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The seven lives of Lapérouse*

*Alex François,† Teliki Thomas, Rubenson Lono,
Emele Mamuli, Kapa Niu Maketi, Willy Usao*

TRANSLATED BY *Daryl Morini‡*

Introduction

‘Any news from Mr Lapérouse?’ Louis XVI famously asked the morning of his execution.¹

While navigator Count of Lapérouse or Jean-François de Galaup (1741-1788) lived a legendary life which French children study at school, the circumstances of his death have long been a mystery.

A naval officer famed for his daring military feats against the British in the Americas, it was as a navigator that Lapérouse’s name entered world history. In 1785, King Louis XVI ordered him to complete the Pacific discoveries of his British hero, James Cook.

* These stories were collected, transcribed, interpreted, and translated into French by Alex François from the original Teanu, Lovono, Tanema, and Tikopia languages in April-May 2005. Individual references are provided in the *Notes*. These seven stories appear here in English translation for the first time. Permission was graciously given by Dr Alexandre François and *de Conti/MkF éditions*, the publisher of story VII, Willy Usao, *How Lapérouse got away*.

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His political objective was to reconnoitre the region’s islands and identify those with the potential to host French colonies.

Lapérouse and his 220-man crew spent the next four years at sea battling scurvy, storms, and slings and arrows. Their voyage was in the shape of a bowtie stretching across the Pacific.

The right-hand loop ran from South America’s serrated tip up to Hawaii, touched Alaska, then glided down North America’s western seaboard. The left-hand loop included stops in Macao, Taiwan, the Philippines, South Korea, Japan, and Russia’s Kamchatka peninsula, where Lapérouse received fresh orders to set sail for Botany Bay, modern Australia. The British were up to no good.

On 11 December 1787, Lapérouse dropped anchor at Tutuila Island, modern American Samoa. Hundreds of Āsu villagers were waiting on the beach upon arrival. They gifted the crew five hundred pigs, pigeons, fruit, and two ‘very tasty’ dogs. The French paid with glass beads, which were more popular than their iron tools.²

One of Lapérouse’s commanders, Captain de Langle, convinced him against his better instincts to send a party of sailors ashore for fresh water to stop scurvy from spreading. Setting out at low tide, their two long boats quickly beached. Confusion broke out. Hundreds of locals began pelting the French with stones, waded knee-deep into the water and clubbed de Langle and eleven crew to death. Thirty Samoans died in the fighting.³

The official French account claims the incident broke out because giving out the glass beads stoked the islanders’ envy. Other sources blamed women’s sexual advances for setting off the fight. ‘Frenchmen have no weapons against such attacks,’ Lapérouse wrote.⁴

Another theory suggests the French may have been mistaken for *aitu*, spirits or minor gods. Violence against gods was justified to snatch their gifts like glass beads. Only, real gods didn’t usually die.

One oral account suggests a more secular explanation: Lapérouse may have unwittingly declared war by striking a chief and rejecting his offering of a pig.⁵

A month later, Lapérouse sailed into Botany Bay. He arrived six days after the First Fleet; three before the Union Jack was raised in

Sydney. Under strict orders not to mention the colony, British officers acted awkwardly around their unexpected French guests. Soon enough, Lapérouse was regaling Red Coats at *soirées* aboard his ship, charming them with his love of James Cook.⁶

Despite his ‘most pleasant’ time with the British, Lapérouse was in a dark mood.⁷ A letter from Botany Bay shows his mind was still afflicted by the violence off Tutuila Island. While still glad he didn’t launch a ‘barbaric’ retaliatory strike, as his crew had demanded, he also writes: ‘I constantly mull over these events and can barely stop.’⁸ Lapérouse ‘always had a sort of secret foreboding’ of the disasters awaiting him.⁹

A ship from the First Fleet, under the ensign of the enemy against whom he had fought gallantly in the Seven Years’ War, dutifully carried his last letter to Europe. Once they had slipped over the horizon’s edge, *La Boussole* and *L’Astrolabe* weren’t seen again.

