



A Forgotten Collector of Australian Ethnographic Objects in the *Muséum d'histoire naturelle* of Le Havre: Eugène Delessert¹

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Introduction

At the time of its inauguration on 3 January 1847, a *Musée-Bibliothèque* built by the Municipality of Le Havre housed a Painting and Sculpture Department, a Public Library and two Natural History Galleries. The first acquisition, the founding component of the ethnographic collection of the *Musée-Bibliothèque*, was made at the beginning of 1848, following a proposal by the young traveller of independent means, Eugène Delessert, to sell to the Municipality of Le Havre his entire ethnographic collection comprising more than 3000 exceptional items of ethnography and zoology that he built up during his voyage around the world, which had concluded a few months earlier.

Shortly after being added to the institution's heritage holdings, these ethnographic objects were displayed in the glass cases on the ground floor as well as on the staircase walls, much to the despair of the art curator, who considered them simply 'curios'.

The merchant Eugène Delessert's ethnographic collection

Eugène Delessert was born in Le Havre on 16 July 1819. His parents were Jacques Louis Paul Delessert (1782–1863), a merchant, and Pauline Roussac (1797–1864). When Eugène finished his studies, he still had everything to learn about the merchant business, which he would soon enter. He was

¹ Translated by Patricia Clancy.



taken under the wing of the banker Benjamin Delessert,² who advised him to take a trip around the world to gain experience in international finance. Eugène made his first voyage between the end of 1839 and the end of 1841 to North and South America, for business. In August 1844 he set sail once again from Le Havre, this time for Australia, where he would spend almost eight months, between 27 December 1844 and 15 August 1845 (Dyer 2013, 93-94),³ the Pacific Islands and Asia, before returning to France, via the Red Sea, Egypt and the Mediterranean, according to his own account (Delessert 1848, 2).

When he returned, Eugène Delessert presented his observations on Australia to his cousin, Benjamin Delessert. The banker began working towards a possible publication of these observations, but he died shortly afterwards in Paris on 1 March 1847. Eugène inherited Benjamin's ethnographic collections, which included some of the objects brought back by Bruny d'Entrecasteaux's expedition, and he incorporated them into his own.⁴

At some point in 1847 Eugène Delessert decided to sell his collections. The remarkable private exhibition of the 3000-piece collection was held over the final months of 1847. The collection included 'native weapons and tools' and over 300 stuffed birds (Journal du Havre 1847, 2 & 3). All the

² The family relationship between Benjamin and Eugène Delessert goes back three generations, through Benjamin's grandparents, and four generations through Eugène's great-grandparents, Paul Benjamin Delessert (1690-1765) and Elisabeth Marguerite Brun (1707-1799), married in 1730: consequently Benjamin and Eugène Delessert are not uncle and nephew, as has often be stated, but sixth cousins. My thanks to Raymond Taconet, who was very helpful in my research into the genealogy of the Delessert family (personal correspondence, August 2015). See also Tisseron & Trémollière 1872; De Lessert 1904.

³ Six months according to Laroche 1966, 79.

⁴ The scope of this article does not allow a description of the circumstances which led to Benjamin Delessert becoming the owner of a part of the ethnographic collections from the d'Entrecasteaux expedition sent by King Louis XVI to search for Lapérouse's expedition, fascinating though they are. A useful reference is the work by Edward Duyker (2004) on the scientist Houtou de La Billardière, who was a member of the expedition led by d'Entrecasteaux, most of whose botanical collections were acquired by the banker and collector Benjamin Delessert. My thanks to Edward Duyker for having alerted me to certain aspects of the fate of that botanist and traveller's collections (personal correspondence October 2015).



promotional work was done by Delessert himself with the aim of influencing municipal councillors in the hope that the ethnographic and zoological collection would be acquired by the *Musée-Bibliothèque*, which had been open to the public for less than a year. He was all the more confident as he surely realised how poor the museum's galleries were in ethnographic objects.

The sale of part of the collection to the Municipality of Le Havre

A Paris auctioneer, Maître Bonnefons de Laviaille, estimated the value of the entire collection at around 4000 francs. Count d'Houdetot, a Le Havre collector of curios, put its worth at about 3,500 francs (AMH, FM R2 C7 L5). In a smart move, Eugène Delessert circulated the rumour that he was going to send his collection to Paris. Intrigued by the exoticism of these 'native objects', some local intellectuals were stirred to action. The Municipality bought a part of the collection in January 1848, consisting of 204 objects (weapons, tools, utensils, items of dress) plus 'more than 250 very curious and rare little men in costume' (AMH, FM R2 C7 L5).⁵ A selection had therefore been made. We do not know by whom, but it is reasonable to conclude that Guillaume Lennier, the assistant curator and later curator of the Natural History Galleries of the *Musée-Bibliothèque*, father of Gustave Lennier, himself curator of the *Muséum d'histoire naturelle* from 1859, probably played an important part.

Another question remains unanswered: what happened to the rest of the collection? Did Eugène Delessert put it up for auction in Paris? It does not seem to have become part of a public collection either in France or Switzerland, where some of the Delessert family lived. The sale document kept in the Le Havre Municipal Archives mentions only the ethnographic collections. It is therefore certain that the stuffed birds and mammals from the Delessert voyage were not part of the transaction.

⁵ An illustration in Loir's article (1932, 486) shows the figures in a market or village diorama, displayed in a cabinet in the Ethnography Room. A small, white, clay figure, originally painted, was found burnt in the ruins of the *Muséum d'histoire naturelle* when rescue excavations were made in 1945 by G. Priem and André Maury. It was catalogued in 1985 as n° 179 (AMHNNH, inventory 1985). There is every reason to believe that it belongs to the fifteen or so very similar figures held in the collections of the *Musée d'Art et d'Histoire du Havre*, probably put into storage in its reserve collection by the curator of the Museum in the 1950s and since forgotten.



