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DRAWINGS BY A. DEBATZ IN LOUISIANA,
1732-1735

(WITH SIX PLATES)

BY

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DRAWINGS BY A. DeBATZ IN LOUISIANA, 1732-1735

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(WITH SIX PLATES)

A. DeBatz, by whom the drawings were made, appears to have been an architect or engineer and he may have been connected with the military forces of France then stationed in Louisiana. The time of his arrival in Louisiana is not known, nor has it been ascertained when, if ever, he returned to France. But a document recently discovered in New Orleans may reveal the location of his earlier home, before he came to America. This is a marriage contract, dated New Orleans, October 27, 1736. It is written in French but the first part, translated, reads: "There were present in their own persons sieur Adrien de Bat called Ricard a master mason of New Orleans, son of Sieur Alexander de Bat and Jeanne Ricarde the wife and mother. Native of Montaterre in Picardy, diocese of Beauvais, party of the first part. . . ." (Numbered 6199.)

Alexander de Bat, the father, mentioned in the contract, is believed to have been the author of the sketches. The spelling of the name differs but that is of little importance. Consequently it may be assumed he migrated from Montaterre in Picardy to Louisiana, and that he arrived soon after the settlement of New Orleans. Dates and legends attached to drawings and documents make it possible to trace his movements during a brief period. Thus he was at the Acolapissa village, on the Mississippi above New Orleans, April 15, 1732; in the Natchez country May 13, 1732; in New Orleans June 22 and July 29, 1732; in New Orleans January 24 and April 30, 1735; in Mobile September 7, 1737.

In addition to the drawings belonging to this collection, five documents bearing the signature of DeBatz are known. These are:

Plan of a church in New Orleans. Original drawing is now in the National Archives, Paris. Dated New Orleans, July 29, 1732.

Petition to sell a piece of land in New Orleans. Original now in the Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans. Dated New Orleans, January 24, 1735. (Numbered 5202.)

Marriage contract witnessed by DeBatz. Original now in the Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans. Dated New Orleans, April 30, 1735. (Numbered 5294.)

Two maps, redrawn by DeBatz from sketches by Indians, were reproduced in *Journal de la Société des Américanistes de Paris*, Nouvelle Serie, Tome XIII, Fasc. 1. Paris, 1921. The two drawings by DeBatz are now in the National Archives, Paris. Dated Mobile, September 7, 1737.

His name has not been discovered in any of the numerous manuscripts relating to the troubles with the Natchez, Chickasaw, or other tribes with whom the French came in contact during the years mentioned. The few drawings known to exist prove him to have been a careful observer and to have been interested in the manners and customs of the Indians. His sketches are crude but graphic. The drawings now reproduced for the first time are the earliest known to have been made in Lower Louisiana, and they are likewise believed to be the oldest pictures existing of members of the Acolapissa, Atakapa, Choctaw, Fox, Illinois, and Tunica tribes.

The paper has turned yellow with age but the colors remain clear and bright, and many details are shown with great exactness, some of which, unfortunately, are lost in the photographs.

The work of DeBatz in the lower Mississippi Valley compares with that of Jacques Lemoyne de Morgues in Florida, and of John White in Virginia, during the latter part of the 16th century. And although the drawings were made by DeBatz at a much later day, the natives with whom he came in contact were no less primitive in their manners and ways of life; consequently the three groups of pictures are of equal interest and importance. The six pictures now reproduced are in the private collection of the author.

*Suppliee le sieur Debats escripteur
 qu'il vous plait de lui par votre de
 vendre un terrain n. 126. situe en
 cette ville qui a cy devers acquis du
 nommé fillas habitant en cette ville
 les formaltes et fees J. L. L.*

*Pour le paiement
 obtenu les formaltes
 requises le 28 Janvier 1735*

J. L. L.

DeBatz

Petition (5202) dated Jan. 24, 1735. Signed DeBatz.