The sea kept their fate secret until 1826, when Captain Peter Dillon found artifacts belonging to *L’Astrolabe* on Vanikoro Island, modern Solomon Islands.

By interviewing locals, Dillon learned that local oral history preserved detailed stories of ships like Lapérouse’s meeting their end on the island. French sailors were remembered for their enormous noses jutting out a foot from their foreheads. Such was the shape of their *tricorne* hats.¹⁰

One account collected in 1826 had Lapérouse’s ships moored off Whanoo and Paiou villages (two coastal villages now known as Lovono and Paiu). Violent winds then picked up and blew them to shore. The first ship off Whanoo was dashed to pieces upon rocks. Most of the crew drowned. The few who swam ashore were clubbed, stoned, and shot with arrows. Dillon heard that ‘not a single soul escaped out of this vessel.’¹¹

The second ship off Paiou became beached. The survivors were captured and, because they didn’t resist, then freed. They were allowed to build an emergency boat from the wreckage. When they could, a party of French sailors sailed away in this craft. A second group spent the rest of their lives on the island.

Locals said they had believed the French to be spirits, suggesting that violence could have broken out for the same reason as on Tutuila Island. Lapérouse had been shocked to see islanders who had killed his men glide up to his ship to trade with the surviving crew. This had also occurred after Captain Cook’s death in Hawaii. Those who killed him also rowed up to his ship and asked to visit the god.¹² Had Lapérouse been mistaken for an evil spirit like his hero?

Promising clues surfaced in the 1960s. As predicted by oral historians, the *Boussole*’s wreck was discovered off Vanikoro island. In 2005, a French expedition confirmed the *Boussole*’s location on the seafloor and recovered its sextant.¹³

During this expedition, French linguist Dr Alex François found answers to the question of how Lapérouse died. While recording stories in the Teanu, Lovono, Tanema, and Tikopia languages, he found that Lapérouse had entered local lore.

‘While Vanikoro island has many other wonders,’ François writes, ‘the most intense experience is surely to be able to hear the Elders recount the legend of Lapérouse to their grandchildren some nine to ten generations after the events of 1788.’¹⁴

Dr François’ translations offer seven accounts of the last days of Lapérouse. They are translated into English and published here for the first time. In some stories, the navigator comes ashore to bury treasure, leave hidden messages, or build a boat to escape. Others have darker endings for Lapérouse.

How true are these stories? Aristotle, the minor god of logic in the Western pantheon, might insist that Lapérouse either died or survived the shipwreck. This law of non-contradiction, he writes, is the ‘most secure’ thing we can believe.¹⁵

This is the wrong attitude to take towards oral history, a mode in which fact and fiction, science and sorcery, memory and myth are not sharply distinguished. In Melanesian stories, the laws of logic are as yielding as the green coconut’s gelatinous flesh. Oral historians seek a truth that isn’t exhausted by the formal rules of thought, as it is for Aristotle.

‘By being sublimated from history into myth,’ François notes, the ‘Lapérouse myth experienced the same alchemy that saw the Trojan War give birth to the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.’¹⁶ Myth also has practical

value. As François notes, studying Homer's verse helped archaeologists track down the lost city of Troy.

The seven stories translated here, retold thousands of times over 217 years, might best be approached as one continuous, creative block of inter-generational memories. Each story could contain key facts from the original story. But the historical and cultural value of these stories is greater than the sum of their parts.

They are useful for shedding light on the tantalising "What if?" questions around Lapérouse's tragic end. One school of thought speculates that, had he escaped from the island, South Australia might today have been French speaking, something like Australia's Québec. Had he followed his itinerary, Lapérouse might have beaten British expeditions that led to southern Australia's settlement.¹⁷

Another counterfactual is even more striking. Among the men lining up to join Lapérouse's ship was an 'ambitious and energetic Corsican lad', one Napoléon Bonaparte.¹⁸ Lapérouse, it's unclear why, rejected his application. History could have been knocked off course, hundreds of thousands saved, if the future French emperor had spent his last days on Vanikoro and not Saint Helena.¹⁹ Would oral stories now feature a long-nosed Corsican rowing back to France in his single canoe?

