instructions to search for the lost ships of

<sup>35</sup> Interestingly, the naturalist aboard *Astrolabe*, Jean René Constant Quoy, wrote in the fifth volume of Dumont d'Urville's account of his voyage (published 1833) that it seemed likely that the Vanikoro survivors had steered for Torres Strait but perished on the preceding reefs: 'Ils se seront probablement dirigés vers le détroit de Torrès et auront péri sur les récifs qui précèdent ce passage'. J.S.C. Dumont d'Urville, *Voyage de la corvette l'Astrolabe exécuté par ordre du Roi pendant les années 1826–1827–1828–1829, sous le commandement de M. Jules S-C Dumont d'Urville*, 13 vols (Paris: J. Tastu, 1830–4), V, 320.

<sup>36</sup> Dumont d'Urville, *An Account in Two Volumes*, I, 239–40; 'Rapport sur les opérations de la corvette *l'Astrolabe*, commandée par M. Dumont d'Urville, depuis son départ d' Hobart-Town (5 janvier 1828) jusqu'à son arrivée à Batavia (29 août 1828)', *Annales maritimes et coloniales*, 1829, II, Part 1, 102: 'L'état dans lequel ils devaient se trouver, ne pouvait guère leur permettre de se hasarder par le détroit de Torrès; car on doit s'imaginer qu'ils avaient été singulièrement affaiblis par les maladies et leurs combats avec les naturels'. He also provided a detailed justification as to why he did not follow his original plan to transit Torres Strait following his time at Vanikoro, stating that to have done so would have resulted in 'inevitable shipwreck'. Dumont d'Urville, *An Account in Two Volumes*, I, 252–53. Brou has noted the influence of this theory on La Pérouse researchers, coming as it did from such a high authority as the great explorer. Bernard Brou, 'Le bateau de secours de Lapérouse', *Bulletin de la Société d'Études Historiques de la Nouvelle-Calédonie*, 48 (1981): 16.

<sup>37</sup> In the central islands of Torres Strait, at 9° 48' South 142° 58' East. Dumont d'Urville, *An Account in Two Volumes*, II, 543–50.

<sup>38</sup> Dumont d'Urville, *An Account in Two Volumes*, II, 541–3.

<sup>39</sup> As Bougainville noted, there had been three 'missed opportunities' – navigators sailing past Vanikoro when it is likely that the two men left behind still resided there – prior to Dillon's and Dumont d'Urville's visits: Edward Edwards in *Pandora* in 1791 (noticing smoke rising, but not landing), d'Entrecasteaux with *La Recherche* and *L'Espérance* in 1793 and Louis Isidore Duperrey in *La Coquille* in 1823. Bougainville, *Journal*, 525. It should be noted here that unlike at Vanikoro, there would have been no one in Torres Strait capable of translating Meriam Mir at that time, which no doubt would have hampered any such investigation. It might also be asked why



FIGURE 2: Tudu (Warrior Island), 15 November 2016. Photograph by author.

La Pérouse<sup>40</sup> – with his discoveries at Vanikoro, perhaps he considered this task largely completed.

Shaik Jumaul's story, and the conjectures of Dumont d'Urville and Bougainville, evoke additional questions. First, why should we believe that the survivors on Vanikoro were not capable of building a substantial, seaworthy vessel?<sup>41</sup> Estimates of the number of survivors range from around 30 to as high as 80 or more, and we know that they constructed it out of wreckage from *L'Astrolabe*,<sup>42</sup>

Bougainville did not follow up on the information he received about Torres Strait while in Sydney.

<sup>40</sup> John Dunmore, *From Venus to Antarctica: The Life of Dumont d'Urville* (Auckland: Exisle Pub., 2007), 58.

<sup>41</sup> For hypothetical examples of a substantial Vanikoro rescue vessel see Brou, 'Le bateau de secours de Lapérouse', 5–23; Association Salomon, *La mystère Lapérouse*, 126–27. The trope of the survivors building a substandard vessel continues; a recent fictional work alludes to the loss of the men in an unseaworthy rescue boat; Naomi J. Williams, *Landfalls* (London: Little, Brown Book Group, 2015), 264–65.

