

## **Effigy Pipes from a Natchez Temple**

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[Revised September 28, 2023]

In the fall of 2015, two of us (Delpuech and Roux) were engaged in a project having two purposes. One was to document the beginnings of archeology in the French Saint-Domingue during the eighteenth century, and the other was to trace the circulation of early Caribbean artifacts in European museums (Delpuech 2015; Delpuech and Roux 2015). Research in the archives of the Musée d'art et d'archéologie du Pays de Laon, France, led to the surprising discovery of certain drawings having nothing to do with the Caribbean, but rather with the eighteenth-century Natchez of the Lower Mississippi Valley. Included within a rather heterogeneous set of documents inventoried as “Antiquities of Saint-Domingue,” assembled in the nineteenth century by the collector Etienne Midoux (1829-1890), were two manuscript drawings dating to 1735. They depict feline effigy pipes said to have been taken from a Natchez temple. Aside from the drawings themselves, their detailed captions are of considerable ethnographic and archaeological importance.

Moreover, one of the pipes depicted in these drawings exists today and is available for study. This connection was discovered by Delpuech six months after finding the Laon drawings. While searching the catalog of the Americas collection of the Musée du quai Branly – Jacques Chirac in Paris, he noticed a photograph of a feline effigy that looked much like one of the two representations from Laon. Examining the object in the museum's collections with the Laon drawing in hand unequivocally confirmed this intuition (Delpuech et al. 2019). A visit to Paris by Knight in 2016 revealed to Delpuech that Steponaitis, Knight, and Lankford were concurrently working on a study of effigy pipes from the Lower Mississippi Valley, including the same quai Branly specimen, which was photographed at that time (Steponaitis et al. 2019). The present paper is the result of a collaboration that unfolded from there.

Our purposes here are several. First, we introduce the newly discovered documents, describing what they show and what they say. Second, we analyze this information in some detail, considering how it fits with other lines of evidence. Third, we discuss the pipes in the Laon drawings from an archaeological point of view, examining their stylistic affinities and probable dates of manufacture. Finally, we discuss what new light is shed by this information on Natchez religion, and more broadly, Mississippian religion.

### **The Laon Drawings**

The first Laon document features expertly drafted, formal renderings of a feline effigy pipe in right profile and frontal views, on a page framed in red ink (Figure 1). The subject is a panther posed on a rectangular plinth, squatting on its haunches but with the upper body raised

on straightened forelimbs. The head is turned slightly to the left. A running volute, carved in relief, adorns the body and a series of small, detached trilobate elements appears on the forelimbs and hindlimbs. The pipe bowl is recessed into the panther's back, while the stem hole enters from the rear.

A small handwritten caption in red ink accompanies the profile view. It reads, in English translation, "Side view of the God **Conchideranet** drawn at the same size as this God who was made of a kind of terracotta."<sup>1</sup> A similar caption appears to the right of the frontal view, which reads "Front view of the god **Conchideranet** whose original terracotta belonging to Mr. Raudot was shown to me in 1735."<sup>2</sup> A longer caption centered beneath the side and frontal views reads "God taken from the Temple of Natchez during the War against the Indians in ..... according to Sr. Dalcourt, a Louisiana settler. This God whom they call **Conchideranet** was used by the High Priest to smoke in honor of the Sun. According to the eldest Indians the pipe is more than two centuries old."<sup>3</sup>

The second Laon document is very much like the first but depicts a separate, although similar feline effigy pipe (Figure 2). This pipe differs from the first in being a bit smaller, with the feline subject posed in a full crouch rather than reared up in front, and in lacking any relief-carved motifs on the body or limbs. In this case the frontal view is complemented by a view in left profile. The page is again bordered in red ink, and the drawings are accompanied by captions in the same handwriting as the first, this time in black ink. The three captions contain the same information as given in the first document, the only significant difference being that the name of the "god" is different: it is called **Bacondinaret**.

### Tracing the Pipes Historically

The name Raudot mentioned on the Laon drawings is quite well known. Jacques Raudot (1638-1728) was Intendant of New France from 1705 to 1711, and his son Antoine-Denis Raudot (1679-1737) was Co-Intendant with his father from 1705 to 1710. The one who possessed the pipes in 1735 must have been the latter. Upon his return from America, Antoine-Denis Raudot had been promoted to *Intendant des Classes* and held the status of Counselor at the Court of Colonial Affairs. He then became, in 1713, the first clerk of the King's house, becoming well known, like John Law, as a theoretician of the colonial economy (Horton 1969).

Having been named one of the three directors of the newly created Company of the Indies in 1717, Antoine-Denis Raudot became particularly interested in Louisiana and began correspondence with cartographers to open a route to the West. He probably did not visit the Mississippi Valley during his stay in America. However, in the years 1710-1720 he authored a series of letters regarding the culture and politics of the American Indians, regarding which he was considered an expert by his contemporaries.<sup>4</sup> In order to expand his knowledge on the subject, Raudot maintained regular correspondence with the Jesuit missionaries Pierre François-Xavier de Charlevoix (1682-1761) and Adrien Le Breton (1662-1736); their letters were often accompanied by packages containing specimens of local flora, fauna, and Native objects (Roux 2011). Presumably Intendant Raudot received the pipes discussed here similarly, from one of his correspondents.

