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et noir*

# LOUIS NICOLAS

## Life & Work

By François-Marc Gagnon

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# LOUIS NICOLAS

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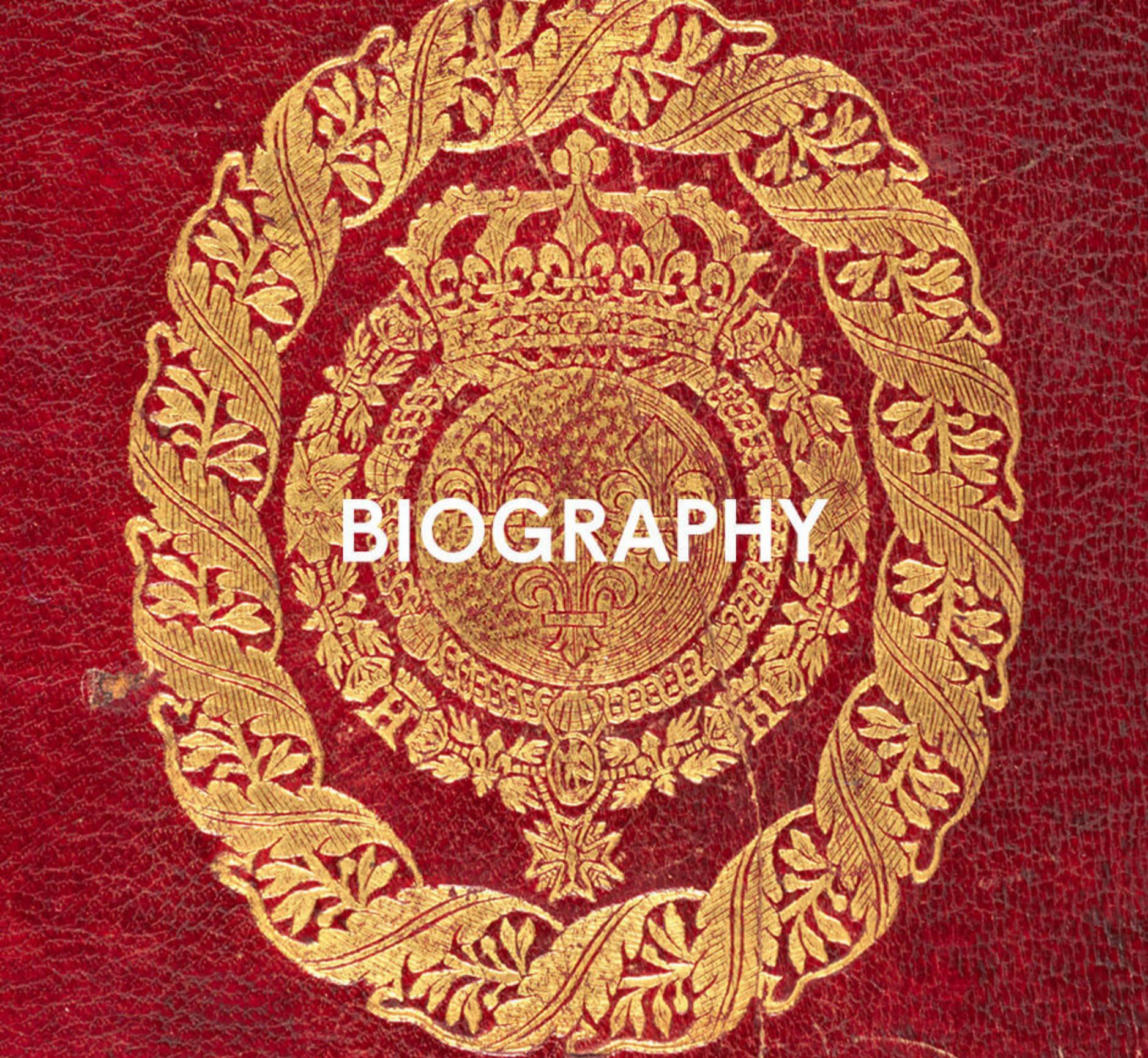
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# BIOGRAPHY

Louis Nicolas (1634–post-1700), who spent eleven years in New France as a Jesuit missionary, created an illustrated manuscript now known as the *Codex Canadensis*—one of the treasures of early colonial art from the region. An intrepid traveller and talented linguist, Nicolas was fascinated by the natural history and ethnography he encountered during his missionary work. His drawings of the local plants, animals, and Indigenous peoples stand out because, in subject and style, they are very different from the official portraits and religious scenes that dominated art of this period.

### THE MAKING OF A MISSIONARY

Louis Nicolas<sup>1</sup> was born in the Ardèche region of France, in Aubenas, on August 15, 1634,<sup>2</sup> and baptized on September 4.<sup>3</sup> Little is known about his life before he entered the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits) on September 16, 1654, in Toulouse, a few months after his mother's death. As a boy, he may well have attended one of the free schools established by the Jesuits across France to educate poor but motivated boys. After becoming a novice Jesuit himself, for a decade he followed the standard curriculum focused on grammar (language, written and oral) and philosophy (drawn from Aristotle as interpreted by Saint Thomas Aquinas rather than the more contemporary scientific discoveries of Francis Bacon and René Descartes).<sup>4</sup> During that time he also taught grammar for four years (1656-60) in Saint-Flour and for one year in Le Puy-en-Velay (1661) before studying philosophy in Tournon-sur-Rhône from 1661 to 1663, at the school founded by François de Tournon (pictured here).



LEFT: The Jesuit College at Tournon-sur-Rhône, Imprimeries Réunies de Nancy, collection of J. Malet. RIGHT: Giovanni Capassini, *Portrait of Cardinal de Tournon (Portrait du cardinal de Tournon)*, c. sixteenth century, oil on wood, 18.1 x 14.2 cm, private collection, Avignon.

There is no information that Nicolas received any instruction in art. Perhaps he developed a natural talent, which would explain the naïve style of his drawings. For one example, see *The Small Owl (La petite chouette)*, n.d., on page 51 of his illustrated manuscript, the *Codex Canadensis*.<sup>5</sup> Nicolas's intention was less artistic than scientific, and it's fair to compare his sketches to those by other naturalists before him, Conrad Gessner (1516-1565), for example. Considered a naturalist, Nicolas stands out for the information he conveyed through his drawings and his writings.

The Jesuits were a Catholic religious order opposed to reform in Europe, supportive of the Pope, and interested in education. Ambitious to convert the whole world to Catholicism, they established a missionary wing that, in the seventeenth century, operated in China and Brazil as well as North America. A few of their missionaries in China—men such as Matteo Ricci, Johann Adam Schall von Bell, and Ferdinand Verbiest—caused great excitement when they used their knowledge of astronomy to predict the eclipses of the sun and moon. But their efforts were mostly directed at converting the people they worked among, and so the Jesuit missionaries tried to learn the local languages and to understand the customs of the people.



LEFT: *The Small Owl (La petite chouette)*, *Codex Canadensis*, page 51, n.d., ink on paper, 33.7 x 21.6 cm, Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma. RIGHT: An owl illustration in Conrad Gessner's *The History of Animals (Historiae Animalium)*, vol. 3 (1555), 742.

Nicolas's career was governed from 1654 to around 1678 by the Jesuits. Within their strictly hierarchical structure, the superiors demanded that the men under them be diligent in their work and capable of independent initiative, yet always respectful and obedient. Nicolas lacked many of these qualities, preferring to follow his own interests in his own way. His teachers at Tournon judged him to be of average ability, more suited to manual work than to intellectual pursuits. Even before he completed his course of studies, however, in 1661 he wrote enthusiastically to the vicar-general of the Society, Father Giovanni Paolo Oliva, asking to be sent as a missionary to Canada. Three years later, though he was still a novice, his request was granted.



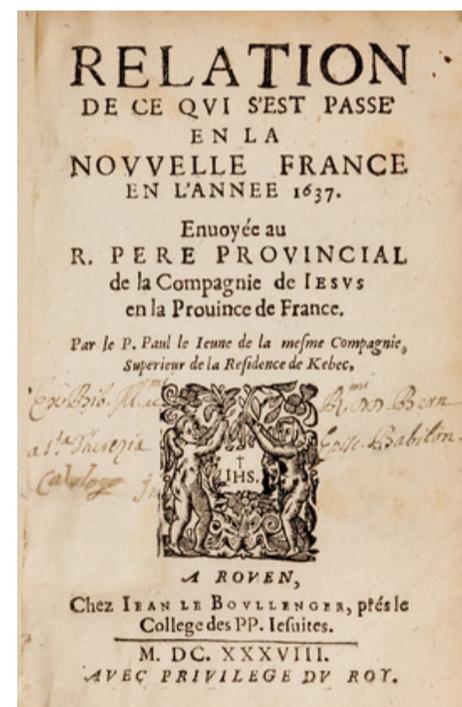
A rendition of the Jesuit missionaries Matteo Ricci, Johann Adam Schall von Bell, and Ferdinand Verbiest from Jean Baptiste du Halde's *Geographical, Historical, Chronological, Political, and Physical Description of the Empire of China and Chinese Tartary* (*Description géographique, historique, chronologique, politique, et physique de l'empire de la Chine et de la Tartarie Chinoise*) (1735).