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When the ethnographic objects were integrated into the general collection of the *Musée-Bibliothèque*, the institution was enriched not only by what Eugène Delessert had gathered on his voyage, but also (see footnote n° 4) by the older ethnographic component from the expedition of Antoine Raymond Joseph Bruny d'Entrecasteaux, kept by the botanist of the expedition, Jacques-Julien Houtou de la Billardière, and acquired by the banker Benjamin Delessert.

The Australian component of the Delessert collection

Based on the original handwritten list of the ethnographic objects in the Delessert collection bought by the Municipality (AMH, FM R2 C7 L5), sixteen objects are identified as probably having come from Australia, of which only ten are explicitly described as such in the inventory. However, the large spear set with kangaroo teeth, as well as the shield 'to fend off boomerangs', although unattributed, are likely to come from Australia.

Order number	Identification	Description	Provenance
8	Club	Mushroom-shaped head	New Holland
9	Club	Mushroom-shaped head Woollen ornament [sic]	
12	Boomarang [sic]		New Holland
13	Boomarang [sic]		New Holland
14	Boomarang [sic]		New Holland
15	Boomarang [sic]		New Holland
35	Shield		New Holland
36	Shield	To fend off boomerangs [sic]	
54	Nulla nulla	From Sydney	New Holland
56	Axe	Turtle bone	
57	Axe	Turtle bone	
131	Large spear	Set with kangaroo teeth [sic]	
132	Javelin	Set with flint	
133	Javelin	Set with flint	New Holland
134	Javelin	Set with flint	New Holland
135	Javelin	Set with flint	New Holland





Judging by the spelling of items in the printed catalogue, identical to the spelling in the handwritten list, we can assume that Curator Couveley's list was based on the Museum's inventory, but a mistake slipped in, perhaps when information about boomerangs was being copied: they are said to come from New Zealand and no longer from 'New Holland' (AMH FM R2 C6 L5).

Plans to hold a day of national commemoration of the Lapérouse expedition were taking shape, and were approved in 1879. From 1888, the *Société de Géographie de Paris* took responsibility for organising the celebration for the centenary of the death of the naval explorer. On the 11 April, Count Henri de Bizemont, Vice-President of the Central Commission of the association in charge of organising the exhibition, contacted the mayor of Le Havre to urgently obtain some items from the d'Entrecasteaux expedition, knowing that they had been part of the Delessert collection held by the *Musée-Bibliothèque* (AMH, FC R2 C4 L7).

As the exhibition was to open on 20 April, it was the Librarian, who was also the Curator of the Archaeological and Ethnological Museum, Jules Baillard, who had the task of replying to the Vice-President. The Municipality decided to approve the loan in principle, provided that the handling and freight were paid for by the *Société de Géographie*. A letter from the *Société* dated 15 April shows that the exhibition would at last open its doors on 23 April for only one week. The objects were sent on 18 April. A copy of the list of the items on loan is in the files kept in the Museum's archives (AMH, FC R2 C4 L7). The table on page 54 shows how the thirty-four objects shown at the exhibition are described.

Baillard chose a variety of objects, and that is how there were some from Australia among the items requested: e.g. n° 1 (shield from New Holland), n° 14 (red and white shield, no stated origin but can retrospectively be considered as one of Delessert's items), and n° 29 (boomerang). When drawing up his list, Baillard used terms corresponding to those published by Delessert in the account of his voyage: *Koreil*, *Tur ra ma*, *Ta win* (written *Tai win* [sic]), *Mal ga*...

All the objects on loan were returned in the days following the event. In the official publication for the commemoration there is no description or list of the objects borrowed from the *Musée-Bibliothèque* (d'Estampes 1888, 244).



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Ref.	Description	Ref.	Description
1	Koreil or shield from New Holland	19	Belt of parrot feathers
2	Carved wooden idol	20	Papuan wig
3	Mal-ga, club with beak-shaped extension	21	Weapon made from two antelope horns
4	Mal-ga, club with handle covered in braids	22	Rattan shield
5 & 6	Pair of leather sandals	23	Headdress of human skin (scalp)
7	Battle-axe, the black stone head is attached with braids. The carved wooden handle is painted red	24	Straight battle-axe. Handle partly covered in fibres. Head made from a root.
8 & 9	Tai-Win, stone hammers with wooden handles	25	Wooden sculpture, a human head with two long ears.
10	Pineapple club, a curved club. The head is crowned with spikes	26	Rattan hat
11	Bow	27	Battle-axe with the top surface flattened in the shape of a leaf
12	Axe handle of carved wood. The part of the weapon that was made of stone is missing	28	Battle-axe with a hook on one side and a point on the other (a fancy ornamental weapon to which the locals attached tassels, little bells, a few feathers or a lock of hair from an enemy (Tonga Islands)
13	Iron axe with wooden handle	29	Bommerang [sic] or Tur-ra-ma
14	Wooden shield with handle (red decoration on white background)	30	Neck ornament, iridescent shell (Rotuma Island)
15	Straight battle-axe. Handle partly carved, partly covered with braids. Head made from a root.	31	Bow
16	Club with mushroom-shaped head (a common weapon throughout Polynesia)	32	Piece of local material
17	Flattened battle-axe, made of black wood (Leeward Islands)	33	Tagal cloak
18	Quiver with arrows for fishing	34	Basalt pestle (Pomotou Iles)



The Muséum d'histoire naturelle, heir to the collections from the Musée-Bibliothèque

Until 1890 Delessert's ethnographic collection was on display on the staircase walls of the *Musée-Bibliothèque*. Gustave Lennier, the curator of the *Muséum d'histoire naturelle*, was the first person to recognise its value as cultural heritage, but its historical significance was not mentioned when it was incorporated into the d'Entrecasteaux expedition's collection. (Report by G. Lennier, year 1890, AMH, FC R2 C4 L4, 18)

In 1895 the Municipality realised the advantage of regrouping all the ethnographic items held in various places in the two establishments, the Museum and the *Musée-Bibliothèque*. The Museum was the one chosen to receive the collections, including all of Delessert's artefacts (Vincent 2009b, 110).