But these stories speak to events far more traumatic to the community than the hundreds of drowned Frenchmen washing up on their beach. A few accounts describe Lapérouse's as blackbirding ships, which raided Pacific islands, abducting men to work on Queensland's sugar plantations. This isn't possible.²⁰ Blackbirding began a hundred years later. Queensland and its sugar plantations did not exist in his lifetime. Part of these stories' great cultural value is that they so movingly absorbed into their dramatic fabric the terror villagers felt when Europeans took their men away—often forever.

Accomplishing a greater feat than accuracy, these stories 'make the past reappear while keeping its emotional power intact,' as François writes.²¹ A great debt of thanks is owed to Dr Alex François and to each storyteller for sharing the history of their village and island, and for finally giving us news of Lapérouse.

I

*The message left by Lapérouse*²²

Teliki Thomas (†2009) narrated this story in the Teanu language on 27 April 2005.

A group of sailors had sheltered over there, down by the *Pain*²³ river, in the hope of making a boat.

They'd go off to chop mangrove wood out near the ancient village of Kama. Then they'd bring it back here, where they'd cut it into planks to build their boat. They worked away at their boat—like a smaller ship—for about two months. And once it was done, they got ready to go back to their country.

They took to sea and got just past the reef over there. It was there, out in the open sea, that their boat broke down, such that they found themselves adrift in the lagoon.

Now, just as they were leaving, Lapérouse was up there, up on the crest of that hill you can see just up there, not far from where the village chief out that way lives. He was in a little clearing up there. Lapérouse surveyed the sea in search of the boat, hoping to catch a glimpse of it making it ashore.

Suddenly gripped with anxiety about [*the fate of*]²⁴ his men, *and maybe to get a better look*, he darted off and clambered up that peak, up there.

At this point, he wrote a message on a strip of metal. He then concealed the metal strip up there, in the clearing where he stood. He buried it in the ground, covering it with a pile of rocks so that no one else would ever discover or take it.

This metal plate has remained here to this day, [*which we know*] because it was never found. It's not clear to me, personally, whether we'll ever find what Lapérouse inscribed [*on the metal plate*], which he wrote and hid somewhere up in that clearing just above. Because, to this day, we search in vain.

II

*The chest Lapérouse buried*²⁵

Teliki Thomas narrated this story in the Teanu language on 27 April 2005.

The chest that I mentioned is found over there, to your left, beneath the roots of the big chestnut tree you can see overhanging the beach.

So, as I was saying, the day Lapérouse landed here with his men, just as their ship was wrecked, well, on the same day, a little girl was in her house.

The adults [*from her village*] were either out bush or fishing. Which is why, as they came ashore, the men closed in on this house and found the little girl inside. They asked her, ‘Where did the grown-ups go? Your mummy and daddy, where are they?’

‘They’re not here!’ she answered. ‘My mummy and daddy are gone. They went to the garden!’

‘Don’t be scared,’ they told her. ‘You’ve got nothing to fear.’

And since she was about to start crying, they repeated: ‘No, no, don’t be scared! Look, we came here with a little chest, and we’d like it to stay here, in this village, and we’d like you to be the one to look after it.’

Gently, they set about digging a hole in the ground and lowered the object to the bottom. Finally, they gave her their instructions: ‘Very well. Looking after this chest will be your responsibility. When your mother is back, be sure to tell her to keep this secret, to tell no one about it: this is how you’ll ensure you keep it with you. Maybe we’ll come back to get it one day.’

They left the area soon after, leaving her with the chest.