Aside from his official duties, Raudot was a passionate collector. It was fashionable among wealthy Frenchmen of that day to maintain and display “cabinets of curiosities.” Raudot’s personal cabinet featured specimens of natural history and artifacts from America, Asia and the Near East. This was an important collection; it was at Raudot’s house that the naturalist Antoine de Jussieu (1686-1758) found material for his comparative study of fossils in 1718 (Jussieu 1723: 2).

Raudot died in 1737, only two years after the Louisiana pipes from his cabinet were drawn by the anonymous artist of the Laon documents. Much of the Raudot cabinet thence found its way into princely hands, acquired by the House of Condé at Chantilly. The natural history collections amassed by Louis IV Henri de Bourbon-Condé (1692-1740), and subsequently inherited by his son Louis V Joseph (1736-1818), were among the richest in Europe. Documents associated with this transfer to Chantilly mention sixteen boxes, two barrels, and four parquets of natural history items with an inventory including some artifacts from colonial Louisiana — but not the pipes. This collection was seized during the French Revolution in 1793 (Gersaint 1736: 31; Schnapper 1988: 301).

The Louisiana pipes appear to have escaped the transfer of Raudot’s collection to Chantilly, probably changing hands soon after 1735. They reappear in 1740 in a catalog of a public exhibition called the “Cabinet of the Spectacle of Nature and Art” (Anonymous 1740). We have been unable to pin down the origin of this cabinet or to discover the reason for its exhibition — perhaps preliminary to a sale. Nonetheless Item 81 of that exhibition clearly has our pipes. It was a bench with six carvings, including “two [...] Gods taken in the Temple of the Natchez during the War with the Indians by Sieur d’Alcourt, a Louisiana settler, one of which is called Banideranet & the other Stiariadet, which were used by the High Priest to smoke in honor of the Sun; they are, according to the report of the eldest Indians, more than twelve centuries old.”<sup>5</sup> Thus, the information repeats what is in the Laon documents with the exception of the spellings of the deity names and the inflation of two centuries to twelve — an entry seemingly miscopied.

Some years later, in 1769, a catalog was published of the cabinet of Pedro Francisco Davila. In a section of the catalog titled *Idoles des Sauvages*, we find suggestive evidence of Native objects of sculpted stone, including as entry No. 255 two “hideous human heads believed to be Idols of the Mississippi Indians” mounted on wooden pedestals. Each was made of a different stone, and the height is given as seven and one-half inches. These are not our pipes, but entry No. 257 from the same section is much less specifically “six other idols or fetishes in stone of smaller form and all different” (Davila and de L’Isle 1769: 76-77). Although there is nothing here to definitively connect the pipes to Davila’s cabinet, most of that cabinet was later acquired by Charles-Adrien Picard, and it is in Picard’s cabinet that the pipes definitely reappear.

A sales catalog published in 1779 inventoried the Picard cabinet following his death (Glomy 1779). The Louisiana pipes appear as part of Item 127, which included three Native carvings, two of which “have the figure of Lions, or Fantasy Monsters. They are Deities of Louisiana; one named Banidenaret, which means the old one; the other Stioriadet, the young one; they have an opening on the back and from behind, because they are calumets used by the High

Priest, to smoke in honor of the Sun, according to the report of M. d'Alcourt, a Louisiana settler." Here again we see new variations on the spelling of the deity names, and a bit of entirely new information. One of the pipe's names is translated as "the old one" and the other's as "the young one." According to annotated copies of this catalog held by several libraries, the three Native carvings sold for 5 livres, 15 sols.<sup>6</sup> We do not know the identity of the buyer.

That is where the trail goes cold, as the pipes then vanished from the published record, remaining invisible throughout the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth. Then, probably sometime after 1920, the pipe called Conchideranet in the Laon documents surfaced again, falling into the hands of prominent Parisian art dealer Charles Ratton (1895-1986), who specialized in collecting and selling "tribal" art. Ratton, in turn, donated this pipe to the Musée de l'Homme in 1950. It was later transferred to the Musée du quai Branly where it resides today (Figures 3-4).

The quai Branly pipe is made of limestone, not of terracotta as stated in the first Laon document. It measures 18.5 cm long and stands 15.5 cm high. The pose of this pipe is unusual in that it shows the subject rearing up on its front legs rather than in a full crouch, with the head turned slightly to one side. A unique feature of this pipe are rectangular cutouts in the sides of the plinth, two per side. Although these cutouts are shown on the Laon drawing, they do not appear to be original to the piece, as the left rear cutout interrupts the contour of the subject's foot (Figure 4, top). A paper label is affixed to the base of the piece, as is the remains of a wax seal. On this label is an apparent eighteenth-century inscription reading "*Banidéranet, Divinité de Loüisiane.*" (Figure 4, inset). This spelling of the deity's name matches that of the anonymous 1740 catalog already mentioned.

