

## Identity of *Testudo gigantea* SCHWEIGGER, 1812 and Rediscovery of the Type Specimen

By R. BOUR

In a key paper describing about two dozen new species of chelonians, AUGUST FRIEDRICH SCHWEIGGER described a new tortoise, which he named *Testudo gigantea*, the “giant tortoise” (1812: 327; 362–363). The type and only specimen was plundered at the end of 1807 or in 1808 by the Napoleonic army from the King of Portugal’s collections in Lisbon, and brought back to Paris by ETIENNE GEOFFROY SAINT-HILAIRE<sup>1</sup>, as SCHWEIGGER (1812: 327) mentioned “Vidi animal e collectione regi Li[s]bonensi proventum in museo Parisiensi” (“I saw the animal from the King of Lisbon’s collection at the Paris Museum”).

A first diagnosis appeared in a manuscript by SCHWEIGGER most probably in 1808, where he later added some corrections following the publication of GEOFFROY SAINT-HILAIRE’s first “mémoire” (1809) about *Trionyx*. This 71 page (36 sheets) precious document is kept at the Bibliothèque centrale (Central Library) of the Paris Museum (Ms 2627). Here the new species “*Testudo macropus* mihi” was described in a section including only it and “*Testudo indica* VOSM.” [= *Cylindraspis vosmaeri* (SUCKOW, 1798)] and characterized as follows: “Margine testae laterali nullo” (no lateral border on the shell), which was opposed to “Margine testae laterali prominenti, acuto” (an acute, salient lateral border on the shell), embracing all other land tortoises. That refers to the ridge made by the folding of the marginal scutes of most turtles, but which in tortoises tends to be laterally reduced or erased. The description of *Testudo macropus* was short: “Lorica convexa lata, supra collum subcomplanata, postice gibbosa, sterno duodecim areis. Commisura bractearum marginalium anteriorum latae. Margo anterior scutelli primi dorsalis obtusus” (Shell wide and convex, almost flattened above the neck, humped backwards, plastron with twelve areas [scutes]. Suture of the anterior [first] marginal scutes wide [long]. Anterior border of the first dorsal [vertebral] scute obtuse). Actually most of these features were given to differentiate *T. macropus* from *T. indica*.

In the published work (SCHWEIGGER 1812), *Testudo macropus* (“big-footed tortoise”) was replaced by *Testudo gigantea* (“giant tortoise”), presumably because this name was previously used by JOHANNES WALBAUM (1782) as a junior subjective synonym of *Testudo mydas* LINNAEUS, 1758. According to his method, the author gave a first diagnosis, then a second slightly more complete one, with measurements (in French feet of 324 mm). We offer a full translation of SCHWEIGGER’s descriptions, including repetitions:

[Page 327] “Giant tortoise. Carapace cylindroid, flattened above the neck, with smooth scutes, supracaudal and fifth dorsal (= vertebral) forming a humped unit, plastron with twelve scutes. Disc of thirteen scutes, bordered by twenty-three similar marginal scutes. Plastron narrowed at both