When she saw her mother come home that night, the little girl said to her, ‘Mummy, the Frenchmen came and they hid a chest here. They told me we shouldn’t tell anyone about it, that this chest belongs to them, and that we have to look after it. Maybe they’ll come back for it one day.’

This very chest still exists in our day, it’s around here somewhere.

III

*Why our gods killed Lapérouse*²⁶

Rubenson Lono (1933–2020) narrated this story in the Lovono language on 2 May 2005.

Back in the day, white-skinned men would land on our island to recruit men. The French would come recruit men they’d take far away, whom they’d put to work for them.

Later on, they’d sometimes bring these men home, those they took away. But it wasn’t always the case. Sometimes a man would just leave for good. When they took him, they took him for good! They took some to Fiji, some to Queensland.

They were men from the Ngama or the Lovono villages—yes, it was mainly those guys they took. And it’s mainly those guys that never came back.

One day, the Lovono and Ngama villagers *gathered together*.

‘Listen up,’ one of them said. ‘One of those ships that take our men just came back. You know, the ones that recruit people but never bring them back! Well, there’s one just like that approaching now. O, Heavens, what will we do about this ship?’

So, they decided to gather their sacred money. When they had enough, they invoked their god, asking it to destroy Lapérouse’s *ship*.

At once, they saw a great, black cloud descend to fill the heavens. The cloud descended so relentlessly that it crushed the ship, which immediately sank into the deep.

Some sailors survived the shipwreck, others on the other hand perished in it. But despite losing many men, some sailors did make it ashore and sheltered on the island.

To be honest, I’m not quite sure what happened to the survivors who made it to the island, or how they finally made it back to their country.

But for most sailors, it was all over—they had perished in the shipwreck.

IV

*How our gods killed Lapérouse*²⁷

Rubenson Lono narrated this story in the Lovono language on 2 May 2005.

As I was saying, they'd gathered their ritual money and invoked their god.

This god was called Tornado *or Fisipure*.²⁸ Tornado got up, and we saw huge, dark clouds approaching which soon covered the whole sky. Suddenly, a tornado began to twist in the sky. It went round, and round, and round, and finally hit Lapérouse's ship, splitting it in half.

Some sailors perished as soon as the ship split asunder, while others were able to make it to the main island. The survivors thus found refuge on the island. But we don't know how they could have left.

Did a new ship come to pick them up? That, we don't know. That's it, the end.

V

*Why the French are so proud*²⁹

Emele Mamuli (†) narrated this story in the Tanema language on 7 May 2005.

In the beginning, it was little ships that had grown accustomed to landing on our shores.

They didn't stay long: we traded goods and off they went to sea again. When this little boat was gone, another would come again. It bought a few things from us, then it too would leave again.

Among them there was a specific ship which, unlike many others, knew the way to our island very well. This boat, which had discovered our country, would come to buy trocas³⁰ from us. It bought trocas from us, then it would leave. On other days, it bought *bêches-de-mer*³¹ from us. It was my father who ran that business; my father looked after it.

One day, Lapérouse's ship approached our shores. Our ancestors invoked their god, Tornado: 'Here's a ship for you. Destroy him!'

No sooner had they spoken than the god fell upon the ship. The two hulls cracked apart violently, the one drifting off, the other staying in place.

These islands where we are, it's the French who discovered them; no other whites had come before them.³² And when the French came here, they carved their names into the dead trees. When they cut down a tree, they'd make use of one side while carving their name into the other.

They came back here later on because they saw this big island as their own. The French are proud because it was France that discovered our island.

This very island, where we stand, they're the ones who discovered it before all the other whites. That's all.

VI

*The killing of Lapérouse*³³

Kaspa Niu Maketi³⁴ narrated this story in the Tikopia language on 10 May 2005.

Here, let me tell you the story of Lapérouse.

This story about Lapérouse relates to [*a certain*] Taureperangi Terua Matakai,³⁵ who was chief of Taumako village. This man had met Lapérouse in person, right here on this island of Vanikoro.

