



# Pacific Matildas: Finding the Women in the History of Pacific Archaeology

RESEARCH PAPER:  
ASIA/PACIFIC

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## ABSTRACT

In this paper I present the background and rationale for a new research project that aims to rediscover the first women who participated in the development of archaeology in the Pacific, from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. I discuss how this research is inscribed in the history of women in science, responding to Rossiter's plea to future scholars: to write a history and sociology of science that is more comprehensive by integrating ever more of the hidden women scientists, or 'Matildas'. I consider how a history of these 'Pacific Matildas' can be connected to factors that have been identified as historically keeping women out of science (especially fieldwork-based sciences) as well as keeping them out of historical records about the making of science. After discussing the methodological and conceptual frameworks envisaged for such a project, I present some preliminary results of this research: a short overview of historical figures already identified and a brief examination of one early case-study in the history of the first women engaged in the discipline, that of Adèle de Dombasle in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. I conclude by highlighting what the first clues we can gather about such stories tell us both about the historical place of women in the field and the place of women in the history written about the field.

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## KEYWORDS:

Women history; Pacific  
archaeology; Gender; Colonial  
history; Transnational history;  
francophone

## TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Dotte-Sarout, E. 2021. Pacific  
Matildas: Finding the Women  
in the History of Pacific  
Archaeology. *Bulletin of the  
History of Archaeology*, 31(1):  
2, pp. 1–17. DOI: [https://doi.  
org/10.5334/bha-656](https://doi.org/10.5334/bha-656)

As archaeologists, we are trained to be aware that in archaeological deposits ‘absence of evidence is not evidence of absence’. It is time for us to apply such a mindset to our understanding of the discipline’s history and confront what historians of minorities have long identified as ‘historical silences’. Among the hidden voices that we have to start listening to, those of the first women to practice archaeology in the largest ocean of the world deserve our attention.

Almost three decades ago Margaret Rossiter called for ‘future scholars to write a more equitable and comprehensive history and sociology of science that not only does not leave all the “Matildas” out, but calls attention to still more of them’ (1993: 337). In this landmark paper, Rossiter described the historical process—coined ‘Matilda effect’—through which female scientists were written out of history, often in association with the ‘halo effect’ where men in prominent positions were given the credit alone for the work of unnamed collaborators. Although research in the history of science has been working to identify and rectify this bias for the past 40 years, such endeavours have been less numerous with respect to the social sciences (McDonald 2004; Carroy et al. 2005; Watts 2007). The history of archaeology – itself a side-concern for the history of science – has in turn produced narratives that are fundamentally gender-biased (Claassen 1994; Diaz-Andreu and Sorrensen 1998; Cohen and Joukowsky 2004). In the Pacific, the history of archaeology is a new field of research, which provides a unique chance to write a more inclusive and multifaceted history of the discipline from the start. This is especially pertinent in relation to the relatively small community of Pacific archaeologists, long apparently dominated by male practitioners. In this paper, I scratch below the surface of this representation and develop the argument as to why and how we need to investigate this question; to analyse the reasons for the perceived or factual absence of women in the development of the discipline, to study the contextual factors that led to such a situation, to determine the barriers faced by those women indeed engaged in the field and, by doing so, highlight their legacy, and tell their stories: ensuring that the ‘Matildas’ of Pacific archaeology are not left out of its history.

Consolidated historiographical research about Pacific archaeology is still a very recent enterprise (Spriggs 2017; Dotte-Sarout et al. 2020; Jones et al. forthcoming).<sup>1</sup> Just as important consideration has been given to non-Anglophone traditions and literature, highlighting the role of ‘hidden’ figures—namely indigenous collaborators and women engaged in the discipline—has been part of the new historiographical agenda in the region. Yet, we have been confronted with the silence of the archives and of conventional archaeological legacies when it comes to these particular historical actors. Of course, such silences have long been recognised by feminist historians (Allen 1986) or historians of ‘minorities’ and subjugated people (Trouillot 1995). In the context of the history of Pacific archaeology as being a recent field of study, our experience clearly demonstrates that each of these topics needs to be examined on its own terms, however still addressing issues of intersectionality (see discussions in Howes and Spriggs 2019; Spriggs 2019; Dotte-Sarout et al. 2020). For the women who were part of the development of archaeology in the Pacific to be included in the history of the discipline, explicit attention has to be given to the subject, using a specific set of approaches and methods informed by gender studies and feminist history of science, while integrating those used in the history of archaeology until now.

There are two sides to the hidden aspect of women in the history of archaeology (or science generally), and both need to be explored in association: (i) what factors constrained women to long remain a minority in the discipline and (ii) why are the women who did manage to contribute difficult to discern in historical records? In this paper, I argue that if we want to address this issue (and I believe we need to), a first step would be to produce a social and cultural history of the scientific lives and contributions of the women who participated in the development of archaeology in the region, from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. This can be better achieved by taking a multinational approach, integrating the two most enduring traditions of Pacific archaeology—the francophone and the anglophone—and comparing

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1 Also see other contributions to the collection ‘Histories of Asia/Pacific Archaeologies’ of the Bulletin of the History of Archaeology <https://www.archaeologybulletin.org/collections/special/histories-of-asia-pacific-archaeologies/>.

the experiences of diverse women across transnational and colonial networks. Only through such research initiatives focusing on the most striking absences in our history, women and indigenous experts, will we be able to more fully integrate their stories and acknowledge their legacies, eventually as one of the main threads woven through the general narrative.