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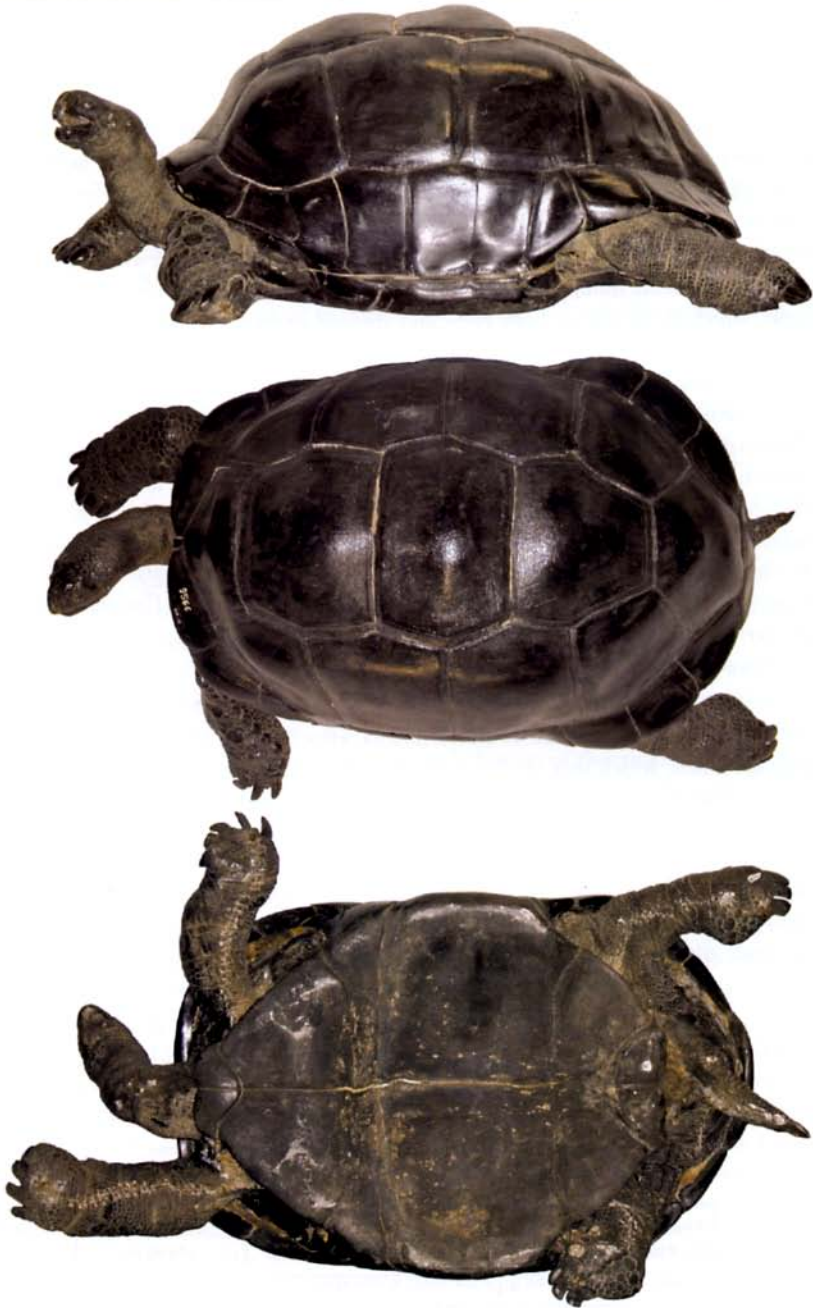
<sup>1</sup>That is the usual version. According to HERVÉ LE GUYADER (1998: 16), in contrast to the raids regularly made by the French in Lisbon, “GEOFFROY SAINT-HILAIRE helped the Portuguese to categorize their collections and proposed exchanges with the Paris Museum, for the benefit of both institutions; after Waterloo, the Portuguese were the only nation not to demand anything, and thanked GEOFFROY for having emphasized their precious collections”. Moreover, it is ascertained that GEOFFROY brought with him several duplicates from the Paris Museum, used in exchanges.

ends. Head massive, covered with scales, jaws denticulate. Neck thick. Limbs shielded by tough and very broad scales; five nails on the hands and four on the feet. Tail thick, not protruding. Inhabits Brazil. I saw the animal originating from the King of Lisbon's collection at the Paris Museum". [Pages 362–363] "Giant tortoise. Rounded head, covered by scales, with denticulate, slightly hooked jaws. Neck thick. Shell convex, cylindroid, brown, flattened in front and making a slope backwards. First dorsal quadrangular, its front edge curved; second, third and fourth hexagonal; fifth pyramid-shaped, inflated, very broad posteriorly, its border curved. First lateral scute (= costal) like a quadrant, second, third and fourth pentagonal. Border of twenty-three marginal scutes, the two front ones oblique, narrow at their common suture, otherwise similar to those following; supracaudal scute humped. Sides of the carapace rounded, bound by an osseous suture with the plastron, which is narrow at both ends and divided in twelve parts. Limbs of rough aspect, shielded by very numerous broad and tough scales, five nails on the hands and four on the feet. Tail thick, not protruding".

