

# COLLECTING IN THE SOUTH SEA

*The Voyage of Bruni d'Entrecasteaux 1791-1794*



edited by

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Middle: handle of a Māori *toki poutangata*, adze, collected in Aotearoa-New Zealand, Universitetsmuseet, Bergen (BME 10). Photograph Svein Skare

Bottom: Fijian *sedri ni waiwai*, oil dish, collected in Tonga, Museum Volkenkunde – Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, Leiden (RV-34-21). Photograph Irene de Groot

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*Bronwen Douglas, as ever, dedicates this book to Charles, Kirsty and Ben, Allie and Andrew, Jean and Owen, whose enduring love and support make everything possible*

*Wonu Veys dedicates it to her mum and grandmother, to Paul, and to her colleagues and mentors whose enthusiasm, patience, and support made this project possible*

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## CHAPTER 6

### Universitetsmuseet, Bergen

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The first 43 entries (BME 1-43) made in the original accession register of the ethnographic collections of the Universitetsmuseet (University Museum) in Bergen, Norway, are identified as follows:

A collection from the Caledonian Islands, collected during D'Entrecasteaux's expedition to the South Seas in 1791–93 in search of Admiral La Perouse. The collection originates from the collections of the previous governor of Tranquebar, Major-General Peter Anker. After his death it was bought from his heir, Major-General Erik Anker, in Christiania.<sup>1</sup>

This description, together with the minutes of a subsequent board meeting of Bergens Museum on 18 November 1835, comprise the only extant documentation of this important collection.<sup>2</sup> When the objects were rediscovered in the museum's storage cupboards in 1997, we suspected that no one had actually touched them or investigated the collection's history during the 172 years since its arrival in Bergen.

At the meeting in November 1835, the chair of the board H.W.K. Christie, who had founded the museum ten years earlier, reported on the results of his two months' stay in Christiania (Oslo), negotiating with several natural scientists the exchange of natural history collections of birds, human skeletons, seashells, and minerals. He had been in conversation with the King and received promises for a series of donations to Bergens Museum. As a token of commitment, he was given a silver cup as an initial gift. He also received various donations from contacts among the bourgeoisie: a gold medallion, a silver coin, a flint dagger and bronze ornament, a poisoned arrow from Java, and a collection resulting from the archaeological excavation of a burial mound close to Bergen. But the major item reported during this meeting was a collection from the Pacific that Christie had bought from one of the leading families of the capital, the Ankers—the purchase 'of weapons and economic tools from the Caledonian islands that were brought to Batavia by the French expedition under Admiral D'Entrecasteaux that was sent out to search for the expedition of La Perouse'.

This announcement is followed by a listing of the 71 objects in the Pacific collection. Three natural history items also came with the purchase from Anker—two tigers' heads and a lion's head. The collection cost 22 *speciedaler*,<sup>3</sup> and the board unanimously agreed that this money could be taken from the museum's account. The composition of the collection is listed as: six bows; a bamboo quiver containing 36 arrows; fifteen more arrows; three spears; two fans made of leaves; 'a tool resembling a lemon reamer' (a barkcloth beater); 'a tomahawk with a serpentine blade'; a 'wooden shaft missing its stone head'; nine clubs of different sorts; a fish hook made of bone; and a coin 'with four thick lines on each side'.<sup>4</sup> When these objects were incorporated into the ethnographic collection, the coin and the three animal heads were transferred to their respective places in the coin and natural history collections. Their present locations are unknown. As indicated above, the Anker materials were given the first 43 numbers in the original accession register of the ethnographic collections. Today, a total of 44 arrows are listed—seven have been lost or misplaced from the original purchase—and the remaining objects are registered in accordance with the original list.

### Tracking provenance

The particular concern of this chapter is to trace the objects in the Bergen collection to their places of origin and where possible to particular episodes of exchange mentioned in the French voyage texts. Careful scrutiny of such episodes provides suggestive clues as to the provenance of particular objects. In turn, this rich collection charts a trajectory of key encounters during the voyage itself—the first hesitant meetings with people at Buka and the Admiralty Islands; the intense visit to Tongatapu; the problematic stay in New Caledonia; and the fleeting, increasingly tense engagements with people in the Solomon Islands and islands east of New Guinea.<sup>5</sup>

### Material encounters

In following the expedition's trail for such clues, I draw mainly on Rossel's edition of Bruni d'Entrecasteaux's journal, published post mortem in 1808.<sup>6</sup> It is clear from this text that one of the explicit scientific purposes of the voyage was to establish contact with local populations and learn about their way of life. As such, the ethnographic items collected were intended to testify to extraordinary encounters in a laboratory of Enlightenment philosophies. The travellers' firsthand accounts say much about these early engagements between Europeans and Pacific Islanders.