### A JESUIT IN NEW FRANCE

The Jesuits arrived in New France in 1611 with the goal of converting the Indigenous peoples to Christianity. Over the following years they focused on exploring the regions radiating from Quebec, learning the local languages, and studying the customs of the various groups they encountered. Their members had to be strong and vigorous, capable of travelling long distances by canoe and on foot in their efforts to establish missions in the hinterland. It was lonely and difficult work, but they were motivated by their belief that they were saving souls from damnation. We can follow their missionary activities in detail through the *Jesuit Relations* (*Relations des Jésuites*), published between 1632 and 1672 in Paris.<sup>6</sup>

The little we know about Nicolas's missionary activities, other than from his own writings, comes from the *Jesuit Relations* and the *Journal of the Jesuits*. The *Relations* were written by the Jesuit Superior, located in Quebec or in France, using reports provided by individual missionaries, and they offer valuable ethnographic information on the early contact period—the languages, warfare, food, migrations, and beliefs of the people the Jesuits wished to convert. The Superior's *Journal* documented all the missionaries' travels.<sup>7</sup> Despite Nicolas's extensive expeditions in North America, he is mentioned briefly in only three passages in the *Relations*. These volumes focus on the conversion efforts of the order, not their scientific interests, and Nicolas gives the impression in his own writings that he was more interested in observing nature than in saving souls.

Thirty years old when he arrived in New France in May 1664, Nicolas was first sent to the Jesuits' residence in Sillery, near Quebec City, to complete his studies in theology and to learn the Algonquin language.<sup>8</sup> By November 1666



Title page from Paul Le Jeune, *Relation of What Happened in New France in 1637* (*Relation de ce qui s'est passé en la Nouvelle France en l'année 1637*), in the *Jesuit Relations*.

he had mastered the language and was posted to the Algonquin territory north of Trois-Rivières, Quebec, to seek converts and combat alcoholism among the people. He returned to Quebec City in March 1667 and made his final vows on May 29 of that year.<sup>9</sup>

At this time, New France, founded just fifty-six years earlier, was undergoing significant political, economic, and social development under two ambitious men: Jean Talon, the first intendant, and François de Laval, the first bishop. Although almost all the paintings in New France were imported from France, the visiting artist and architect Frère Luc (1614-1685), who had joined the Récollet Order in mid-life, not only designed part of the Hôpital Général, the Séminaire de Québec, and the chapel for his religious order during the fourteen months he was there, in 1670-71, but also painted religious scenes for churches, portraits, and a number of religious paintings.



LEFT: Claude François (Frère Luc), *Portrait of Jean Talon (Portrait du Jean Talon)*, 1671, oil on canvas, 72.7 x 59.3 cm, collection of the Monastère des Augustines, Hôtel-Dieu de Québec, Quebec City. RIGHT: Attributed to Claude François (Frère Luc), *Portrait of Bishop François de Montmorency-Laval, First Bishop of Quebec (Portrait de Monseigneur François de Montmorency-Laval, premier évêque de Québec)*, c. 1672, oil on canvas, 86.4 x 71.1 cm, collection of the Séminaire de Québec, Musée de la civilisation, Quebec City.

Unlike Frère Luc, Nicolas was a missionary priest, and he focused in his artwork on the nature he observed and on the Indigenous peoples he met. (See, as only one example of several, *Portrait of a Man of the Nation of the Noupiming-dach-iriniouek* [*Portrait d'un homme de La Nation des Noupiming = dach = iriniouek*], n.d., which he based on an engraving found in a book by François Du Creux [1596-1666], who never travelled to New France. The Noupiming-irriouek lived in the region of Lake Abitib.<sup>10</sup>) When he eventually made his drawings, probably in the 1690s in France, he remembered some of the aesthetic tendencies among the Indigenous peoples he had encountered—for example, their body painting and the decorations on their clothing, tobacco pouches, and masks. This interest was uncommon among European visitors to North America at the time: most missionaries had only scorn for any Indigenous nations' artistic manifestations, and so did not record them. In that sense, Nicolas's sketches are unique.



LEFT: Louis Nicolas, *Portrait of a Man of the Nation of the Noupiming-dach-iriniouek* (*Portrait d'un homme de La Nation des Noupiming = dach = iriniouek*), *Codex Canadensis*, page 9, n.d., ink on paper, 33.7 x 21.6 cm, Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma. RIGHT: An engraving found in François Du Creux, *The History of Canada, or of New France* (*Historiae Canadensis seu Novae Franciae Libri Decem*) (1664), 76.

### THE MISSIONARY AT WORK

During his eleven years in New France (1664–75), Nicolas travelled from the western end of Lake Superior to Sept-Îles (at the eastern end of New France), and from Trois-Rivières to the Iroquois lands south of Lake Ontario, his trips interspersed by numerous visits to Quebec. All of these trips were made at the behest of his Jesuit superiors, but he seems to have initiated at least one himself to a place he called “Virginia,” south of Lake Erie. He later created two ornate maps to record his travels, one of the Saint Lawrence Valley and the other of the Mississippi River (Manitoumie), and, like other cartographers of the period, he filled them with topographical features and place names—and, on his map of Manitoumie, the figures of a fish and a snake.



Louis Nicolas, *Map*, *Codex Canadensis*, n.d., ink on paper, 33.7 x 43.2, Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma. The map depicts the "Manitouinie," the Mississippi River region.

Nicolas's first mission was to Chequamegon Bay, an isolated post situated on the southwest bank of Lake Superior. On August 4, 1667, Father Claude Allouez had returned to Sillery from the Saint-Esprit Mission in Chequamegon to recruit some "worthy men" as well as a missionary with facility in Algonquin.<sup>11</sup> Nicolas was chosen as the man to go. Their journey was arduous: Marie de l'Incarnation, the founder of the Ursuline Order of nuns in Canada, reported that the Indigenous guides were overloaded and, when they reached Montreal, they threw the priests' baggage onto the shore.<sup>12</sup>

Allouez left Nicolas in charge of the mission at Chequamegon and continued on alone up the Baie des Puants (Green Bay) on Lake Michigan, where he founded the Saint-François-Xavier Mission. Chequamegon was in Outaouaks (Ottawa) territory, part of the larger Northern Algonquin lands, and, as a centre for trade in the region, it afforded the opportunity for contact with people from many surrounding groups. As such, it was an ideal location for a mission—and, as it turned out, for the documentary artist (Nicolas's *King of the Great Nation of the Nadouessiouek* [Roy de La grande Nation des Nadouessiouek], *Portrait of a Famous One-eyed Man* [Portrait d'un Illustre borgne], and *Fishing by the Passinassiouek* [La pesche des Sauvages], all n.d., illustrate some of the Indigenous leaders he met there as well as some of the customs and

implements he observed). He also travelled widely from this base: the *Codex Canadensis* includes drawings of Illinois and Sioux chiefs, a Mascouten man, and an Amikouek man, all of whom he would have encountered in a large area around Lake Huron and extending north.