A similar origin involved another new species, *Emys Geoffroyana*, dedicated to GEOFFROY SAINT-HILAIRE: "Vidi specimen in museo Parisiensi, quod ill. GEOFFROY Lisbonae in museo regio collegat" ("I saw the specimen at the Paris Museum, which was collected by the famous GEOFFROY in the Royal Museum of Lisbon"). However, while this second specimen (today *Phrynops Geoffroyanus*) has since always been traced (MNHN 9417) and correctly identified, this is not the case with the former. JOHN EDWARD GRAY, who visited the Paris Museum in 1828 or 1829, did not locate the tortoise, and from SCHWEIGGER's description, understood that it was stored in the Lisbon Museum (GRAY 1831: 9); he included the species with all known giant insular tortoises in the synonymy of *Testudo indica* SCHNEIDER, 1783, today *Cylindraspis indica*. Much later (GRAY 1872: 8), he identified *Testudo gigantea* with *Testudo phayrei* BLYTH, 1853, today *Manouria emys phayrei*. As early as 1835, CONSTANT DUMÉRIL and GABRIEL BIBRON associated SCHWEIGGER's description with another unique specimen, which was obviously distinct. DUMÉRIL and BIBRON actually described a new species, but mistakenly attributed it to SCHWEIGGER. *Testudo gigantea* sensu DUMÉRIL & BIBRON (1835: 120) has the following features which did not fit with *Testudo gigantea* SCHWEIGGER: "carapace bombée; écailles du disque très convexes; une écaille nuchale; suscaudale double" ("shell bulged; scutes of the disc very convex; one nuchal [= cervical] scute; supracaudal scute double [= divided]"). Other details also distinguish this specimen from the one described by SCHWEIGGER, including the rough scales of the forelimbs, and also the size: according to DUMÉRIL & BIBRON, the "new" *Testudo gigantea* has a shell length (over the curve) of 130 cm and a depth of 49 cm, vs. 75.6 cm and 24.3 cm, respectively for the "old" one. The specimen is still preserved in the Paris Museum collections, with MNHN 9566 as registration number (Fig. 1). Its main dimensions are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Measurements (in mm) of MNHN 9566, male of *Dipsochelys dussumieri* (GRAY, 1831), used by DUMÉRIL & BIBRON to describe *Testudo gigantea* SCHWEIGGER, 1812.

Length of shell, straight	Length of shell, curved	Width of shell	Depth of shell	Length of plastron	Length of bridge
950	1270	645	475	760	380