Early 1896 marked the beginning of a relationship between the Museum and the Department of Education, through Dr Ernest Hamy, a member of the *Institut de France*, who knew G. Lennier personally. Encouraged by this support, Lennier suggested the creation of an ethnographic room in the Museum. The reassembling of the collections did not proceed very quickly, however. A report from the Public Education and Fine Arts Commission to the Municipal Council dated 20 March 1896 states that 'the whole Delessert collection, grouped in no particular order and neglected, is still cluttering up the rooms and passages of the *Musée-Bibliothèque*.' (AMH, D CM 1896-1, 272)

Meanwhile the Curator claimed a new name for the institution: *Muséum d'histoire naturelle et d'ethnographie* (Lennier 1896, 26). Another three years passed and the announcement for which the Curator had been waiting so many years finally arrived: on 2 May 1899, following a report by Gustave Lennier couched in the same blunt terms as the 1896 report, the Municipal Council decided to amalgamate the ethnographic collections still on show at the *Musée-Bibliothèque* with those of the Museum (AMH, FC R2 C4 L2 and AMH, FC R2 C4 L4). The full ethnographical collections were not displayed until July 1901 with the inauguration of the Ethnography and Prehistory Rooms, organised under the presidency of Dr Hamy, whose interest in anthropology and benevolence towards the Museum never wavered (AMH, FC R2 C4 L2).



Successive curators of the *Muséum d'histoire naturelle du Havre* took little interest in the collections in their care (Anonymous [Loir] 1929, 22; Loir 1932, 489). At best, Dr Loir, who had worked in New South Wales for the Pasteur Institute and taken an interest in the Aborigines, rather laconically summed up the situation: 'Numerous objects brought back by navigators have been added to these two collections (Delessert and Le Mescam)' (Loir and Legangneux 1929, 181). However, although able to mention a few of the most worthy donors, Dr Loir does not bother to complete the list and simply cites the two names already known.

The Second World War completed the steady fall into oblivion of the ethnographic collection in the *Muséum d'histoire naturelle du Havre*. In 1939, having reached retiring age, Dr Loir moved to Paris. In 1940, for financial reasons, the Municipality did not see fit to recruit another curator. From 1941, with bombs falling in the vicinity, nothing was done to save the collections, which were left to their fate in the rooms of an institution that had been closed to the public since 1939.

Finally in March 1941, André Maury, a science teacher, was recruited to 'look after the collections'. He had the considerable responsibility of seeing to their safe-keeping and even their removal. At the end of January 1942 he had six crates of ethnographic objects, only six crates, moved three kilometres from the city centre to Graville Abbey, where Le Havre's archaeological collections were being assembled. The inventory of the crates sent away has recently been found (Vincent 2012a, 62–63; Vincent 2014, 54; Vincent, 2015). According to the typescripts, crate n° III held the following Australian objects from the Delessert collection from display cases 1034–1035:

- A turtle-bone axe
- Two boomerangs
- A shield
- A small knife with splinters of glass
- A small club with stones set in resin
- A spear-thrower

The crates remained in a basement of the Abbey throughout the war. In the spring of 1943, when the Directorate of French Museums offered André Maury the unexpected opportunity to evacuate the Museum's most precious objects at the State's expense, he quarrelled with the Directorate representative, then with the Director himself and refused all offers of help.





On 5 September 1944, the Museum and the geology, palaeontology, zoology and ethnography collections still there were totally destroyed in a bombardment of the city centre by the allied forces. On 6 September, the Graille Abbey area was also bombed. Although the church and monastic buildings were badly damaged, the six crates of the ethnographic collection were miraculously unharmed by the shelling.

Relics saved from the bombed Museum

The few collections saved were placed, still in their crates, in the care of André Maury and temporarily housed in a room of the *École des Beaux-Arts*. The first mention of the former ethnographic treasures of the Museum is contained in the text of the lecture given by André Maury to the *Institut havrais de sociologie économique et de psychologie des peuples* on 21 March 1947. It is succinct and only takes up three lines: 'The South Pacific in particular was abundantly represented by the Delessert collection of 1845, which contained a large number of weapons and some objects gathered by d'Entrecasteaux.' (AMHNNH, Maury, lectures, 1947, 3, typescript n° 737609, underlined in the original)

From the mid-1950s, institutions in Paris sent several missions to provincial museums to carry out inspections and draw up inventories. It was for this purpose that Marie-Charlotte Laroche, who had influence in the *Société des océanistes* based in the *Musée de l'Homme* in Paris, organised a trip to the *Muséum d'histoire naturelle du Havre* in 1966.⁶ She hoped to evaluate the objects from the South Pacific and assess how much had been lost from the institution's collections during the war.

The introduction to the account of this visit reveals the way in which the Curator presented the facts to Laroche, highlighting what he had done and concealing his failure to take action to protect the Museum's heritage holdings at the crucial moment. The interesting part of the document is to be found in the lists Laroche drew up during her visit. As regards the Delessert collection, she found that of the 204 objects the Municipality bought from Delessert, 150 related to the South Pacific. During her inspection, she identified only thirty-two (Laroche 1966, 79). On page 89 of her report she states that she

⁶ During her first visit, which was made during the war, she noticed some 'treasures' (*trésors*) in the collection but on that occasion she didn't have the opportunity or the time to examine them properly (Laroche 1945, 36, 38 & 39).