1

TEMPLE, AND CABIN OF THE CHIEF. ACOLAPISSA. 1732

Two centuries and more ago, when the French entered Lower Louisiana, many tribes occupied the region near or bordering the Mississippi. The scattered native villages differed in size and importance but may not have varied greatly in general appearance. One custom was followed in common for as DuPratz then wrote: "All the people of Louisiana have temples, which are more or less well cared for according to the ability of the nation." Some were quite simple in form and resembled the habitations in the nearby or surrounding villages, others were more elaborate and of greater size, and such was the temple which stood in the village of the Acolapissa during the spring of 1732. This settlement was probably a short distance up the Mississippi from the site of the earlier village of the same tribe which was visited by Charlevoix just 10 years before when he described it as "the finest in all Louisiana." Three carved and painted figures of birds, probably quite similar to those so clearly shown in the sketch of the Acolapissa temple, are mentioned as having surmounted like structures which had formerly stood in the villages of the Taensa and Natchez. These and other temples in Lower Louisiana served as burial places for the chiefs of the tribes.

The cabin of the Acolapissa chief, as given in the sketch, was probably a typical habitation of the region and time, but among some tribes rectangular cabins were also erected.

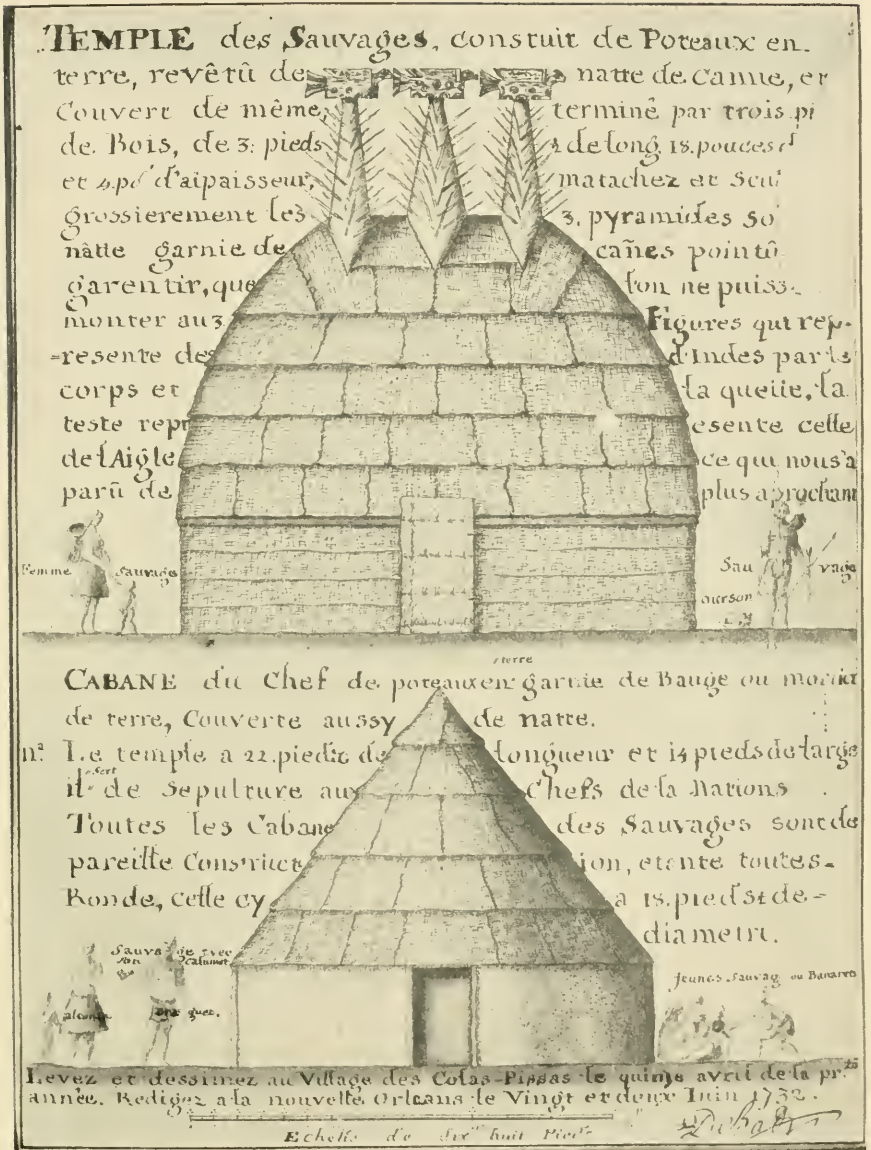
Temple of the Savages, constructed of posts in the ground, covered with mats of cane, and roofed with same, ending in three [stakes] of Wood, $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet long, 18 inches [wide] and 4 inches thick, crudely colored and [sculptured]. The 3 pyramids [are of] reedwork trimmed with pointed canes [to] prevent one climbing to the 3 figures, the body and tail of which represent turkeys and the head that of the eagle, which seemed to us the most like it.

