
THE FREYCINET MAP OF 1811: THE FIRST FULL MAP OF AUSTRALIA?

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Abstract: A map of Australia by Louis de Freycinet, published in 1811, is widely considered to be the first full map of Australia. The map was an outcome of the French scientific expedition from 1800-1804 led by Nicolas Baudin, an expedition with grand aspirations. Remarkably the expedition was undertaken at a time of considerable strategic tension and military conflict between the British and the French, giving rise to much mutual suspicion. Freycinet experienced considerable difficulties before the map was finally published in 1811. But was it the first full map of Australia? This paper considers other maps that could potentially be considered as contenders for the first full map of Australia.

BACKGROUND

The Freycinet map of “*Nouvelle Hollande*” (**Fig. 1.**) was first published by Louis de Freycinet in 1811, and is generally recognised as the first full map of Australia to be published. The bicentenary of its publication was commemorated in 2011. But was it the first such map, how do we know, and are there other claimants? This paper considers these questions and other maps from the period that may claim precedence.

In its historical context the Freycinet map can be seen as a manifestation of two specific strands of history, one the culmination of a long chain of events in Australian maritime contact history, and the other a product of hostilities between France and Britain. Furthermore, it provides a series of vicarious links between Australia and the towering historical figure of Napoléon Bonaparte. Indeed, Napoléon’s name actually features on the Freycinet map, as *Terre Napoléon*.

Towards the end of the 18th century an army officer, Napoléon Bonaparte, emerged from the chaos of the French Revolution, rising quickly through the ranks, thanks to his military successes in continental Europe. He became First Consul in 1799, heading an all powerful troika, as a result of the *coup d’État du 18 brumaire*, and was crowned Emperor in 1804. The French in this period began a concerted effort to match the British navy and its navigational standards, and, it was hoped, its successes. From this milieu emerged the idea of the Baudin Expedition to Nouvelle Hollande. The Baudin expedition was intended to be a voyage of discovery that would further scientific knowledge and perhaps eclipse the achievements of James Cook. First Consul Napoléon Bonaparte approved the expedition “to the coasts of New Holland”,¹ after receiving a delegation on 25 March 1800 consisting of Baudin and eminent members of the Institut de France. The explicit purpose of the voyage was to be “observation and research relating to Geography and Natural History.”² So, with “600 leagues” of unexplored south coast in New Holland, and the prospect of new discoveries beckoning, the expedition departed Le Havre on 19 October 1800.

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Among those joining the Baudin expedition's ships, the *Géographe* and *Naturaliste*, were Sub-Lieutenants Louis-Claude de Saulses de Freycinet and his older brother Henri-Louis. Ironically, Louis did not initially sail as a 'geographer'. Both were eventually promoted to the rank of lieutenant, and Louis was later given command of the schooner *Casuarina*, purchased in Sydney to enable better inshore surveying. Another member of the expedition, someone who was ultimately to have a highly significant influence on its outcomes, was the 25 year old assistant zoologist François Péron.

The expedition finally returned to Lorient roadstead on 24 March 1804, but without its commander Baudin, who had died the previous September in Mauritius. From a scientific viewpoint the Baudin expedition had been an outstanding success. In geographic terms much of Australia's coastline had been explored, though they had been preceded by Flinders in the *Investigator* and Lt. Grant in HMS *Lady Nelson* in charting most of all the previously unknown part of the south coast. Just about all the expedition could lay claim to discovering was a small stretch of the coast of South Australia, from Mt. Schanck to Encounter Bay.

Publication of the volumes giving the official account of the expedition, *Voyage de Découvertes aux Terres Australes*, and the associated atlases, was authorised by Napoléon on 4 August 1806. Péron, along with naturalist Lesueur, was given responsibility, with Louis de Freycinet, who had already been working on the charts, to undertake the cartography.