<sup>42</sup> The Vanikoro village chief Valiko indicated to Dumont d'Urville at least 30 survivors – which was as high as he could count – while one of his officers at Manevai village was told of 70 to 80 survivors. Dumont d'Urville, *An Account in Two Volumes*, I, 226–7. In addition, the two frigates carried some 20 boats on board, including an 18-tonne boat with a deck, built in Brest, dismantled and

as well as from timber hewn from the dense forests of Vanikoro.<sup>43</sup> There are numerous instances of rescue vessels being built by shipwreck survivors,<sup>44</sup> including sizeable craft constructed by much smaller parties, some of which went on to have service lives of many years. These include the 34-foot schooner *Matavy* (originally *Resolution*) constructed by 11 HMS *Bounty* mutineers in eight months on Tahiti.<sup>45</sup> Other examples include the rescue vessel *Deliverance* built from the remains of the French steamer *Duroc*, lost on Mellish Reef northwest of New Caledonia in 1856; *Hamlet's Ghost*, a rescue yacht built from the wreck of the *Prince of Denmark* in the Chesterfield Group in 1863; and the vessel built by survivors from HMS *Porpoise* on the Wreck Reefs in the Coral Sea in 1803.<sup>46</sup> It should also be remembered that in Sydney, La Pérouse's men constructed two longboats from frames brought from France.<sup>47</sup>

As Bougainville,<sup>48</sup> and more recently Barres, has noted, Torres Strait would almost certainly be the preferred route of the rescue vessel, and so make the Dutch settlement of Coupang in West Timor – the safe haven of choice for any seafarers who came to grief in Torres Strait or the southwest Pacific at this period.<sup>49</sup> Late 18th-century examples include the boats of the *Pandora*, and as its tender, *Matavy*, following its loss on the Great Barrier Reef in 1791, as well as injured crew members of the ships *Shah Hormuzeer* and *Chesterfield*, attacked at Darnley Island, Torres Strait in 1793.<sup>50</sup>

stored in a box. Association Salomon, *La mystère Lapérouse*, 126–7; Dunmore, *The Journal of Jean-François de Galoup de la Pérouse*, I, c.

<sup>43</sup> Dillon, *Narrative and Successful Result of a Voyage*, II, 212.

<sup>44</sup> Martin Gibbs, 'The Archaeology of Crisis: Shipwreck Survivor Camps in Australasia', *Historical Archaeology*, 37:1 (1983): 136.

<sup>45</sup> H.E. Maude, 'The Voyage of the Pandora's Tender', *The Mariner's Mirror*, 50:3 (1964): 217–35; Nicholson, *Via Torres Strait*, 23. It should also be noted that the mutineers on the *Bounty* permitted the carpenter to take his tools on board the longboat with Bligh, although some opposed this, with one calling out 'Damn my Eyes he will have a vessel built within a month!' William Bligh, *A Narrative of the Mutiny, on Board His Majesty's Ship Bounty; and the Subsequent Voyage of Part of the Crew, in the Ship's Boat, from Tofoa, One of the Friendly Islands, to Timor, a Dutch Settlement in the East Indies* (London: Printed for George Nicol, 1790), 95.

<sup>46</sup> W.C. Thomson, 'The "Hamlet's Ghost"', *Journal of the Historical Society of Queensland*, 1:5 (1918): 290–303; Frédéric Zurcher and Élie Philippe Margollé, *Les naufrages célèbres* (Paris: Librairie Hachette et Cie, 1877), 153–64; Robert Purdie, *Narrative of the Wreck of HMS Porpoise*, ed. M. Fishburn (Potts Point, NSW: Hordern House, 2014).