He's the one who beheaded Lapérouse. They'd worked together for five days before he beheaded Lapérouse. That's right, for five days he worked with him. But at nightfall on the sixth day, the chief began to pray according to his rituals. He prayed in this way while the sailors slept.

He stood up suddenly and slit their throats. He killed all of them. Then he took their bodies to bury them a little further inland, in a village by the name of Taumako. That's right, he buried them in Taumako.

Then he took his canoe to go see the place where the ship had sunk, right in front of Paiu. This is when he spotted several people who'd stayed on the ship. Again, he conducted his rituals and set

fire to the ship, which burned to ashes. The men on board were also burned [*alive*] along with the ship.

This was the story of the Taumako chief, and Lapérouse too. He's clearly the one who wrecked the ship. This is the story of Chief of Taumako from Tikopia.

Afterwards, he gathered all the things *from the shipwreck* and took them back to Tikopia island. Saucepans, plates, and other objects, all these things he took there.³⁶

That's where they stayed down to Peter Dillon's day.³⁷ Those are the very things Peter Dillon found in the end *in Tikopia*. Some of these objects were later returned [*to us*] here. Dillon and his men were the ones to repatriate some of the objects they found in Tikopia.

Finally, [*local inhabitants*] Pū Rātia and Meone explained to Peter Dillon that it was this very ship that Lapérouse ran aground off Paiu³⁸ on Vanikoro island.

This, then, is the story of Lapérouse in Vanikoro. I, Kasper Niu Maketi, have just told it here, in the village of Paiu.

VII

*How Lapérouse got away*³⁹

Chief Willy Usao (†2017) narrated this story in the Teanu language on 6 May 2005.

In olden times, some ships had grown used to coming here to recruit men. They took them to work down south, towards Santo.⁴⁰

At times, the locals here would watch ships sail away but, for years on end, never saw them return.

Things went on like this until it was the turn of a great navigator by the name of Lapérouse. This man sailed in a huge canoe, of the kind we call a *tepakare*,⁴¹ that is a two-hulled boat. This double-canoe was sailing straight for our island and it entered Paiu Bay.

Within moments, the whole island's population was in a state of alert, in Paiu as much as in Tanema, in Lovono, in Lale. The alarm was sounded everywhere 'Help! Here comes another one of those

ships to again take our men away! This boat is so massive! It's the end of us!'

In this way, people hastened from every corner of the island, from the Lale region, from Ngama, from Lovono. The men held a council and resolved to invoke their gods.

'Hark, dear friends! The French are back, they come to take our men away! They will once again kidnap them and never bring them back to this land. This is the end of our people! O, mighty Filisao, god of arrows and tornadoes!⁴² Inflict on this vessel what it deserves! May it break, may it run aground at the mouth of this channel! Crush it, that it may sink deep into the sea!

Two tornadoes suddenly shot up: one black, the other white. They rose up in the sky all at once, before falling inexorably upon the ship, which they slammed into and broke in half, pulling its hulls apart.

One of the two tornadoes collided with the first hull, which was marooned out in the Ngambe Passage, in the very spot where objects are discovered in the present day.

The second hull drifted away a little, getting swept out to sea, where it was finally engulfed by the waves, out near the open sea.

Well, that's what my grandfather told me. I'm telling you the story just as he told me.

What became of the sailors on board this ship and of their captain? Well, their great chief Lapérouse and a handful of the young men under his command managed to get to shore along the coast of Paiu, to shelter on the island.

As soon they got there, they searched for a spot to hide, a temporary hide-out. That's when they dug in on—what's it called again? That's right! Filimoe island.⁴³

While staying there, they got to work building a new boat in Paiu, on the banks of the Paiu river. They were rebuilding their ship in the form of our *tepakare* canoe, you see? Anyway, that's what I was told.