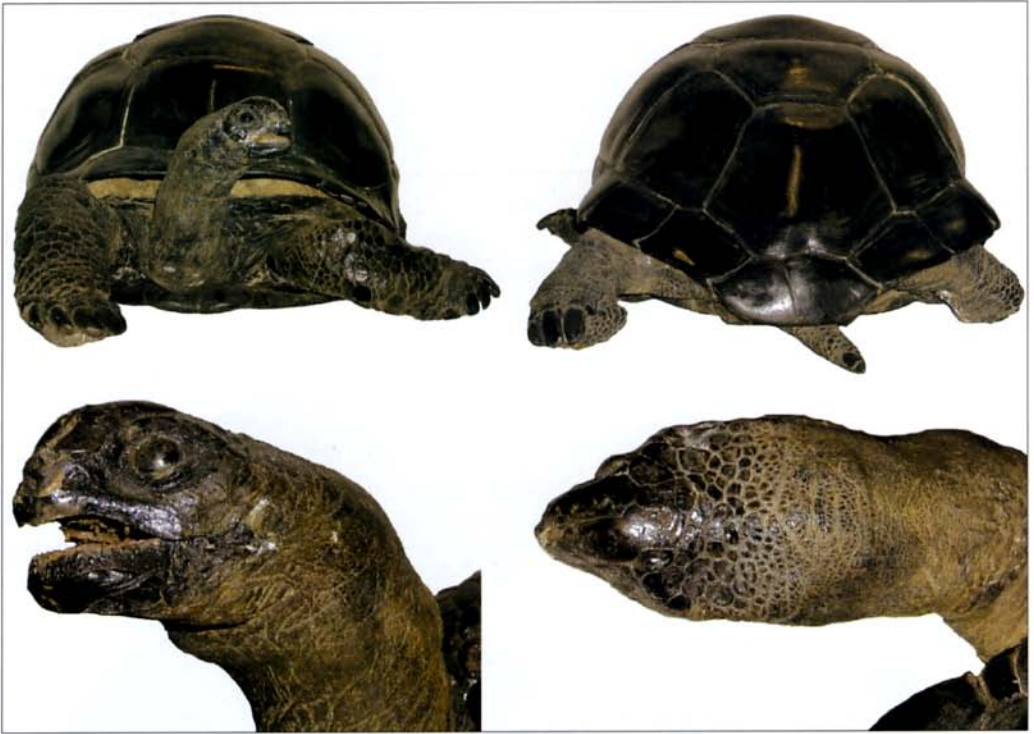


Fig. 1. Specimen MNHN 9566, an old stuffed male of *Dipsochelys dussumieri* (GRAY, 1831). The description of *Testudo gigantea* by DUMÉRIL & BIBRON (1835) and subsequent authors was based entirely on this individual. Unfortunately, it was a different species from SCHWEIGGER's type specimen of *T. gigantea*. Note the convex shell, the presence of a cervical scute, and also the splitted supracaudal – origin of a lasting confusion! All photographs: R. BOUR.

As outlined by DUMÉRIL & BIBRON themselves, their *Testudo gigantea* was very close to their new *Testudo elephantina* – today *Dipsochelys dussumieri* (GRAY, 1831) –, the Aldabra tortoise, a point of view shared, for instance, by ALBERT GÜNTHER (1877: 22, note) and GEORGE ALBERT BOULENGER (1889: 168). Finally, WALTER ROTHSCHILD (1897: 407) then FRIEDRICH SIEBENROCK (1909: 529–530) lumped both nominal species, *Testudo elephantina* being considered as a subspecies of *Testudo gigantea* – but of *Testudo gigantea* sensu DUMÉRIL & BIBRON! Nevertheless, from the beginning of the 20th century, the valid name for the Aldabra tortoise seemed to have been definitely settled, and the binomina *Testudo gigantea* or *Geochelone gigantea*, with SCHWEIGGER as author, have been widely used until today. *Aldabrachelys*, as a subgenus of *Geochelone* FITZINGER, 1835, was coined by ARTHUR LOVERIDGE and ERNEST WILLIAMS to include the Aldabra tortoise and its relatives, with *Testudo gigantea* SCHWEIGGER as type species by original designation (LOVERIDGE & WILLIAMS 1957: 225). However, *Aldabrachelys gigantea* was rarely used as such. Apparently the discordance between the intention and the actual type specimen was never noticed until I erected a new nominal genus to include the Aldabra tortoise and related species, *Dipsochelys*, with

*Testudo elephantina* as type species, by original designation (BOUR 1982). A little later, I developed the analysis further, and suggested that the true *Testudo gigantea* of SCHWEIGGER was a Mascarene tortoise, according to several characters: no cervical, cylindroid shell, denticulate jaws...; I added that the type specimen seemed to be lost (BOUR 1984). Two papers dealing with the same topic were published in 1986. One by CHARLES CRUMLY, "The identity of *Testudo gigantea* SCHWEIGGER, 1812: another interpretation" was purely polemical, using arguments like "uncertainty" and "established name" to maintain the use of *Testudo gigantea*. But the other one, by PETER PRITCHARD, "A reinterpretation of *Testudo gigantea* SCHWEIGGER, 1812", the fruit of an exchange of mail between the author and myself, was more constructive. PRITCHARD, initially impressed by the origin of the type specimen, was convinced that *Testudo gigantea* SCHWEIGGER is a synonym of *Testudo denticulata* LINNAEUS, 1766, today *Chelonoidis denticulata*, the (sometimes giant) yellow-footed tortoise of South America, which can reach a straight length of 82 cm (PRITCHARD & TREBBAU 1984).

Fig. 2. Specimen MNHN 9554, an old stuffed male of *Chelonoidis denticulata* (LINNAEUS, 1766). This tortoise, formerly in the collections of the Royal Museum in Lisbon, was seized and brought back in 1808 by the Napoleonic army, then used by SCHWEIGGER in 1809 to describe his new species *Testudo gigantea*. Note the rounded flanks, the heavy, broad scales on the forearms, and the absence of a cervical scute.