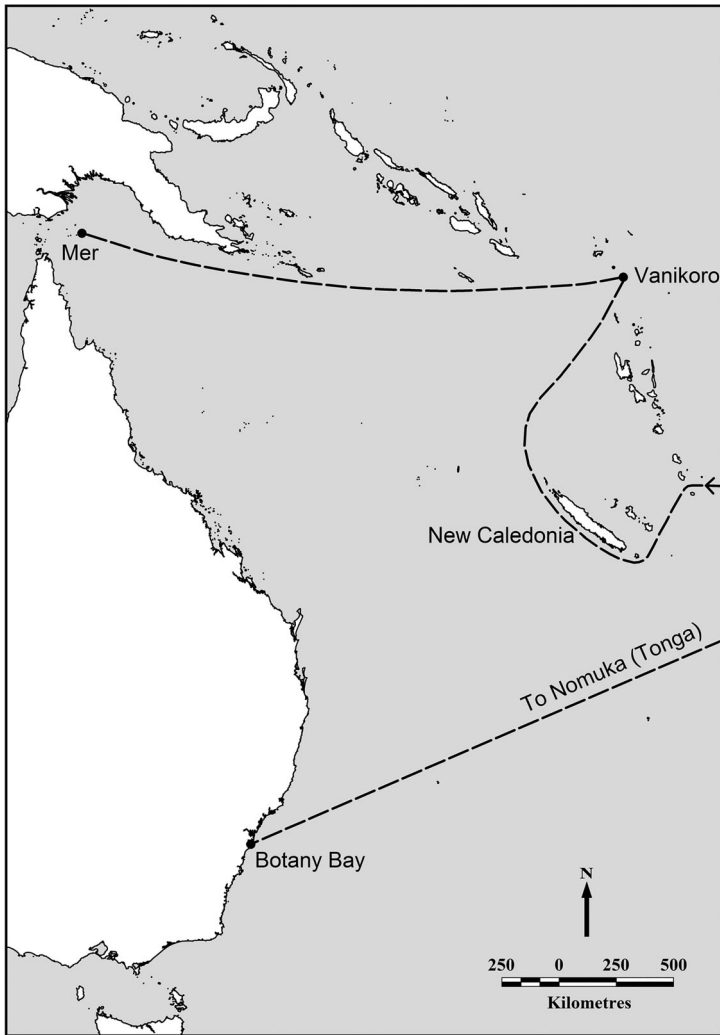
<sup>47</sup> Philip Gidley King, *The Journal of Philip Gidley King: Lieutenant, R.N. 1787–1790*, ed. P.G. Fidlon and R. J. Ryan (Sydney: Australian Documents Library, 1980), 40; John Dunmore, *Where Fate Beckons: The Life of Jean-François de La Pérouse* (Sydney: ABC Books for the Australian Broadcasting Association, 2006), 248.

<sup>48</sup> Bougainville, *Journal*, 703: 'La route la plus courte pour se rendre aux Moluques étant celle du détroit de Torrès, que Lapérouse avait d'ailleurs l'intention de traverser'.

<sup>49</sup> See also Association Salomon, *La mystère Lapérouse*, 126.

<sup>50</sup> *Remarkable Escape, and the Unparalleled Sufferings, of Three Officers, belonging to the Chesterfield Whaler, in an Open Boat, from the Cannibals of Tate Island; Who Barbarously Murdered Four of their Companions* (Thirsk, Yorkshire: H. Masterman, c. 1795); George Hamilton, *A Voyage Round the World in His Majesty's*





MAP 2: Proposed route of the La Pérouse expedition, after Dunmore, *The Journal of Jean-François de Galaup de la Pérouse*, between 448–9. Map by author.

Finally, if it was indeed the crew of La Pérouse who were killed in the Murray Islands, who was the lone survivor, said to be a ‘young boy’? One possible candidate is the cabin or ship’s boy (*mousse*) on *L’Astrolabe*, François Mordelle, from Tréguier in Brittany.<sup>51</sup> Whoever this castaway was, his final fate may be the last great mystery of the La Pérouse expedition.