Cabin of the Chief, of posts in the ground plastered with clay or earth mortar, also covered with mats.

ⁿ³ The temple is 22 feet long and 14 feet wide; it serves as the sepulcher for the chiefs of the nation.

All the Cabins of the savages are of similar construction, all being round, this one is 18 feet in diameter.

Surveyed and sketched at the Village of the Acolapissa the fifteenth of April of the present year. Redrawn at New Orleans the twenty-second of June 1732. DeBatz.



Size 12 $\frac{1}{2}$ by 9 inches

2

BUFFALO TAMER, CHIEF OF THE TUNICA. 1732

The spring of 1731 found the Natchez scattered and wandering as a result of the destruction of their villages during the wars of the preceding years. Soon they appealed to the French for a pardon, and asked that they might settle near the Tunica; permission was granted them to erect a village not less than two leagues from that of the Tunica, but they were to come unarmed. Later a large number of Natchez arrived at the Tunica village where they were received and given food, and Charlevoix related how the Tunica and their new guests "danced till after midnight, after which the Tunica retired to their cabins, thinking that of course the Natchez would also go to rest. But soon after—that is to say, one hour before day, for it was the 14th day of June [1731]—the Natchez . . . fell upon all the cabins and slaughtered all whom they surprised asleep. The head chief ran up at the noise and first killed four Natchez; but, overborne by numbers, he was slain with some twelve of his warriors. His war chief, undismayed by this loss or the flight of most of his braves, rallied a dozen, with whom he regained the head chief's cabin; he even succeeded in recalling the rest, and after fighting for five days and nights almost without intermission remained master of his village." The name of the Tunica chief killed in this encounter and whose wife and child escaped was Cahura-Joligo, and evidently Bridelles Boeuf, or Buffalo Tamer, was his successor. Buffalo Tamer may have been the war chief mentioned by Charlevoix.

Savage adorned as a Warrior, having taken three scalps, that is to say having killed three Natchez men. *A.* Buffalo Tamer Chief of the Tunica, he takes the place of his predecessor whom the Natchez killed in the month of June last. *B.* Woman chief widow of the defunct. *E.* Jacob son of the defunct. *H.* Scalps ornamenting the staff likewise drawn from nature on the spot. Redrawn at New Orleans the 22 June 1732. DeBatz.



Size 12 $\frac{1}{2}$ by 9 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches

3

TREE NEAR SITE OF THE NATCHEZ TEMPLE. 1732

This tree, considered a great rarity by the French and evidently regarded with awe by the Natchez who "held it in great veneration," is believed to have been an Osage orange, *Toxylon pomiferum*.

The tree probably stood near the temple and not far from the Village of Valleur, therefore in the immediate vicinity of the severe fighting between the French and Natchez during the latter part of February, 1730. The French were intrenched near or surrounding the temple while the Natchez held the village, having constructed what the French termed Fort de la Valeur. The great Natchez temple was destroyed at that time, on or about February 23, 1730.