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found four Australian objects in the collection: a spear-thrower (n° 124), two boomerangs (n° 125 & 126) and a turtle-bone axe (n° 127).

Mme Laroche did not see all the objects that had been saved in the Delessert collection, nor all the Australian items, and still less all the ethnographic objects from the South Pacific. For example, she never mentions the necklace of reed rings that the present author recently identified as an item belonging to the Lesueur collection (Vincent 2012a & 2012b). She says nothing of the existence of the two shields, nor the knife with fragments of flint,⁷ nor of the club set with flint. These objects must have been mixed with the African items that she did not inspect. That deprived her of the opportunity to assess other important items, such as the shark tooth spears.

The old Museum, once restored, finally opened its doors to the public at the beginning of February 1973 with three days of festivities (Anon. [Maury] 1973). Several rooms were devoted to geology and zoology, but at that time there was no room dedicated to ethnography. That was opened in 1974, put together by the curator André Maury, assisted by an administrative director, Gérard Breton, a geologist and palaeontologist appointed before the opening of the building. The ethnographic collections were displayed in a separate room on the top floor. They are the ones that were put away before the bombing and which had stayed in storage for exactly thirty-one years, augmented with new donations, e.g. about fifteen objects, including clubs from the Solomon Islands from the Gosselin collection and a few items from French Guyana, donated by Mme Fauvel.

Return to storage

Apart from a few details, that ethnography room remained unchanged until the beginning of the 1980s. In 1982 André Maury, aged 90, was transferred to an honorary position. He died the following year (Havre-Pressé 1982; Breton 1983).⁸ With the agreement of the Office of Cultural Affairs of the Municipality of Le Havre and on the recommendation of the national

⁷ 'The knife' has a long wooden shaft set with sharp fragments of flint, glass or clear obsidian, affixed with black vegetable gum. André Maury had described it in such terms in the list made in 1942.

⁸ According to copies of letters and personal notes that André Maury wrote at that time to the municipal authorities, he felt that those last years of his career were an affront and humiliation (ASGNAMH, file André Maury).



museum authority (*Inspection générale des Musées*), Gérard Breton took over both the administrative and curatorial control of the Museum. The rooms were now too small to show the new collections that had recently been put together. That September, the Ethnography Room was deemed outmoded and colonial. The objects were taken out of their showcases but no summary list was drawn up. From the beginning of 1983, due to lack of room, the objects were put in boxes and stored in the basement of the *Musée de l'Ancien Havre* at Percanville situated in the Saint-François area near the fishing port, which turned out to be damp.

Between autumn 1984 and winter 1985, Le Havre suffered heavy rainfall together with strong tides. The basements of houses were flooded and the packing cases stored in the Percanville Museum were not only flooded but through lack of communication were left in stagnant seawater for several days. The author of the present article, concerned by the lack of action, undertook their rescue. He was subsequently put in charge of the follow-up as well as of the preparation of the inventory. (Vincent 2009b, 124)

In January 1985, with no real resources and under difficult conditions, an initial cleaning was undertaken together with an inventory. In hindsight, the inventory has turned out to be very valuable as it can be considered as the reference in establishing the contents of the Museum's Ethnography Room dating back to 1974 (AMHNNH, inventory, 1985). The handwritten list shows the existence of two important Australian objects from the Delessert collections: n° 506, 'small club with wooden shaft set with stones affixed with resin' (length: 32.5 cm, height head: 7 cm) and n° 566 'red wood thrower' (length: 63 cm; width: 9 cm).

One might be surprised that there was no mention of the boomerangs and shields. They were saved from the flooding as, at that time, they were in a room on the first floor of the Museum devoted to the works of Charles Alexandre Lesueur set up by Mme Jacqueline Bonnemaïn. These items were therefore not included in the inventory on this occasion.

From 1990, with the help of Arnaud Duchemin, the objects in question were at last put into partially heated storerooms. They were arranged on the shelves according to broad geographic provenance. They were, however, considered inaccessible by the management (Breton 1992). From 2005 there was sporadic work done on a numerical inventory of the collections, recommenced five times in three years. The then Director of Cultural Affairs of the Municipality denied consultation of the collections, except for access



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granted to a few researchers, and they have remained inaccessible since 2008 because of a projected move to new storage rooms.

The collection and Delessert's account of his voyage

When Eugène Delessert inherited the ethnographic objects from his cousin, he quickly added them to his own collection without making a distinction between them. Since he did not draw up a list either before or after, it is not easy to know which collection a given piece came from. This is all the more difficult as not only did the scientists on the d'Entrecasteaux expedition collect items in various ports of call, but Eugène Delessert also bought numerous objects from curio dealers in certain trading posts on the islands he visited, as well as during his eight-month stay in the Sydney region (Laroche 1966, 79).

A proposition put forward by Hélène Richard in her comprehensive work on the d'Entrecasteaux expedition is worthy of note. She says, 'among these objects bought from Delessert by the Municipality of Le Havre are some weapons and axes from regions where the traveller certainly did not go: the Tongan Archipelago, the Solomon Islands, the New Hebrides; there was also an axe which was attributed to New Holland, a name virtually abandoned in 1850 and replaced by "Australia". That leads us to believe that several objects his uncle had bought from La Billardière's heirs [which were sold to the Municipality of Le Havre] were added to Eugène Delessert's collection. They are currently still in the collections of the *Muséum d'histoire naturelle* in that city.' (Richard 1986, 226–227)⁹

The question now is this: do the Australian ethnographic objects which are now considered to have come from Eugène Delessert actually belong to the d'Entrecasteaux collection, added to the Delessert collection before it was bought by the Municipality of Le Havre? The answer is a definite no.