Existing archaeological and ethnographic evidence from Mer (Murray Island) that may be of relevance to these questions is scant. A 1920 account related a tradition

*Frigate Pandora* (Berwick: Printed by and for W. Phorson; B. Law and Son, London, 1798), 120–26; Maude, ‘The Voyage of the Pandora’s Tender’, 217–35.

<sup>51</sup> Dunmore, *The Journal of Jean-François de Galaup de la Pérouse*, II, 562.



Shaik Jumaul, the lascar, when he accompanied the natives, to the other Islands, saw several muskets, and a compass; on an island called *Tood*, he saw a gold watch. On *Mairce* they had two cutlasses, and on his asking where they had procured them, he received the following account: That about thirty years ago (for only the oldest man in the island recollected it) a large ship was wrecked in sight of the island; that a great number of white men came in their boats from her and fought them; that several escaped to the other islands, where they were killed; but a young boy's life was saved, who lived amongst them a very long time; he, however, with two young girls, went off in a canoe one night, and was never heard of afterwards, although they searched the neighbouring islands. They seemed to esteem this person very much, for they never spoke of him without shedding tears, and kept his clothes with great care, often looking at, and crying over them. They were blue woollen clothes. Might not this have been *Perouse's* ship? it seems very probable, for it agrees with the time he left *Port Jackson*; the cutlasses and clothes might throw more light on it. The *Pandara's* boats got safe through the straits; and we do not know of any other European ship being wrecked in them.

FIGURE 3: Excerpt from *The Madras Courier* (Supplement), 29. Dec. 1818. Reproduction provided to author by The British Library.

of an early shipwreck on the reef, including reference to 'very dark men' coming ashore on a raft with a chest of coins, and noted that Captain Dabelle, a Torres Straits Pilot, had found a silver dollar and old-fashioned hour-glass there.<sup>52</sup>

The account of Shaik Jumaul re-focuses our gaze on the very real possibility that the *La Pérouse* expedition met its final fate in Torres Strait (see [Map 2](#)). Maritime archaeological research on the reefs near Mer is probably the best chance of confirming whether or not the 18th-century shipwreck he reported is indeed that of the *Vanikoro* escape vessel.

*THE MADRAS COURIER (SUPPLEMENT)*, 29 DECEMBER 1818, 6 (see [Figure 3](#))

MURRAY'S ISLAND. In a letter dated from on board the ship *Claudine*, in Torres' Strait, on the 7th of September, we have been furnished with some particulars of the state of this Island, which deserve to be made public.

<sup>52</sup> Brooke Nicholls and Thomas Dunbabin, 'Forgotten history: treasure trove: Torres Strait', *Australasian*, 19 June 1920, 45. It is interesting to note that in the early 1860s, Captain Banner, a beche-de-mer fisherman, obtained 'the gold case of an old-fashioned watch' from Naghir (Mount Ernest Island), an island 39 nautical miles southwest of Tudu, at 10° 15' South 142° 29' East. 'Wanderings in Tropical Australia. No. 7', *Sydney Mail*, 22 Feb. 1862, 6. It is possible that the objects collected by Banner and Dabelle came from one of the numerous ships which came to grief in the Strait in later years.

About three years since, a ship, called the *Morning Star*, was wrecked in Torres' Strait,<sup>53</sup> and a lascar belonging to the crew had the good fortune to escape destruction, and get safe to Murray's Island, where he remained among the Natives, and during this space of time acquired a considerable knowledge of their language, as well as of the language of another island with which they held intercourse, a little to the northward of them, and thought to be the one called Darnley's Island<sup>54</sup> in the charts.