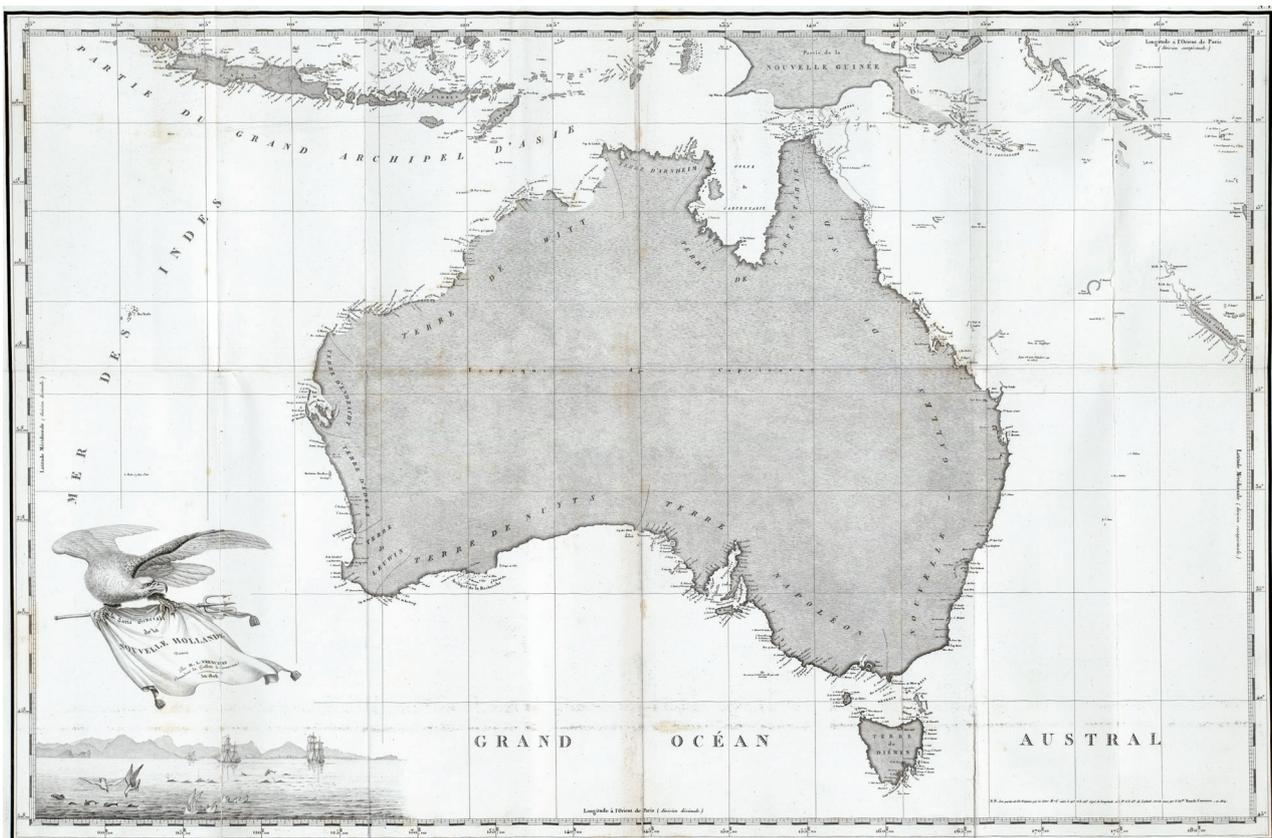


Figure 1. The Freycinet map (Freycinet 1811) (National Library of Australia, Map RaA 1 Plate 1).

But a range of difficulties and delays arose, and it took ten years for the project to be completed, resulting in some confusion in the order of publication.³ The first volume, *Historique*, was published in 1807, but the second volume, also *Historique*, was not published until 1816, although the third volume, *Navigation et Géographie*, had already been published in 1815. This was partly due to the death of Péron in 1810, from tuberculosis, and partly to strained government finances. As a consequence of Péron's death, Louis de Freycinet took over responsibility for the final volumes.