The earliest possible provenance of pieces in the Bergen collection occurred as the expedition sailed through the Solomon Islands to Buka (Papua New Guinea) in mid-1792. On 15 July, several canoes manned by about 70 men approached the vessels at the island's northern extremity. Bruni d'Entrecasteaux noted:

The natives showed us bows and arrows that they appeared to want to fire, which did not seem like a good omen; but we soon realized that they were offering them to us in exchange, and were demonstrating their use in order to encourage us to buy them. Of their own accord, without our asking, they attached one of their bows to the line tethering the plank on which we were giving them knives, nails, small mirrors and a piece of red muslin: this gesture



Figure 6.1 (left).  
Detail of a husul,  
bow, probably collected  
in Buka, held in the  
Bruni d'Entrecasteaux  
collection of the  
Universitetsmuseet,  
Bergen (BME 19).

Figure 6.2 (right).  
Detail of a spear  
with obsidian point,  
possibly originating  
in the Admiralty  
Islands, held in the  
Bruni d'Entrecasteaux  
collection of the  
Universitetsmuseet,  
Bergen (BME 13).

excited our generosity, and each of us hastened to pass them what he had to hand; but then they became more reserved, and whatever we gave them, they only sent back arrows. Red cloth seemed to please them more than iron, mirrors, and even cutting tools.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, after initial success in purchasing a single bow, the men of the *Recherche* could only obtain arrows. However, the Bukans were subsequently so entranced by a violin, on which one of the officers played 'a rather lively air', that they offered in exchange not only a second bow but some clubs. Bruni d'Entrecasteaux noted that the crew of the *Espérance* bartered more successfully for artefacts because many more Islanders approached that vessel.<sup>8</sup> This encounter is the possible source of a bow (Figure 6.1) and several arrows in the Bergen collection (see feature).

A few days after leaving Buka, the expedition anchored for a week in Carteret Harbour (Lamassa Bay) in New Ireland. There, the ships replenished with wood and water but obtained almost no provisions and made no contact with local residents.<sup>9</sup> In late July, the French again encountered a 'considerable' Indigenous population in the Admiralty Islands, though Bruni d'Entrecasteaux refused to land due to the ever-present danger of reefs and the inhabitants' reported hostility towards earlier European voyagers. At La Vendola (Nauna), they counted 'about 150 persons' on the beach, eager to engage in exchanges. According to Bruni d'Entrecasteaux, 'they rid themselves willingly of their arms, their ornaments, and finally of everything we asked for'. At





Figure 6.3. Detail of a bow, probably originating in Ambon (Maluku Province, Indonesia), held in the Bruni d'Entrecasteaux collection of the Universitetsmuseet, Bergen (BME 20).

a small island off the northeastern tip of much larger Manus Island, the travellers obtained ornaments, arms, and 'even the shells which covered their nudity', in return for nails which the people seized 'with the greatest avidity' while ignoring everything else offered. The weapons received were limited to 'spears ending in a hard, sharp stone and the kinds of arrows thrown by hand'. No bows or clubs were seen.<sup>10</sup> Two spears with obsidian points (BME 13–14; Figure 6.2) held in the Bergen collection might well have been among these items. One such object is depicted in the *Atlas* of the naturalist La Billardière, who added in the 'Table des planches' (Table of plates): 'its upper extremity terminates in a piece of volcanic glass'.<sup>11</sup>

One bow (Figure 6.3) and two palm leaf fans (BME 42–43) in the collection probably originated in Ambon (Maluku Province, Indonesia), where the Dutch had a fort. The expedition spent more than a month in Ambon restocking, before rounding New Holland (Australia) and Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) and re-entering the

Pacific in early 1793.<sup>12</sup> No further linkage with objects held in Bergen occurred until 11 March when the vessels surveyed Three Kings Islands and the northern extremity of New Zealand (see feature). Bruni d'Entrecasteaux expressed little ethnographic interest in the inhabitants who visited the ships in three canoes, since their customs and manners were 'so well known and described' by earlier voyagers that 'it would have been difficult to add anything' to existing knowledge. However, the Māori men spent a late afternoon and evening trading and communicating with the crews:

We began to trade with them: they had fish, mats; weapons, such as javelins, spears, one of which measured 16 feet long, a perfectly polished club of hard stone; fishhooks of all sizes, made of shells and animal bones, fishing lines of New Zealand flax, much better braided than our finest threads.... We gave them axes, nails and a few pieces of cloth. They seemed to prefer worked iron over other objects.... They parted with some of their necklaces and we realized with horror that they included human bones.<sup>13</sup>

This encounter is the only possible source for the Māori objects in the Bergen collection, which include a magnificent adze handle, missing its blade (Figure 6.4), and an extraordinary fishhook made from human rib bone (Figure 6.6).

The Bergen collection holds several particularly interesting objects obtained during the expedition's next landfall in Tongatapu, during a complex set of more or less tense relationships with the Islanders. The very high-ranking Tu'i Tonga Fefine Nanasipau'u, known to the French as 'Queen Tiné', visited the *Recherche* and subsequently held a grand reception in honour of the visitors, attended by several thousand people.<sup>14</sup> Bruni d'Entrecasteaux reported that the participants in a dance performance each carried 'a little paddle', drawn in action in a field sketch by Piron of a



Figure 6.4. Wooden handle of a Māori toki poutangata, adze, collected in Aotearoa-New Zealand and held in the Bruni d'Entrecasteaux collection of the Universitetsmuseet, Bergen (BME 10).