On the afternoon of the day on which this letter is dated, the *Claudine* and *Mary* anchored close under the shore of Murray's Island, when a number of Natives were seen on the beach, and contrary to the expectation of those who saw them from the ships, and who had been led to imagine them a ferocious people, from the character given to them in popular descriptions of these islands, they were all unarmed. A small canoe was also seen with four men, one of whom stood up from among the rest, and waved a branch over his head. This was answered from the ship's poop, with a white flag, as equally symbolic of peace, and the jolly boat with an officer and four men were sent to meet them, with the most positive instructions to avoid hostilities, and even if they received an inquiry from them not to resent it, but to return on board. On the jolly boats approaching the shore, the canoe retreated, and when within a short distance of landing, the natives, to the number of fifty, all flocked to the beach. From the signs of friendship that were held out, an interview now took place between those who were in the jolly boat and those who were in the canoe, the natives from the shore giving them at the same time cocoanuts and hollow bamboo canes of water, without expressing a wish to have any thing in return.

The surprise of the boat's crew, however, was still greater, on observing a Bengal lascar advance from among the crowd and address them in Hindoostanee, which fortunately was understood by one of the seamen of the party, who were all Europeans. This intelligence being conveyed to the Commander of the *Claudine*, Captain Welsh, he manned his boats and went on shore in the evening himself, accompanied by Captain Ormond of the *Mary*, and Lieutenant Stewart of the Bengal Army. The whole force of this little party, which was summoned together, not with hostile intentions, but with a view to repel any act of treachery, consisted of twenty-eight Europeans, armed with small arms: pistols, cutlasses, and boarding pikes. They did not immediately push to the shore and effect a landing, but first accomplished what they most desired, a friendly interview from the boats. The natives flocked around them on the beach, and exchanged with them their shells, cocoanuts, and rude ornaments, for yellow bunting, nails, and knives.

The writer adds that he had never found the natives of the Friendly or Society Isles more civil, obliging, hospitable, and well-disposed than these natives were, and he very naturally expresses his wonder at so marked a change in the conduct of a race of people who but a few years since committed such piratical depredations on all ships and boats that they could overpower, as to make their cruelties proverbial. And this

<sup>53</sup> The lascar was in fact marooned on Mer for four years: the *Morning Star* was lost in the vicinity of Quoin Island, Fison and Eel Reefs in mid-1814. K. Hosty, 'Shipwrecks East of India', 20.

<sup>54</sup> Erub is the traditional name for Darnley Island, 9° 35' South 143° 46' East. It is 25 nautical miles to the northwest of Mer.

wonder is increased by his not being able to learn any sufficient cause for this remarkable improvement in their habits of life.<sup>55</sup>

When the Commander of the *Claudine* approached the lascar who was discovered among these people, the first wish he expressed was that of returning to his native country. Powerful as this desire must have been to have occupied the first place in his thoughts, he whispered it in secret only while the Islanders were near him, and did not venture to declare himself openly, until he was seated in the boat that was to bear him away from his exile, and until he found himself secure amid the armed band by which he was surrounded. Rising then in the centre of the boat, he turned towards the natives in the canoe and on the beach, and professing his gratitude towards them as his deliverers and protectors in misfortune, when many of his shipmates fell victims to their sufferings, declared that though he quitted them to return to his native country, it was still with feelings of affection and regret.

The Commander gave to each of the natives who were present a knife, and to one of them a piece of bunting also, with which marks of favour they were highly pleased.

He remarks that he witnessed this scene with feelings of surprise and gratification, as the natives were quite afflicted at parting with the Indian whom shipwreck had thrown upon their shores, and whom friendly hands had taken from among them; while the Indian himself said all he could to reconcile them to this separation, and even thought it necessary to soothe them by promising that he would soon return to them again.

When the lascar reached on board, provisions were given to him by order of his deliverer, but his stomach had been so long accustomed to nothing but cocoanuts and plantains, that it was too weak to retain even the simplest animal food.

As the crew of the *Claudine* were Europeans, the man was afterwards removed to the *Mary*, Captain Ormond, where he was more at home with shipmates and countrymen of his own nation and religion, and in this ship he has safely reached Calcutta.