⁹ 'Toutefois parmi ces objets [achetés à Delessert par la Ville du Havre] figuraient certaines armes et des haches provenant de régions où ce voyageur ne s'était absolument pas rendu : archipel des Tonga, îles Salomon, Nouvelles-Hébrides ; il y avait aussi une hache qui était notée comme provenant de la Nouvelle-Hollande, expression pratiquement abandonnée en 1850 et remplacée par "Australie". Ceci nous permet de penser que la collection d'Eugène Delessert fut augmentée des quelques objets que son oncle avait achetés aux héritiers de La Billardière qui furent ainsi vendus à la ville du Havre et sont encore actuellement dans les collections du Muséum d'histoire naturelle de cette ville.'



The proposition put forward by Hélène Richard is all the more surprising because she has closely studied the itinerary of Bruny d'Entrecasteaux's two sailing ships. It is clear that although the expedition once stopped in Esperance Bay in the south of Western Australia, but without making contact with the Aborigines, and twice in Van Dieman's Land, it never landed in the south of eastern Australia.

Consequently, the Australian objects in the Delessert collection, some of which are said to come from the Sydney region, cannot belong to the d'Entrecasteaux collection, but were indeed collected by Eugène Delessert during his eight months in Sydney.

Another look at the handwritten acquisition list and a fresh examination of the 1860 inventory of the *Musée-Bibliothèque* show that all the items in the Delessert collection bearing an indication of provenance are in fact said to be from 'New Holland'. Now, Delessert uses precisely this term 'New Holland' in the body of his account of his voyage published in 1848. It is therefore a name that is part of his vocabulary. At that time he does not seem to take heed of the fact that 'New Holland' is out-of-date and should be replaced by 'Australia'.¹⁰

In his travel diary, Delessert gives an account of the circumstances in which he managed to obtain certain weapons and some aboriginal tools.¹¹ To give more weight to his descriptions, he draws on his rendering of aboriginal weapons in the form of the plates accompanying his book:

It is not without difficulty or sacrifice that I managed to procure most of the weapons being used by the natives in the interior of New Holland; they do not want to part with them for money nor do they want to exchange them for any other object. As soon as I had obtained these weapons, I sought to know their names and the use to which they were put. [...]

The spear n° 1, to which they give the name *mo-ting*, is usually used for fishing. One end has four branches tipped with sharpened kangaroo bone. These branches can come together or move apart by means of small crosspieces held against the string that binds the branches to the shaft of

¹⁰ See also the remark by C. Dyer (2013, 94), who notices that Delessert indiscriminately uses Australia and New Holland when referring to that country.

¹¹ Colin Dyer has published a partial translation of this work, focussing on the traveller's stay in the Sydney region between December 1844 and August 1845 (2013, 96–97; see also Dyer 2005, 163–164).



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the spear, which is approximately 8 feet long. The other end has a notch to receive the hook of a stick, n° 15, called *wom-mur-mur*, which is used to throw the *mo-ting*. [...]

The *ta-win*, n° 2, is a club made of very hard wood about 1½ feet long. On each side, sharp fragments from large siliceous stones are set to form a double edge and to replace iron, which is only known close to the shoreline. The fragments of flint are held in place with a hard, strong resin. This very primitive weapon is used today only by inland tribes.

The *wa-rai*, n° 3 & 5, is a spear made of light wood tipped with a piece of ironwood or flint. The name is also given to an ironwood weapon with knots, hooks or teeth n° 4.

The *tolos*, n° 6, 7 & 8, or javelins, come in several forms: they are made of ironwood, armed with kangaroo teeth, fragments of flint or hooks. The javelins, which the natives can throw a long way without using the *wur-mur-mur*, are 5 or 6 feet long.

The *mogo* or *bai-bai*, n° 9, is a sharpened stone supported by a handle of woven rushes forming a kind of axe. It is another of those primitive tools that is no longer seen near places occupied by Europeans.

The *waddy*, n° 10 & 14, and the *nulla-nulla*, n° 16, are the commonest weapons. They are small bludgeons. The *waddy* is fairly long; the *nulla-nulla* is made of ebony with a large rounded, carved end. The natives rarely walk without one or other of these weapons. They use them to settle personal quarrels. In these situations each of the combatants lowers his head in turn to receive his adversary's blow until one or the other is knocked down. It is cowardly to avoid a blow. One can still see other weapons of various forms; they are always made of more or less primitively carved wood. Those that the native inhabitants call *mal-ga*, n° 11 & 12, are clubs. One has a long sharp point at right angles with the straight handle; the other has a slightly curved handle forming two acute angles. These are terrible weapons in the hands of the natives, and it is doubly difficult to find protection against them, as it is not possible to see whether the blow will come from the point or the back of the instrument.

The *muri-muri*, n° 13, replaces the knife. Like the *ta-win* it is made from blades of flint embedded in a hard resin that does not flake easily.



It would seem that bows and arrows are unknown in New Holland, at least I have never seen any and I do not think that these weapons have been mentioned in any traveller's account of his voyage.

The aborigines have two kinds of shields or *koreils*, n° 17–20; one is narrow, 2 feet and a few inches long, thick and triangular. They use it with great skill by making it whirl round. The other is oval in shape and protects its bearer against blows from spears or javelins. These shields are usually well carved and brightly daubed with red and white.