Unknown Tree. This Tree is now standing among the Natchez. The Savages preserved it and held it in great Veneration, taking from it some branches or twigs to cast into the Sacred fire which they maintained perpetually in their Temple which was built near the said Tree. The French burned and destroyed this Temple in February 1730. According to the report of the most ancient of this Colony this Tree is the unique and only one in this Province. *A.* Branch covered with these Leaves of the natural size and Color. *B.* Flower of pale White color. *C.* The starting point of the leaf, a scar remains when the leaf falls, which forms a Bud and it may be seen how many leaves it produced.

The Tree is always Green.

Sketched from nature at the village of Valleur the 13 of May later Redrawn at New Orleans the 22 June 1732. DeBatz.

25 feet high.

ARBRE inconnu. Cet Arbre est actuellement sur pied aux Natchez, Les Sauvages le Conservoient et le tenoient en grande Veneration, en prenoient quelque Branches ou Rameaux, pour mettre dans le feu Sacré, qu'ils entretenoient perpetuellement dans leur Temple, qui étoit Construit proche ledit Arbre, les Francois Brulerent & détruirent ce Temple en fevrier 1730. Suivant le Rapport des plus anciens de cette Colonie, Cét Arbre est le

Seul et unique de cette Province. Les Branches garnies de ces Feuilles de grandeur et Couleur naturelle, ressemblent à la fleur d'une couleur blanche et pâle. La fleur à sa naissance; il reste une queue qui tombe qui forme un bouton et son pédoncule. Combien il a près de feuilles.



L'arbre est à la Nouvelle Orléans, au Village des Natchez le 13. may l'année de l'année 1732. Le dessin est de M. de la Roche.

Size 12½ by 9½ inches

4

ILLINOIS, FOX, AND ATAKAPA. 1735

During the year 1735 the French took many Illinois Indians to Lower Louisiana, probably to New Orleans, to assist in the war against the Chickasaw. From the interesting drawing made at that time it is evident that not only warriors but women and children made the long journey down the Mississippi. In the sketch the chief, on the extreme left, is shown with his right hand resting on the head of a Whooping Crane, *Grus americana*, which may indicate that the bird had been domesticated. This would agree with a statement by Lawson, who, when referring to the Congaree of North Carolina, wrote: "they take storks and cranes before they can fly and breed them as tame and familiar as dung-hill fowls."