Within the year, Nicolas returned to Quebec, possibly sent back because of his bad temper and vanity. Antoine Alet, secretary of Gabriel de Queylus, Superior of the Sulpicians of Montreal (an order of priests engaged mainly in parish work), said the Algonquin chief Kinonché had complained that Nicolas had beaten him with a stick—even though he was the leader of a nation. Nicolas had also boasted that, when he arrived in Montreal, he would celebrate mass dressed in magnificent gold and silver garments, proving to the people how well respected he was. When the Sulpicians learned about these boasts from Kinonché himself, they refused to allow Nicolas to celebrate high mass.<sup>13</sup> This unruly side of Nicolas's nature may be reflected in the way he scorned people who didn't believe in the existence of unicorns (a creature he depicted in the *Codex*) and in his comments in another of his books, *The Natural History of the New World* (*Histoire naturelle des Indes occidentales*).<sup>14</sup>



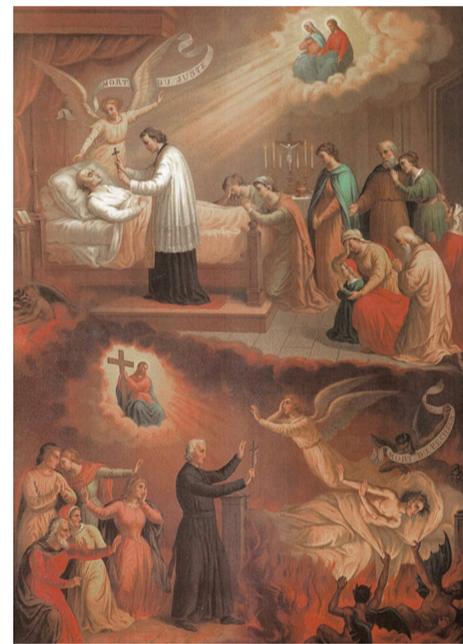
A map showing the range of Louis Nicolas's missions.

The *Jesuit Relations* are vague about the success of this mission, but it seems that Nicolas was more interested in exploring and involving himself in the fur trade than in converting the local inhabitants. It is likely that his superiors disapproved of his work, though the Jesuits engaged in this trade to some extent, much to the annoyance of the French and English merchants.

A document written by Father Le Mercier to the General of the Jesuits in Rome on June 21, 1668, states that Nicolas was sent back to Quebec because “he was not really proper for that mission” owing to “his rough manners and behaviours, and also because of his lack of foresight in business and his frequent and sudden movements of wrath, that scandalize both the French and the Natives.”<sup>15</sup> Nicolas “shed so many tears” and “manifested such a regret of what he was accused” that he was allowed to return to Chequamegon. However, he was back in Quebec in the spring of 1669.

### MEETING FATHER JEAN PIERRON

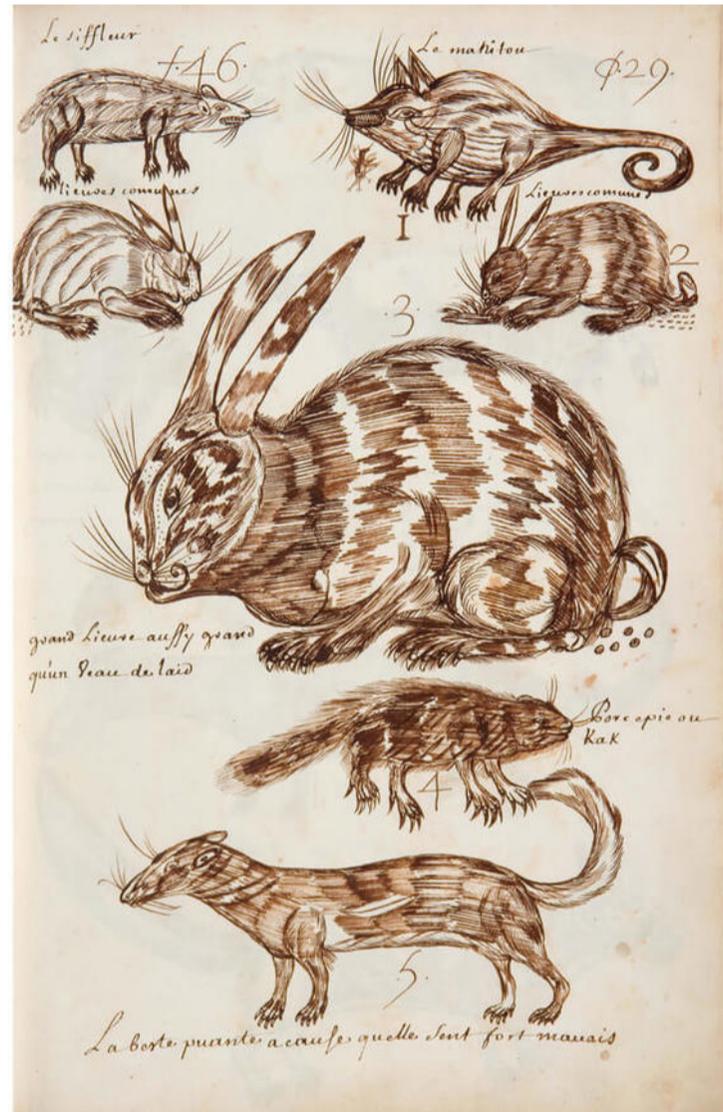
Nicolas remained in Quebec until a visit from Father Jean Pierron (1631–1700)<sup>16</sup> in 1670 changed his fate. Pierron was a missionary who used his talent as an artist to create devout spiritual paintings that served him powerfully in his attempts to convert Indigenous peoples to Christian beliefs, as did Father Claude Chauchetière (1645–1709)<sup>17</sup> at the Jesuit Iroquois mission of Saint-François-Xavier at Sault St. Louis (Kahnawake, Quebec).<sup>18</sup> Pierron had painted images of both a good death and a bad death (*la bonne et la mauvaise mort*), for instance, with the former giving entry to heaven, and the latter to hell. (This image has not survived, but the theme has resurfaced in modern versions of the Catechism in Pictures [*catéchisme en images*], an example of which is seen here.) On the other hand, the portrait of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha, the original attributed to Chauchetière and a facsimile of which is now in the Church of Kahnawake, is of a more recent date and by an anonymous author.



“The death of the righteous man and the death of the sinner” or *la bonne et la mauvaise mort*, an illustration from a pictorial catechism.

Pierron was proud of his achievements in Tionnontoguen, the Iroquois territory where he had spent fifteen months, and he asked his superiors to send more missionaries to Iroquois territory, where he thought they would make many converts. His request was honoured, and Father Thierry Beschefer and Nicolas accompanied Pierron back to the mission, which was located at Ossernenon, present-day Auriesville, New York, not far from the Mohawk River. It is unclear whether Nicolas was active there. Father Claude Dablon, who wrote the *Relations* of 1671–72, mentions the many baptisms that Pierron performed<sup>19</sup> but is silent about Nicolas and Beschefer. The only thing we know for certain, according to the *Restored Catalogue of the Jesuits of New France* (*Catalogue restauré des Jésuites de la Nouvelle France*) (n.d.), is that in 1671 Nicolas was back in Quebec.

Nicolas’s *The Natural History* offers one possible reason why he may have been sent back once again to Quebec: his passion for travel over the Jesuit goal of conversion. In a few places in *The Natural History* he mentions a trip he made to “Virginia,” which he located south of Lake Erie.<sup>20</sup> Nicolas returned with a wealth of information on the plants and animals of the region (see, for example, his *Papace, or Grey Partridge* [*Papace ou perdrix grise*], n.d.) and details about the daily life of the inhabitants. He seems to have been less successful, however, in converting many people to Christianity.



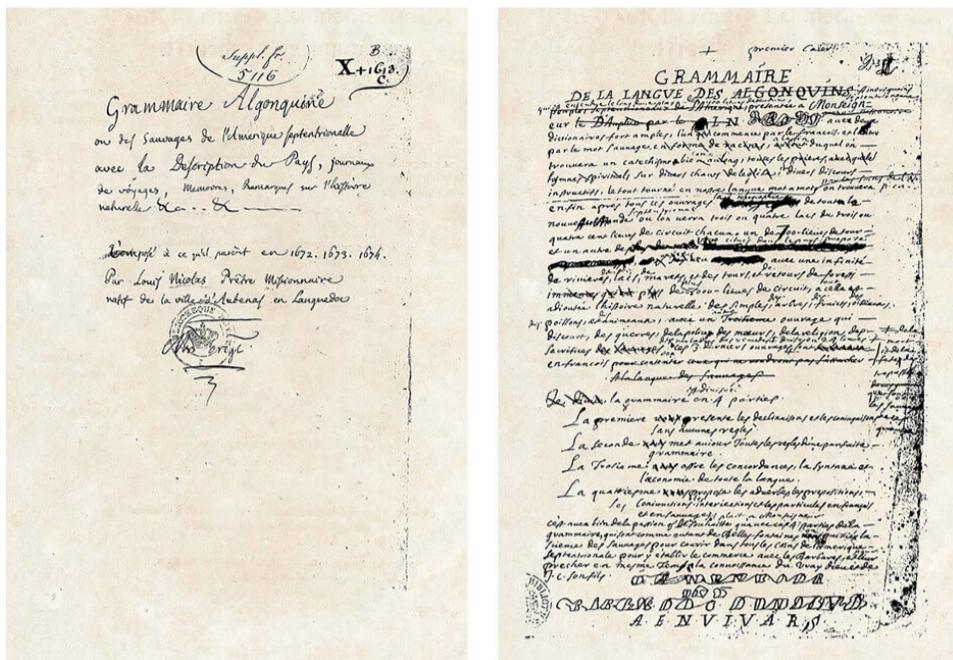
LEFT: Louis Nicolas, *Drawing of the Sun (Figure du soleil)*, *Codex Canadensis*, page 4, n.d., ink on paper, 33.7 x 21.6 cm, Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma. RIGHT: Louis Nicolas, *The Whistler (Le siffleur)*, *Codex Canadensis*, page 29, n.d., ink on paper, 33.7 x 21.6 cm, Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

### WRITING THE GRAMMAIRE AND THE MÉMOIRE

In 1672 Nicolas was the vicar at Sillery. His responsibilities were light, and it is probably during this period that he began to write his *Algonquin Grammar (Grammaire algonquine)*, a dictionary of the Algonquin language, which he penned between 1672 and 1674 and which has no illustrations.