## BACKGROUND

### WOMEN IN THE HISTORY OF SCIENCE

It is important to remember that the history of women in (western) science as it stands today is at the confluence of two large movements of intellectual transformations, both starting around the 1960s. The influence of the work first led by Thomas Kuhn, on the one hand, has triggered the development of historical, philosophical and sociological analyses of scientific knowledge construction that considers the importance of socio-historical and subjective contingencies (i.e. Kuhn 1962; Ravetz 1971; Latour and Woolgar 1979—pertinently here, inspired in particular by historian of science Hélène Metzger). This is relevant in considering how gender played a role in the making of scientific facts and theories, and more basically in access to scientific practice and legitimacy (Charron 2013). On the other hand, second-wave feminism and the development of Women's Studies—then evolving into Gender Studies—prompted an exponential increase in research on women's history, as a specific approach to history that 'highlights women's activities and ideas and asserts that their problems, issues, and accomplishments are just as central to the telling of the human story as are those of their brothers, husbands and sons' (Offen 2008 cited in Yan and Offen 2018: 11). This intellectual context elicited foundational works in the 1980s, researching the lives and legacies of women scientists.<sup>2</sup>

In particular, the first volume of Margaret Rossiter's *Women Scientists in America* (1982) not only demonstrated that many women had been active in American science since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but also that they developed specific strategies to overcome oppositional reactions and the segregated structuration of the scientific establishment. These observations hold true for the rest of the western world, with women scientists finding ways to advance knowledge and practice at least since antiquity (Watts 2007), including in the belatedly appearing disciplines of the social sciences (McDonald 2004; Carroy et al. 2005). Rossiter had already identified the gendered assumptions that tended to keep women out of science as a masculine field, writing that 19<sup>th</sup> century 'women scientists were (...) caught between two almost exclusive stereotypes: as scientists they were atypical women; as women they were unusual scientists' (1982: xvii). This question has since been much examined by historians of science as an engendered space (Watts 2007; Schiebinger 2014; Milam and Nye 2015). It is certainly pertinent in regard to the first women who were interested in the emerging field of prehistory/archaeology in the Pacific: not only were they entering the masculine realm of science, but also those of fieldwork and the public sphere in exotic,<sup>3</sup> mostly colonial spaces – not a woman's place by any 19<sup>th</sup> century or early 20<sup>th</sup> century expectations (Kuklick and Kohler 1996; Oreskes 1996; Henson 2002). It must also be remembered that in most of the western world, sociocultural gendered norms were articulated with the legal subjugation of women severely restricting their freedom and participation in public society until the 1960s in some countries, including in France (Fraisie and Pérot 1991; Thébaud 1992), with consequences for the way Pacific science has been practiced in the field.

Another aspect identified early by Rossiter is that of the 'basic inconsistency' according to which American society and universities of this period were 'far more willing to educate women in science than to employ them', given their expected role as mothers and wives (1982: xvii). This process has been identified in Europe as well (Fraisie and Pérot 1991; Thébaud 1992; Watts 2007; Schiebinger 2014) and eventually meant that the professionalization of science during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, despite the increasing number of (western) women graduates, actually represented an even greater barrier for women to participate in science and

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<sup>2</sup> I believe that in regard to the processes of scientific recognition and historical invisibility, the main factor to be taken into account is not, sadly, actors self-identifying as women but actors having been identified as women by their peers, colleagues and the societies with which they interacted.

<sup>3</sup> This space was as much 'exotic' for western women traveling in the Pacific islands as for indigenous women crossing sociocultural borders to enter the world of western science.

be officially recognised for their work (Rossiter 1982; Watts 2007; Charron 2013). These barriers were greater still in the case of married scientist couples and in the context of anti-nepotism laws that worked mainly to the disadvantage of women. Again, this aspect will certainly find echoes in the lives of important personalities in the history of Pacific archaeology, with the first women graduates entering the field between the 1910s and 1950s: i.e., Katherine Routledge, Laura Thompson (the second person, after Ralph Linton, to earn a PhD in Pacific archaeology, in 1933),<sup>4</sup> Mary Elizabeth Shutler and Susan Bulmer. Three of these women were married to prominent men in the field of anthropology and archaeology and all, except eventually Mary Elizabeth Shutler, struggled to get academic appointments. In any case, these women, trained and experienced in the field of Pacific archaeology, all chose to diversify their regional fields and/or turn to consulting and public anthropology to continue in their career. These strategies and the contexts of these choices need to be investigated, compared between them and with those of their male colleagues.

## THE HISTORY OF ARCHAEOLOGY, THE PACIFIC AND WOMEN

Although the history of archaeology has risen in prominence during the past 30 years (Murray and Spriggs 2017), it has long been written according to what Oscar Moro-Abadia termed ‘a historiography of legitimisation’ (2020) following a tradition of ‘presentist’ and positivist history of science that repeated itself from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century (Daniel 1950, 1981; Laming-Emperaire 1964; see Moro-Abadia 2009, 2020). What has changed more recently is the incorporation of analytical and contextual approaches as developed in the field of the history and philosophy of science and social sciences. After the first large-scale effort to apply such new perspectives to the history of archaeology in Trigger’s well-known volume (1989) a large number of historical syntheses, biographies and critical analyses have appeared (i.e., most pertinently here: Murray 2002; McNiven and Russell 2005; Diaz-Andreu 2007; Kaeser 2008; Richard 2008; Schlanger and Nordbladh 2008; Murray and Spriggs 2017; Griffiths 2018).

Although the Pacific had largely been left out of this literature, new research is starting to identify major themes in the history of Pacific archaeology: the long-lasting intellectual imprints of early European representations of the Pacific islanders; the importance of transnational networks, within and beyond imperial webs; institutional control and support systems from western academic centres (Europe, Australia, the USA, New Zealand); the importance of biographical experiences especially in the field in the construction of the discipline; the little acknowledged agency of indigenous collaborators; and the hidden role of women—as co-travelers, early observers, collaborators, professionals, and wives (all non-mutually exclusive roles) (see contributions to Dotte-Sarout and Spriggs 2017; Howes and Spriggs 2019; Dotte-Sarout et al. 2020; Howes and Spriggs 2020; Jones et al. forthcoming).