A number of controversies arose with the publication of the volumes and maps. Included in these was the almost complete elimination of any reference to Baudin and, it seems at Péron's behest, the application of French names to many features and coasts explored and named by other navigators, particularly Flinders.⁴

THE FREYCINET MAP

In discussing the Freycinet map as the first map of Australia care needs to be taken in qualifying what one means. Flinders prepared a map of Australia in 1804,⁵ while detained in Mauritius, courtesy of one of Napoléon's confidants, General Decaen. But this was a 'fair drawing', a manuscript map, which was not published until 1814, and then in modified form. Use of the term 'complete' map of Australia is not strictly correct either, in relation to the Freycinet or Flinders maps. Both have numerous small gaps where inlets were missed or it was too dangerous to undertake close surveying. Hence the term 'full' is used, as the full outline of Australia is finally discernable. Thus, the Freycinet map is generally regarded as the first full map of Australia to be published. But is this really the case? Are there are other maps which could be considered as possible candidates as full maps of Australia published prior to 1811?

Addressing this question, the first reference to the publication of a full map of Australia is in Part 1 of the *Atlas Historique* of 1807,⁶ accompanying the first volume of *Voyage de Découvertes*. In the table of contents is listed "Carte Générale de la Nouvelle-Hollande" [General Map of New Holland] (**Fig. 2.**).

