

PELLETIER

THE FORGOTTEN CASTAWAY OF CAPE YORK

BY STEPHANIE ANDERSON

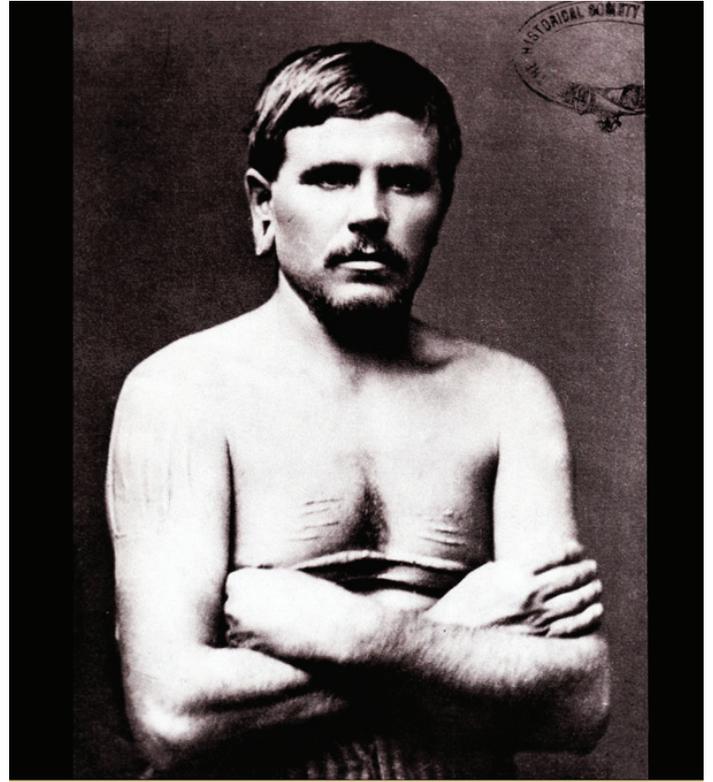
WITH COMMENTARY BY ATHOL CHASE

French cabin boy Narcisse Pelletier was fourteen years old when the *Saint-Paul* was shipwrecked near Rossel Island off New Guinea in 1858. Leaving behind more than 300 Chinese labourers recruited for the Australian goldfields — believed to have been subsequently massacred by the Rossel Islanders — the ship's captain and crew, including Pelletier, escaped in a longboat. After a gruelling voyage across the Coral Sea to Cape York, Pelletier was abandoned by the crew. He was rescued by an Aboriginal family and remained with them as a member of their clan until 1875 when he was sighted by the crew of a pearling lugger. 'Rescued' against his will, Pelletier was conveyed to Sydney and then repatriated to France.

Even though Pelletier's Cape York experience is all but forgotten in Australia, and in France it is known only in its broad outlines, his story rivals that of the famous William Buckley, both as a tale of human survival and as an enthralling and accessible ethnographic record.

The author, Stephanie Anderson, came across Pelletier's story by chance in an old French anthropological journal. As she started researching it, her fascination with the story grew. She found that Pelletier had left an account of his experiences, first published in 1876, that had never been translated into English.

Now, for the first time, this remarkable true story is presented in English, complemented by an in-depth introductory essay and ethnographic commentary. This book is required reading for anyone with an interest in Australian history, anthropology, or the intriguing pre-colonial world of a coastal Aboriginal people.



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'Stephanie Anderson, with perceptive assistance from ethnographer Athol Chase, has unearthed a forgotten treasure, brought it vividly to life and imparted it with a deep lustre. The moving and melancholy story is every bit as illuminating as the better-known castaway tales of Buckley, Morrill and Barbara Thomson. Prodigious scholarship and keen insight has gone into making this fascinating multilayered book that is part biography, part primary source, part ethnography and part investigative social history.'

Professor Iain McCalman, author of *Darwin's Armada*

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