A comparison of the quai Branly pipe together with the drawings of the first Laon document verifies the precision of the drawings (see Figure 3). This fact gives us confidence to treat the drawings of the missing pipe in the second Laon document as faithful representations of the original.

Using the information from the Laon captions, let us now consider where, when, and how the pipes shown in the drawings were obtained.

### **Temples and the French Siege of 1730**

The Laon captions state that the pipes were "taken from the Temple of Natchez during the War against the Indians" with the date left blank, indicating that the author did not know it. Based on other circumstantial evidence, we can infer that the temple in question was located at the Grand Village of the Natchez (archaeologically known as the Fatherland site, near Natchez, Mississippi) and that the year was 1730. The Grand Village was the capital of the Natchez, occupied by its principal chief, called the Great Sun, and his brother the war chief, called the Tattooed Serpent. French missionaries, soldiers, and citizens of the French colony of Louisiana had settled among the Natchez Indians beginning in 1699, where they eventually established a fortified military garrison and two "concessions," which were large private plantations. There were, however, periodic conflicts between the French and the Natchez. In 1735, when the pipes were shown to the unknown artist of the Laon documents, the war of 1729-1731 was the most

recent and by far the most consequential of these conflicts (Swanton 1911; Barnett 2007). Its result was the permanent expulsion of the Natchez Indians from their homeland. Moreover, as will be seen, the French military had direct and sustained access to Natchez temples during that conflict.

The wooden temple that stood on Mound C at the Grand Village of the Natchez is well known ethnographically, as it attracted much interest by French visitors during the early eighteenth century. Swanton (1911: 158-172) has collected many of the relevant passages from eyewitness accounts, which tell unequivocally that the temple contained a sacred fire that was not allowed to go out, that it contained the bones of ancestral Natchez aristocrats, that it housed priests appointed as its guardians, and that it was frequented by the principal chiefs of the Natchez. Several narratives mention sacred objects seen within this temple. Of these, perhaps most relevant to the present work is the account of Pénicaut, who witnessed “a quantity of little stone figures enclosed in a coffer,” unfortunately undescribed (Swanton 1911: 159). This temple and its predecessors on Mound C are also well known archaeologically, having been excavated first by Moreau Chambers (Ford 1936: 59-64) and then by Robert Neitzel (1965). Admirable efforts to reconcile the ethnographic descriptions and the archaeological data have been made by Neitzel (1965) and Brown (1990).

What is not yet widely appreciated is that in the 1720s there were six mounds at the Grand Village, not merely the three that are visible today. French maps from this period show two temples, one referred to as “new” and the other as “old” or “abandoned,” situated on Mounds C and D, respectively (Brown and Steponaitis 2017).<sup>7</sup>

The war in question began when the Indians attacked and destroyed the French colony in Natchez in November of 1729. As a punitive measure, an army consisting of French soldiers and settlers, as well as their Choctaw and Tunica allies, arrived at the Grand Village in January of 1730 and laid siege to Natchez forces, who had taken up defensive positions in two nearby forts recently built west of the mound group. The French and their allies encamped on and around the mounds, and from there dug a siege trench that zig-zagged toward one of the Natchez forts. The battle ended when the Natchez escaped the siege and withdrew, leaving the Grand Village and the surrounding countryside to the French and their allies.<sup>8</sup>

During this siege, the French commandeered several mounds for various purposes (Brown and Steponaitis 2017). They built a parapet on the summit of Mound E for service as an artillery battery of two cannons, and it was from this fortified position that the siege trench was begun. Most importantly for our purposes, both the current Natchez temple on Mound C and the old, abandoned temple on Mound D were put to use by the French. The new temple on Mound C was repurposed as a command post, fortified by a parapet built around the structure. Closer to the action, the old temple on Mound D was used as a field hospital, implying that the structure, although labeled as “abandoned” in 1730, was still weathertight. Thus, the French had unfettered access to both Natchez temples during the battle, and continued to have access after the Natchez withdrew, providing ample opportunity for anything in these temples, including the pipes, to be taken as trophies of war.

## **Etienne Dalcourt**

In the Laon documents the information that the pipes were taken from the Natchez temple is attributed to “Sr. Dalcourt, a Louisiana settler.” This was undoubtedly Etienne de Lalande Dalcourt, a resident of New Orleans whose name appears frequently in documents relating to the colony of Louisiana during the early eighteenth century. New Orleans had been established in 1718 and had become capital of French Louisiana in 1722.

Dalcourt served as cashier and storekeeper-general for the Company of the Indies, the private company founded by John Law that held a monopoly on French colonial trade until 1731. Dalcourt, however, was reputed to be a rascal and was known to be heavily indebted to the Company. He was fired from his post in 1724 but continued to live in New Orleans at least into the 1740s (Giraud 1991: 9, 17, 21-23; Rowland and Sanders 1929: 263, 269, 301-302, 327-329, 460, 463, 562-563, et passim; 1932: 286, 486, et passim; Cruzat 1928: 293-294, 297).