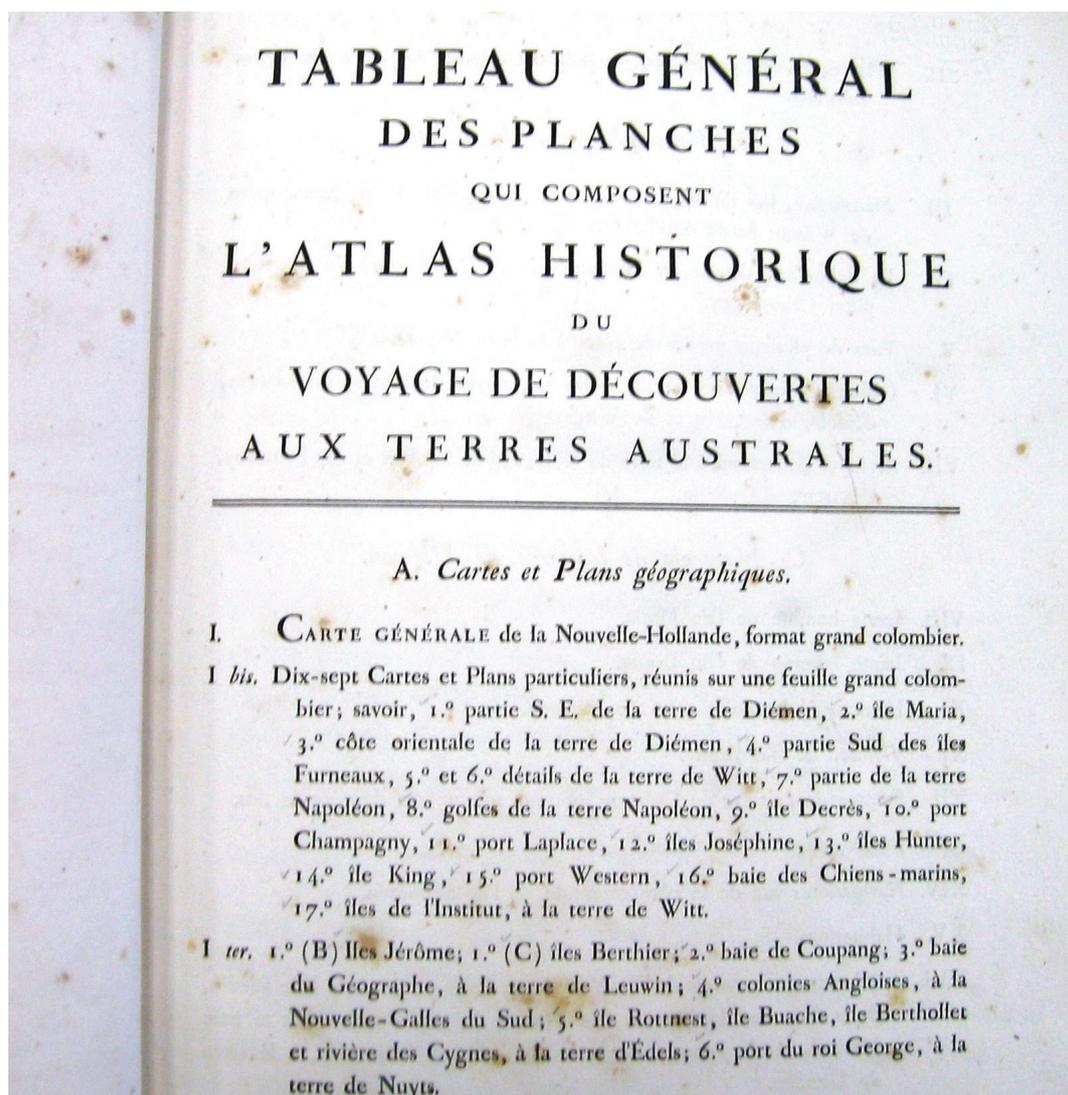


Figure 2. Table of Contents of *Atlas Historique* (Peron 1807).

But when one looks, it does not appear to be there. For his 1910 book on the Baudin expedition, *Terre Napoléon*, Scott examined four original editions but was unable to locate any such map in that publication.⁷ One of the present authors (Gerritsen) examined a further nine original editions, with the same result. However, the explanation was actually already evident in 1816, with a note indicating the map intended for Part 1 of *Atlas Historique* had been “présentés avec plus de détails et dans un autre ordre dans l’atlas historique, 2e partie.” [presented with more detail and in another order in *Atlas Historique*, Part 2.].⁸ In other words the map had been published in the second part of *Atlas Historique* in 1811, largely because the engraver had not been paid on time.

POTENTIAL CONTENDERS FOR PRECEDENCE

Despite the authoritative credentials of the 1811 map, another map exists in the National Library of Australia’s map collection which seems to have been published earlier, in 1808 (**Fig. 3**).⁹