<sup>55</sup> Reflecting on Welsh's peaceable visits there in 1818 and 1820, the *Hobart Town Gazette* (30 Dec. 1826, 2) suggested 'the lascar, who we mentioned in a late number had been three years on shore, and was rescued by the *Claudine*, must have in some degree civilized the natives, as they readily and peaceably trafficked with the ships'. That same year (1826) a jolly boat from the wrecked brig *Sun* landed at Mer, and the crew were treated with kindness – though the Islanders were referred to as 'little better than savages' – during the two or three days they spent there, before being picked up by the vessel *John Munro*. *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, 26 Jan. 1827, 3. This may be the source of an old, oak stern thwart ship board, from a ship's stern or jolly boat, 'of very old fashion, apparently of American make', collected by Commander C.M. Lewis at Mer on 27 June 1836, when he picked up two castaways on Mer from the *Charles Eaton*. The Islanders 'explained that the boat had been left with them, as a reward for preserving the life of a white man, and that they venerated it as a relic'. Phillip Parker King, *A Voyage to Torres Strait in Search of the Survivors of the Ship Charles Eaton, which was Wrecked upon the Barrier Reefs, in the Month of August, 1834, in His Majesty's Colonial Schooner Isabella* (Sydney: E. H. Statham, 1837), 24–25.

The knowledge which this man has acquired by so long a residence with these Islanders, of their language, habits, and manners, might fit him to give to any one who had leisure for the enquiry many new and curious particulars regarding this people, and if pursued indeed to the extent of which it is capable, might be made subservient to purposes of a still higher nature, than the gratification of mere curiosity.

Of the island itself, the writer remarks that it is small, easily taken possession of, and as easy to be kept and defended at a small expence. The inhabitants are not numerous, and as may be inferred from their behaviour on this occasion, well-disposed. The soil is described as excellent and capable of producing most of the fruits suited to the climate, while the sugar cane, with which it abounds, grows luxuriantly over every part of the Island, and might itself be made a sufficient object of consequence to promote the cultivation of. He indulges in the hope that some advantage may be taken of the present incident towards the civilisation of the natives, and in this we offer him the union of our best and warmest wishes.

In addition to this intelligence as communicated to us by Letter, we republish some interesting Memoranda regarding these Islanders, as collected from the relation of the lascar in question, and inserted in the last number of the Asiatic Mirror:<sup>56</sup>

When they determine to marry, the female is taken by force by her lover to his hut, when he informs her parents, which immediately causes a meeting of the Friends of both parties, who start objections, and a battle ensues. If the bridegroom and his party are victorious, he is considered married, and next day the parties are reconciled and join in singing and feasting, &c. They paint their bodies with red and white earths.

Their women are the source of constant quarrels, for they only allow one wife; but this being little attended to, they have, on the discovery, a battle. Children, not borne by the wife, are immediately killed.

When a person dies, the body is brought out of the hut and stretched on the ground, when the relations and friends of both sexes sit down round it, and cry for a considerable time. It is then removed to their plantations in the interior of the island, when a frame of bamboos is raised about 6 feet high, with a mat on it. On this the body is placed, and here it remains, the people returning to their huts.

There appears to be four tribes<sup>57</sup> on the island, residing at Saib Mirga,<sup>58</sup> Chirwah-gait,<sup>59</sup> and Koomaid,<sup>60</sup> who have frequent quarrels amongst each other: they have no Chiefs.

<sup>56</sup> As previously mentioned, the writer of this account was Alexander Macdonald Ritchie, who interviewed Shaik Jumaal aboard the *Mary*.

<sup>57</sup> There are actually eight tribes on Mer. See Wolfgang Laade, 'Notes on the clans, economy, trade and traditional law of the Murray Islanders, Torres Straits', *Journal de la Société des Océanistes*, 39 (1973): 151–67.

<sup>58</sup> Zaub and Mergar villages. A map of Mer showing village locations appears in Alfred Cort Haddon (ed.) *Reports of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Straits*, vol. 6: *Sociology, Magic and Religion of the Eastern Islanders* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1908), 170.

<sup>59</sup> Probably Serwaged village.

<sup>60</sup> Keweid village.

On their dances they rub themselves with cocoanut oil and red earth. A small drum made from the skin of the Guanna, is the only thing in the shape of a musical instrument amongst them.