There is no specific mention of Dalcourt in documents relating to the Natchez siege of 1730. However, he could well have served in the settler militia that fought there. If not, he certainly would have known others who did. Thus, Dalcourt was in the right place at the right time to have obtained the pipes. Attributing to him the information that the pipes came from the Natchez temple is eminently plausible.

## **How the Pipes Were Used**

A fascinating thing about the captions in the Laon documents is that they provide a description of how the pipes were used. They say that the pipes were “used by the high priest to smoke in honor of the Sun.” This description agrees with our previous interpretation of similar effigy pipes from the Lower Mississippi Valley. Such pipes are rare, showing extraordinary workmanship that suggests they were made by master carvers commissioned by religious practitioners. We have argued that the pipes were considered spiritually powerful objects used by priests who had the requisite knowledge to activate their power in a smoking ritual (Steponaitis and Dockery 2014: 36; Steponaitis et al. 2019: 20-21).

However, the accounts in the captions pose a conundrum. The Native American cosmos of the Eastern Woodlands was layered, and the Sun was the principal celestial or Above World deity (Lankford 2007a). In contrast, the pipes appear to be representations of the Underwater Panther, a major cosmic power of the Beneath World commonly depicted with an unusually long tail (Lankford 2007b). Normally, beings from these two cosmic realms were strongly opposed, and the things representing opposed realms were kept separate (Hudson 1976: 120-169). Thus, to smoke a pipe invoking a Beneath World power in honor of an Above World deity involves a religious logic that is not immediately apparent.

We can suggest at least three explanations for this apparent contradiction. First is the possibility of cultural misunderstanding. It is doubtful that a French settler who may have

witnessed such a pipe in use (or heard about it second hand) would have known the intricacies of the ritual and its meaning. Thus, the statement about the reason for smoking might well have been conjecture, based on a general sense that the Natchez worshiped the sun as a deity (Swanton 1911: 174).

A second possibility, not mutually exclusive with the first, is that “sun worship” among the Natchez was a late addition, a practice without deep roots in the Lower Mississippi Valley.<sup>9</sup> If so, then perhaps older religious practices involving Beneath World powers had been co-opted by, or combined with, the newer religious orientation to the Above World. In support of this hypothesis, it is worth noting that the religious imagery in the Lower Mississippi Valley during the centuries before French colonization was dominated by Beneath World referents (e.g., Reilly 2011; Steponaitis et al. 2019). And even after the French arrived, the Natchez temple contained a sacred fire fueled by three logs that met in the center (Swanton 1911: 160), a representation clearly akin to a triskele or trilobate, both symbols of the Beneath World.<sup>10</sup> Also kept in the Natchez temple was a wooden rattlesnake effigy, another Beneath World referent (Swanton 1911: 162). Indeed, one wonders if the French colonists’ emphasis on “sun worship” among the Natchez, and their blindness toward other aspects of Natchez belief, was caused by their own cultural biases that stemmed from having a monarch at the time known as the “Sun King” (cf. Barnett 2012: 84).

A third possibility is that the “Sun” in this context referred to a person rather than the celestial object. Those at the highest rung of the Natchez aristocracy were generally called “Suns,” and the principal chief of the nation was called the “Great Sun” (Swanton 1911: 100-108). Some French observers, like Le Page du Pratz (1758: 2: 338-351, et passim), consistently referred to this chief using the full title (*le Grand Soleil*). But others, like Charlevoix (1744: 177, 183, et passim), simply called him “the Sun” (*le Soleil*).

It is hard to know which of these possibilities is correct, so for now the matter remains unresolved.

## **The Pipes’ Names and Ages**

Another intriguing aspect of the information in the Laon documents is that they provide distinct names for the “gods” represented by the pipes. Among Native Americans of the Eastern Woodlands the Underwater Panther was the Master of the Beneath World (Lankford 2007b). As already noted, both Laon pipes appear to be representations of this deity, as do 15 other examples of the theme from this region (Steponaitis et al. 2019). It is reasonable to ask, then, why the Natchez would use two different names for the same being.

It is possible that the different names apply to different aspects or manifestations of the Underwater Panther. As Lankford (2007b: 117) notes, this major supernatural was “the leader of the various races that live in the water, or even, to use Smith’s provocative phrase, the ‘plural person’ who represents all the powers of the Beneath World.” As a plural person, the action of any of these water spirits was thus the work of the Master of the Beneath World. However, it strikes us as more likely that these names referred not to differentiated spirit beings but to the

pipes themselves, as descriptors. These were important religious objects that could well have had individual names and distinctive “life histories.” Ethnographic examples of this sort of naming are not hard to find, one being the Omaha sacred pole which was called the “Venerable Man” (Fletcher and La Flesche 1911: 223-251, Figure 51).

The names provided in the Laon documents differ somewhat in spelling from those printed in later catalogs and on the object label in the Musée du quai Branly pipe, but are generally consistent, except for the change from Conchideranet to Stiariadet that occurs for one pipe between the 1735 Laon drawing and the 1740 catalog.