But the boat probably wasn't big enough to sail out in high seas. When their workday was over, off they'd go to hide out in their secret camp site on Filimoe island. And off they went again to work

on their boat the next day. All their work they conducted in Paiu. It went on like that for a while.

Their work bore fruit because, in the end, they were able to get off the island and out to sea thanks to their makeshift canoe. They only ditched their boat when they'd made it on board a much bigger ship and got away safe and sound.

I've personally never heard [*anyone say*] that one or two men stayed behind in Vanikoro. Everyone knows that, had they stayed, the locals would have slaughtered them.

There you are. That's all. Thanks for listening to me, dear sir.

Notes

- 1 Louis XVI, '*A-t-on des nouvelles de M. de Lapérouse?*' Cited in Jean-Dominique Bourzat, *Les après-midi de Louis XVI* (Brédys: La Compagnie Littéraire, 2008), 1990.
- 2 Serge Tchekézo, '*First Contacts*' in *Polynesia: The Samoan Case (1722-1848): Western Misunderstandings about Sexuality and Divinity* (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2004), 53.
- 3 Tchekézo, '*First Contacts*' in *Polynesia*, 58.
- 4 Tchekézo, '*First Contacts*' in *Polynesia*, 54.
- 5 Tchekézo, '*First Contacts*' in *Polynesia*, 62.
- 6 The British were pleased to hear a Frenchman say (in French) that 'Mr Cook has done so much that he has left me nothing to do but to admire his works.' Cited in Ernest Scott, *Lapérouse* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson Ltd, 1913), 76.
- 7 Scott, *Lapérouse*, 73.
- 8 '*...vous voyez mon cher ami que je suis encore affecté par les événements, j'y reviens sans cesse et presque malgré moi.*' Lapérouse, Letter to Claret de Fleurieu, Botany Bay, 7 February 1788.
- 9 '*...des malheurs...dont j'ai toujours eu, en quelque sorte, un secret pressentiment.*' Lapérouse, Fleurieu letter, 7 February 1788.
- 10 Scott, *Lapérouse*, 95.
- 11 Scott, *Lapérouse*, 94.
- 12 Tchekézo, '*First Contacts*' in *Polynesia*, 59.
- 13 CNN, 'French explorer's shipwreck found', 10 May 2005, available at: <<http://edition.cnn.com/2005/WORLD/asiapcf/05/10/laperouse.wrecked/>>.
- 14 Alexandre François, 'Mystère des langues, magie des légendes', in Association Salomon (ed.), *Le mystère Lapérouse ou le rêve inachevé d'un roi* (Paris: de Conti, Musée national de la Marine, 2008), 230.
- 15 'The most secure of all beliefs is that mutually contradictory statements cannot be jointly true.' Aristotle, *The Metaphysics* (London: Penguin, 2004), 105-107 (1011b13-14).
- 16 François, 'Mystère des langues', 232.
- 17 Scott, *Lapérouse*, 46.
- 18 Robert W. Kirk, *Paradise Past: The Transformation of the South Pacific, 1520-1929* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2012), 206.
- 19 Kirk, *Paradise Past*, 206.
- 20 François, 'Mystère des langues', 232.
- 21 François, 'Mystère des langues', 232.
- 22 Teliki Thomas, 'The message left by Lapérouse', 27 April 2005, in Alexandre François, *Field archives from the Solomon Islands*. Pangloss Collection, CNRS. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0002605>>.