But without any doubt the most remarkable weapon, of unknown origin, is the *bommereng*, n° 21 & 22, called *tur-ra-ma* by the aborigines. It is a projectile weapon made of a piece of very hard wood, 2 feet 2 inches long and slightly curved. It weighs about 9½ ounces. One of the sides is very slightly convex and inlaid; the other is flat and smooth. [...]

There are two sorts of *bommerengs*: one, which is shorter and more curved, comes back and falls at the feet of the thrower, n° 21; the other does not come back, n° 22, but covers a greater distance.

(Delessert 1848, 131-135)¹²

¹² Ce n'est pas sans peine et sans sacrifices que je parvins à me procurer la plupart des armes en usage parmi les sauvages de l'intérieur de la Nouvelle-Hollande ; ils ne veulent s'en défaire ni à prix d'argent, ni en échange d'aucun objet. Aussitôt que j'avais obtenu ces armes, je cherchais à connaître son nom et l'emploi auquel elle était destinée. [...]

La lance n° 1, à laquelle on donne le nom de *mo-ting*, est ordinairement employée pour la pêche ; elle est terminée d'un côté par quatre branches dont les extrémités sont armées d'os taillés de kangaroos. Ces branches se rapprochent ou s'écartent à volonté au moyen de petites traverses serrées contre la corde qui lie les branches au corps de la lance, dont la longueur est de huit pieds environ. L'autre extrémité présente une échancrure pour recevoir le crochet d'un bâton, n° 15, nommé *wom-mur-mur*, qui sert à lancer au loin le *mo-ting*. [...]

Le *ta-win*, n° 2, est une masse en bois très-dur, d'une longueur d'un pied et demi environ. De chaque côté, des fragments aigus de grosses pierres siliceuses sont disposés de manière à former un double tranchant et à remplacer le fer, dont l'usage n'est connu qu'à peu de distance des bords de la mer. Les fragments de silex sont fixés à l'aide d'une résine dure et résistante ; cette arme toute primitive est aujourd'hui seulement employée par les tribus de l'intérieur des terres.

Le *wa-rai*, n° 3 et 5, est une lance en bois léger, terminée par un morceau de bois de fer ou par un fragment de silex. On donne aussi le nom à une arme faite de bois de fer et présentant des nœuds et des crochets ou des dents n° 4.



Les *Tolos*, n° 6, 7, 8 ou javelots, sont de plusieurs formes ; ils sont en bois de fer, armés de dents de kangaroos, de fragments de silex ou de crochets. Les javelots, que les naturels lancent à de grandes distances sans se servir du *wur-mur-mur*, ont cinq à six pieds de longueur.

Le *mogo*, ou *bai-bai*, n° 9, est une pierre aiguisée soutenue par un manche de jonc tressé et qui forme une espèce de hache. C'est encore un de ces instruments primitifs qu'on ne voit plus près des lieux occupés par les Européens.

Le *waddy*, n° 10 et 14, et le *nulla-nulla*, n° 16, sont les armes les plus communes. Ce sont de petites massues. Le *waddy* est assez allongé ; le *nulla-nulla* est en bois d'ébène et se termine par une masse arrondie et sculptée. Les indigènes marchent rarement sans porter l'une ou l'autre de ces armes. Ils s'en servent pour vider leurs querelles particulières. Dans ce cas, chacun des combattants baisse la tête à son tour pour recevoir le coup de son adversaire jusqu'à ce que l'un des deux soit renversé ; éviter le coup est une lâcheté. On voit encore d'autres armes de formes diverses, elles sont toujours en bois plus ou moins grossièrement sculptées. Celles que les naturels nomment *mal-ga*, n° 11 et 12, sont des casse-têtes ; l'une présente une longue pointe taillée à angle droit avec le manche qui est droit ; l'autre, dont le manche est un peu courbé, forme deux angles aigus. Ce sont des armes terribles dans les mains des naturels, et il est d'autant plus difficile de se garantir de leur atteinte qu'on ne peut voir si le coup sera porté par la pointe ou par le dos de l'instrument.

Le *muri-muri*, n° 13, remplace le couteau, il est, comme le *ta-win*, fait avec des lames de silex enchâssées dans une résine dure et peu friable.

Il paraîtrait que les arcs et les flèches sont inconnus dans la Nouvelle-Hollande, du moins je n'en ai jamais vu, et je ne pense pas qu'il soit fait mention de ces armes dans aucune relation de voyage.

Les aborigènes ont deux sortes de boucliers ou *koreils*, n° 17 à 20, l'un est étroit, long de deux pieds et quelques pouces, épais et triangulaire. Ils s'en servent très adroitement en lui faisant faire le moulinet. L'autre est de forme ovale et protège celui qui le porte contre les coups de lance ou les javelots. Ces boucliers sont ordinairement très soignés comme sculpture et bariolés de couleurs rouge et blanche.