	<i>Laon K4.76.9</i>	<i>Laon K4.76.6</i>
1735 drawing	Conchideranet	Bacondinaret
1740 catalog	Stiariadet	Banideranet
1779 catalog	Stioriadet	Banidenaret
Object label	—	Banideranet

We examined existing Natchez vocabularies (e.g., Haas 1956; Van Tuyl and Walker 1979) and could not find convincing matches for any of these terms. In this connection, however, one thing does stand out. The Natchez language lacks the phoneme /r/ (Brinton 1873: 486; Swanton 1924: 49), while all these name variants have it. Of course, this could have been misheard or mistranscribed, particularly because the /r/, which was rolled in French at this time, might have been used to represent a spoken /l/. Then again, the presence of this phoneme might be significant. The languages of the Muskogean family originally spoken to the east of the Mississippi River (including Choctaw and Chickasaw) also lack this phoneme. Tunica, in contrast, is one of the very few Southeastern Indian languages that has /r/ (Haas 1940, 1953; Swanton 1921: 2). Tunican languages were spoken in the Natchez nation by residents of the Tioux and Grigra towns (Swanton 1911: 9). It is conceivable, then, that the pipe names are Tunican, but again we could find no convincing matches with Tunica vocabularies. Given how little we know about Native languages and dialectical variability in the colonial-era Lower Mississippi Valley, a cautious approach to any attribution or translation is prudent (Goddard 2005).<sup>11</sup>

A final ethnographic note in the Laon captions is no less intriguing. It says, for both pipes, that “according to the eldest Indians the pipe is more than two centuries old.” In other words, the captions claim that the pipes were heirlooms passed down from another era entirely. As we will see, this statement is fully in accord with archaeological information about the age of the pipes. They were indeed fabricated centuries prior to their recovery from an eighteenth-century temple.

### **Reliability of the Ethnographic Information**

The specificity of the information in the Laon documents implies a missing document, perhaps originally a letter accompanying the delivery of the pipes to Raudot. If information copied from this missing document accompanied the pipes as they changed hands in the eighteenth century, this might explain the emergence of additional information in a later source,



the 1779 catalog. But the existence of such a missing document raises the question of how the information was originally obtained.

The only source named in the Laon documents is Dalcourt. Although Etienne Dalcourt may have participated in the French siege of 1730, the circumstances of that conflict surely would have denied him any opportunity to personally interview a Natchez informant. Moreover, the kind of information included in the Laon documents — the names of deities, the manner in which priests smoked the pipes, and the pipes' age — sounds like the kind of “insider” information which could have been known only to someone intimately familiar with the Natchez, someone who knew Natchez language and culture far better than Dalcourt. Perhaps the ethnographic and linguistic information in these documents came indirectly from someone like Le Page du Pratz or Dumont de Montigny, both of whom had spent years among the Natchez and later resided in New Orleans (Sayre 2002). Another possible source was one of the enslaved Natchez women who are known to have lived in New Orleans in the 1730s (Sayre 2009: 430-431; also see Hall n.d.; Lauber 1913: 63-102; Lee 1989).

Given the uncertainty surrounding the ultimate source or sources of the information, knowing that it must have been obtained indirectly, and given the cultural barriers involved in transmitting this knowledge, we are obliged to view the testimony in these documents with an abundance of caution. That said, we also note that nothing in these documents is implausible, and the parts we can check are consistent with other lines of evidence. Thus, the testimony should not be rejected out of hand.

We move now to consider the Laon pipes from an archaeological point of view.

### **The Pipes and the Bellaire Style**

Both pipes from the Laon drawings are good examples of the Bellaire style originally defined by Brain and Phillips (1996: 384-388) and subsequently refined by Steponaitis et al. (2019). Bellaire was the predominant style of effigy pipes made in the Lower Mississippi Valley during the centuries preceding European arrival, from ca. AD 1100 to 1500. Bellaire-style pipes in general depict several anthropomorphic and zoomorphic subjects, or “themes,” and Laon pipes both exhibit the most common one, the panther.

Steponaitis et al. (2019) define a chronological sequence of two substyles of Bellaire, called Bellaire A and Bellaire B. The first Laon pipe, now at the Musée du quai Branly, possesses rounded features and open carving, with spaces between the legs and between the belly and the plinth. These are characteristics of Bellaire A. However, the relief-carved running volutes and trilobate elements are features of Bellaire B. Thus, the pipe appears to be a transitional piece, falling near the boundary between the two substyles.

The second Laon pipe, for which we have only the drawing, is a classic example of Bellaire A carving. Its compositional features are extraordinarily close to two other well-known pipes showing the same subject: one from the Bellaire site in Arkansas (from which the style takes its name; Lemley and Dickinson 1964: Fig. 2) and the other from the Moundville site in Alabama (Moore 1905: Figs. 2-3). Like the quai Branly pipe, both the Arkansas and the Alabama

pipes are made of limestone. It is very likely that pipe illustrated in the second Laon document was made of limestone as well.

The Laon pipes are not the only two Bellaire-style panther effigy pipes attributed to the Grand Village of the Natchez. A fragment of a third pipe, executed in the Bellaire B substyle with a running volute carved in relief on the flank, was found at the Grand Village in the nineteenth century and is now part of the Butler collection at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History (Steponaitis et al. 2019: Fig. 2i). It is also made of limestone.

