

Jacques Grasset de Saint-Sauveur

R. D. J. COLLINS

The wide-ranging intellectual curiosity which marked the eighteenth century in Europe finds a humble reflection in the works of Jacques Grasset de Saint-Sauveur (1756-1810). From the appearance of his first book in 1784 to the posthumous publication of his last in 1812, the 31 titles which are associated with his name embrace themes and genres as diverse as novels with an oriental flavour, and texts expressing a stern morality in harmony with a new spirit in French politics and society; the world of the theatre, and the achievements of French patriots during the Revolution and under the Empire; classical mythology, and the voyages of discovery.¹

The six texts which Grasset de Saint-Sauveur devoted to New Zealand, based necessarily on the experiences of others, set him up as a distinctive mediator between the reality of New Zealand as reported by the earliest visitors, and the French public. The illustrations, likewise presumably derived from earlier sources, generated several imitations and adaptations: perhaps even more than the texts they influenced and helped disseminate the image of New Zealand held in France in the period after 1788.

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Grasset de Saint-Sauveur's first published work, the *Costumes civils actuels de tous les peuples connus*, poses bibliographic problems which extend beyond the scope of the present study. Suffice it to say that neither of the copies of the 1784 edition which we have seen contains a section on New Zealand. The *Tableaux cosmographiques de l'Europe, de l'Asie, de l'Afrique et de l'Amérique* (1787) also falls well short of the vast ambitions implied by its title: in both copies sighted the text 'Division des peuples du Canada' which follows an eight-page introduction and a 15-page general survey of America, breaks off at the end of page 28. We assume that difficulties, the nature of which must remain conjectural, forced the abandonment of this specific project.

It is only in the fourth volume of the 1788 edition of the *Costumes civils actuels de tous les peuples connus*, subtitled *Amérique*, that an essay on New Zealand first appears.