The houses are round, built of bamboos, cocoanut leaves, and long grass; they sleep upon bamboo frames raised about 6 feet from the ground, with mats on them; these are built round the hut, and the centre is kept clear for the fire.

The Fruits, &c. Cocoanuts, Plantains, Sugar Canes, Sweet Potatoes, and Mangoes, are equal to those of Bengal.

Shaik Jumaul, the lascar, when he accompanied the natives, to the other Islands, saw several muskets, and a compass; on an island called *Tood*,<sup>61</sup> he saw a gold watch. On Mairee<sup>62</sup> they had two cutlasses, and on his asking where they had procured them, he received the following account: That about thirty years ago (for only the oldest man in the island recollected it) a large ship was wrecked in sight of the island; that a great number of white men came in their boats from her and fought them; that several escaped to the other islands, where they were killed; but a young boy's life was saved, who lived amongst them a very long time; he, however, with two young girls, went off in a canoe one night, and was never heard of afterwards, although they searched the neighbouring islands. They seemed to esteem this person very much, for they never spoke of him without shedding tears, and kept his clothes with great care, often looking at, and crying over them. They were blue woollen clothes. Might not this have been Perouse's ship? It seems very probable, for it agrees with the time he left Port Jackson; the cutlasses and clothes might throw more light on it. The Pandara's [sic] boats got safe through the straits; and we do not know of any other European ship being wrecked in them.

A few dogs are the only animals on the island, which tradition says came from a ship wrecked many years ago.

#### LETTER FROM A. RITCHIE<sup>63</sup>

Sydney, 16<sup>th</sup> september 1825.

My dear sir,

At your request I shall commit to paper the circumstances alluded to in our conversation regarding the fate of the unfortunate Perouse.

I sail'd through Torres strait, in the month of september 1818, on board a ship called *the Mary* captain Orman (in company with *the Claudine* captain Welsh), on the 6th of that month we anchored off Murrays Island, the natives inviting us on shore, two boats were sent, and, at a short distance from the beach, were met by a small canoe with a native of Bengal on board, who implored us to remove

<sup>61</sup> Tudu, or Warrior Island, in the central Torres Strait Islands.

<sup>62</sup> Mer, or Murray Island; in early accounts (and some contemporary hydrographic charts) it is sometimes rendered as Maer.

<sup>63</sup> Reproduced in Bougainville, *Journal*, 704.

him from the island where he had been four or five years; having been wrecked in a brig called the *Morning Star* from Sydney for Calcutta. The natives showed considerable sorrow at parting, and it required some finesse to get him away.

This man was rather intelligent and seemed to understand their language perfectly, and I took pleasure in putting questions to him every day in my cabin, which I committed to writing – amongst his relations of what he heard, the following most particularly attracted my attention. That a great many years ago a *very large ship* with white men was lost on the great reef (pointing to the barrier reef); that the white men came in their boats, fought with the natives. Many were killed and some of the boats went to other islands; a white boy was spared whom they took great care of and married him to one of their daughters. He and his wife went into their canoe one night and were never heard of. They have still his cloaths [sic] preserved with great care, and from the questions put, there must be some impression on the buttons. Sumoon, the name of the man we rescued, told me he had seen musquets and swords amongst them *differently made from english*, and that on the adjacent islands he had seen many more; also a compass and a watch which they seemed to preserve as trophies, making no use of them. I had Flinders's work on board, and on comparing dates, which shewed [sic] that no large European ship but *Perouse's* could have been in these seas about that time, coupled with what I have mentioned, it struck me that it might have been that lamented navigator. I am sorry I have lost the memoranda I took at the time, as many remarks made have escaped me; but you will find them published in a Calcutta paper of november 1818 named *the Asiatic Mirror*.

Wishing you pleasant and prosperous voyage to your native land, believe me yours faithfully.

A. Ritchie

To captain Du Camper, H. C. M. ship *l'Espérance*.

SYDNEY COVE