### **Archaeological Age of the Pipes and the Question of Heirloom**

Based on the archaeological contexts in which examples have been found, the Bellaire style as a whole spans the four centuries from AD 1100 to 1500, falling within the Mississippian period in eastern North America. It is therefore immediately apparent that the statement from the Laon documents that the pipes are two centuries old is correct. In fact, they are older than that. If the pipes were used in some manner from the time of their manufacture until the time of their recovery, they are excellent examples of heirlooms. James A. Brown (2007) has argued that Mississippian ritual objects were often curated for centuries. In the present case, the ethnohistoric and the archaeological information converge nicely to affirm that the Laon pipes, in the hands of the eighteenth-century Natchez, were indeed heirlooms of long standing when still in use at the temple.

Let us take a closer look at the question of archaeological age. We have published estimated ages of manufacture for the two Bellaire substyles as follows: AD 1100-1350 for Bellaire A, and AD 1300-1500 for Bellaire B (Steponaitis et al. 2019: 13-15). Recalling that the first Laon pipe, the Musée du quai Branly specimen, is stylistically transitional between the two substyles, our estimates would place this pipe's manufacture in the first half of the fourteenth century, ca. AD 1300-1350. The second Laon pipe is a classic example of Bellaire A, for which the age of manufacture, according to our estimates, would fall mostly within the twelfth and thirteen centuries, ca. AD 1100-1350. Thus, purely on archaeological grounds, we would argue that the second pipe is older than the first. This fact happens to match the purported, but still unsubstantiated translations of the pipes' names in the 1779 catalog of the Picard cabinet as "old one" (for the second) and "young one" (for the first). If such names reflected some distant cultural memory, they would be not only correct but would tend to confirm the idea that the names of the pipes were descriptors of the objects rather than deity names. Even so, for reasons already stated we can place no great confidence in these translations.

### **Conclusions**

To summarize our findings, due to a fortuitous and surprising discovery we now have historical evidence that in 1730, the temple(s) of the Natchez contained two effigy pipes. These pipes were taken during the war between the French and the Natchez of that year, and were shortly thereafter conveyed to France, where they found a place in the private natural history cabinet of a high-ranking French official, Antoine-Denis Raudot. Accompanying the objects was

ethnographic information concerning the Native names of the pipes, their stated age and use, as well as the identity of the Louisiana resident who supplied the information, a resident of New Orleans known to have worked for the Company of the Indies.

The subsequent history of the pipes in France can be partially traced, as the pipes entered at least two subsequent private natural history cabinets in the eighteenth century. One of the two pipes surfaced in the early twentieth century, when it was purchased by a prominent Parisian dealer in tribal arts, who subsequently donated it to the Musée de L'Homme in Paris, as a result of which the physical specimen is available for study today.

Accurate drawings by an unknown artist were made of both pipes in 1735, while they were still in Raudot's cabinet. Ethnographic testimony included in the captions to these drawings, while difficult to fully trust, is consistent with archaeological evidence regarding carved effigy pipes of the Mississippian period from the Lower Mississippi Valley. The evidence from the Laon documents suggests primarily three things. First, that the pipes were smoked by priests in religious ceremonies. Second, that they were individually named, and likely had known "life-histories." And third, that they were heirloomed objects at least two centuries old and, given the archaeological information, likely even older.

The Laon drawings add to the known corpus of Bellaire style effigy pipes from the Lower Mississippi Valley (Steponaitis et al. 2019), a corpus for which much is known independently. The findings also add texture to our understanding of religious practices among the Natchez in particular, and among Mississippian peoples generally. Such new revelations illustrate the fact that in France today resides a great deal of information yet to be revealed, in the form of documents and artifacts, relating to the Native American ethnology and archaeology of former French colonies.

## Acknowledgments

We thank Ives Goddard, Geoffrey D. Kimball, Judith M. Maxwell, and Jack B. Martin for generously sharing their linguistic expertise.

## References Cited

Anonymous

1730 *Plans des deux forts des Natchez assiégés au mois de février 1730 par les Français Tchactas Tonicas Colapissas et Oumas[.] La présente carte levée sur les lieux à l'Estime[.] faite et dessinée a la N.lle Orleans Le six avril mil sept cent trente.* Manuscript map. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Estampes, Vd 21 (3) Fol. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b78835725>

Anonymous

1740 *Catalogue des diverses curiositez et raretez, qui sont contenuës dans le cabinet du spectacle de la nature & de l'art, qui est exposé aux yeux du public dans le carrefour de l'Ecole,*

*vis-à-vis la ruë des Prêtres, tous les jours depuis deux heures de relevée jusqu'à sept heures.*  
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*armes anciennes, et des sauvages; vases d'agate d'Orient, d'Allemagne, & de jade, travaillés aux Indes. Quelques tableaux, dessins & estampes. Différents morceaux d'histoire naturelle des trois regnes, mineral, végétal & animal; et autres curiosités composant le Cabinet de feu M. Picard.* Mérigot, Paris.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> “Vue de Coté du Dieu **Conchideranet** dapres et de la meme grandeur que ce Dieu qui etoit d’une espece de terre cuite.”

