

on with drawing and painting.<sup>23</sup> The manuscript of *Projets* contains the phrase: 'Look into accounts of voyages, navigators' narratives etc. etc'. He was perhaps thinking in terms of executing a cycle of historical paintings, embracing du Fresne, La Pérouse and Cook. It is logical that, having meditated on du Fresne's murder, Meryon should have turned to the other major French maritime disaster of Pacific exploration, the disappearance of La Pérouse, and it is indeed tempting to go further and wonder whether he might not have had Cook's death in mind as the subject of another work. Barthélémy Lauvergne (1805-1871), who had participated in the 1826-1829 voyage commanded by d'Urville which solved the mystery of La Pérouse's fate, exhibited *Naufage de la corvette l'Astrolabe, commandée par M. de la Pérouse, sur les récifs de l'île de Vanikoro* (Wreck of the corvette the *Astrolabe*, commanded by M. de la Pérouse, on the reefs of the island of Vanikoro) at the 1842 Salon. In 1838 and 1841 he had exhibited works representing the region of Cape Horn. Lauvergne visited New Zealand in 1827 and in 1831.

*Un combat de pirogues Mahouries* is the only overtly New Zealand subject in this group. It is also the most markedly exotic of them all, and can legitimately be compared to the host of North African, Middle Eastern and North American paintings which appeared in French exhibitions in this period. Three long canoes, each with about 30 combatants, men and women, are to occupy the centre of the picture. Damaged, a defeated canoe sinks under the weight of its crew: 'Scenes of carnage on the water and in the canoes'. Meryon reminds himself of 'the feathers decorating men and boats.' Seagulls and sharks surround the canoes. In the distance other canoes hasten to join the combat: 'In these canoes, you can pick out men standing, waving spears and clubs in their hands—These canoes are decorated with streamers of black and white cock-feathers.—Evening, a few moments before sunset.—Faces are strongly lit by the luminary's last rays.—There will have to be land in the background, at varying distances—' The attention paid to detail appears more marked in this outline than in the others.

The remaining planned work, *Providentia, a Deo missa*, was obviously a work of considerable importance in Meryon's mind, for he devised two schemes for handling it: 'This subject could be treated in two ways: positive manner, allegorical manner'. The second has already been mentioned.

A sub-title explains the subject of the work: 'Encounter between the State ship the *Rhin* and a lost whale-boat', although it is apparent that 'canoe' would be more appropriate. The 'positive' or literal approach was to show a masted canoe, sailing obliquely away from the spectator. Of the six natives (5 men, 1 woman) in the canoe, one man steers, standing up, 'his eyes fixed on the ship which appears on the horizon.'