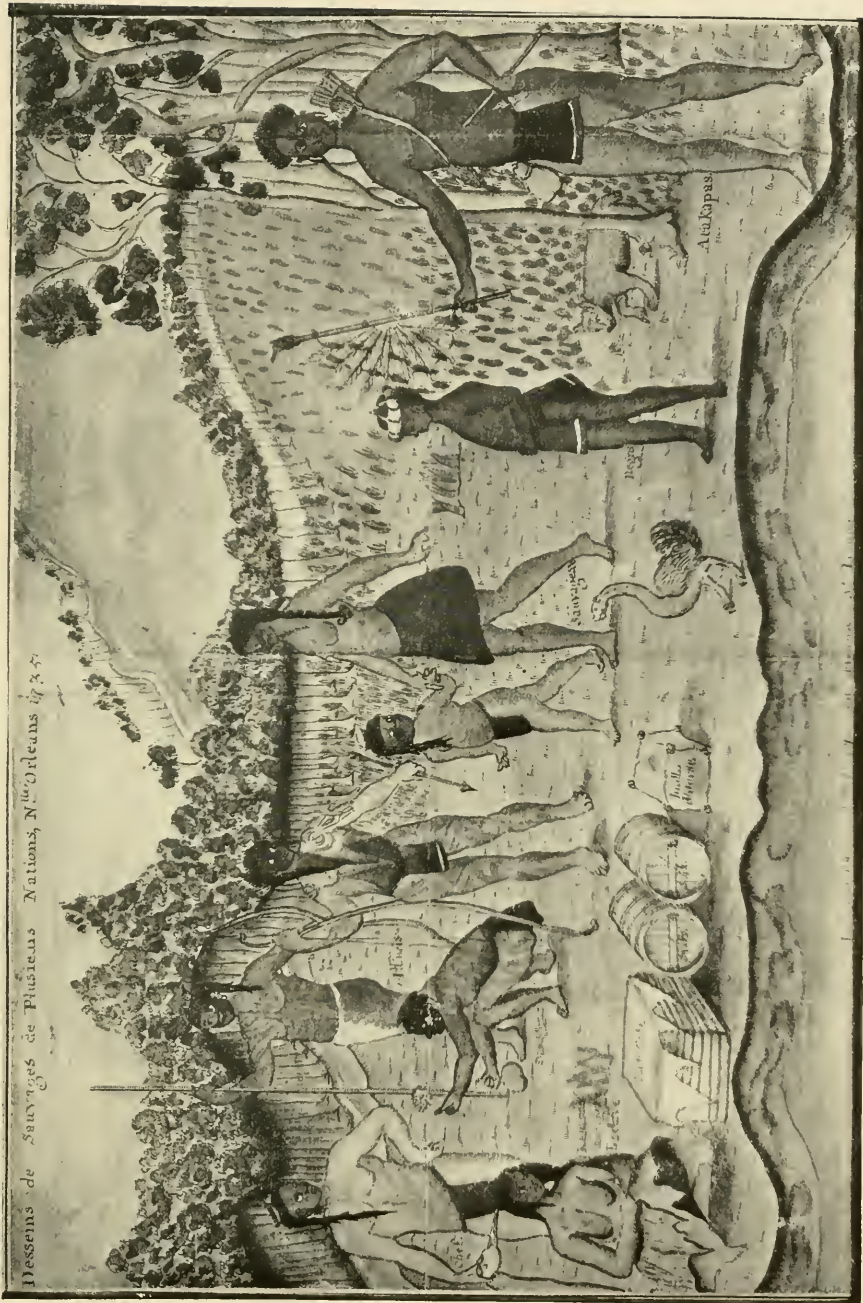
The Fox woman was evidently a captive taken by the Illinois in their then recent war with that tribe.

The Atakapa is represented holding a calumet in his right hand and a small pipe in the left, with a quiver filled with arrows on his back, but no bow.

The sketch was probably intended to represent the bank of the Mississippi, and at the bottom appears the words: "Balbahachas. Missysipy ou fleuve St. Louis." DuPratz described the Mississippi and mentioned the various names by which it was then known, and continued: "Other *Indians*, especially those lower down the river, call it *Balbancha*; and at last the *French* have given it the name of *St. Louis*."

Drawing of Savages of Several Nations, New Orleans. 1735

Balbahachas. Mississippi or River St. Louis.



Size 11 1/2 by 17 1/2 inches

5

CHOCTAW WARRIORS, NATCHEZ CHIEF

The massacre of the French by the Natchez occurred late in the year 1729. A large number of Choctaw warriors soon joined the remaining French and late in January, 1730, Le Sueur reached the scene of devastation accompanied by a force of many hundred Choctaw. The warriors sketched by DeBatz may have been some of that wild group.