This issue is not specific to the Pacific, but is a constant in the histories of archaeology around the world, despite a few historical biographies of famous female personages (i.e. Gran-Aymeric and Gran-Aymeric 1991; Van Tilburg 2003; Adams 2010), a number of journal articles (Australia having received the bulk of attention focused on Oceania: i.e. Beck and Head 1990; McBryde 1993; Bowdler and Clune 2000) and some online resources on the topic (Hassett et al. 2017 on the *Trowel Blazers* website; *Women archaeologists* section of the New Zealand based website *Archaeopedia*; or the *Women in Ancient World Studies* blog). The only edited collections analysing the scientific lives of women archaeologists were published more than 15 years ago (Claassen 1994; Diaz-Andreu and Sorrensen 1998; Cohen and Joukowsky 2004). With a focus mainly on European and American figures, the Pacific is not represented in these volumes, despite one chapter on Australia (Beck 1994). More strikingly, the information gathered in these publications does not seem to have been incorporated into the dominant narratives on the history of archaeology, which remain largely gender-blind and gender-biased – except, importantly, for recent efforts in relation to Australian and Pacific archaeology (Griffiths 2018; Jones et al. forthcoming).<sup>5</sup> The difficulty of integrating women into the general history of the discipline is exemplified in the synthesis written by Margareta

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<sup>4</sup> Although Margarete Schurig also completed her museum collections and literature based doctoral dissertation *Die Südseeöpferei* (Pacific Pottery) in 1930 in Leipzig, which remained the foremost text on the subject for at least the next thirty years.

<sup>5</sup> Or, to look away from well-investigated areas, Amazonia (Rostain 2020).

Diaz-Andreu, on the global development of archaeology in the 19<sup>th</sup> century considered within its ‘socio-cultural and historical framework’ (2007: 4). In her book, Diaz-Andreu manages to give consideration to some of the pioneer archaeologists who were identified as women: Jane Dieulafoy in present-day Iran (1880s), Gertrude Bell in the Middle East (1900–1910s) or the less well-known Margarethe Leonore Selenka in Java (1900s). She also devotes a specific sub-chapter on the topic of ‘Nationalism, socialism, feminism, and the economic crisis of 1873’ where she reflects on the difficulty for women to enter the profession as it developed between the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and World War I (2007: 370–391). In spite of these efforts, the basic lack of easily accessible sources on the topic means that women scholars and their legacies remain peripheral to the history of archaeology.<sup>6</sup>

## METHODS AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

While acknowledging the important debates in the field of women and gender studies about the use of ‘women’ as a category of analysis, my perspective here considers that ‘women’ and ‘men’, however historically and socio-culturally contingent categories that encapsulate a diversity of realities, still act as real groupings universally structuring the world and personal experiences<sup>7</sup> (Héritier 1996; Gunnarsson 2011). It also adopts the stance recently clarified by historian Karen Offen (2018) within which women’s history concerns itself with enhancing ‘our cumulative knowledge of the past of human kind – a past in which we can “see” women as historical actors just as we have seen men as historical actors, and in which we can render visible the sexual politics of knowledge’ (Yan and Offen 2018: 15; emphases mine, *men* and *women* being categories where, for most of the history of science, an actor would be placed not so much in accordance with their own choice of self-identification, but with that of their peers, communities and social structures). Consequently, I advance that in order to write a more inclusive history of our discipline, and while remaining within a framework of analysis that is aware of the socially and historically constructed aspect of gender, we first need to develop comparative case-studies of women scientists in socio-cultural history. It is anticipated that the results of such investigations will then trigger new inquiries in gender history *per se*, understood as historical analysis focusing on the socio-political relations between the sexes, or on the actual dynamics of constructions of femininity and masculinity (Yan and Offen 2018). These social processes and their manifestations within archaeology have been explored by previous research outside of the Pacific but that comprised important Australian perspectives – including in terms of questioning the ‘gender’ of theory or practice in archaeology (i.e., Ducros and Smith 1993; Balme and Beck 1995; Wylie 1997; Conkey 2003, 2007; Moses 2007). As evident in these publications, though, a precise and solid historical analysis of such processes in Pacific archaeology can only be conducted once we have documented the lives, experiences and legacies of the category neglected by the history of the field, women: ‘It is important in the first place to discover or rediscover women in science’ (Watts 2007: 12, original emphasis).

To achieve such aims, I propose that an interdisciplinary approach needs to be developed, one that:

- Applies a self-aware internalist approach: investigating the history of women in Pacific archaeology from the point of view of a currently practicing archaeologist, makes it possible to grant specific attention to (i) field data and collections gathered by the women in question, so as to re-assess their significance for Pacific archaeology today; and (ii) the theories and interpretations they proposed to re-establish their place in the epistemological heritage of Pacific archaeology.

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<sup>6</sup> This is exemplified again in the case of Amelia Edwards and the role she has been afforded in the history of Egyptology and archaeological science in general (Muñoz 2017).

<sup>7</sup> Which is to say that the lived experience of gender-diverse actors, of women of colour, or women of sociocultural backgrounds not aligned with the dominant western Anglo-Saxon or francophone cultures would have differed from that of women that could be identified as associated to the dominant colonial cultures and so-called ‘racial groups’ in the Pacific. However, my perspective accepts the idea and observation that the large majority of societies throughout history, especially in regard to the 19th and 20th century realm of western science, have used gender categorisation relying on the binary grouping of ‘men’ vs ‘women’ (which is not ignoring the existence of non-binary/queer gender roles, as well-documented in Polynesia – a case that will ask for specific analysis relying on informed intersectional perspectives). Hence, the first archaeologists of the Pacific all had their lived experience and historical placement strongly influenced by their positioning in either the category of ‘women’ or ‘men’ – with other categorisations adding up to this (class, indigenous or not, skin colour, cultural and linguistic background, etc).