	MNHN 9554	SCHWEIGGER	DUMÉRIE & BIBRON
Total length	880 (nares to supracaudal, curved)		840
Length of head	102 (nares to occipital scales)	108	100
Depth of head	54 (nares to occipital scales)		60
Width of head	69.5 (skull, maximum)	78	65
Length of shell, curved (median)	770	756	770
Length of shell, straight (maximum)	607		
Depth of shell	255 (at V3)	243	240
Width of shell (middle)	380 (at M6)	365 (at V4)	360
Width of shell (maximum)	398 (at M9)		
Length of plastron (maximum)	550	531	
Length of plastron (median)	525		(485?)
Width of plastron (humeral)	252		
Width of plastron (abdominal)	353	324	370
Width of plastron (femoral)	259		
Bridge	270		
Concavity of plastron	26		
Length of gulars	55		
Length of humerals	147		
Length of pectorals	30		
Length of abdominals	171		
Length of femorals	104		
Length of anals	30		
Length of tail	85 (opening anals – supracaudal)	78	80

Table 2. Measurements (in mm) of MNHN 9554, male of *Chelonoidis denticulata* (LINNAEUS, 1766), holotype of *Testudo gigantea* SCHWEIGGER, 1812 compared with data published by SCHWEIGGER (1812) and DUMÉRIE & BIBRON (1835). There are several discrepancies between measurements, perhaps in connection with the used method, and also probably some mistakes; for instance, according to DUMÉRIE & BIBRON 's data, the width of plastron would be greater than the width of shell.

During a subsequent visit by PRITCHARD to the Paris Museum, we looked for a specimen which might fit the original description, but in vain. But we failed to look at an old stuffed tortoise identified "*Testudo carbonaria*, DUM. BIB., très vieux sujet d'origine inconnue" ("very old specimen of unknown origin"). I located it a few years ago, and when later I read again SCHWEIGGER's original text, it became obvious that it was the very specimen described by this brilliant student of CONSTANT DUMÉRIL (Fig. 2). The description translated above, and also the given measurements (cf. Table 2), leave no doubt about its identity. It must be remembered that the specimen (registered as MNHN 9554) was also described and measured by DUMÉRIL & BIBRON themselves (1835: 89–94), without any details about its origin, under the heading *Testudo tabulata* WALBAUM, 1782, a junior and invalid subjective synonym of *Testudo denticulata*. Its presence in the MNHN collections is further confirmed in a hand-written catalogue dated ca. 1864, with "Brésil" ("Brazil") as locality (registration number: 120). I am glad to acknowledge here the perspicacity of my colleague and long-standing friend PETER PRITCHARD.

To conclude, the type specimen of *Testudo gigantea* SCHWEIGGER is identified at last, and the name cannot be applied to the Aldabra tortoise. In the same way, *Aldabrachelys*, fortunately rarely used, becomes a subjective synonym of *Chelonoidis* FITZINGER, 1835 (type species: *Testudo boiei* WAGLER, 1829, subjective synonym of *Testudo carbonaria* SPIX, 1824), and cannot be used to encompass the Aldabra tortoise and its relatives, unless a request to the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature would be submitted and accepted.

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### Addendum

This note was finished and ready to print when I became aware of an article by JACK FRAZIER (2006), where a neotype of *Testudo gigantea* SCHWEIGGER, 1812 was described, this nominal species being an Aldabra tortoise according to the author. Thanks to the understanding of the editors of EMYS I am able to publish this addendum, and a full article will be independently submitted to Herpetological Review. I thank ALAIN DUBOIS, BALÁZS FARKAS and PETER PRITCHARD for their “smoothing” of my English; however, the ideas expressed are mine.

#### 1. Neotype of *Testudo gigantea*

Following PRITCHARD (mainly 1996), among some other changes, the universally used *Testudo elephantopus* HARLAN, 1827, a name for the Galápagos tortoises, was replaced by *Testudo nigra* QUOY & GAIMARD, 1824, apparently without major objection from scientists. On the other hand, FRAZIER (2006) strongly emphasized the “general instability and chaos regarding the valid name of the Aldabra tortoise”. Actually, an “established nomenclatural system” (i. e. *Testudo gigantea* according to FRAZIER) is the most commonly proposed argument against *Testudo dussumieri* GRAY, 1831 or *Testudo elephantina* DUMÉRIL & BIBRON, 1835, the types of which are without doubt Aldabra tortoises. Therefore, FRAZIER believed that a neotype designation could clarify this situation. I wish to stress several points in the ICZN (1999) Code (art. 75) which were not taken into account by FRAZIER. Designation of a neotype is made to settle a taxonomic problem, not a nomenclatural problem: there is no doubt about the identity of the Aldabra tortoise, but disagreements about its name. The selected neotype is not “consistent with what is known of the former name-bearing type from the original description” (e. g., absence vs. presence of a cervical scute; limbs shielded by tough and very broad scales vs. only postcranial skeleton, and fragments of skin). Finally, the recommendation that “before designating a neotype, an author should be satisfied that the proposed designation does not arouse serious objection from other specialists in the group in question” was not performed.