## Encountering Māori and their artefacts

Billie Lythberg and Mānuka Hēnare

During the late afternoon of 11 March 1793, Bruni d'Entrecasteaux and his men on the *Recherche* and the *Espérance* made brief contact with a small group of Māori men in three *waka*, canoe, off Cape Maria van Diemen, the westernmost point of the North Island of Aotearoa-New Zealand (see Figure 2.6).<sup>1</sup> Whereas the Māori refused to board the ships, 'several' Frenchmen 'got down into the canoes'.<sup>2</sup> This meeting produced two well known portraits of Māori (Figure 6.5), drawn by the artist Piron and published as engravings in the *Atlas* of the naturalist La Billardière.<sup>3</sup> The encounter involved intentional transactional intensity on the part of Māori and ambivalent reception and perception by the French.

The European accounts reveal indirect familiarity with these people and their conduct derived from precedents, particularly the voyages of Cook and their own compatriot Marion du Fresne, whose narratives featured among numerous items in the expedition's well-stocked shipboard library.<sup>4</sup> In 1772, Marion du Fresne and 24 shipmates had been killed and their bodies partly consumed by Māori in the Bay of Islands. The following year, Cook's colleague Furneaux lost 10 men in similar fashion at Queen Charlotte Sound (Totara-nui).<sup>5</sup> Two decades later, Bruni d'Entrecasteaux and his companions were haunted by foreknowledge of the past actions of 'these wretched cannibals', as the chief helmsman Joseph-François Raoul put it and La Billardière openly acknowledged.<sup>6</sup> Such collective memory is implicit in the reaction of Hesmivy d'Auribeau, first officer on the *Recherche*, to the proffering of a Māori ornament made of 'a piece of human bone': 'a custom as revolting as it is barbarous'. In practice, the contradictions between Māori repute, appearance, and actions perplexed the voyagers and fuelled the oscillating emotions expressed in their reports. So Hesmivy d'Auribeau

and Raoul also praised the 'good faith in the exchanges' and the 'good and kindly behaviour' of these Māori, about whom 'we had only good to say'.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Bruni d'Entrecasteaux and La Billardière professed pleasure at the 'good faith' and 'scrupulous exactness' of their dealings, alongside 'horror' that 'part of a human forearm' should be worn as a 'kind of trophy' by a 'fierce savage' who performed an ironic pantomime of 'cannibal' glee.<sup>8</sup>

The French journals document in detail the material aspects of these exchanges. In return for the voyagers' 'scrap iron[,] some pieces of cloth and glass', plus 'knives and nails, which they greatly prized', the Māori gave 'everything they owned': 'fish, fishing lines[,] fishhooks[,] clubs and spears, sorts of cloaks made of straw and native flax ... shell bracelets, stones of a kind of jasper and pieces of human bone that they wore around their neck'; some 'would go so far as to give their paddles[,] having nothing else'.<sup>9</sup> La Billardière noted that 'these Savages even stripped off their clothes in order to acquire our objects of exchange', while 'Bruni d'Entrecasteaux thought that they 'appeared to prefer worked iron' over anything else.<sup>10</sup> Halle de Longuerüe, sub-lieutenant on the *Recherche*, observed that the Māori they met 'seemed to be only fishermen; and indeed we caught many fish from them'.<sup>11</sup> While possibly the case, they appear to have paddled intentionally from the shore to meet the Europeans. La Billardière recorded seeing a large fire lit on the loftiest of the hills skirting the sea,<sup>12</sup> probably kindled as a signal when the ships were sighted.

Moreover, apart from the varied Māori artefacts in the collection of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology at Harvard University,<sup>13</sup> the Universitetsmuseet (University Museum) in Bergen holds a *matau*, fishhook,

made from human rib bone (Figure 6.6) and the handle from an adze of the *toki poutangata* type (BME 10; see Figure 6.4).<sup>14</sup> Both have particular qualities suggesting their donors' premeditation, however brief their opportunity to prepare for the encounter.

*Toki poutangata*—literally, adze to strike a person; figuratively, ceremonial adze or baton of rank—have both ritual and practical functionality.<sup>15</sup> They are instantiations of the status and prestige of people who have used them and physical representations of ancestral ties. Formerly, the battles they attended and the warriors they despatched would have further added to their significance. Their finely carved and embellished wooden handles incorporate a *manaia* figure, a guardian being with a bird's head and human body which carries messages between the earthly realm of mortals and the domain of the spirits. This underpins their use in *karakia*—formal appeals to spiritual forces and beings—and other rites connecting the human and spiritual worlds and the *tapu*, restriction, prohibition, and *mana*, status and personal efficacy, associated with them.<sup>16</sup> Today, such *taonga*, treasure, continue to be used in this way: punctuating oratory, recalling tribal histories, and cutting the first notch in canoes or tribal houses or applying their finishing details for ceremonial purposes.