- Tests a range of techniques to address the issue of archival and historical silences, capitalising on methods applied in particular in the field of feminist history: by conducting interviews and integrating oral narratives in the dataset; by cross-analysing and ‘reading against the grain’ various written sources (personal, official, academic) produced by the women when available but also by their male life/work companions; by analyzing genealogical and biographical data (also using the prosopographical approach to map up connections); and by examining their field data and collections.
- Uses a transnational, multilingual and comparative analysis: avoiding the pitfalls and false sense of universalism in which monolingual analyses can become trapped, it is essential to study the lives, field experiences and archaeological research of women from several traditions of Pacific archaeology. Notably, the dominant anglophone one, strongly North American, Australian and New Zealander, and the secondary francophone one, mainly French but also conducted from the francophone Pacific Islands where it speaks directly to more than half a million islanders (Dotte-Sarout et al. 2020). Evidently, other traditions should be taken into account if we are to develop a more comprehensive understanding of our history in this region: hispanophone ones important in Easter Island, Micronesia and in regard to trans-pacific theories (Ballesteros-Danel 2020), but also Russian, German and Japanese contributions to the field. Each of these need to be related to a consideration of colonial ‘webs of empires’, especially regarding field experiences and the specific (and multilayered) politics of gender in such contexts. Finally, all also include indigenous contributions and the rare but essential references produced in indigenous languages (see for instance Natua 1992).
- Consequently to the above, adopts a framework of analysis that is aware of gendered sociocultural structures and intersectionality as significant factors shaping the experiences and lives of the first women engaged in Pacific archaeology. This is especially necessary when considering the lives and contributions of indigenous women scholars who were essential collaborators to professional archaeologists. Some of the personalities that a history of ‘Pacific Matildas’ in archaeology will encounter also defied the gender and sexual norms expected of women in their milieu (be it western academic and mostly European middle-class or Pasifika indigenous societies), necessitating a multilayered analysis that should build on intersectional studies. As neatly expressed by Erica Townsend-Bell, ‘the lessons of intersectionality theory – that we are all raced, classed, and gendered (and sexed and nationalized) – are especially important in the fieldwork experience’ (2009: 311); and fieldwork has remained the essential foundation for the practice of archaeology as a science (Moser 2007).
- Finally, undertakes ‘biography as micro-history’ and employs a ‘real-life science’ perspective: giving particular attention to biographic experiences in the making of the discipline is a powerful means to avoid presentism and acknowledge the dynamic socio-historical context, as already successfully implemented in the history of archaeology (Murray 1999; Kaeser 2003, 2008). Such case-studies allow the analysis to move from the particular experiences and legacy of one scientific life to historical contingencies and general historiographical significance, through comparison and contextual analysis.

## PRELIMINARY RESULTS

### FINDING THE PACIFIC MATILDAS

To apply this approach and set of methods, the first step is to identify a number of historical figures whose role in the constitution of the discipline deserves examination. Katherine Routledge remains the uncontested topical pioneer woman archaeologist, not just in the Pacific, and her story as well as her legacies for the field were finely analysed by Jo-Anne Van Tilburg (2003). The recent work undertaken on the history of Pacific archaeology has enabled detailed examination of archival and historical sources (including oral and disciplinary narratives commonly spread within the community), recognizing and (re)discovering a number of often less prominent individuals.<sup>8</sup> Early examples include: stow-away wife-adventurer Rose de

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<sup>8</sup> Hints of the role played by these women in the history of the discipline and first considerations of their contributions can be found in, for instance: Laurière 2014; Spriggs 2017; Dotte-Sarout and Howes 2019; Dotte-Sarout et al. forthcoming; Howes forthcoming.

Freycinet whose potential contributions to 19<sup>th</sup> century representations of the Pacific people and their past has not been considered yet; traveler and artist Adèle de Dombasle who documented archaeological sites in the Marquesas during the 1840s and whose story demonstrates the role played by figurative arts in the integration of women in archaeology and expeditions-based sciences (see below); Jeanne Leenhardt as essential collaborator and network agent for both her husband Maurice Leenhardt and amateur archaeologist Marius Archambault in New Caledonia during the 1900s-1920s (Dotte-Sarout 2021); or Margaret Stokes as an active fieldworker and collector of ethnobotanical data accompanying her husband on Rapa in the 1920s.

In the first decades of the last century, other important figures appear, such as Victoria Rapahango Tepuku who collaborated essential indigenous expertise during the Métraux-Lavachery archaeological mission to Easter Island in 1934; Margarete Schurig who authored as her PhD thesis (1930) what remained the most comprehensive analysis of Pacific pottery for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century but whose life was little known until recently (Howes forthcoming); Laura Thompson, evoked earlier as one of the first academically trained Pacific archaeologists and especially active in Marianas' archaeology from the 1930s, whose essential contributions to the field have been recognized in the past but deserve to be analysed in relation to her career trajectory.

The mid-20<sup>th</sup> century period sees the entry of a number of professional women in the field, including archaeologist turned cultural anthropologist Virginia Drew Watson, working with her husband in Papua New Guinea from the 1950s to the 1960s; Mary Elizabeth Shutler whose fieldwork and research, conducted with and without her husband, in New Caledonia and Vanuatu from the 1950s to 1960s tend to be well-known but frequently amalgamated with that of Richard Shutler; and of course Susan Bulmer whose archaeological research encompassed Papua New Guinea and New Zealand from the late 1950s and is still cited as a reference while her professional trajectory was not always reconciled with this status—both Bulmer and Shutler were part of the first professional archaeologists conducting fieldwork in the region after WWII but their particular career directions, in comparison to their male colleagues, exemplify the historical implications of the gender factor.

Just before the exponential increase of women graduates observed in the field after the late 1960s and early 1970s, other figures of our disciplinary history also include Aurora Tetunui Natua as a key indigenous network agent, material culture and oral tradition expert collaborator for the first professional archaeologists to work in French Polynesia (Dotte-Sarout et al. forthcoming); or the first few women graduate students to undertake significant research and fieldworks with established (male) Pacific archaeologists (and their wives-collaborators) in the early 1960s, such as Marimari Kellum in French Polynesia (*Figure 1*).