Fortunately, the rediscovery of the holotype instantly removes any need for a neotype as type-specimen of the same taxon, as the neotype is set aside according to ICZN (1999) Code (art. 75.8); FRAZIER’s action becomes void. Nevertheless I concede it will never be possible to prevent some nostalgic naturalists from using *Testudo gigantea*.

#### 2. Availability of *Testudo dussumieri*

Another subject tackled by FRAZIER is his denial of the availability of *Testudo dussumieri*. The nominal species *Testudo dussumieri* was first published by GRAY (1831: 9), with a diagnosis, but as a synonym of *Testudo indica* “GMELIN” (= SCHNEIDER, 1783):

“Junior. Testa nigra margine laterali angulato, areolis magnis. *Test. Dussumieri*, SCHLEGEL MSS. (v. Mus. Leyd.) – Pet. Gaz. t. 76. f. 4”.

The second reference, "Pet. Gaz.", was based on a shell drawn in PETIVER (1764: pl. 76, fig. 4). *Testudo dussumieri* was once again mentioned as a synonym of *T. indica* by TEMMINCK & SCHLEGEL (1835: 75), and published the same year as a valid species (but without diagnosis) by FITZINGER (1835: 122), in the genus *Testudo*, "sectio" *Psammobates*:

"5. *T. Dussumieri*. SCHLEGEL. (*Test. indica*. DEKAY. – *Test. indica*. GRAY. part.)".

DEKAY was also cited by GRAY (1831), the original reference being DEKAY (in: HARLAN 1827), which clearly described two members of the Aldabra group of tortoises. Later *T. dussumieri* was at least twice mentioned by GRAY (1844: 5; 1855: 6).

The ICZN (1999) Code states in article 11.6: "Publication as a synonym", that "A name which when first published in an available work was treated as a junior synonym of a name then used as valid is not thereby made available. (...) However, if such a name published as a junior synonym had been treated before 1961 as an available name and either adopted as the name of a taxon or treated as a senior homonym, it is made available thereby but dates from its first publication as a synonym (...)".

Therefore, *Testudo dussumieri* GRAY, 1831, first published in synonymy, then published as the name of a valid taxon, with reference to the first publication which includes a diagnosis, is nomenclaturally available. Obviously the diagnosis by GRAY (1831) only refers to the specimen he saw in the Leiden Museum ("v. Mus. Leyd."); however, to avoid any contestation based on a possible ambiguity, or a selection of the second specimen ("Pet. Gaz.") as "type", I here designate the Leiden specimen named by SCHLEGEL as lectotype of *Testudo dussumieri* GRAY, 1831.

### 3. Type specimen and type locality

Named in a manuscript by HERMAN SCHLEGEL, the type specimen (lectotype) of *Testudo dussumieri* is a juvenile in spirit, still in the Nationaal Natuurhistorisch Museum, Leiden collections (RMNH 3231; Fig. 3). TEMMINCK & SCHLEGEL (1835: 75) gave a short account of this specimen: "Cet établisse-