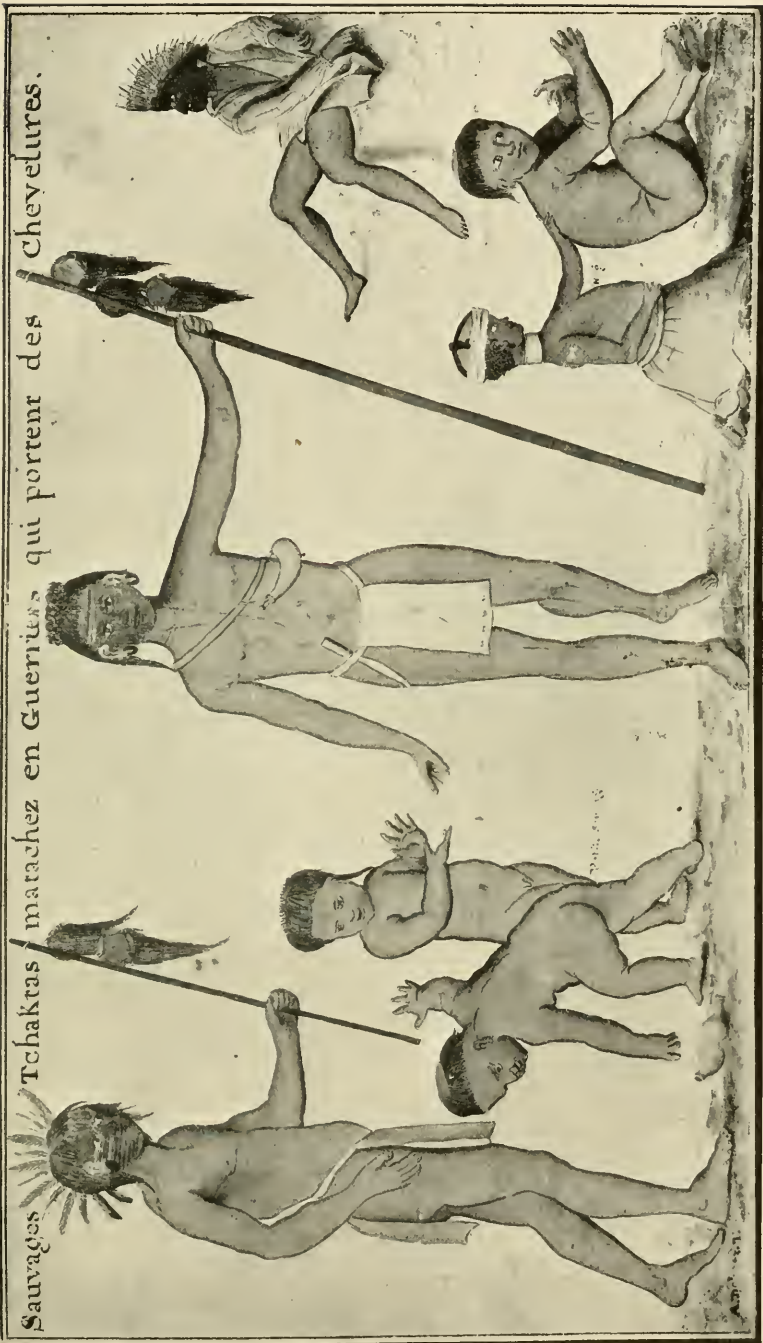
Two young children are shown playing a game.

The seated figure, on the right, evidently represents a Natchez chief, wearing a crown of feathers as described by DuPratz. Early in the spring of 1725 the great Natchez chief Stung Serpent died at the principal Natchez village. When prepared for burial the body was viewed by French officers. DuPratz then wrote: "we found him on his bed of state, dressed in his finest cloaths, his face painted with vermilion, shod as if for a journey, with his feather-crown on his head." And when describing the dress of the Natchez he again mentioned the feather-crown in these words: "The chief ornament of the sovereigns is their crown of feathers; this crown is composed of a black bonnet of net work, which is fastened to a red diadem about two inches broad. The diadem is embroidered with white kernel-stones, and surmounted with white feathers, which in the forepart are about eight inches long, and half as much behind. This crown or feather hat makes a very pleasing appearance."

Choctaw Savages painted as Warriors, carrying Scalps.

A. Debatz. T.

Sauvages Tchaktas / matachez en Guerriers qui portent des Chevelures.



Size 81 by 143 inches

6

WINTER COSTUME

Buffalo skins, dressed so as to allow them to become soft and pliable and without removing the hair, were used by the Indians throughout the Mississippi Valley to protect them from the cold of winter. Such robes were often decorated on the inner side by designs painted in several colors. This sketch shows a robe decorated with a simple design in red and black.

The drawing has not been identified but is believed to have been made to represent an Indian belonging to one of the tribes living at that time in the vicinity of New Orleans. The figure suggests the sketch of the "Atakapas" shown in Plate 4, and it may have been intended to portray one of that tribe in winter dress.

A Savage in winter dress.



Sauvage En habit d'hiver.

Size 9½ by 4½ inches