**Figure 1** Marimari Kellum in the field, Ua Huka, c. 1964 (courtesy of Hiria Ottino).

Other women or groups of women are also worthy of a specific focus in the perspective I defend in this paper. For instance, the identity and legacies of those who formed the elusive group of mainly women voluntary assistants and students working under the lead of Marie-Charlotte Laroche at the *Société des Océanistes* from 1939 to the 1970s should be determined and analysed. This happened in the context of the creation of the Musée de l'Homme (Delpuech et al. 2017; Conklin 2002) and of the emergence of the distinct school of 'archéologie océaniste' (Dotte-Sarout et al. 2020). The particular dynamics that characterised the increasing engagement of women in New Zealand and Australian archaeology, accompanying the developments in Pacific archaeology between the 1950s and the 1970s<sup>9</sup> asks for a comparative analysis to be devoted to the topic. New Zealand saw a relatively rapid integration of women in archaeological establishments, most certainly linked to early advances in legal rights, while Australia became a dynamic stage of international reputation for gendered approaches to archaeological analysis (Ducros and Smith 1993; Balme and Beck 1995). Considering the fluid delimitations between the various fields of anthropological sciences throughout history, the work undertaken in the Pacific by pioneer women in disciplines cognate to archaeology is not to be underestimated. The topic certainly also requires a feminist and gendered oriented approach: for instance the specific contributions to the development of archaeological ideas realised by early women anthropologists (i.e., Willowdean Handy, Honor Maude, Kathleen Haddon—strikingly all noted for their studies of string figures), specialists in material culture studies (such as Ruth Greiner or Beatrice Blackwood) or 'folklorists' who produced fundamental records and translations of oral traditions and were mainly indigenous scholars (i.e. Mary Kawena Pukui, Lahlahi Webb in Hawai'i; Teuira Henry in Tahiti).

Of course, these are by no means comprehensive listings nor ones based on a measure of historical importance. They represent the result of a first appraisal of the number of women protagonists within the history of Pacific archaeology whose scientific lives can serve to understand the dynamics at play when women tried to enter the field. Their histories can in turn be the basis for a more inclusive, diverse and, ultimately, realistic historiographical narrative. As the research on the topic is being conducted, more figures are being identified and are starting to demonstrate the variety of ways in which women managed to engage in archaeology in the Pacific, but also the historical and sociocultural mechanisms eroding the traces of their participation. It is also the case that the deeper we dig within the archives and historical collections of Pacific archaeology, the more hidden figures we encounter; in particular, those figures whose histories have been subjected to complex taphonomic processes of historical invisibility (typically at the intersections of gendered, sexed, raced and classed minority identities). It is envisaged that the results of this research will for instance help identify some key figures and sources to develop new investigations about the essential role of indigenous collaborators and communities in the history of our discipline.

## **ADÈLE DE DOMBASLE IN THE PACIFIC: A CASE-STUDY ABOUT WOMEN TRAVELER-ARTISTS IN THE EARLY HISTORY OF ARCHAEOLOGY**

'I came to Noukouhiva<sup>10</sup> with the unique aim of seeing.' In 1848, a young French divorcée<sup>11</sup> who had sailed across two oceans, from Bordeaux to the Marquesas Islands through Valparaiso, was calmly explaining to the Naval Officer representing France in these remote 'possessions' why she was going to explore a secluded valley of Nuku Hiva, whatever his reticent opinion on the project.

'Do you actually not want to understand, Sir, how much interest I find in seeing the savages truly in their own interiors, in the midst of their customs, surrounded by all the objects they use. I can be told all kinds of long stories about their ways of life, I will only imperfectly learn what I really want to know. The simple inspection of a house will tell me much more. Better than descriptions, it will reveal to me the intimate particularities of their existence. You know it, I came to Noukouhiva with the unique aim of seeing' (de Dombasle 1851: 507).

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<sup>9</sup> The 1950s were marked in New Zealand archaeology by the fieldwork of Christina Jefferson in the Chatham islands and the 1970s by the first women gaining PhDs and professional positions in archaeology in both New Zealand and Australia.

<sup>10</sup> Nuku-Hiva, in the Marquesas Islands archipelago of French Polynesia.

<sup>11</sup> More precisely, separated from her husband, as recorded in French archives under the 19th century legal term "*separée de corps*" (de la Grandville 2001: 22).

Adèle de Dombasle<sup>12</sup> was indeed certainly not visiting the Marquesas as an upper-class dilettante tourist from Europe: she had embarked on this voyage as an ‘illustrator’ with amateur ethnologist Edmond Ginoux de La Coche, who had managed to be entrusted with a mission to Oceania and Chile for the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs (de la Grandville 2001). Born in 1819 in Nancy, in a family of intellectual nobles (her uncle was a famous and progressive agronomist), she had received what appears to be fairly good literacy and artistic education, quite typical of young women from her milieu in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These skills prepared her as a perfect companion for a future husband who would expect a wife able to support and understand his own intellectual endeavours and be occupied with activities suited to her class (Noel 2004; Pomeroy 2017). What is more unusual for the time is how she was able to apply these skills. After a short-lived marriage with a professional musician in Paris (where she had moved with her mother and sister after the death of her father in 1834), and despite being the mother to three young children,<sup>13</sup> the independent young woman decided to leave on a long and distant expedition with another atypical personage. Edmond de Ginoux was just back from his first stay in French Polynesia (1843–45), where he had started to expand his interest in ethnological collecting and observations (Ginoux 1844; de la Grandville 2001). In the meantime, he had also become known (and not always appreciated) as an outspoken liberal and democratic journalist. He had petitioned the Minister of Foreign Affairs to conduct a sponsored mission that would take him across the Pacific from South America to Australia and China, enabling him to continue his collecting activities and ethnographical observations (de la Grandville 2001: 21). In order to record the people, material culture items and scenes observed, an illustrator was part of the voyage: Adèle de Dombasle.

Unfortunately, the mission was cut short after just one week in the Marquesas and three weeks in Tahiti, where Ginoux’s previous history and bluntly expressed opinions had made him a few powerful enemies. Clearly, the presence of a woman separated from her husband as the ethnologist’s travel companion was also a motif of condemnation. Indeed, historical sources indicate that the Governor of Tahiti visited Ginoux and de Dombasle’s hotel, to make sure that they did not share the same bedroom. In another instance, the Governor was bothered by the presence of Ms. de Dombasle when meeting with Ginoux. The local government council rapidly issued a specific deportation order against Ginoux that stated he was ‘a dangerous person and had demonstrated since his arrival in Tahiti a conduct contrary to the good order and tranquillity of the colony’ (de la Grandville 2001: 374–377). According to Ginoux’s biographer Frédéric de la Grandville, archival sources indicate that the Governor ‘left Adèle de Dombasle the choice to either stay by herself on the island or accompany Ginoux back’, but they do not record any traces of her decision (2001: 24) and historical sources remain silent about what she chose to do, until 1851 when we know she was back in France.