The blades of *toki poutangata* were functional and usually made of *pounamu*, a nephrite found specifically in the South Island of Aotearoa-New Zealand. The *toki poutangata* in Bergen has lost its blade but was probably exchanged with one. Its receipt by French voyagers in the far north of the North Island is material testament to a lively local economy and the expansive trade networks encompassing all of Aotearoa.<sup>17</sup> When a great *rangatira*—leader, person of high status—died, the handle of their *toki poutangata* was often buried with them but the blade was passed down to their heir; notches on the side of the blade recorded the generations it had passed through.<sup>18</sup> The Māori men might have carried

the *toki poutangata* with them that evening for the purpose of *karakia* to sanctify their fishing. Or perhaps they took it to their meeting with the Europeans for its protective qualities and then offered it to them as a *taonga*, a gift to cement a relationship. Its current location in a museum far distant in space and time no doubt also signifies a Māori desire for iron and other European goods so strong that even sacred treasures were not immune to being traded.

La Billardière admired the finely polished stone sinker we believe now resides in the Peabody Museum (PM 67-10-70/244; see Figure 11.1). Bruni d'Entrecasteaux acknowledged that the intricately twined flax fishing lines the French received were 'much better braided than our finest cords.'<sup>19</sup> Raoul listed 'fishhooks, of bone and shell', among the items traded by the Māori visitors, while La Billardière and Bruni d'Entrecasteaux noted their 'different shapes' and 'sizes.'<sup>20</sup> But Hesmivy d'Auribeau found them 'neither well made nor of a shape fit for ordinary use'. On the other hand, he also noted the 'quite large quantity of fish they gave us.'<sup>21</sup> This patent contradiction hints at the great range of local variations in Māori fishhook design for particular fish species, of which the French knew nothing.

Hooks made with human bone shanks or barbs, such as the one now in Bergen (Figure 6.6), have a special place in Māori oral traditions. For example, Māui, a trader, explorer, and great ancestor well known throughout Polynesia, is said to have fished the North Island of Aotearoa-New Zealand—Te Ika-a-Māui, the fish of Māui—from the sea using a hook made from the jawbone of his ancestress. The Bergen fishhook is simple, without ceremonial embellishment, and looks very functional, but is nevertheless a significant object. Human bone was a prized material, especially when obtained from an ancestor or an enemy. Whilst an ancestor's bones were revered and honoured—the bone pendants and necklaces acquired by the French might well have been such relics—the use of an enemy's bones in utilitarian objects such as fishhooks was a direct

insult, thereafter illustrative of the bearer's *mana*, authority, and prestige.

The small assemblage of Māori artefacts attributed to Bruni d'Entrecasteaux's expedition and now held in Bergen and the Peabody Museum are material residues of exchanges made during a brief encounter. They testify to the ambivalence provoked in the French protagonists, who 'knew' in advance that 'these Savages ... devour human flesh,' but 'regarded it as a mark of the greatest confidence that they had no qualms about giving us all their weapons.'<sup>22</sup> The written traces of these transactions detail vividly the Māori actions which provoked the visitors' trepidation and relief, but say nothing of Indigenous motivations for bestowing a valuable *toki poutangata* and a human bone fishhook on strangers so fleetingly met.