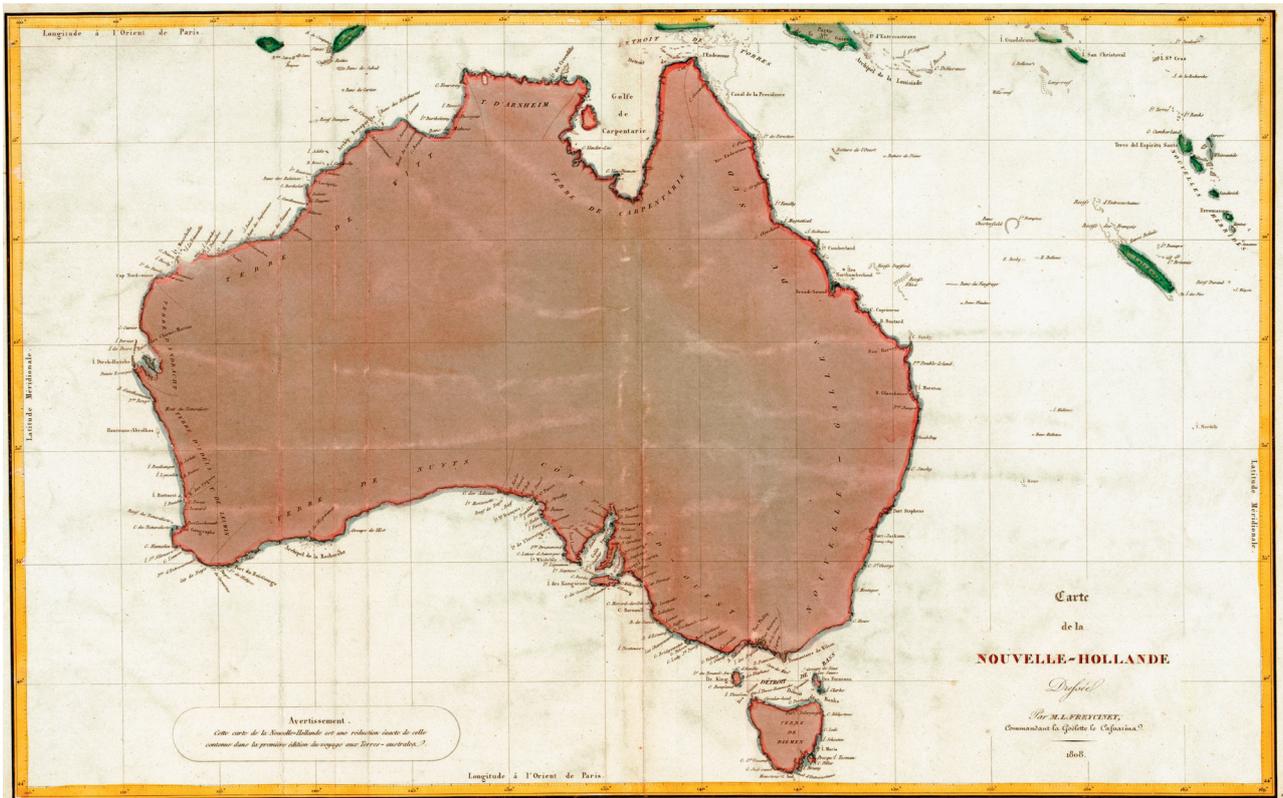


Figure 3. *Carte de la Nouvelle Hollande ... 1808* (National Library of Australia, Map RM 2189).

Its appearance is different to the accepted 1811 map, it places Australia further to the west, it has a slightly different title, ‘Carte de la Nouvelle Hollande’, [Map of New Holland] and the library’s catalogue indicates it was published in 1808.

Authorship of this map is ascribed to Louis de Freycinet and the catalogue indicates that it may have been published in Paris, although the publisher is unknown. Physical examination of the map reveals nothing further other than a note in pencil on the rear indicating it was acquired by the National Library in 1983, and the price. However, closer scrutiny quickly demolishes the claim that its publication actually preceded the 1811 map. There is a cartouche on the bottom left corner (**Fig. 4**) which when translated indicates, ‘This map is an exact reproduction of that contained in the first edition of *Voyage aux Terres Australes*.’ Thus it is simply a copy of the map contained in the first edition of *Voyage de Découvertes*, and so must have been published after 1811. Further examination shows that much of the nomenclature has been changed to reflect the precedence ascribed to Flinders, following publication of his map in 1814.

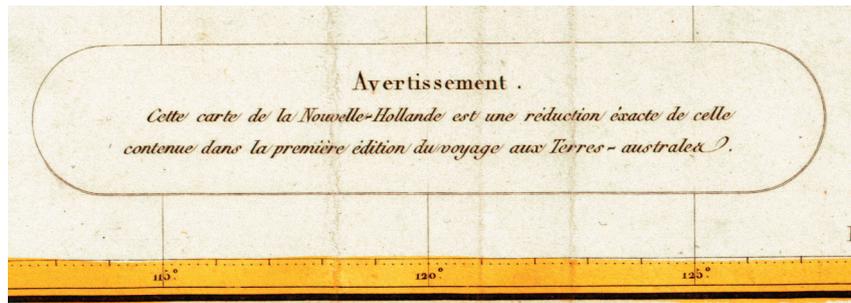


Figure 4. Cartouche of *Carte de la Nouvelle Hollande ... 1808* (National Library of Australia, Map RM 2189).

Scott refers to a map of this form, claiming it was published in a revised *Atlas* in 1817.¹⁰ But no trace of any such atlas has been found.¹¹ An antiquarian bookseller, offering a copy of this map, claims it comes from a revised atlas published in 1815.¹² Again, no trace of any revised atlas from this period can be found. However, if one examines the second edition of *Voyage de Découvertes*, published in 1824, the explanation of this conundrum becomes clearer. There, in the *Atlas* of this publication, is a map identical to the ‘1808’ map.¹³ The ‘1808’ on the map simply reflects the state of cartographic knowledge at the time of the map’s preparation, not the date of publication. ‘1808’ in fact also appears on the cartouche of the 1811 map. Thus we can conclude the ‘1808’ map was published after 1814 and is probably a single sheet reproduction of the ‘Carte de Nouvelle Hollande’ contained in the 1824 *Atlas*.