Despite this aborted expedition and short time in the field, Adèle de Dombasle managed to produce several tens of drawings during her travels in Polynesia (and Chile). These represent monuments and sites from the Marquesas, Tahitian and Marquesan inhabitants with elements of material culture, landscapes and portraits—including from historical figures such as Queen Pomaré. The details are exceptional (i.e. plants species are identifiable thanks to the precision given of the leaves or general forms, motifs of tattoos or artefact decorations are finely depicted) and mean that the limited number of her drawings that have been preserved in public collections until today are a unique source of information for archaeologists working in the region (Molle 2017) (*Figure 2*). Unfortunately, only a handful of her illustrations are known and available today: the Musée du Quai Branly-Jacques Chirac in Paris (MQB-JC) holds 17 lead pencil drawings and some watercolours attributed to Adèle de Dombasle,<sup>14</sup> while it appears that some of her pictures are still in private family archives (as illustrated in de la Grandville 2001).

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12 During my research, I identified “Adèle de Dombasle” as Gabrielle Adélaïde Garreau née Mathieu de Dombasle, born 1819, deceased after 1881.

13 This information derives from cross-analyses of several genealogical online databases.

14 [https://www.quaibrany.fr/en/explore-collections/base/Work/action/list/mode/thumb/?orderby=null&order=desc&category=oeuvres&tx\\_mqbcollection\\_explorer%5Bquery%5D%5Btype%5D=&tx\\_mqbcollection\\_explorer%5Bquery%5D%5Bclassification%5D=&tx\\_mqbcollection\\_explorer%5Bquery%5D%5Bexemplaire%5D=&filters\[\]=adele%20de%20dombasle%7C2&refreshFilters=true&refreshModePreview=true](https://www.quaibrany.fr/en/explore-collections/base/Work/action/list/mode/thumb/?orderby=null&order=desc&category=oeuvres&tx_mqbcollection_explorer%5Bquery%5D%5Btype%5D=&tx_mqbcollection_explorer%5Bquery%5D%5Bclassification%5D=&tx_mqbcollection_explorer%5Bquery%5D%5Bexemplaire%5D=&filters[]=adele%20de%20dombasle%7C2&refreshFilters=true&refreshModePreview=true)



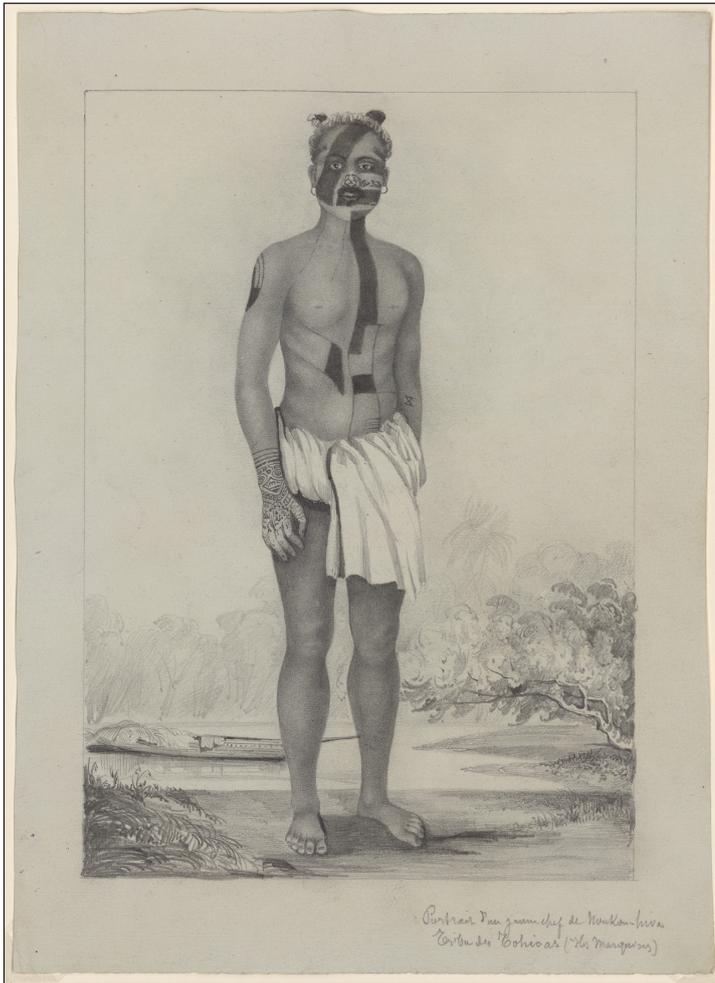
**Figure 2** Untitled drawing.  
Adèle de Dombasle, 1848.  
Labelled 'Morai in the  
Marquesas Islands' (© musée  
du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac,  
70.2009.25.33).

Our only direct source from Adèle de Dombasle, apart from her drawings kept at the MQB-JC, is the paper she published in 1851 about her experiences in the Marquesas. It is certainly not anecdotal that the latter was not published in one of the typical journals of the time for traveler accounts<sup>15</sup> but rather in *La Politique Nouvelle*, a journal of political discussions and opinion pieces – typical of the kind of intellectual circles Ginoux would have been familiar with (de la Grandville 2001: 13–16). It is hence not improbable that de Dombasle was able to see her travel observations published thanks to the support of her male companion, though still outside of classically recognized forums for such works. As abundantly discussed in the literature around women traveler-writers, 19<sup>th</sup> century authors escaped the inherent paradox of their position as women/writers/travelers by integrating their observations (ethnographic or naturalist) within autobiographical accounts—in France, more often published as books, until the creation of the *Tour du Monde* in 1860 (Monicat 1996; Ernot 2011; Estelmann et al. 2012). For Adèle de Dombasle, it would have been difficult to assert any legitimacy as a traveler writer who could publish her account in a similar way as her male counterparts – and at this stage we do not know if it was something that she actually sought further.