## Notes

- 1 Bruni d'Entrecasteaux, *Voyage ...* (Paris, 1808), I:271–3; La Billardière, *Relation du voyage ...* (Paris, 1800), II:83–7.
- 2 Gicquel Destouches, 'Nottes', 11 March 1793, ANF (MAR 5 JJ 14<sup>1</sup>).
- 3 See Collins and Hannah, 'Through Classicising Eyes: Revisiting Piron's Images of Pacific Islanders from d'Entrecasteaux's Voyage', *Journal of New Zealand Art History* 29 (2008):27–9; Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific 1768–1850 ...* (Oxford, 1969):111.
- 4 Thevenard [Ministre de la Marine], 'Etat sommaire des livres de voyage, de navigation, de physique, d'histoire naturelle et autres remises à M. d'Entrecasteaux ...', n.d., in SHD, 'Expédition du contre-amiral d'Entrecasteaux ...', 1785–1810 (MAR BB<sup>4</sup> 992). See also Ollivier, *Extracts from New Zealand Journals...* (Wellington, 1986):17–21.
- 5 Cook, *A Voyage Towards the South Pole and Round the World ...* (London, 1777):254–60;
- Crozet, *Nouveau voyage à la mer du sud ...* (Paris, 1783):88–126; Salmond, *Two Worlds ...* (Auckland, 1991):386–402; *Between Worlds ...* (Auckland, 1997):102–5.
- 6 La Billardière, *Relation*, II:87; Raoul, [Journal], 11–12 March 1793, ANF (MAR 5 JJ 14<sup>1</sup>), in Ollivier, *Extracts*:48.
- 7 Ibid.:50; Hesmivy d'Auribeau, [Journal de mer], 13 March 1793, ANF (MAR 5 JJ 13<sup>6</sup>) in Ollivier, *Extracts*:30, 32.
- 8 Bruni d'Entrecasteaux, *Voyage*, I:272; La Billardière, *Relation*, II:85–6.
- 9 Gicquel Destouches, 'Nottes', 11 March 1793; Raoul, [Journal], in Ollivier, *Extracts*:48, 50.
- 10 Bruni d'Entrecasteaux, *Voyage*, I:272; La Billardière, *Relation*, II:85.
- 11 Halle de Longuerüe, 'Journal', 10–11 March 1793, in Ollivier, *Extracts*:46.
- 12 La Billardière, *Relation*, II:83.
- 13 Chapter 11.
- 14 Chapter 6.
- 15 Personal communication, Wayne Ngata, Māori Language Commissioner, January 2018.
- 16 Personal communication, Lewis Gardiner, master carver, January 2018.
- 17 See Hazel Petrie, *Chiefs of Industry: Māori Tribal Enterprise in Early Colonial New Zealand* (Auckland, 2006); Adrienne Puckey, *Trading Cultures: A History of the Far North* (Wellington, 2011).
- 18 Dorota C. Starzecka, Roger Neich, and Mick Pendergrast, *Taonga Māori in the British Museum* (Wellington, 2012):68.
- 19 Bruni d'Entrecasteaux, *Voyage*, I:272; La Billardière, *Relation*, II:85.
- 20 Bruni d'Entrecasteaux, *Voyage*, I:272; La Billardière, *Relation*, II:84; Raoul, [Journal], in Ollivier, *Extracts*:48.
- 21 Hesmivy d'Auribeau, [Journal de mer], in Ollivier, *Extracts*:30.
- 22 La Billardière, *Relation*, II:84–6.





Figure 6.5. [Figs 1 and 2] of Plate 25 of La Billardière's Atlas portraying two of the Māori men encountered by Bruni d'Entrecasteaux's expedition at sea off the north coast of New Zealand. Copia after Piron, 'Sauvage de la Nouvelle Zéelande'; 'Jeune sauvage de la Nouvelle Zéelande', 1800, engraving.



Figure 6.6. Māori matau, fishhook, made from human rib bone, held in the Bruni d'Entrecasteaux collection of the Universitetsmuseet, Bergen (BME 40).



Figure 6.7 (left). Tongan apa'apai, club, held in the Bruni d'Entrecasteaux collection of the Universitetsmuseet, Bergen (BME 1).

Figure 6.8 (middle). Fijian ula tavatava, throwing club, collected in Tongatapu and held in the Bruni d'Entrecasteaux collection of the Universitetsmuseet, Bergen (BME 7).

Figure 6.9 (right). Kanak barkcloth beater from New Caledonia, held in the Bruni d'Entrecasteaux collection of the Universitetsmuseet, Bergen (BME 41).

'Danse de tongatabou' (Dance in Tonga) (see Figure 18.1).<sup>15</sup> One such object, decorated with shell inlays of the moon and stars (BME 8; see Figure 7.4), is in the Bergen collection. So are three decorated clubs (BME 1–3; Figure 6.7) and a *tukipitu*, bamboo stamping tube or ceremonial percussive instrument (BME 21; see Figure 15.1), which was filled with arrows on arrival in Bergen because Anker had mistaken it for a quiver.

Bruni d'Entrecasteaux found it 'truly surprising' that Tongans sailed so often to the Fiji Islands and noted the 'frequent wars', 'communications', and 'exchange' between the groups. Much impressed by the 'fine figure' and 'great intelligence' of a Fijian man seen in Tongatapu, he extrapolated from this single personal encounter a generalization about the 'inferiority' of Tongans to Fijians in military performance, craftsmanship, and



Figure 6.10 (left). Wooden handle of a Kanak axe from New Caledonia, held in the Bruni d'Entrecasteaux collection of the Universitetsmuseet, Bergen (BME 11).

Figure 6.11 (right). Fig. 21 of plate 38 of *La Billardière's Atlas* showing a Kanak axe from New Caledonia resembling an object in the Bruni d'Entrecasteaux collection of the Universitetsmuseet, Bergen. *La Billardière, 'Hache de serpentine emmanchée de bois', 1800, engraving.*

intelligence.<sup>16</sup> Such intergroup relations were no doubt the source of the typically Fijian *ula tavatava*, throwing club (Figure 6.8), in the Bergen collection, as well as a *gugu*, club (BME 4), with a design that—according to Fergus Clunie—originated in Viti Levu.<sup>17</sup>

On departure from Tongatapu, the expedition sailed westwards to New Caledonia where they spent 18 days in the northeastern port of Balade. The Bergen collection holds five objects of typically Kanak manufacture: two hardwood clubs (BME 5–6); an adze handle missing its stone blade (BME 9), resembling one in Leiden's Bruni d'Entrecasteaux collection (RV-34-10; see Figure 8.1), as well as another held by the British Museum (Oc.7948); a barkcloth beater (Figure 6.9), also similar to one in the British Museum (Oc1944,02.1141); and a simple axe handle, also without a blade (Figure 6.10)—perhaps the 'wooden shaft missing its stone head' mentioned in the museum board minutes. The last item is nearly identical to the handle of an axe engraved in *La Billardière's Atlas* (Figure 6.11) and labelled 'Serpentine axe hafted with wood'. Bruni d'Entrecasteaux reported exchanges with the men manning several canoes which visited the ships after