The second example of a map that could lay claim to being an earlier map than the 1811 Freycinet map is one showing Australia as “*Nouvelle Hollande*”, with “*Océanique Centrale*” inscribed on a cartouche formed by an illustration of a Tasmanian bark-bundle canoe (Fig. 5).

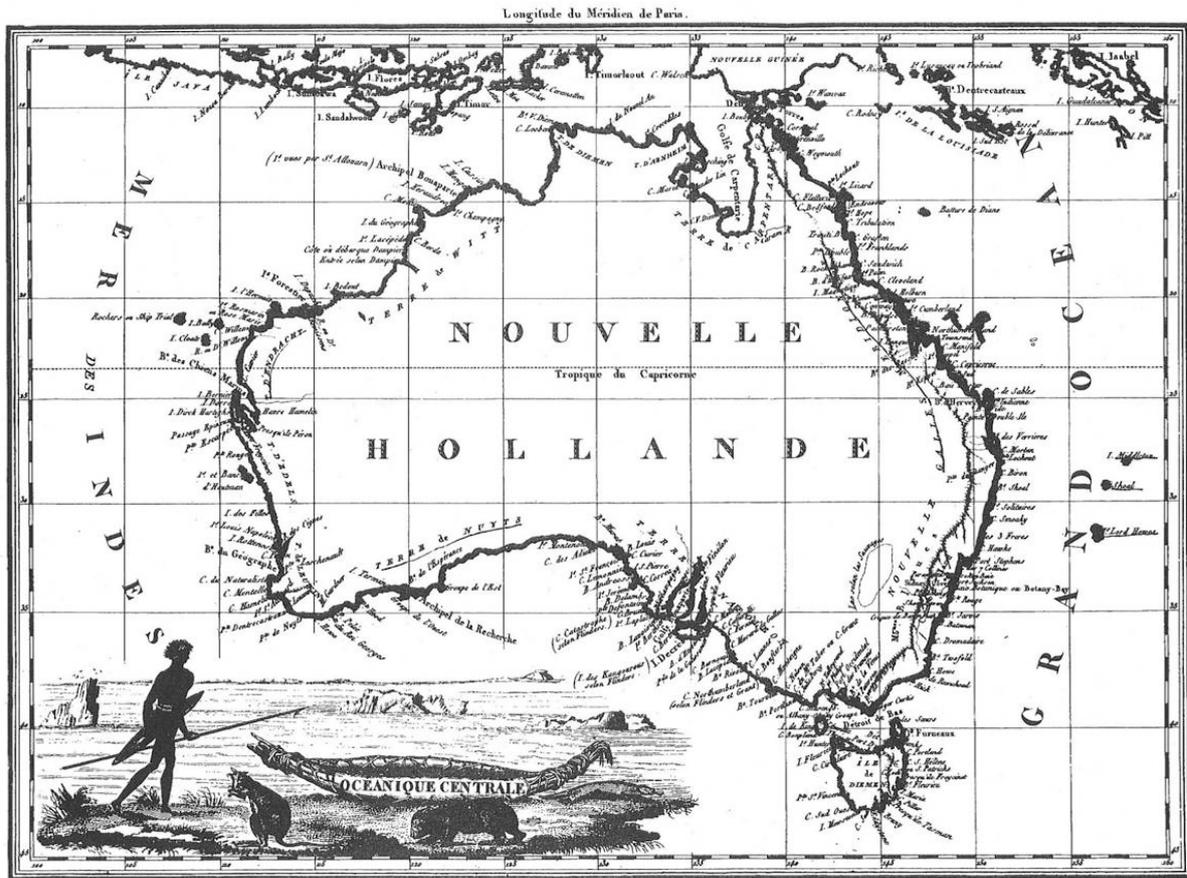


Plate 67. Lapie 1809

Figure 5. *Océanique Centrale* (Tooley 1985, Plate 67)