In her piece, she evokes her delighted discovery of Marquesan landscapes and sites, the context for the tracing of some of her drawings, her attentive encounters with Marquesan people and their culture as well as her playful and trustful relation with Ginoux. The text is rich with detailed descriptions of plants and landscapes, cultural sites and the people with their objects—where, without escaping the colonial 'orientalist' gaze of her times (Mills 1991; Knapman 1997; Ernot 2011), the artist demonstrates a certain freedom of perception, deserving of more examination (*Figure 3*). As our only direct source so far about her accounts of this Pacific experience, it is an important document. In particular, it is evident that she undertook her travel well prepared: she refers to previous knowledge she had acquired about some of the personages she met in Nuku-Hiva or about cultural facts and items (1851: 512, 520). She was also able to identify some local traditions, as when she was offered to enter into a *ha'a ikoa* (exchange of name involving the formal establishment of kinship relationship) with a 'high priestess' she was visiting on Nuku Hiva: 'It was not necessary for anyone to explain to me the meaning of this proposal: I knew about the details of the relationship that links two Ikoa' (1851: 524). The text documents how she perceived Ginoux's support of her somewhat unusual behaviours and ventures, for a mid-19<sup>th</sup> century woman of the French upper-class. Calling him her 'auxiliary', 'excursion companion' or 'unofficial guide', she recounts how Ginoux would respond to the

<sup>15</sup> The main journals for such publications in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, before *Le Tour du Monde*, were the *Revue des Deux Mondes* (launched in 1829) and *Nouvelles Annales des Voyages* (1807). The latter is where Ginoux had himself published some of his travel accounts in 1844. In 1851, when Adèle de Dombasle published her own account in the *Politique Nouvelle*, the only woman signing as an author in either the *Revue des Deux Mondes* or *Nouvelles Annales* was George Sand, by then a well-known and unique female writer under a literary contract with the editor of the *Revue*.

disapproving officer: 'Rather than thinking about restraining madam when she manifests her will to undertake a long excursion, I am the first to inspire her the desire to do so' (id.: 511). Finally, her paper clearly shows her curiosity and will to carefully document all her observations, as in this instance when she stops along the track to trace one of her drawings: 'I did not want to move away before having augmented my album with a sketch of this picturesque place' (1851: 516).



**Figure 3** 'Portrait of a young chief of Noukouhiva, Tohioas tribe'. Adèle de Dombasle, 1848 (© musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac, 70.2009.25.16).

A further passage records another unclear and potentially important aspect of her anthropological contributions: her role in the making of Ginoux de la Coche's rich collection of Pacific artefacts, hosted today by the Musée de la Castre<sup>16</sup> in Cannes, southern France. Indeed, de Dombasle narrates how the *ha'a ikoa* between herself and 'the great priestess Hina' was sealed through a gift offered to her by the high-ranked woman:

'a necklace, a kind of amulet, made up of a small sperm-whale tooth slipped through a braided bark string, which she came to bind around my neck, asking for my name:

- Atéra (Adèle), answered Ginoux [translating the conversation between the 2 women].
- From now on: you, are Hina; I, am Atéra' (1851: 524–525)<sup>17</sup>

This particular pendant was then integrated to Ginoux de la Coche's collection of 'Comparative Ethnography', for which he compiled a descriptive catalogue in 1866 (de la Grandville 2001). The pendant is listed under number 32 as a 'sacred necklace' (de la Grandville 2001: 63). Ginoux notes that it was offered by 'the great priestess Tahia, wife of Vékétou, high priest of the Teüs tribe, to a Frenchwoman, Mme de Dombasle, whom I had introduced her to' (id.). He then cites an extract of the article published by de Dombasle about the episode.

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.cannes.com/fr/culture/musee-de-la-castre/collections-permanentes/voyage-ethnographique.html>.

<sup>17</sup> This passage is also an example of how the agency of the indigenous hosts of western anthropologists fundamentally directed the collection and observation making of the latter - in this case through the interesting exchange that link two women protagonists.

The assimilation of this object offered to Adèle de Dombasle into the ethnographic collection of her male travel companion is striking. It resonates with several pieces of information revealing that she played an essential role in its curation. Notably, she appears to have been the legal heir of the collection after Ginoux's premature death in 1870, also purchasing his house and part of his estate in Nice and possibly acquiring his library. She might have been in charge of the collection as early as 1867, when Ginoux's deteriorating health forced him to move into a medicalised asylum out of his Villa, and she eventually made sure that the collection remained intact and properly cared for (de la Grandville: 32–33; 385–389). A local newspaper article published in 1874 talks about the collection as being 'the property of Madam G. de Dombasle', when she sold it to the curator of the Museum of the Baron Lycklama in Cannes, the foundation for the Musée de la Castre (de la Grandville 2001: 387). However, once again, her trace is difficult to follow in historical sources and confirming her role and exact positioning during this period will require more research.

As often remarked by historians of 19<sup>th</sup> century women travellers, the most typical attribute shared by these figures is precisely their atypical character (Robinson 1991; Knapman 1997). Despite her originality and the specific contingencies that allowed her expedition, there are a number of traits that we can identify in Adèle de Dombasle's story to better understand the history of women in Pacific archaeology. In her case, she exemplifies the participation of women to the very early history of the discipline, before the term 'archaeology' itself was seen as being applicable to the Pacific islands,<sup>18</sup> at a time when Europe was just discovering its own 'pre-history'<sup>19</sup> and when 'ethnology' encompassed the study of exotic material culture in all its form since there was no sign of antiquity expected from the islands. In this sense, it is striking to note that it is through her figurative art skills that she was able to participate in a Pacific expedition with an ethnographic purpose. Given the gendered assumptions that long associated (mundane) art to women's education, it is noteworthy that painting and drawing expertise often represented a back door entry for women in the field (as in other sciences, i.e. botany) —be it rock art studies (i.e. Porr and Doohan 2017) or material culture approaches (as was the case of Margarete Schurig on the pottery, or Willowdean Handy's work on tattoo motifs and string figures).