Figure 6.12: Detail showing the barb of an arrow from Santa Cruz, held in the Bruni d'Entrecasteaux collection of the Universitetsmuseet, Bergen (BME 38).



their arrival at Balade. So hungry were the people that, far from providing provisions, they exchanged 'everything they had in their canoes' for a few coconuts. He did not specify the objects received but La Billardière mentioned 'spears and clubs'.<sup>18</sup>

The Bergen collection holds many arrows spanning the categories typical of the Melanesian inventory (see feature). For example, in May 1793, Bruni d'Entrecasteaux sought unsuccessfully to anchor at Santa Cruz (eastern Solomon Islands). Numerous Islanders came out to the ships in canoes, eager to trade. Two boats sent in search of an anchorage were surrounded by 20 or 30 canoes. Amicable exchanges were under way when a man fired an arrow which wounded one of the sailors. The French returned fire and shot the assailant. His companions abandoned the canoe which was seized and taken on board the *Recherche*. It contained three bows and three bundles of arrows. These were the only intact arrows received, since the Islanders snapped the points of those they traded. Some of the arrows held in Bergen (Figures 6.12, 6.14) might have been obtained during this encounter or during another meeting two days later off the island's north coast.<sup>19</sup>

Other arrows in the Bergen collection were probably acquired during subsequent encounters with Islanders in canoes as the expedition coasted past the southern Solomon Islands, the Louisiades, and the D'Entrecasteaux group. No further meetings are reported during the passage north of New Britain, south of New Ireland, and along the north coast of New Guinea. Fear of

Indigenous violence, difficult sailing conditions, and bad weather discouraged the French from landing between New Caledonia and Waigeo, northwest of New Guinea. Such fleeting contacts as did occur were all initiated by Islanders.

### Java to Bergen

The Bergen collection—which certainly constitutes only a small fraction of the total number of ethnographic objects collected during Bruni d'Entrecasteaux's expedition—followed a trajectory of its own after the ships reached Java in October 1793. Though I have found no documentation on how Peter Anker obtained the objects in question, his personal history suggests likely possibilities. From 1788 to 1806, he served as governor of the Danish colony of Tranquebar (Tharangambadi), on the southeast coast of India. Anker's major political challenge in these years was to negotiate relations between the British, the French, the Dutch, and the local Rajah in order to secure trade and shipping back to Scandinavia. In 1793, the little colony became involved as a neutral party in the war that had united almost all European governments against Revolutionary France. The Dutch colonies, including the Netherlands East Indies, were at that stage also at



## Archery equipment

Andy Mills

Much of the Bruni d'Entrecasteaux collection in the Universitetsmuseet (University Museum) in Bergen consists of archery equipment. The toxophilite craze had spread throughout Western Europe during the 18th century and remained strong thereafter,<sup>1</sup> explaining in part why the crew collected and studied projectile weapons so keenly—though professional military interest was no doubt also a factor. Indeed, it is the meticulous descriptions of the naturalist La Billardière that enable the Bergen archery collection to be traced to several specific locations: Ambon (Maluku Province, eastern Indonesia), Buka (eastern Papua New Guinea), Santa Cruz (Temotu Province, eastern Solomon Islands), and Tongatapu (southern Tonga). Apart from Ambon, represented only by a bow, the collection comprises both bows and arrows from each of these Oceanic cultures. Exemplifying the strongest archery traditions encountered, this typological division probably retains some of the original integrity it had when the expedition ended in Batavia. That said, stylistic variation in archery equipment is more poorly understood than almost any other aspect of Pacific art history and cultural attributions are challenging, to say the least. The Ambonese bow (Figure 6.3) is an exquisite artwork, finely gilt and overpainted with delicate vine scrolls suggestive of Islamic influence.

In Buka, Bruni d'Entrecasteaux and La Billardière both commented on the sharp trading of local men, who approached the French vessels on 15 July 1792 in several canoes, including a large war canoe, and quickly showed their familiarity with exchange. The Frenchmen noted their immediate proffering of 'a very fine bow' but, while the Islanders were henceforth happy to exchange arrows, they refused to part with further bows. La Billardière admired their skilled bowmanship and 'industry' in fabricating

arms, which they 'worked with much care'. They coated their bowstrings with 'a kind of resin', so they resembled catgut, and protected the centre of their bows with a fibre binding. He remarked on the 'artistic' bindings used to reinforce their arrows at the nock and where the hardwood head was socketed into the lightweight shaft.<sup>2</sup> The Bergen Museum's eight Buka arrows (BME 26–30, BME 34–6) demonstrate both the shaving down of arrowheads for aerodynamic balance and a range of fine barbing patterns. The Bukan bow in this collection (Figure 6.1) is of a basic type produced from the lowlands of southeastern New Guinea eastwards throughout the Massim and Bismarck Archipelago. As tall as a man and carved in black palmwood (*Borassus flabellifer*) with a flattened D-shaped section, its fifteen remaining woven split cane collars were applied to prevent the fibrous wood from splitting under compression. The asymmetrical hourglass shaped nocks provided a double fixing for the loops of the bowstring which were originally sealed with a parinarium nut paste.