In the spring of 1673 his Superior sent him to Sept-Îles. Like Chequamegon, it was a trading post. On his way back from Sept-Îles in June or July 1673, Nicolas served as a procurator at Cap-de-la-Madeleine. There he likely wrote his *Memorandum for a Missionary Who Will Go to the Seven Islands, Which the Savages Call Manitounagouch, or Properly, Manitounok (Mémoire pour un missionnaire qui ira aux 7 isles q[u]e les sauvages appellent Manitounagouch ou bien manitounok)*.<sup>21</sup> This text, which is also without illustrations, is only four pages long, but Nicolas reveals himself to be a good ethnographer, able to distinguish the three principal cultures of the region and their dialects: the Montagnais Papinachois (Opâpinagwa), the Oumamiwek (Bersiamite), and the Inuit. As he also describes the plants and animals of the region, he highlights his talents as a keen naturalist.

Although Nicolas possessed a genuine passion for missionary work, his avid interest in natural history and travel, along with his rude manners, made it impossible for him to meet the standards demanded by his Jesuit superiors. In 1675 he was sent back to France. The final mark against him may possibly have been that he kept two captured bear cubs in the grounds of the Jesuit residence in Sillery and trained them to do tricks, with the idea of bringing them back to France and presenting these “curiosities” to King Louis XIV himself.

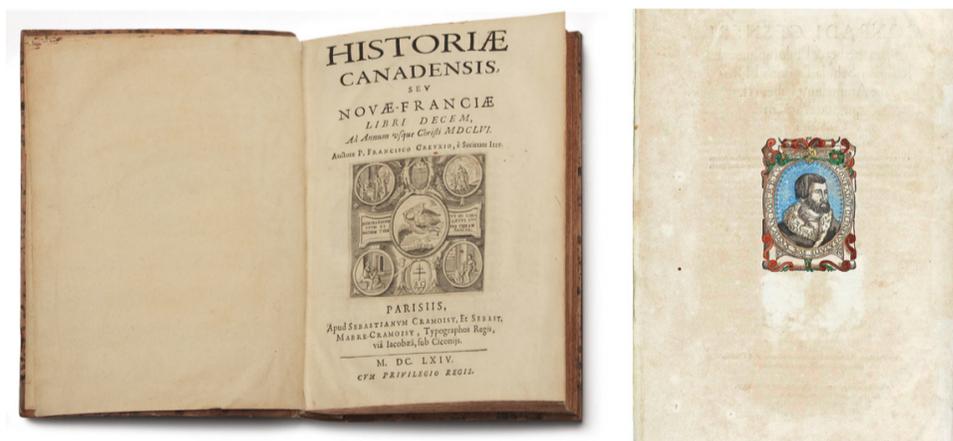


Interior pages from Louis Nicolas, *Algonquin Grammar (Grammaire algonquienne)* (1674).

### CREATING THE CODIX CANADENSIS IN FRANCE

Little is known for certain about Nicolas after he returned to France. It seems, though, that he succeeded in his desire to present an animal from North America to the king. As he relates in *The Natural History of the New World*, he gave a chipmunk he had brought instead of the bears he had tamed, because, he said, he did not have a box big enough to carry them to France.<sup>22</sup>

Nicolas left the Jesuit Order in 1678 after his superiors refused to permit him to publish *The Natural History*, which by that time he had begun to write. As a well-trained seventeenth-century Jesuit, Nicolas liked to organize his knowledge into hierarchical systems based on the principles set out by Aristotle. He dreamed of writing a series of works on the New World: a complete “catechism,” including a grammar book; a topographical study; a natural history of plants, animals, birds, and other creatures; and a study of Indigenous peoples—their customs, religion, and government.<sup>23</sup> He never completed this task, but experts have now attributed five particular manuscripts to Nicolas: the *Algonquin Grammar*, *Treatise on Four-footed Animals (Traité des animaux à quatre pieds)*, *Memorandum for a Missionary*, *The Natural History*,<sup>24</sup> and the *Codex Canadensis*. The first three seem to have been written in New France, and the latter two after his return to France.



LEFT: Interior of François Du Creux's *The History of Canada, or of New France (Historiae Canadensis seu Novae Franciae Libri Decem)* (1664), McCord Museum, Montreal. RIGHT: A portrait of Conrad Gessner on an interior spread of his book *The History of Animals (Historiae Animalium)*, vol. 1 (1551).

Several details in the text of *The Natural History* and the captions of the *Codex* indicate that Nicolas wrote most of *The Natural History* during the 1680s and created the drawings for the *Codex* in the 1690s, relying on his memory, supplemented by descriptions and engravings in published books. His “portraits” of different Indigenous nations in the *Codex*—for instance, his *King of the Great Nation*—are often inspired by the engravings illustrating *The History of Canada, or of New France (Historiae Canadensis seu Novae Franciae Libri Decem)* (1664) by François Du Creux (1596–1666). Similarly, his animals—for instance, his otter or his beaver—were inspired by images in *The History of Animals (Historiae Animalium)* (1551–58, 1587) by Conrad Gessner (1516–1565). Despite the similarities of Nicolas’s drawings to these sources, however, they are all rendered in a style that is unique and unmistakably his own. Some, particularly the sketches of birds, are remarkably accurate in their details, such that experts can identify them today; but others (for example, the unicorn), are imaginary or, as with the “sea monster,” include fanciful characteristics.

No evidence has been found to explain how Nicolas supported himself over these two decades, but he may have become a parish priest, with several short postings. He must have had access to major libraries—perhaps the library of Sainte-Geneviève-du-Mont in Paris, which housed some twenty thousand printed volumes and a cabinet of curiosities. Like most well-educated men of his day, Nicolas probably found a patron to support him in his endeavours.<sup>25</sup>

The dictionary of French-Canadian clergy states that he died in 1682, though it provides no documentation and no proof.<sup>26</sup> The date is certainly wrong: both *The Natural History* and the *Codex Canadensis* were completed later and both have been attributed to Nicolas. If this interpretation is correct, as I believe it is, Nicolas was alive at least in 1700. In that year he would have been sixty-six years old.



Hyacinthe Rigaud, *Louis the XIV (Louis XIV)*, 1701, oil on canvas, 277 x 194 cm, Louvre Museum, Paris.



# KEY WORKS

In his only illustrated work, now known as the *Codex Canadensis*, the Jesuit missionary priest Louis Nicolas created a unique record of the natural life and inhabitants he observed in New France. He also included two maps and three drawings to dedicate his album to King Louis XIV. The twelve works selected here are typical of his interest and of his style.

## ROYAL CROWN OF FRANCE N.D.



Louis Nicolas, *Royal Crown of France (Couronne royale)*, n.d.  
 Ink on paper, 33.7 x 21.6 cm  
 Codex Canadensis, page 2  
 Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma

This drawing of the royal crown of France is one of three dedications to the King of France, Louis XIV, which Nicolas placed at the beginning of the *Codex Canadensis*, his album of drawings. It depicts the large French crown, supported by a pair of globes atop two columns, sitting astride the upside-down towers of Castile—the symbol of Spain.

The image of the *Royal Crown of France* is significant in two respects. First, it dates the inscriptions and the captions (but not the artworks, which were completed beforehand) included in the *Codex Canadensis* to late 1700 or early 1701. Philip V, Louis XIV's grandson, became king of Spain in 1700, but the following year his ascension led to the War of the Spanish Succession, 1701–14, an event that is not mentioned in the caption. Second, the careful positioning of the caption in the space within the drawing demonstrates that the captions were entered after the illustrations were completed. Professor Emeritus and paleographer Germaine Warkentin, who has examined the manuscript of the *Codex*, says that the captions were written by the same hand that composed other manuscripts attributed to Louis Nicolas, most certainly *The Natural History of the New World* (*Histoire naturelle des Indes occidentales*).