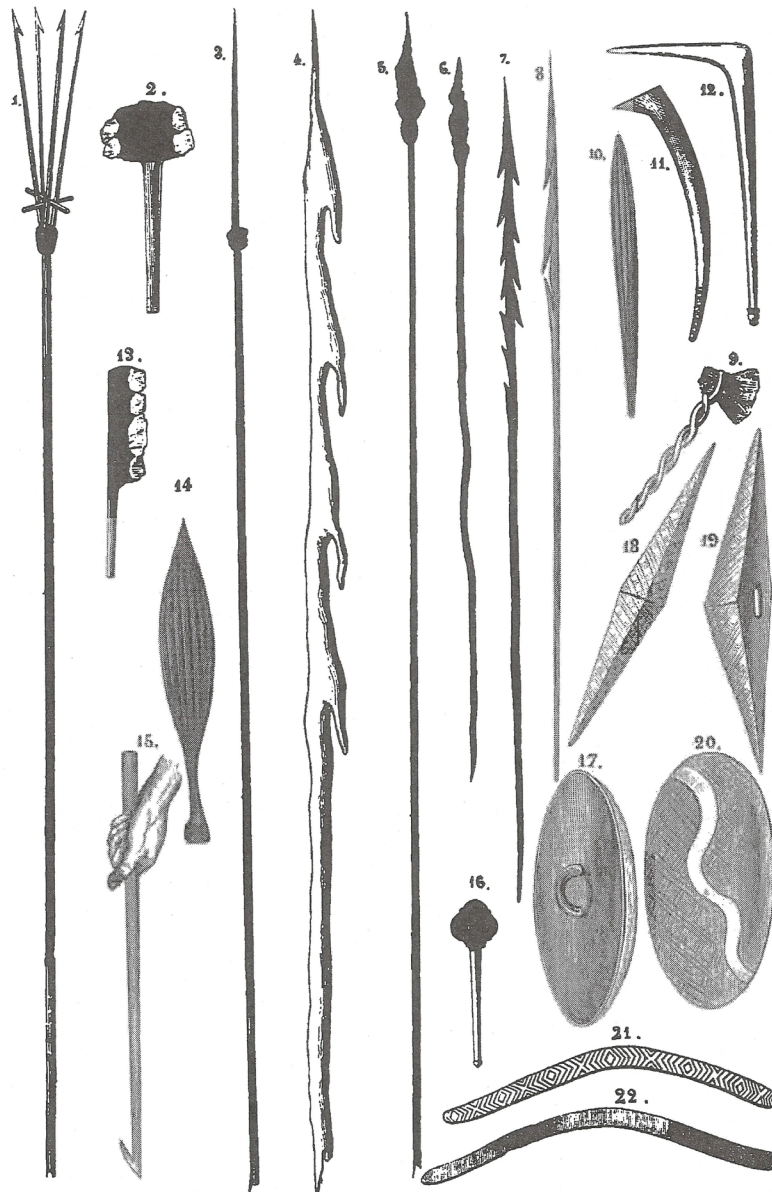
Mais l'arme la plus remarquable sans contredit, et dont l'origine est inconnue, est le *bommereng*, appelé *tur-ra-ma*, n° 21, 22, par les aborigènes. C'est une arme de trait formé d'un morceau de bois très-dur, d'une longueur de deux pieds deux pouces, et légèrement recourbé. Son poids est d'environ neuf onces à neuf onces et demie. Un des côtés est tant soit peu convexe et revêtu d'incrustations ; l'autre est plat et uni.

[...]

Il existe deux sortes de *bommerengs* : l'un, moins long et plus recourbé, revient tomber au pied de celui qui le jette, n° 21 ; l'autre n'y revient pas, n° 22, mais il franchit une plus grande distance.



A Forgotten Collector of Australian Ethnographic Objects: Eugène Delessert



Armes de la Nouvelle-Hollande.

Plate showing weapons collected by Delessert in New Holland (Delessert 1848, p. 132).

N° 2: ta win, n° 13: muri muri, n° 15: wur mur mur, n° 16: nulla nulla,
n° 17—n° 20: koreils, n° 21 & n° 22: tu ra ma.





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Thanks to the plate published by Delessert, it appears that certain objects held by the *Muséum d'histoire naturelle du Havre* are a good match with those brought back from his journey and then bought by the Municipality of Le Havre:

- A thrower (*wom-mur-rur*) (n° 15)
- An axe (*ta-win*) (n° 2)
- A small club (*nulla-nulla*) (n° 16)
- A small knife (*muri-muri*) (n° 13)
- Two shields (*koreil*) (n° 17 & n° 20)
- Two boomerangs (*tur-ra-ma*) (n° 21 & n° 22)

The turtle-bone axe (n° 29) on page 191 could be added to these. It is described there as coming from Polynesia (Tahiti), but was revised by M.-C. Laroche (1966, 89) as within the category of Australian tools according to the old label 'New Holland', which was still attached to the object when she was in Le Havre in 1966. Going by the engraving in the plate on page 132, the diamond-shaped shield (n° 18 & n° 19) has not been saved, or more probably, was not bought at the sale in 1848.

According to the old inventory register (AMHNNH, inventory 1851–1859), Delessert made another gift to the *Musée-Bibliothèque* in 1851, but it was of stuffed animals and not ethnographic objects (AMHNNH, inventory 1851–1859). In that case, where does the second shield come from (order n° 35 or 36 in the first table), which is supposed to belong to the Delessert collection?

Our investigations have not allowed us to answer this question; however it is obvious that the item does not belong to the Louis Le Mescam collection, nor to the Faure collection of objects from the South Pacific donated later to the *Muséum d'histoire naturelle du Havre*. M.-C. Laroche had already noted the possibility of mistakes being made, stating clearly: 'It is possible that following the loss of archives and labels, some pieces of this collection have been attributed to other series' (Laroche 1966, 79). The same remark applies to later acquisitions, for which it seems there is sometimes only very little information available.

Conclusion

It is something of a paradox that despite the great enthusiasm researchers have shown for South Pacific ethnography, certain collections of the area's



ethnographic items, which the *Muséum d'histoire naturelle du Havre* has made a special feature, have been somewhat forgotten with the passage of time. This is how the author of this article discovered that, apart from the ethnographic collection sold in January 1848 by Eugène Delessert to the Municipality of Le Havre, and later the South Pacific items donated by Louis Le Mescam in 1895, important pieces from Captain Charles Vesque and the President of the Republic Félix Faure do not appear in any of the studies published between the end of the nineteenth century and the end of the twentieth century. Not that they were any less worthy, but perhaps they have been eclipsed by the two major donors. It was not until the first decade of the twenty-first century that studies indicated the existence of the Faure collection in the Museum's South Pacific ethnographic holdings (Malon 2006, 524; Vincent 2009a, 84 & 85; Vincent 2012a & 2012b).