According to one of the most respected authorities on Australian cartographic history, Ronald Tooley, this map was prepared by Pierre Lapie and published in 1809.¹⁴ As Lapie was head of the Bureau Topographique of the Dépôt de la Guerre at that time,¹⁵ and possibly privy to the cartographic work of the Baudin expedition, such a claim must be taken seriously. However, internal evidence in terms of the nomenclature on the map suggests this date may be wrong. In 1810 a review of the English translation of the first volume of Péron's *Voyage de Découvertes* was published.¹⁶ The anonymous reviewer, thought to be John Barrow, Secretary to the Admiralty, indicated he had seen copies of some of Flinders charts and papers,¹⁷ and took issue with the application of French names to prior discoveries by Flinders and others, citing some examples, including Kangaroo Island and North West Cape.¹⁸

And there on *Océanique Centrale* one finds a number of instances where dual names were applied (Fig. 6). Kangaroo Island for example, the French "Île Decrès", has adjacent to it in brackets "I. des Kangourous selon Flinders." This dual naming would seem to place the publication of *Océanique Centrale* after 1810. In fact, it appears in an atlas of Lapie's maps, *Atlas complet du précis de la géographie universelle*, published in 1812.¹⁹

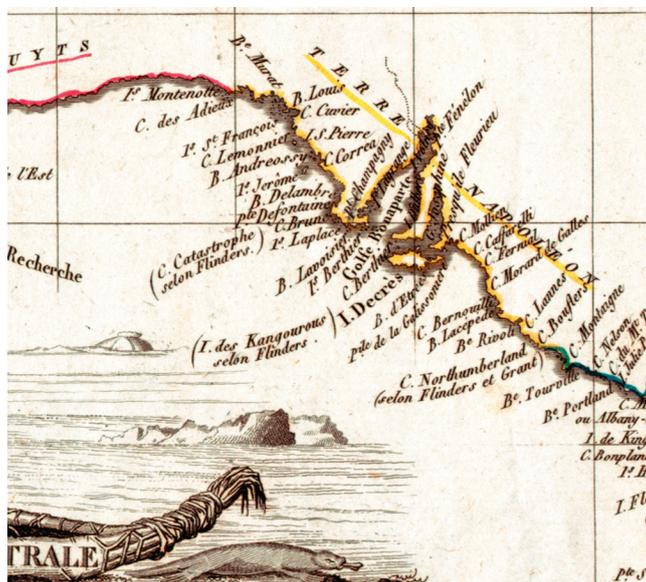


Figure 6. Portion of *Océanique Centrale* (National Library of Australia, Map T 843).

In this publication we find a statement that Lapie had in fact been denied access to Louis de Freycinet's cartographic information.

Pour donner à plusieurs parties de cette Carte un plus grand degré d'exactitude, nous aurions désiré pouvoir consulter la grande et belle *Carte de la Nouvelle-Hollande*, que M. Freycinet, capitaine de marine, a dressée pour l'Atlas du *Voyage aux Terres Australes*; mais un devoir rigoureux défendoit à M. Freycinet de nous la communiquer: nous n'en avons pas pu profiter.²⁰

[To provide several parts of this map a greater degree accuracy we would have preferred to consult the great and beautiful *Chart of New Holland*, that M. Freycinet, sea captain, drew up for the Atlas of *Voyage to the Southern Lands*. But strict adherence to duty prevented M. Freycinet from communicating with us: we have not been able to benefit from it.]

It seems he did indeed rely upon other sources, such as the 1810 review written by Barrow, and a memoir and a small manuscript map sent by Flinders to *Annales des voyages*, edited by geographer Conrad Malte-Brun. From this conjunction of evidence it is believed Tooley was in error, and *Océanique Centrale* is now ascribed a publication date of 1812.

The final example is a map from an atlas in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, *Précis de la géographie universelle*, published in 1810 by Malte-Brun,²¹ recently brought to our attention by Dr. Bronwen Douglas of the Australian National University (Fig. 7).



Figure 7. *Océanique*, 1810.

Source: Online Digital Sources and Annotation System. M. Malte-Brun 1809.

“Océanique” (Object Id: 21578). In *Précis de la Géographie universelle*, M. Malte-Brun, 1810.