LEFT: Hyacinthe Rigaud, *Philip V, King of Spain (Philippe V, roi d'Espagne)*, 1701, oil on canvas, 225.5 x 154 cm, Palace of Versailles, France. RIGHT: Louis Nicolas, *Escutcheon of France . . . (Eccusson de France . . .)*, *Codex Canadensis*, page 3, n.d., ink on paper, 33.7 x 21.6 cm, Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma.



What is striking in this dedication is that the text could be read as a correction of the image. In the drawing, “the silver towers of Castile” are represented upside down. But the inscription states that they have been “re-established today by the same Crown of France in the person of Philip V.”

The other two dedications in the *Codex* are similar in style and purpose: one depicts the royal mace positioned above an overturned lion, the symbol of Holland; the other shows the royal escutcheon, displaying the “sun” of Louis XIV, supported by two eagles, the symbol of Germany. These two images celebrate French victories over Holland in 1668 and Germany in 1673–74.

## KING OF THE GREAT NATION OF THE NADOUESSIOUEK N.D.



Louis Nicolas, *King of the Great Nation of the Nadouessiouek (Roy de La grande Nation des Nadouessiouek)*, n.d.

Ink on paper, 33.7 x 21.6 cm

*Codex Canadensis*, page 8

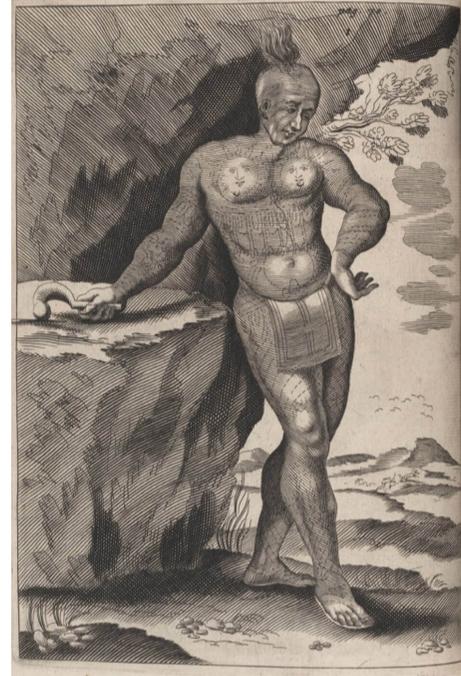
Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma

According to the caption, this drawing represents the “King of the great nation of the Nadouessiouek [Sioux people] . . . armed with his war club, which is called *pakamagan*. He reigns in a great country beyond the Vermilion Sea [the Gulf of Mexico]”<sup>1</sup> It is one of several images Nicolas created that represent the various groups he encountered during his extensive travels as a missionary in New France.

These drawings are not portraits in the usual sense of the word—accurate portrayals of particular individuals; rather, they represent “types.” They are significant, however, because they present rare images of the body paintings, clothing, hairstyles, and implements (fishing and hunting tools, weapons, pipes, tobacco pouches) used by Indigenous peoples in the latter seventeenth century. Archaeologists have unearthed the bowls of many ceramic pipes, for instance, but none of the reeds that Nicolas represents here.

This drawing bears a striking resemblance to an image of an Indigenous warrior found in *The History of Canada, or of New France (Historiae Canadensis seu Novae Franciae Libri Decem)* (1664), a text written by Father François Du Creux (1596-1666). Nicolas often took the outlines of human and animal figures from published sources, and the pose and proportions of five of his portraits are clearly based on engravings found in Du Creux. In each case he modified the details to fit with his own observations—and he claimed proudly that he had seen everything he recorded. In this image, the standing hairstyle, the club in the right hand, the position of the left arm, and the figure of the sun and the moon painted on the chest are similar in both Du Creux’s and Nicolas’s figures, but Nicolas gives his king an elaborately constructed and decorated pipe that spews flames and smoke. At the time it was common for both writers and illustrators of works on natural history to copy or derive inspiration from texts and engravings that had been published previously—usually without any attribution at all.

Nicolas likely encountered the Sioux when he was at Chequamegon, at the southwest end of Lake Superior, in 1667-68. The Sioux were enemies of the Ottawas, who, according to Father Claude Dablon, were well established at Chequamegon.<sup>2</sup> Despite this hostility, the Sioux still visited Chequamegon “in small numbers” to trade and to fish. Nicolas, eager to record as many of his observations and experiences as he could, took advantage of the mingling of different groups at this and other trading stations.



An engraving found in François Du Creux’s *The History of Canada, or of New France (Historiae Canadensis seu Novae Franciae Libri Decem)* (1664), page 70.i.

## PORTRAIT OF A FAMOUS ONE-EYED MAN N.D.



Louis Nicolas, *Portrait of a Famous One-eyed Man (Portrait d'un Illustre borgne)*, n.d.  
 Ink on paper, 33.7 x 21.6 cm  
 Codex Canadensis, page 14  
 Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma

Portraits of individual Indigenous figures from early colonial history in New France are extremely rare, making *Portrait of a Famous One-eyed Man* very unusual. The subject here is introduced as Iscouakité, a warrior with superior oratory ability who had lost an eye to an arrow.<sup>1</sup> Here Iscouakité, which means “burning firebrand,” is presented as “addressing his men through a birch-bark tube,” commanding them to listen to him. This drawing is the only portrait by Nicolas for which he provided a person’s name. All the other figures in the *Codex Canadensis* depict types that are representative of a particular group.

Nicolas probably met Iscouakité—the leader of the Ottawa Nation and a powerful enemy of the Iroquois and the Sioux—during his time in Chequamegon, his first mission posting in New France. Iscouakité is mentioned in the *Jesuit Relations (Relations des Jésuites)* as having gone to Sault Ste. Marie in 1672–73 to place the wives and children of his nation under the protection of the Jesuits while he and his men went to Montreal to trade furs. He is more fully clothed than many of Nicolas’s other figures, and he sports a distinctive flaring hairstyle and is heavily painted. In addition to his speaking tube, he carries a bag, and his pipe lies on the ground beside him, the flames and smoke still rising high. As a documentary artist intrigued by the people and the environment around him, Nicolas filled his drawings with as many details that were curious to him as he could fit into the illustration.

The only other known portrait made in New France of an Indigenous individual is of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha, painted in 1690 by Father Claude Chauchetière (1645–1709). This Jesuit missionary, like Father Jean Pierron (1631–1700), used his artistic talent to try to convert the Indigenous peoples at the mission of Saint-François-Xavier at Sault St. Louis (Kahnawake, Quebec). Renowned for her exceptional piety, Kateri had suffered from smallpox as a child, leaving her with a disfigured face. When she died at the age of twenty-four, Chauchetière reported, her scars miraculously disappeared and her face became beautiful. Specialists no longer believe that the distinctly European-style oil painting in Kahnawake Church was the original by Chauchetière. More likely it is a copy from a later date.



Anonymous, *Portrait of Kateri Tekakwitha*, n.d., oil on canvas, 91.4 x 76.2 cm, Saint-François-Xavier Mission, Kahnawake Mohawk Territory, Quebec.

## FISHING BY THE PASSINASSIOUEK N.D.



Louis Nicolas, *Fishing by the Passinassiouek (La pesche des Sauvages)*, n.d.  
 Ink and watercolour on paper, 33.7 x 21.6 cm  
 Codex Canadensis, page 15  
 Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma

*Fishing by the Passinassiouek* depicts Sioux men from Eastern Dakota in a canoe, fishing on the rippling waters of southwestern Lake Superior. In the scant images he created depicting scenes of Indigenous life, Nicolas worked mainly from his own observations and relied, with a few exceptions, on his natural talent.<sup>1</sup> The less-formal illustrations he created of people in their domestic surroundings, travelling, taking care of the dead, and so on, have a spontaneous if somewhat naïve quality that is not only appealing but provides valuable information about Indigenous cultures in the late seventeenth century.