Ten months later, the expedition spent three days off Santa Cruz.<sup>3</sup> The Islanders disarmed the arrows they traded by snapping off their tips (probably to retain the human bone points which were derived from their own deceased relatives), but a canoe containing three bows and three bundles of intact arrows was seized following a violent clash. One bow in the Bergen Museum is probably traceable to the Santa Cruz Islands (BME 15), with its lenticular section in a golden hardwood and asymmetrical nocks (one a rounded dovetail and the other a slender cone). It is the longest bow in the collection and seems, appropriately, to blend stylistic characteristics from the east and the west. However, identifying the geographical origin of this bow was made significantly more difficult because the string from BME 17 or BME 18, both Tongan, has been



transferred on to it at some stage during its long sojourn in Bergen. Seven arrows in the Bergen collection (BME 12, BME 31–3, BME 37–9) match those described by La Billardiére in Santa Cruz or conform to later Santa Cruz styles. They exhibit worked heads of human arm or leg bone (Figure 6.12), foreshafts forked to accommodate bone slivers (BMD 33), fine overpainting in the red, white, and black style characteristic of Temotu Province (BME 32), and complex barbing.<sup>4</sup> Of particular note is a three-pronged fishing arrow (Figure 6.13) with three barbs along the inside of each jaw, loosely bound with fine coconut fibre to open around the prey and secure it. As with the Bukan arrows, these weapons differ significantly from the well known late 19th-century Temotu arrow style—only the long arrow (BME 12) exhibits the geometrically carved foreshaft so distinctive of Santa Cruz in later years.

In the meantime, the expedition had anchored at Tongatapu for 18 days. By contrast to the Buka and Santa Cruz items, the 29 Tongan arrows (BME 22–5) held in Bergen, eight with lost heads, are notably simple and unbarbed, although their socketed heads are fire-hardened and their *’olongā* fibre (*Pipturus argenteus*) bindings carefully glued with breadfruit gum. The length of Oceanic arrow shafts was generally determined to balance the head’s weight in flight, and so these simpler Tongan arrows are

considerably shorter than the others. Twenty-one have a double collar where the head enters the cane shaft, maximizing the force transmitted to the head upon impact. The collection’s three *kaufana tangata*, lit. man bow, generally carved of mangrove wood (*Rhizophora mangle*) (BME 16–18), are remarkable pieces of technology. Possessing shallow grooves down their bellies and carved shield-shaped string guides below their conical nocks, they also exhibit elaborate knotted *’olongā* bindings around their middles to increase tensile resistance. One of them (Figure 6.14) also includes a slender wooden fillet inside its wrapped belly groove to increase compressive resistance. This is an extremely rare example of Oceania’s only tradition of composite bow manufacture.

## Notes

- 1 Grayson, *et al.*, *Traditional Archery from Six Continents* (Columbia and London, 2007):235–9; Thompson, *The Witchery of Archery ...* (New York, 1878):3–4.
- 2 Bruni d’Entrecasteaux, *Voyage ...* (Paris, 1808), I:122–5; La Billardiére, *Relation du voyage ...* (Paris, 1800), I:222–30.
- 3 Bruni d’Entrecasteaux, *Voyage*, I:368–79; La Billardiére, *Relation*, II:250–60.
- 4 Koch, *Materielle Kultur der Santa Cruz-Inseln* (Berlin, 1971).



Figure 6.13 (left). Fishing arrow collected in Santa Cruz (Temotu Province, Solomon Islands), held in the Bruni d'Entrecasteaux collection of the Universitetsmuseet, Bergen (BME 39).

Figure 6.14 (right). Tongan composite kaufana tangata, man bow, held in the Bruni d'Entrecasteaux collection of the Universitetsmuseet, Bergen (BME 18).

war with France but by 1795, after France had defeated the Dutch Republic and set up a puppet regime in the Netherlands, the Dutch East Indies were aligned with France. The objects now held in Bergen presumably came into Anker's hands during this period.