ODSAS: http://www.odsas.fr/scan_sets.php?doc=21578.

As can be seen, it is a regional map of Oceania, not specifically of Australia, but one that does show a full outline of Australia. The author of the map is Pierre Lapie, who, according to the cartouche, prepared it in 1809. A close examination reveals an accurate and detailed coastline, and some names appear such as *G. Bonaparte*, *Île Decrès* and *Terre Napoléon*. This can be seen in a version held by the National Library of Australia (Fig. 8.), which has been given a possible publication date of 1812 by the National Library, but it would appear that this in fact it is a single sheet reproduction of the 1810 *Océanique* map.



Figure 8. Portion of *Océanique*, 1812? (National Library of Australia, Map T 841).

FIRST FULL MAP OF AUSTRALIA APPEARING ON A MAPPE-MONDE

It is worth noting that in the 1810 *Précis de la Géographie Universelle* there is also a mappemonde showing, perhaps for the first time, a map of the world with a full outline of Australia (Fig. 9.).



Figure 9. *Précis de la géographie universelle*, Mappemonde, 1810

Source: Online Digital Sources and Annotation System. M. Malte-Brun 1809.

“Mappemonde” (Object Id: 21560). In *Précis de la Géographie universelle*, M. Malte-Brun, 1810.

ODSAS: http://www.odsas.fr/scan_sets.php?doc=21560.

In view of Lapie's statement in the 1812 atlas that he did not have direct access to Freycinet's charting, it is a mystery how he was able to map the blank part of the south coast by 1809. He stated that he had drawn from the first volume of *Voyage de Découvertes*, published in 1807.²² However there were no charts of the south coast published in that, and insufficient detail in the account of the voyage to be able to reconstruct the charting of the south coast and insert it into his *Océanique* map and the *mappe-monde*. Furthermore, none of the other sources he used for the 1812 atlas appear to have been available in 1809 either. This mystery may well be a matter for future research.

CONCLUSION

Having considered known contenders for the first full map of Australia, we are able to conclude with some confidence that the Freycinet map of 1811 was indeed the first full map explicitly of Australia as such to be published. Other maps which may appear to have preceded it are either non-existent or incorrectly dated. There are indeed earlier maps showing the full outline of Australia, such as *Océanique* 1810 and the Malte-Brun's *mappe-monde* of 1810, but neither of these maps is explicitly of Australia.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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NOTES

¹ Horner 1987, p.40.

² 'Plan of Itinerary for Citizen Baudin' in Baudin 2004, p.1.

³ Péron 1807; Petit & Lesueur 1807; Freycinet 1811, 1812 & 1815; Péron & Freycinet 1816.

⁴ The causes of this are still being debated. See for example Fornasiero *et al.* 2006.

⁵ Flinders 1804.

⁶ Petit & Lesueur 1807.

⁷ Scott 1910, p.73.

⁸ Péron & Freycinet 1816, p.467.

⁹ L. Freycinet, *Carte de la Nouvelle Hollande*/dressée par M. L. Freycinet, Commandant la Goelette le Casuarina 1808 (NLA Map RM 2189).

¹⁰ Scott, p.89. It can be ascertained Scott is referring to this map as he quotes from cartouche.

¹¹ Despite searching the National Library catalogue, Libraries Australia catalogue, consulting rare book catalogues (Wantrup 1987, Horden House 2010), and searching the internet.

¹² Personal communication – D. Lilburne, Antipodean Booksellers, 12/1/2011.

¹³ Péron 1824 *Atlas*, No. 1. Verified in Perry & Prescott 1996, p.188.

¹⁴ Tooley 1985, p.112, Plate 67.

¹⁵ Tooley, p.111.

¹⁶ Anon., 1810.

¹⁷ Anon., p.52.

¹⁸ Anon., p.53.

¹⁹ Malte-Brun 1812, Plate LXII.

²⁰ Lapie in *Atlas complet* 1812, p.9.

²¹ Malte-Brun 1810.

²² Lapie in *Atlas complet* 1812, p.9.

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