In using the term “sauvages,”

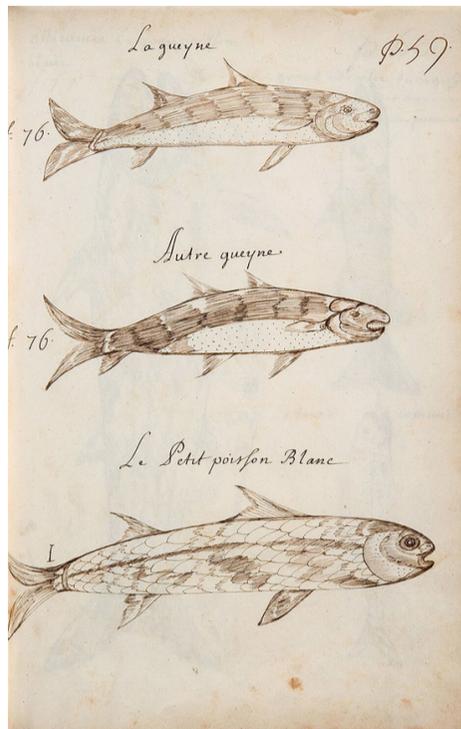
Nicolas was following his contemporary usage, which derived from a hierarchical conception of humanity. At the top of the pyramid were the king and the nobles; lower, the ordinary people; and lower still, the “sauvages,” a term used by the French to describe the Indigenous peoples of North America, because the colonizers erroneously considered the land’s original inhabitants not to have religions, intelligible languages, forms of government, or morals to speak of.

The men are holding nets and some of their catch, and Nicolas displays hooked spears and other fishing implements at the bottom left of the illustration. He seems determined to record as many details as he can in his illustrations. In addition, although he draws the image, as he always did, with a quill pen in brown-ink lines and strokes, this illustration is one of the few that he or someone else tinted—here with crimson and ochre watercolour.

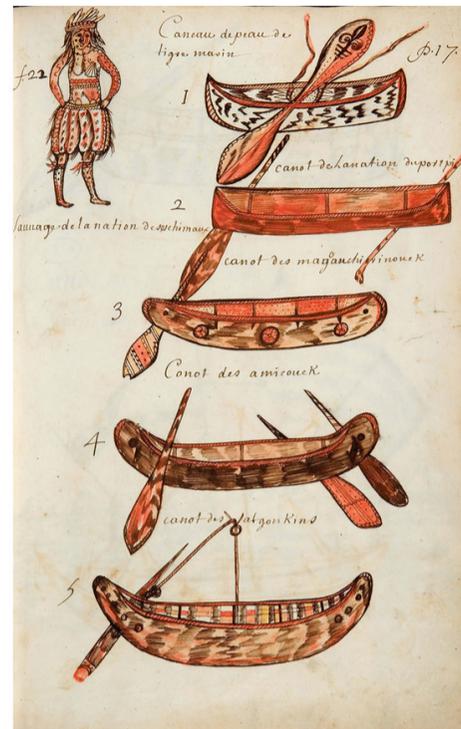
In the caption, Nicolas indicates that he has described this practice elsewhere—and he may be referring to the following passage, which he wrote in *The Natural History of the New World Histoire naturelle des Indes occidentales*.

There he describes seeing the Sioux and other Indigenous groups fishing during his visit to the Saint-Esprit Mission:

These Argonauts [fishermen] push their canoes violently into the middle of the rapids, until they arrive at places where they know that there are so many of these big white fish that the entire bottom of the water seems to be paved with them or rather they are piled up one on the other in such numbers that they have only to drop their second pole [the first pole is the one that anchors the canoes in the rapids], at the end of which there is a net in the shape of a cone or hood. Each time they raise it, as they do quickly, they bring up five or six large white fish. I gave a picture of the net in my figures.<sup>2</sup>



LEFT: Louis Nicolas, *The Gaine (La gueyne)*, *Codex Canadensis*, page 59, n.d., ink on paper, 33.7 x 21.6 cm, Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma. RIGHT: Louis Nicolas, *Americans Going to War on the Water (Américains qui vont à la guerre sur leau)*, *Codex Canadensis*, page 16, n.d., ink and watercolour on paper, 33.7 x 21.6 cm, Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma.





Elsewhere, dealing with “the small and large white fish,” he mentions the *atigamek*. Perhaps this reference correlates with the illustration of the fish, labelled *atikamek*, in the lower right of the drawing.<sup>3</sup> The “large white fish” is identified as the Lake Whitefish and, Nicolas says, it is “hardly caught anywhere except in our great lakes, and never in salt water.”<sup>4</sup>

## ABORIGINAL RITUALS N.D.

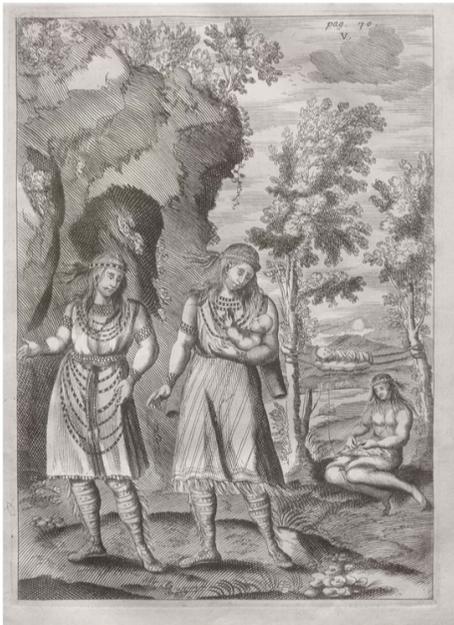


Louis Nicolas, *Aboriginal Rituals*, n.d.  
 Ink on paper, 33.7 x 21.6 cm  
 Codex Canadensis, page 21  
 Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma

Nicolas was fascinated by Indigenous ways of life, and he eagerly recorded his impressions of a broad range of activities, including religious practices. The five images grouped together on this page capture Nicolas's interest in Indigenous daily life and ritual. He called each of the different images a "figure," which he marked with the letter "f," and numbered them sequentially throughout his illustrated album, the *Codex Canadensis*.

On this page, in f. 33 Nicolas depicts the "sacrifice that this man is making to the moon": he will soon offer the animal (a deer?) that he is roasting under the roof of the outdoor shelter to the moon above. The illustration f. 34 contains two images: "Cabin made of skin, where one sees a skin [on a pole] offered or sacrificed to Aguakoqué, who is the war god of the Americans," as well as a "drawing of the head of the earth god that this man is going to see." The cabin "made of skin" is a sweat lodge, and the man is carrying a bow and wearing a wooden mask, likely one from the False Face Society—a group of Iroquois healers or medicine men. This drawing is the only known representation of Indigenous masks from the latter seventeenth century. At this time, the French and other European colonizers generally held Indigenous art in the same low estimation they had for Indigenous religions and frequently described it as grotesque.

The illustrations f. 35, 36, and 37 are more domestic than divine in nature: a picture of a child lying on a cradle board positioned among tree branches, a child's hammock, and a mortar for grinding corn. F. 35 and 36 are the only drawings of this set that were inspired to some extent by the engravings found in the volume by Father François Du Creux (1596–1666). Although these sketches ignore the mother figures found in the published engravings of these same subjects, they show valuable and detailed records of child-minding customs from this period.



LEFT: Engravings found in François Du Creux's *The History of Canada, or of New France (Historiae Canadensis seu Novae Franciae Libri Decem)* (1664), 70.v and 22. RIGHT: Engravings found in François Du Creux's *The History of Canada, or of New France (Historiae Canadensis seu Novae Franciae Libri Decem)* (1664), 70.v and 22.

In general, missionaries were critical of the beliefs of the people they sought to convert to Christianity. When Indigenous religious practices are mentioned in other seventeenth-century writings by early French explorers and missionaries, they are often ridiculed or denounced as inspired by the Devil. The Jesuit Paul Le Jeune (1591–1664), for instance, devotes one chapter in his 1634 *Jesuit Relations (Relations des Jésuites)* to "the beliefs, superstitions, and errors of the Montagnais." Nicolas, as many passages of his *The Natural History of the New World (Histoire naturelle des Indes occidentales)* reveal, was no different, but in his drawings he recorded what he saw without any judgmental commentary.

