

French invasion plan published in new study

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F. PÉRON.

Francois Péron.

Details of a little-known French proposal to invade the young British

colony in Sydney Cove will be published in English for the first time, as part of University of Adelaide research into the 1800-1804 Nicolas Baudin expedition.

The plan was written as a confidential report to Napoleon's Government in Paris by the expedition's Chief Zoologist and intellectual leader Francois Péron, and adds weight to the debate about the strategic nature of the British settlement at Port Jackson.

The document, found only in draft form, is held with other expedition material by the [Natural History Museum](#) of Le Havre in France. Napoleon later refers to the plan in correspondence while engaged in a losing battle with the British for control of the Indian Ocean.

University of Adelaide researchers Professor Jean Fornasiero, Head of the School of Humanities, and Associate Professor John West-Sooby, Head of the Discipline of French Studies, are working with Le Havre to transcribe and put the manuscripts online.

"This document gives a wonderful outsider's perspective of the new colony in Port Jackson, just 14 years old at the time of the Baudin expedition's visit there in 1802," says Professor Fornasiero. "It describes how well the English had done and how strategically placed Port Jackson was. It even suggests having potential allies among the Irish convicts should an invasion take place.

"It's full of belligerent language about the English, talking about 'outrageous claims to sovereignty over half the Pacific' and so on; it's very colourful and an interesting mix of anglophilia and anglophobia. Péron hates the English but is full of admiration for what they've achieved."

Professor Fornasiero and Associate-Professor West-Sooby have

transcribed the document from its handwritten French, corrected past misreadings and translated it into English.

Together with other archival supporting documents, the document will be published early next year in a book, *French Designs on Colonial New South Wales*, commissioned by the Friends of the State Library of South Australia.

"This [document](#) highlights how other European nations - in this case the French - viewed Port Jackson as a strategic move on the part of England," says Associate Professor West-Sooby. "It buys into the debate about whether Port Jackson was established primarily as a penal colony - which is what we all grew up learning - or whether it was much more of a strategic move by the British."

This study stems from an earlier large Australian Research Council [Discovery Project](#) with the University of Sydney which involved transcribing and translating the important documents from the Baudin expedition and making them available on a dedicated web site.

Provided by University of Adelaide

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