<sup>2</sup> “Vue de face du Dieu **Conchideranet** dont l’original en terre cuite qui appartient à Mr Raudot m’a été communiqué en 1735.”

<sup>3</sup> “Dieu pris dans le Temple des Natchez lors de la Guerre contre ces Sauvages en ..... parle Sr. Dalcourt habitant de la Louisiane. Ce Dieu qu’ils appellent **Conchideranet** servoit au Grand Prêtre a fumer a l’honneur du soleil. Il a suivant le rapport des plus vieux Sauvages plus de deux Siecles.”

<sup>4</sup> A selection of these letters was first published in French by Pierre Margry (1886: 7-16), and the complete set by Camille de Rochemonteix (1904). Vernon Kinietz (1940: 335-336, 339-410) translated some of these letters into English, and Ivy Dickson (1980) later translated Rochemonteix’s work in full. Because the manuscript copies in which these letters survived were unsigned, confusion has arisen over their authorship. Margry and Kinietz believed the letters were written by Antoine-Denis Raudot. Rochemonteix, on the other hand, believed the author was Father Antoine Silvy, a Jesuit priest who was Raudot’s contemporary. Dickson adopted the Silvy attribution in her translation. In the view of most scholars today, the matter was long ago settled by Jean Delanglez, who argued persuasively that Raudot was the true author (Delanglez 1939: 65, note 44; 1944: 185-186, note 72).

<sup>5</sup> “deux autres Dieux pris dans le Temple des Natchés lors de la Guerre avec les Sauvages, par le Sieur d’Alcourt, Habitant de la Louisiane, lesquels s’appelloient l’un **Banideranet**, & l’autre **Stiariadet**, qui servoient au Grand Prêtre à fumer à l’honneur du Soleil ; ils ont, suivant le rapport des plus anciens Sauvages, plus de douze siècles.”

<sup>6</sup> Annotated copies of the Glomy catalog are held at the Institut national d'histoire de l'art in Paris (<https://bibliotheque-numerique.inha.fr/idviewer/19305/32>) and the Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg (<https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/glomy1779/0065/image>).

<sup>7</sup> We should mention that in addition to the two temples at the Grand Village, individual outlying Natchez towns had their own temples in the early eighteenth century (Le Page du Pratz 1758: 3: 57; Swanton 1911: 336). Aside from their existence, little is known about these. As the Laon documents specify that the pipes came from “*the* temple of the Natchez” (emphasis ours), it is unlikely that one of these ancillary temples was their source.

<sup>8</sup> Three prior French actions against the Natchez have been called “wars.” The first, in 1716, began with the murder of four Canadian traders and was blamed on the rebelliousness of several Natchez town chiefs. A meeting with the chiefs resulted in the execution of two of the offending ones. The second, in 1722, resulted from the murder of an aged Natchez town chief by a rash French soldier. In retribution, three insurgent Natchez town chiefs burned both French concessions located in the Natchez country. A French military expedition was sent, but was met

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by the Natchez war chief who negotiated a peace. The third, in 1723, was incited by the poaching of French cattle by certain Natchez towns. A punitive French military expedition was sent, which burned three of the offending towns, and the Natchez war chief delivered the head of one of the belligerent chiefs (Swanton 1911: 193-204, 207-217). These actions transpired at scenes located some distance from the Grand Village, principally involving towns and chiefs said to be allied with the English. None of these “wars” are likely candidates for the one mentioned in the Laon documents. Delpuech et al. (2019: 171) also raise the possibility that the pipes were taken in another siege that took place a year later, in January of 1731, when the French attacked a Natchez town near modern Sicily Island, Louisiana. They consider this possibility to be unlikely and we agree, as no temple was mentioned in the contemporary accounts or shown on the maps that were drawn of the 1731 battle (Green 1936; Steponaitis and Prickett 2017).

<sup>9</sup> This view has long been held by our colleague, the ethnohistorian George Lankford (personal communication).

<sup>10</sup> Charlevoix’s description of the arrangement of the logs that burned in the Natchez sacred fire is ambiguous, but we can reasonably infer that it was like that among the Creeks, whose sacred fires had logs that met in the middle and were equally spaced in radial fashion. The Creek fires, with four logs, have long been interpreted as representing a cross, a center symbol associated with the Middle World (Waring 1968: 33-35; Lankford 2007a). By the same reasoning the Natchez fire, with three logs, would represent either a triskele, a center symbol associated with the Beneath World (Lankford 2011), or a trilobate, a Beneath World symbol associated with snakes and Underwater Panthers (Phillips and Brown 1974: 156, Figure 267) — including the quai Branly pipe discussed here. The original description published by Charlevoix (1744: 173) reads as follows: “Trois pièces de bois, qui le joignent par les bouts, & qui font placées en triangle, ou plutôt également écartées les unes des autres, occupent presque tout le milieu du Temple, & brûlent lentement.” The clearest English translation appears in Kellogg (1923: 2: 240): “Three pieces of wood, joined at the extremity, and placed in a triangle, or rather at an equal distance from one another, take up almost the whole middle space of the temple, and burn slowly away.”