## PLANTS N.D.



Louis Nicolas, *Plants*, n.d.  
 Ink on paper, 33.7 x 21.6 cm  
 Codex Canadensis, page 23  
 Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma

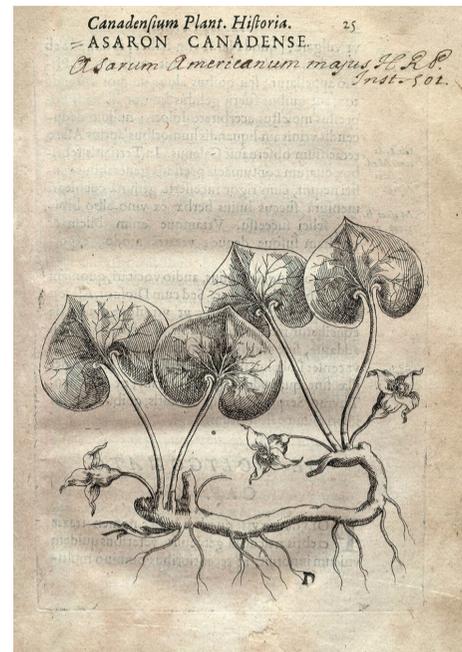
Nicolas ordered his drawings in the *Codex Canadensis* according to a seventeenth-century hierarchy: first humans, then plants, animals, birds, and finally fish. This crowded page, which begins the plant section, contains eight different figures. He captioned number 3, for example, as the “three-colour herb,” number 6 as “wild garlic,” number 7 as the “Cotonaria, which bears honey, cotton, hemp, a beautiful flower, and asparagus,” and number 2 as “ounonnata, which grows roots like truffles.” “Ounonnata,” an Iroquois word, has been identified as the rhizome of *Sagittaria latifolia*, the broadleaf arrowhead, known in the United States as the wapato or Indian potato.<sup>1</sup> In his rendition, Nicolas chose to highlight its edible tubers.

Botanists have found the “Lymphata” (number 5) difficult to identify because of inaccuracies in the drawing. One expert suggested it is a kind of wild ginger, but others, basing their information on a description in *The Natural History*, believe it to be a kind of water lily. The name Nicolas used may provide the best clue: in Latin, *lymphatus* means “watered,” perhaps indicating the plant’s habitat. Identifying plants and animals by habitat was one way in which seventeenth-century natural historians classified them.

Nicolas was certainly interested in flora: he illustrated eighteen different species on four pages in the *Codex*. In *The Natural History of the New World* (*Histoire naturelle des Indes occidentales*), he describes close to two hundred plants in all—more than any other contemporary writer in New France. Nicolas had observed all the vegetation he drew, unlike botanist Jacques-Philippe Cornut, for example, who never visited North America and in his *History of Canadian Plants* (*Canadensium plantarum historia*) (1635) relied on descriptions and specimens provided by other botanists and travellers.

While he worked in New France as a missionary, Nicolas may well have made sketches of these specimens. However, he completed his artworks after he returned to France in 1675. Unlike his drawings of Indigenous chiefs and some of his animals, all the plant images seem to be original to him and not derived from published engravings. He undoubtedly studied the Canadian varieties he found growing in several gardens in Paris and Montpellier, such as the white cedar of Canada in the Jardin des Tuileries, but his distance from his original sources probably explains why some of the plants are poorly represented.

Nicolas lived before Carl Linnaeus (1707-1778), the famous Swedish naturalist who developed modern taxonomy, so he did not depict plants according to the Linnaean principle that emphasizes the sexual organs—the stamens and the pistils. Instead, Nicolas placed emphasis on those parts of the plant most useful to humans—edible, pharmaceutical, or otherwise. In particular, he illustrates the roots, fruits, or flowers. He ordered his drawings according to size—first smaller herbs, then fruit, and finally trees.



Wild ginger (*Asarum canadense*) in Jacques-Philippe Cornut's *History of Canadian Plants* (*Canadensium plantarum historia*) (1635), 25.

## UNICORN OF THE RED SEA N.D.



Louis Nicolas, *Unicorn of the Red Sea (Licorne de La mer rouge)*, n.d.  
Ink on paper, 33.7 x 21.6 cm  
*Codex Canadensis*, page 27  
Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma

In his *Codex Canadensis*, Nicolas begins the section on the wildlife he observed in New France with this extraordinary depiction of a tiger and the mythological unicorn. Curiously, the image of the unicorn is divided in two parts and labelled A and B. Nicolas probably miscalculated the space he had to draw in and expected that readers would join up the front and back sections of the animal in their imaginations. The tiger is found in between the two parts of the unicorn, and is covered in spots, rather than stripes. Europeans were not familiar with the tiger at the time. What the sixteenth-century French writer Michel de Montaigne claims to have seen in a menagerie in Florence and calls a “tiger” could have been a leopard or an ocelot. Nicolas was certain that unicorns existed and insisted he had seen one killed.<sup>1</sup> But he also knew that neither the unicorn nor the tiger were native to the New World. So why would he include these animals in a book about New France?

Nicolas liked to begin or finish a grouping of similar species with an image he considered “monstrous” or “worth showing”—in the original meaning of the word monster, derived from the Latin word *monstrare*, to show—regardless of whether it was indigenous to North America. For the section on animals, the unicorn plays a similar role to the illustration of the passion flower (*passiflora*), which concludes the section on plants.<sup>2</sup> Although this plant does not grow in Canada, it has religious significance as a symbol of the Passion of Christ. By including the unicorn among his animals, Nicolas may have been influenced by the fact that the Scandinavians sold narwhal tusks in Europe as unicorn tusks, claiming they had special healing powers.

Paradoxically, Nicolas used the example of the unicorn to emphasize the importance of direct observation over purely bookish information.<sup>3</sup> The creature would disparage “les gens de cabinet” who didn’t believe in unicorns simply because they had never travelled outside their parish. As he wrote in the *The Natural History of the New World (Histoire naturelle des Indes occidentales)*:

I do not know what to say about the appalling error that has crept in even among many learned people who are otherwise very knowledgeable, but have seen nothing of the admirable things produced by nature because they have never lost sight of their parish church tower, and who hardly know how to get to the Place Maubert or the Place Royale without asking the way. I say that these people are stubborn to insist that there is no unicorn anywhere in the world<sup>4</sup>

In the ten crowded pages that follow this illustration, Nicolas drew sixty-seven mammals, or “terrestrial four-footed animals,” and classified them by their size, the smallest first.



Louis Nicolas, *Sea Horse That Is Seen in the Meadows Along the Chisedek . . . (Cheval Marin qu'on voit dans les preries du bord du fleuve de chisedek . . .)*, *Codex Canadensis*, page 40, n.d., ink on paper, 33.7 x 21.6 cm, Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

## AMPHIBIANS N.D.



Louis Nicolas, *Amphibians*, n.d.  
Ink and watercolour on paper, 33.7 x 21.6 cm  
*Codex Canadensis*, page 37  
Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma

Illustrators in the seventeenth century rarely worked from nature. Most of the wildlife they saw up close was already dead, so the models they followed were stiff, often with their tongues hanging out. Nicolas couldn't escape this example, and many of his drawings are also stretched out, with exposed dangling tongues—his bears, for instance, in the section on animals, and the moose. It was also common for illustrators to base their work on existing images, even if that meant using European models to depict Canadian fauna.

In making these four drawings that open the “amphibian” section—in descending order the otter, beaver, and seals (labelled the sea wolf and the sea tiger)—Nicolas was influenced by two published sources: *The Natural History of Fishes* (*La Nature et la diversité des poissons*) (1555) by Pierre Belon du Mans for the otter<sup>1</sup> and the engravings in *The History of Animals* (*Historiae Animalium*) (1551–58, 1587) by Conrad Gessner (1516–1565). The source image he used from Gessner for the beaver has the animal standing vertically in the margin of the page, but Nicolas presents it horizontally, and posed as though it were sitting on the ground. Obviously Nicolas is breaking with tradition and trying to make his beaver look alive.



LEFT: A depiction of the beaver in Conrad Gessner's *The History of Animals* (*Historiae Animalium*), vol. 1 (1551), 336. RIGHT: A depiction of the otter in Pierre Belon du Mans's *The Natural History of Fishes* (*La Nature et diversité des poissons*) (1555), 27./figcaption>

The two seals come also from Gessner. The first one was said by Gessner himself to have been copied from the sixteenth-century French naturalist and physician Guillaume Rondelet. As well, Nicolas derived the drawing of the “marine tiger” from Gessner.

All four creatures on this page are tinted in blue watercolour, to suggest that they lived in water. In addition, the outlines of their bodies are embellished with fine slanting quill strokes to capture the exact appearance of fur or hairy skin. Their whiskers, sharp teeth, and claws are carefully drawn, along with the other markings in ink on their bodies.

Naturalists at this time generally classified animals by their habitats—and Nicolas followed their example. He grouped those creatures that live on the ground as four-footed animals; those that live in the air, such as bats, as birds; and everything that lived in water, including whales, as fish. Surprisingly, Nicolas closes the section with a “mountain rat as big as a spaniel,” and classifies frogs with the fish.