During two decades in South Asia, Anker doubtless had opportunities both to travel to Batavia in Java, where the *Recherche* and the *Espérance* had ended up and were finally sold at auction, and to meet other travellers coming from Batavia. Moreover, Anker was a member of the 'local node of science', the Tranquebarske Selskab (Tranquebarian Society), which was modelled on and maintained regular contacts with the Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen (Batavia Society for Arts and Sciences).<sup>20</sup> His biographer mentions that in 1795 Anker welcomed to his station a French captain and some sailors who had escaped from a British warship.<sup>21</sup> A letter from the French government in Ile-de-France (now Mauritius) honoured Anker for the goodwill he offered French refugees to Tranquebar during the war, despite strict orders from Great Britain to take them prisoner.<sup>22</sup> Such intercolonial links across the Indian Ocean were not uncommon. In 1801 Gicquel Destouches, who had been a pilot on the *Recherche*, sent a letter from Ile de France, where ill health had forced him to abandon Baudin's expedition en route to New Holland. Carried to Europe on a Danish ship, the letter reports that Achard de Bonvouloir, Gicquel's former shipmate on the *Recherche*, was 'no longer at Batavia', having departed several years previously in command of a small vessel and 'made his return to Trinquebart where it is believed that he stayed'.<sup>23</sup> There he presumably met Anker and perhaps assisted his acquisition of ethnographic objects from Bruni d'Entrecasteaux's expedition.

Peter Anker was a keen art collector and his collections would ultimately be central to the nation-building aspects of museum collecting in Copenhagen, Oslo, and Bergen.<sup>24</sup> Three years after his death in 1832, his heir Erik Anker turned the collection over to Bergens Museum. Christie, the museum's founder, and Anker were both central figures in the improvised parliament formed in 1814 to liberate Norway from Danish colonial rule and in subsequent drafting of the first Norwegian constitution.

## Conclusion

Amongst the several extant museum collections of materials assembled during Bruni d'Entrecasteaux's voyage, that held in Bergen is notable for its wide breadth of provenance. It appears to include objects from most places, Van Diemen's Land excepted, where exchanges are recorded between members of the expedition and local populations—though no consolidated list is known to exist of items collected during the voyage. At the time of its accession by Bergens Museum, the Bruni d'Entrecasteaux collection testified not only to an intrepid voyage to the South Seas, to enlightenment, and to science, but also to the adventurous politics and diplomatic relations of Peter Anker in India and to the nation-building process in Norway.

## Notes

- 1 UB, 'Katalog for de Etnografiske Samlinger', 1835–98, I:1, Kulturhistorie arkiv, UB.
- 2 UB, [Minutes of board meeting], 18 November 1835, Kulturhistorie arkiv, UB. See also Chapter 7. Bergens Museum was founded in 1825, incorporated into the new University of Bergen in 1946 as Historisk Museum, and is now Universitetsmuseet i Bergen.
- 3 The *speciedaler* was the Norwegian currency between 1816 and 1874. According to the Norges Bank, 22 *speciedaler* is equivalent to approximately NOK7,800 or €810 at 2016 values <http://www.norges-bank.no/Statistikk/Priskalkulator/>
- 4 UB, [Minutes of board meeting], 18 November 1835.
- 5 Chapter 2.
- 6 Bruni d'Entrecasteaux, *Voyage ...* (Paris, 1808), I.
- 7 Ibid.:123.
- 8 Ibid.:124–5.
- 9 Ibid.:127.
- 10 Ibid.:131–9.
- 11 La Billardièrre, *Atlas ...* (Paris, 1800): plate 38 (fig. 25); see Figure 1.10; 'Table des planches ...', in *Relation du voyage ...* (Paris, 1800), II, Tables:107.
- 12 Ibid.:155–67; La Billardièrre, *Relation*, I:289.
- 13 Bruni d'Entrecasteaux, *Voyage*, I:270–2; La Billardièrre, *Relation*, II:83–7.
- 14 Chapter 17.
- 15 Bruni d'Entrecasteaux, *Voyage*, I:293–4; Piron, [Esquisses], ANF (Marine 5 JJ 4). La Billardièrre called them 'a little club almost in the form of a paddle'. *Relation*, II:153.
- 16 Bruni d'Entrecasteaux, *Voyage*, I:311–14.
- 17 Clunie, *Fijian Weapons & Warfare* (Suva, 1977):54. See Chapter 16 for a detailed discussion of Tongan and Fijian clubs in relation to Bruni d'Entrecasteaux's expedition and the extensive regional networks in play.
- 18 Bruni d'Entrecasteaux, *Voyage*, I:330; La Billardièrre, *Relation*, II:184.
- 19 Bruni d'Entrecasteaux, *Voyage*, I:368–79.
- 20 Jensen, 'The Tranquebarian Society: Science, Enlightenment and Useful Knowledge in the Danish-Norwegian East Indies, 1768–1813', *Scandinavian Journal of History* 40:4 (2015):542–5.
- 21 Nielsen, *General-Major Peter Anker, Guvernör i Trankebar* (Kristiania, 1870):56.
- 22 Ibid.:56–7.
- 23 Giquel Destouches, 'Copie des lettres que j'ai ecrite a M.<sup>e</sup> Beaupré par un navire danois: Ile de France le 7 floreal an 9.<sup>e</sup> [27 Avril 1801]', ANF (MAR 5 JJ 55), in 'Journal et autres documents de Pierre-Guillaume Gicquel', *The Baudin Legacy Project*:145, 149.
- 24 Chapter 7.