- 23 *Italicised* words are those which the French translator, Alexandre François, inserted into the text inside brackets.
- 24 [*Italicised and bracketed*] words are those which the English translator, Daryl Morini, inserted into the text for clarity.
- 25 Teliki Thomas, ‘The chest left by Lapérouse’, 27 April 2005, in Alexandre François, *Field archives from the Solomon Islands*. Pangloss Collection, CNRS. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0002604>>.
- 26 Rubenson Lono, ‘The story of Lapérouse’, 2 May 2005, in Alexandre François, *Field archives from the Solomon Islands*. Pangloss Collection, CNRS. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0002651>>.
- 27 Rubenson Lono, ‘Conversation about “The story of Lapérouse”’, 2 May 2005, in Alexandre François, *Field archives from the Solomon Islands*. Pangloss Collection, CNRS. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0002652>>.
- 28 *Fisipure* is the Lovono word for the god known as *Vilisao* in the Teanu language. See VII, Willy Usao, *How Lapérouse got away*. See Alexandre François, *Teanu Dictionary (Solomon Islands)*, 2021, *Dictionaria* 15, 1-1877. Available at: <<https://dictionaria.clld.org/sentences/teanu-XV001173>>.
- 29 Emele Mamuli, ‘The story of Lapérouse (3)’, 7 May 2005, in Alexandre François, *Field archives from the Solomon Islands*. Pangloss Collection, CNRS. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0002685>>.
- 30 *Trocas* (*Tectus niloticus*) are a type of sea snail harvested across the Pacific and valued for its nacreous shell and meat.
- 31 *Bêches-de-mer* (*Holothuroidea*), a.k.a. sea cucumbers or trepang, are harvested in the Pacific and a delicacy in Asia.
- 32 The first Europeans to sight Vanikoro Island from afar were on board Spanish captain Álvaro de Mendaña’s ship in 1595, two centuries before Lapérouse. Locals may not have seen them. The French were likely the first on shore.
- 33 Kaspā Niu Maketi, ‘The story of Lapérouse’, 10 May 2005, in Alexandre François, *Field archives from the Solomon Islands*. Pangloss Collection, CNRS. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.24397/pangloss-0002687>>.
- 34 At the time of recording, Kaspā Niu Maketi was a leader of the Polynesian community established on Vanikoro island. That community, tied to the island of Tikopia further east, settled on Vanikoro’s southern shores several centuries ago, and was thus present on the island at the time of Lapérouse.
- 35 *Taureperangi Terna Matakai*: presumably a 19th century Tikopia chief. No further written information is available.
- 36 As described in this story, Captain Peter Dillon’s expedition found such artefacts on the island of Tikopia in 1826.
- 37 *Peter Dillon* was the captain who found remnants of the Lapérouse shipwreck in 1826. See *Translator’s Introduction*.
- 38 A century earlier, oral history correctly designated *Paiu* (*Païou* in François’ usage) as a site of one of the two shipwrecks.

- 39 Cited in Alexandre François, ‘Mystère des langues, magie des légendes’, in *Association Salomon, Le mystère Lapérouse ou le rêve inachevé d’un roi* (Paris: de Conti, Musée national de la Marine, 2008), 230-233.
- 40 *Espiritu Santo* in modern Vanuatu was colonised by the French. Like Vanikoro, Santo was targeted by the Queensland blackbirding trade. In one 1880s incident, local Santo residents fought back against HMS Cormorant, killing one of its officers with rifle fire. At the time, Royal Navy ships based in Australia protected the blackbirders and were tasked with crushing such acts of resistance with violent punitive expeditions—including in *Espiritu Santo*.
- 41 *Tepakare* is the name of a large double-hulled, catamaran-like canoe used by Polynesians. See entry ‘*Tepakare*’ in François’ dictionary. Available at: <https://dictionaria.clld.org/units/teanu-tepakare_1>.
- 42 *Filisao*, or *Vilisao*, the god of tornadoes, is named after the Teanu word for “tornado”, also *vilisao*. See Alexandre François, *Teanu Dictionary*, 2021, available at: <https://dictionaria.clld.org/units/teanu-vilisao_1>.
- 43 *Filimoe* is an ancient, submerged atoll on the west coast of Banie island, near Lale. Alexandre François, ‘Vilimoe’, *Teanu Dictionary*, 2021, available at: https://dictionaria.clld.org/units/teanu-Vilimoe_1.