<sup>11</sup> In trying to address this problem, we reached out to four linguists with expertise in the Indigenous languages of the American South: Ives Goddard, Geoffrey Kimball, Jack Martin, and Judith Maxwell. They generally confirmed the lack of obvious translations. Maxwell added that the names, if accurately transcribed, are unlikely to be Tunican, in that Tunica words lack voiced stops, such as /d/ and /b/, which appear in both names. Kimball suggested that Stiaridat or Storiadet, if authentic, is likely missing an initial syllable, as initial consonant clusters are rare in Southern Indian languages. Goddard stressed that any attempt to retrospectively etymologize these names would be unwise, given the degree of phonological uncertainty.

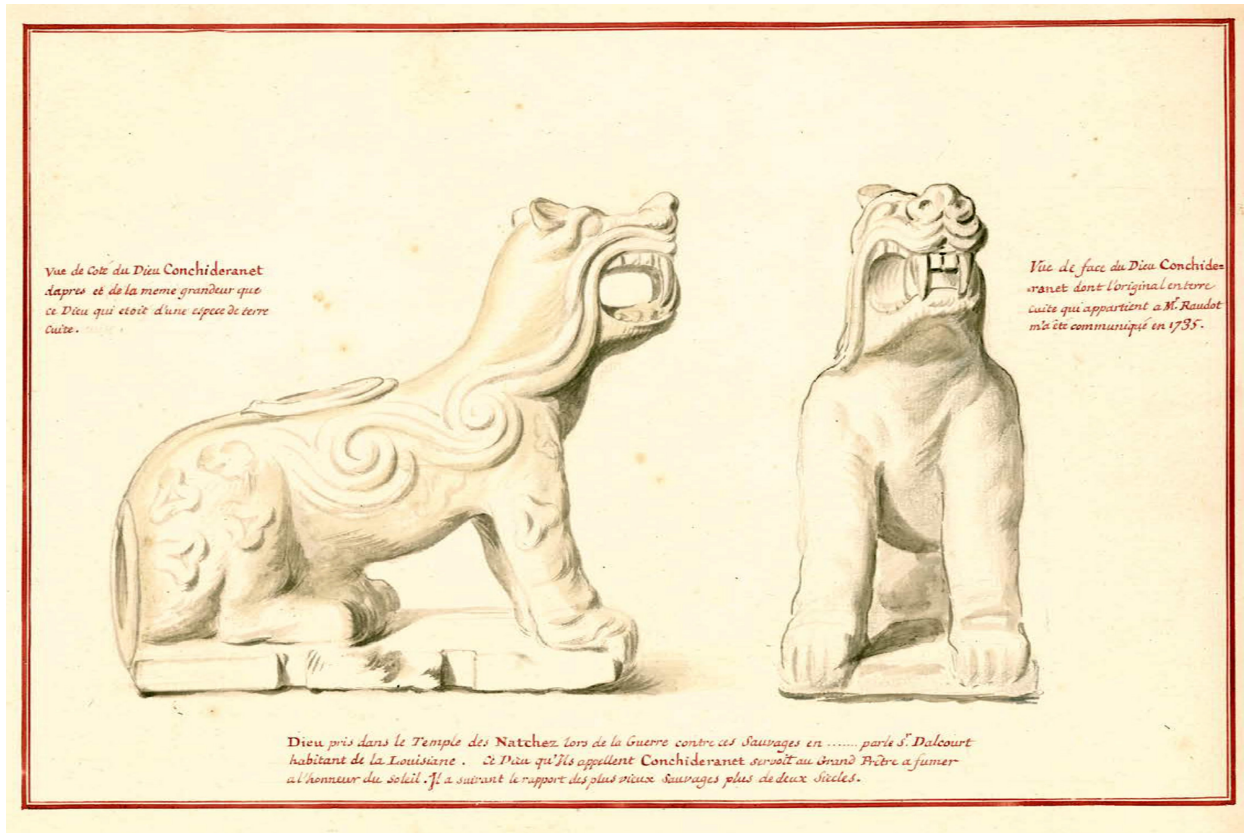


Figure 1. The first Laon document (musée Laon, K4.76.6).



Figure 2. The second Laon document (musée Laon, K4.76.9).



Figure 3. Comparison of the pipe in the first Laon document (top) with the quai Branly pipe (bottom) (Musée du quai Branly – Jacques Chirac, 71.1950.88.1).



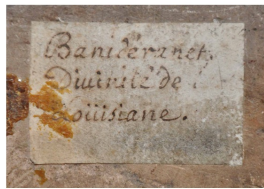


Figure 4. Additional views of the quai Branly pipe (Musée du quai Branly – Jacques Chirac, 71.1950.88.1). Inset shows the paper label on the base of the pipe with an inscription, likely dating to the eighteenth century, that reads “Banidérinet, Divinité de Louïsiane.”