This preliminary research on Adèle de Dombasle's contributions to the beginnings of Pacific archaeology also highlights two important aspects in regard to women's history: the difficulty of tracing her specific history in historical sources where she appears as a secondary personage associated to her male companion, and the particular barriers she had to confront as a woman, even more one who did not fit the proper expectations attached to her gender and class. Interestingly, based on our unique direct source documenting her experience in the field, it is mainly with the French colonial administration that she had some issues as a woman, not with the indigenous population nor social norms. It is also possible that her gender played a role in inhibiting her ability to leave a historical legacy about her work: her writing is only known as one paper published outside of recognised forums for travel writing of the time, her artistic realisations remained exclusively private until the work of Frederic de la Grandville on Ginoux and the recent entry of some of her drawings in the MQB-JC (2009),<sup>20</sup> while her contributions to Ginoux's collection continue to be shadowy. It is also probable that given her situation, as a mother separated from her husband under the Napoleonic code known for its severe discrimination against women (Schnapper 1978; Tetu 1979; Fraisse and Perrot 1991), she had more pressing responsibilities to attend to after her return to France, than trying to achieve any form of scholarly recognition. For instance, we are yet to identify and analyse the way she perceived (or not) any representations of the past in the material items she documented in the islands – i.e. if her legacies for Pacific archaeology and anthropology today also encompass early interpretations about the history of Oceania.

In her particular case though, Adèle de Dombasle certainly benefited from the unusual cooperation of her male companion: in this aspect she joins the group of early women explorers

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18 On this point see contributions in Dotte-Sarout and Spriggs 2017; Jones et al. forthcoming.

19 Boucher de Perthes' *Les Antiquités Celtiques et Antédiluviennes* was precisely published the year de Dombasle and Ginoux left, in 1847, but the idea of a prehistoric past for humanity was not accepted before the 1860s (Richard 2008).

20 Sarah Ligner, Musée du Quai-Branly-Jacques Chirac, pers. com. October 2020.

and archaeologists who were able to enter the field through the support of progressive men (as with the well-known late 19<sup>th</sup> century case of Jane Dieulafoy in archaeology). However, the way that she portrays her position in their common exploration and her relationship with him is an important warning against the biased perception we can easily fall to in representing these women. In her account of the voyage, it is clear that she sees herself as an independent traveller with a personally set agenda, and that Ginoux is her travel companion, providing assistance in her ventures—not the other way around.

## CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

With this paper, I have aimed at demonstrating the need and feasibility for a new direction in our historiographical investigations of Pacific archaeology: it is timely for the discipline to pay specific attention to the hidden figures of its past. Based on the rich literature that exists on the history of women in science and expanding our fruitful first explorations of the history of Pacific archaeology, (re)discovering the ‘Pacific Matildas’ and including their stories and legacies in our historical analyses is an essential task. The approach advocated here will also be pertinent when trying to confront the ‘historical silences’ that have tended to keep indigenous contributions to the field in a ‘shadowy band’<sup>21</sup> peripheral to traditional narratives about our past and mirroring the position afforded to women in this history. The preliminary results of this research have already identified several historical figures—more than 20 individuals—whose scientific lives and archaeological contributions can be analysed as case-studies to address the two general aims of such an investigation: (i) understand the variety of ways in which women managed to engage in the early archaeology of the Pacific and clarify the historical place of women *in the field*, (ii) disentangle the historical and sociocultural mechanisms eroding the traces of their participation and redress the place of women *in the history written* about the field.

The first preliminary case-study provided here, of mid-19<sup>th</sup> century artist-traveler Adèle de Dombasle, exemplified several key aspects of these considerations. First of all, the significance of her contributions to Pacific archaeology and the utility in rediscovering her work. But also: the role of artistic skills as oblique strategies to enter the field,<sup>22</sup> the need to use secondary or parallel sources and ‘read against the grain’ or even ‘between the lines’ to access the stories of some of these women, the specific sociocultural barriers inhibiting in some respects their participation but even more so the recognition of their legacies linked to the historically subjugated position of the gender ‘woman’ in most societies. Some women importantly benefited from the cooperation—or at least the almost equal treatment—of atypically progressive men who were close to them and generally working in the field themselves, as was the case with Adèle de Dombasle and Edmond de Ginoux. Yet, this is far from a generality for the many ‘Pacific Matildas’ identified in this research. In fact, one important lesson from the study of Adèle de Dombasle’s sources is that we should be careful to reposition our perspective from the point of view of the women themselves, even when their own voices are difficult to access, and consider how they viewed and experienced their activities within the field.

On the story of Adèle de Dombasle, as on those of the many ‘Pacific Matildas’ already identified or yet to be recognized, much more research needs to be conducted. A direct output of the project that just started to address the questions raised in this paper will be a bibliographical database that will allow for a wide exposure of the works produced by the first women archaeologists of the Pacific. It is hoped that this will ensure their contributions will re-enter the circuit of knowledge produced by Pacific archaeology, and that our understanding of our own disciplinary past will progressively automatically integrate the histories of the first Pacific archaeologists who also happened to be (seen as) women. The Pacific offers a research terrain that fits transnational, multilingual perspectives and represents a rich landscape of indigenous and intersectional experiences, and as such it has the potential to provide innovative case-studies for the history of archaeology in general.

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21 To use the words of Isabel McBryde referring to the first women practicing archaeology in Australia (1993: 11; see also Bowdler and Clune 2000).

22 Language skills were also identified as another ‘back door’ entry for some of the ‘Pacific Matildas’ (Dotte-Sarout et al 2019).

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research presented here is funded by an Australian Research Council DECRA grant (DE200100597) and I also want to acknowledge the role of the research I conducted previously in the development of this project, especially with Matthew Spriggs and Hilary Howes at the Australian National University. I thank Guillaume Molle for our discussions and his shared interest in Adèle de Dombasle. Thank you to Frederic de la Grandville and Sarah Ligner from the MQB-JC for answering my questions. Finally, I would also like to acknowledge my colleagues at the University of Western Australia who have provided feedback on earlier versions of this text (too many to be named here) and to Tim Murray and Kathleen Sheppard at BHA for their helpful advice.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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*Bulletin of the History  
of Archaeology*  
DOI: 10.5334/bha-656

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## TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Dotte-Sarout, E. 2021. Pacific Matildas: Finding the Women in the History of Pacific Archaeology. *Bulletin of the History of Archaeology*, 31(1): 2, pp. 1–17. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5334/bha-656>

Submitted: 30 October 2020  
Accepted: 25 November 2020  
Published: 05 April 2021

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