Was this due to ignorance of the treasures in the Museum's ethnographic heritage, or negligence when research was carried out, or difficulties in gaining access to the few documents still in existence? It is a question worth asking. The bombing of the town centre on 5 September 1944 caused the disappearance of most of the archives kept in the Museum and, more regrettably, pieces coming from these collectors. However the 'rediscovery' of the lists of objects donated has made it possible to compare them with the few ethnographic objects saved from destruction. If that does not always allow positive identification of certain pieces belonging to the donors, at least it clearly shows that the richness of the South Pacific ethnographic collections in the *Muséum d'histoire naturelle du Havre* is not solely due to Eugène Delessert and Louis Le Mescam but also—amongst other donors who certainly still need to be identified¹³—to Bruny d'Entrecasteaux, Charles Vesque and Félix Faure.

¹³ Among the donors of remarkable documents and objects from the South Pacific whom I have come across in the files of the Le Havre Municipal Archives I would like to mention: M. Peschard from Caen who, at the beginning of July 1895, donated seventy glass-plate negatives of landscapes, costumes, weapons and bones of extinct birds, in particular the remains of New Zealand Dinornis (AMH FC R2 C4, packet 09); M. Patrimonio, Chief Judge of the Le Havre Civil Court, who, in April 1913, donated a set of weapons and objects from the Solomon Islands (AMH FC R2 C4, packet 11). Although it is likely that M. Peschard's negatives were destroyed in the fire on 5 September 1944, it could well be the case that certain ethnographic pieces from the Solomon Islands, kept safe from damage and until now considered part of the Louis Le Mescam collection (according to the list published by Gustave Lennier 1896, VIII), including poisoned arrows made of fish bone, combs, a carved wooden spear, engraved bamboo betel pot, spears armed with fish bones and club sabre are part of the Patrimonio gift.



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As regards the Australian items, the final question is this: of the Australian ethnographic collection sold by Eugène Delessert to the Municipality of Le Havre in 1848, which pieces have survived in the collection?

For the record, we should not forget that the collection has been through three wars, a bombardment and a Revolution; it has been moved three times, transferred three times to other locations outside of the Museum, twice stored in unsuitable places¹⁴, then flooded; it has been in six public exhibitions and has undergone a great deal of rearranging in ways more or less respectful of the historical value of the items that made up the collection. Of course, things inevitably change over the course of time, but there have been irreparable losses to this collection. At the present time there are only about fifteen objects from the South Pacific definitely belonging to the Delessert collection in the *Muséum d'histoire naturelle du Havre*, of which eight are directly related to Australian ethnography. Verification is necessary for three or four clubs identified as not belonging to the Le Mescam collection, which could turn out to be items from Delessert's South Pacific collection, and perhaps among these objects there could even be a club with a 'mushroom-shaped head' from 'New Holland'. Furthermore, a morphologically surprising object could be the *nulla nulla* illustrated in the plate on page 132 of Delessert's book, but at present wrongly identified.

At the conclusion of this research, it is probably pointless to look any further for the two missing boomerangs: they were not included in the removal of ethnographic objects to safe storage organised by André Maury in January 1942. Similarly, there is scant hope of finding a mushroom-headed club, the long spear with kangaroo teeth and the four javelins set with flint, which were still in the Museum's galleries at the time of the bombing on 5 September 1944, and therefore must have been destroyed. The same goes for the second turtle-bone axe and for the diamond-shaped shield, if it has been sold.

¹⁴ According to S. Reneau (1987, 10) on the subject of Le Havre: 'Its cultural heritage has been largely destroyed, museum collections have been moved then stored in places that were not very suitable, risking all kinds of damage. Then the war left Le Havre isolated, having sustained more damage than the other towns in Normandy.' As a more or less direct consequence of the war, the poor conservation conditions lasted until the 1990s in some institutions.



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Identification	Description	Comment
Club	Mushroom-shaped head	Could still exist, but wrongly referenced
Club	Mushroom-shaped head with woollen ornament [sic]	disappeared
Boomerang (tur ra ma)		disappeared
Boomerang (tur ra ma)		disappeared
Boomerang (tur ra ma)		present, in the collection
Boomerang (tur ra ma)		present, in the collection
Shield (koreil)		present, in the collection; has been restored
Shield (koreil)	To protect from the boomerang [sic]	present, in the collection; has been restored
Club (nulla nulla)	From Sydney	thought to have disappeared, but could still exist; wrongly identified
Axe	Turtle bone	present, in the collection ; corresponds to the one identified as coming from Polynesia (see Delessert's plate, p. 191)
Axe	Turtle bone	disappeared
Long spear	Set with kangarou [sic] teeth	disappeared
Javelin	Set with flint	disappeared
Javelin	Set with flint	disappeared
Javelin	Set with flint	disappeared
Javelin	Set with flint	disappeared
Club (tai win)	Armed with stones affixed with resin	present, in the collection of the <i>Muséum du Havre</i> , but wrongly identified
Knife (muri muri)	Armed with flint or splinters of glass	present, in the collection of the <i>Muséum du Havre</i> , but wrongly identified
Spear-thrower (wom-mur-rur)		present, in the collection



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These are regrettable losses for our cultural heritage, and yet it is extraordinary to know, as it is now factually confirmed, that the *Muséum d'histoire naturelle du Havre* still has in its collection significant ethnographic pieces dating from the first half of the nineteenth century that belonged to Eugène Delessert, who had acquired them in the Sydney region, in Australia.

Le Havre, France

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