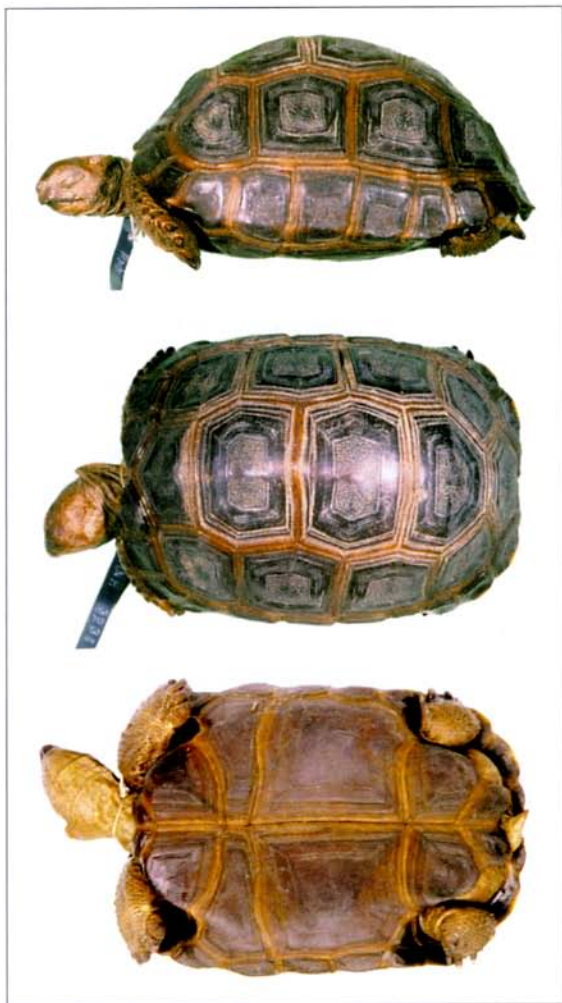


Fig. 3. Specimen RMNH 3231, lectotype of *Testudo dussumieri* SCHLEGEL. Juvenile collected on Aldabra by J.-J. DUSSUMIER.

ment a reçu du Musée de Paris un autre individu très-jeune, communiqué sous l'épithète de *Test. Dussumieri*, rapporté par le voyageur dont elle porte le nom, de l'île Aldebra [sic] située au nord du canal de Mozambique" ("This institution [Leiden Museum] received from the Paris Museum another very young specimen, communicated under the epithet of *Test. Dussumieri*, brought by the traveller whose name it bears, from Aldabra Island situated in the north of the Canal of Mozambique"). HUBRECHT (1881: 43–44) confirmed: "Finally our spirit collection contains a young specimen, which will have to be referred to *Testudo gigantea* D. & B. (...) The locality from whence the specimen was brought is sharply fixed. DUSSUMIER himself on his travels in the tropics collected it in the island of Aldabra (N.W. of Madagascar), the chief dwelling place of the closely allied *Testudo elephantina*".

Deposited in the MNHN, the tortoise was sent to the RMNH, probably as a duplicate, a common practice in the 19th century. During his travels across the Indian Ocean, DUSSUMIER called several times at the Seychelles; it is known (LAISSUS 1973, BOUR 2006) that during his 1826–1827 journey he brought back 22 reptiles in spirits and 13 living tortoises, and this is most probably the origin of the type of *Testudo dussumieri*. Data about an exchange with the Leiden Museum, or a gift from the Paris Museum could not be found, neither in Paris nor in Leiden (M. S. HOOGMOED in litt., 21 September 1984).

#### 4. Taxonomy and nomenclature

*Testudo gigantea* SCHWEIGGER, being a junior subjective synonym of *Testudo denticulata* LINNAEUS, 1766 as here demonstrated, *Testudo dussumieri* is the oldest available name for the Aldabra tortoise, and the designation of a neotype made by FRAZIER (2006), more for nomenclatural than taxonomical purposes, is now invalid. In the last twenty years a consensus appeared to recognize the generic identity of the Aldabra tortoise and its relatives. Because *Aldabrachelys* LOVERIDGE & WILLIAMS, 1957 is linked to *T. gigantea* (type species by original designation), BOUR (1982) created the name *Dipsochelys*, with *T. elephantina* DUMÉRIL & BIBRON, 1835 (a junior subjective synonym of *T. dussumieri*) as type species by original designation. BOUR (1984: 171, footnote) was probably the first to resurrect the nominal species *T. dussumieri* and to recognize its availability, adding "we consider, provisionally, this name as a «*nomen oblitum*»".

GERLACH & CANNING (1995: 133) were certainly the first to coin and use the combination *Dipsochelys dussumieri*; the main justification given was to avoid "confusion with the phenotypically similar Galápagos complex of *Chelonoidis elephantopus* (HARLAN, 1827). Since, as outlined by FRAZIER (references given), JUSTIN GERLACH regularly uses *Dipsochelys dussumieri* to name the Aldabra tortoise, I presently see no reason to not to name the Aldabra tortoise *Dipsochelys dussumieri*, especially as *Dipsochelys* is nowadays much more widely used than *Aldabrachelys*. Anyway, if further examination indicated that *T. dussumieri* is to be rejected, the next valid name for the Aldabra tortoise would be *Testudo elephantina* DUMÉRIL & BIBRON, 1835.

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