## BIRDS N.D.

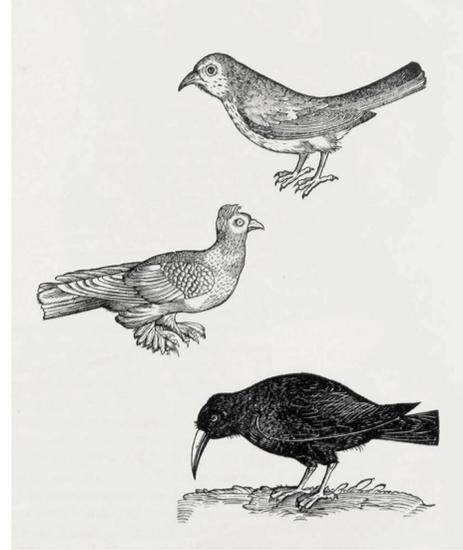


Louis Nicolas, *Birds*, n.d.  
 Ink and watercolour on paper, 33.7 x 21.6 cm  
 Codex Canadensis, page 41  
 Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma

One of the most beautiful pages in the *Codex Canadensis* is the opening page for the section on birds. Here, most of the birds are designated by their colours: “yellow bird” (number 1), “red finch” (2), “red and black finch” (3), and “royal blue bird” (4), though number 6 has a longer caption: “American sparrow, whose plumage is quite varied. In the winter it is white; in other seasons it is grey mixed with other colours.” It is one of the few pages on which the beautifully marked quill-and-ink drawings are enhanced with watercolour (or perhaps tempera). There is no way to prove whether Nicolas tinted the drawings himself or, as commonly happened, someone else did so at a later date.

As with the amphibians, Nicolas appears to have classified the birds in the *Codex* by habitat and size (smallest to largest). As with some of his drawings of people and animals, it is possible to link a few of his bird illustrations with engraved models from published sources. However, making the connection is tenuous, because, for example, in *The History of Animals, Book Three, That Is of the Nature of Birds* (*Historiae Animalium Liber III qui est de Avium natura*) (1555) by Conrad Gessner (1516–1565) there are 217 black and white engravings of birds illustrated and they are presented in alphabetical order, with names that are no longer familiar to us.

Despite the vague descriptions in the captions and his limited knowledge of taxonomy, Nicolas was sufficiently accurate to enable modern ornithologists to identify the birds from the drawings. The seven shown here have been identified by Michel Gosselin, who reproduced them in an article he wrote alongside modern photos of the same birds.<sup>1</sup> In his words, the “Rouroucasou ou oiseau mouche” (top left) is the ruby-throated hummingbird; then, numbered one to six, the “oyseau jaune,” the American yellow warbler; the “pinson rouge,” the purple finch; the “pinson rouge et noir,” the scarlet tanager; the “oyseau royal bleu,” the eastern bluebird; the “hortoland ameriquain,” the bobolink; and the “moigneau ameriquain,” the snow bunting.



Birds found in Conrad Gessner's *The History of Animals* (*Historiae Animalium*), vol. 3 (1555); 654, 279, and 522 respectively. From top: yellowhammer, domesticated pigeon, and chough. These images were reproduced on pages 68, 64, and 61 respectively in *Curious Woodcuts of Fanciful and Real Beasts* (1971), edited by Edmund V. Gillon, Jr.

## PAPACE, OR GREY PARTRIDGE N.D.



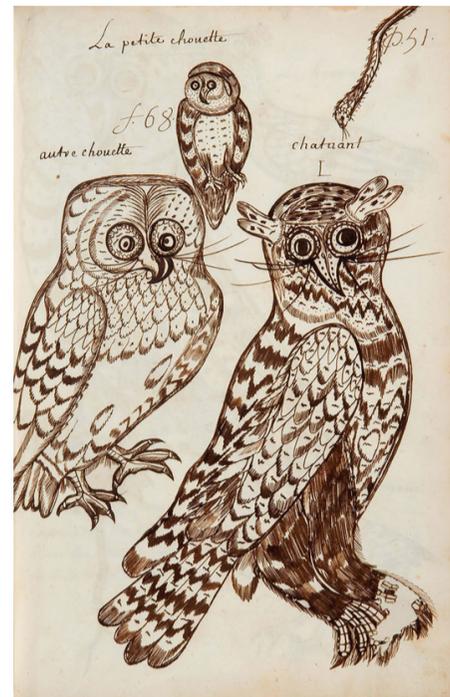
Louis Nicolas, *Papace, or Grey Partridge (Papace ou perdrix grise)*, n.d.  
Ink on paper, 33.7 x 21.6 cm  
*Codex Canadensis*, page 46  
Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma

This illustration shows how Nicolas used European sources to depict a North American bird. The caption states that the “Papace, or grey partridge” is remarkable for the noise it makes “beating its wings on the rotten tree in the woods. It can be heard almost a league away.” This precise description applies well to the ruffed grouse, *Bonasa umbellus*, a bird that lives in an area ranging from the Appalachian Mountains across Canada to Alaska.

As his model for this magnificent creature, Nicolas used an engraving of a ptarmigan that he found in *The History of Animals, Book Three, That Is of the Nature of Birds (Historiae Animalium Liber III*

*qui est de Avium natura)* (1555) by Conrad Gessner (1516-1565).<sup>1</sup> He took a lot of freedom with his model, drawing on his own observations in the field and including many other details. He added feathers on the head and around the throat of the bird to give it the famous ruff that inspires the name. A magnificent tail replaces the rather plain one of the model, while the legs bear no feathers.

In this striking drawing, Nicolas demonstrated his fine skill as a draftsman in pen and ink. To achieve the accuracy and realism he wanted, he rendered the markings on the feathers and the legs in varied and finely wrought quill strokes. This drawing is, in fact, less fanciful than Nicolas’s much-admired representations of owls (pages 51 and 52). The “Coucoucouou” (so named in imitation of its call) is probably the Great Grey Owl, *Strix nebulosa*, pictured with a long-tailed mouse in its claws.



LEFT: A depiction of the ptarmigan in Conrad Gessner’s *The History of Animals (Historiae Animalium)*, vol. 3 (1555). RIGHT: Louis Nicolas, *The Small Owl (La petite chouette)*, *Codex Canadensis*, page 51, ink on paper, n.d., 33.7 x 21.6 cm, Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

## SEA MONSTER KILLED BY THE FRENCH N.D.

Louis Nicolas, *Sea Monster Killed by the French (Monstre marin tue par les françois)*, n.d.

Ink on paper, 33.7 x 21.6 cm

Codex Canadensis, page 55

Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma

Sea monsters, living insects, and venomous, loud frogs: Nicolas chose to showcase four extraordinary creatures on this opening page of his section on fish in the *Codex Canadensis*. Collectively, these drawings demonstrate how he classified “fish” as any animal living in or close to the water, from frogs to whales—and he emphasized that point by positioning them all surrounded by rippling water. Like the *Unicorn of the Red Sea* (*Licorne de La mer rouge*), n.d., these four figures also present an example of Nicolas’s preference for beginning or ending each grouping of species in the *Codex* with examples that are in some way fantastic or miraculous.

The illustration on the top left is of a “Sea Monster killed by the French on the Richelieu River in New France”—a human-headed fish. This creature was no doubt inspired by an image reproduced by many authors in the period.<sup>1</sup> Father Pierre-François Xavier de Charlevoix, a French Jesuit often distinguished as the first historian of New France, refers to a written report by an “old missionary” who claimed to have seen the sea monster “in the River of Sorel”—which we know today as the Richelieu River. Charlevoix regrets, however, that the writer did not provide a good description of what he saw. He also expressed surprise that the sea monster had not been seen by anyone else until it reached Chambly (near Montreal).<sup>2</sup>



LEFT: Illustrations of sea monsters in Gaspar Schott’s *Physical Curiosities* (*Physica Curiosa*) (1697), 401. RIGHT: A depiction of the metamorphosis of a frog in Bernard Germain, Comte de Lacépède, disciple of Georges-Louis Leclerc Buffon, *General and Special History of Oviparous Quadrupeds and Snakes* (*Histoire générale et particulière des quadrupèdes ovipares et des serpents*) (1788-89), plate 31.



At the right of the sea monster are two small images of the “firefly” (*mouche luisante*), which, according to the caption, “is seen by the thousands on the evening of a fine day on the banks of the St. Lawrence River” (numbers 1 and 2). Nicolas also mentions the firefly in *The Natural History of the New World* (*Histoire naturelle des Indes occidentales*), describing it almost reverentially: “Among the remarkable things in America, I find that the firefly should not have the last rank; for on looking at it carefully, one would say that it is a living star.”<sup>3</sup>

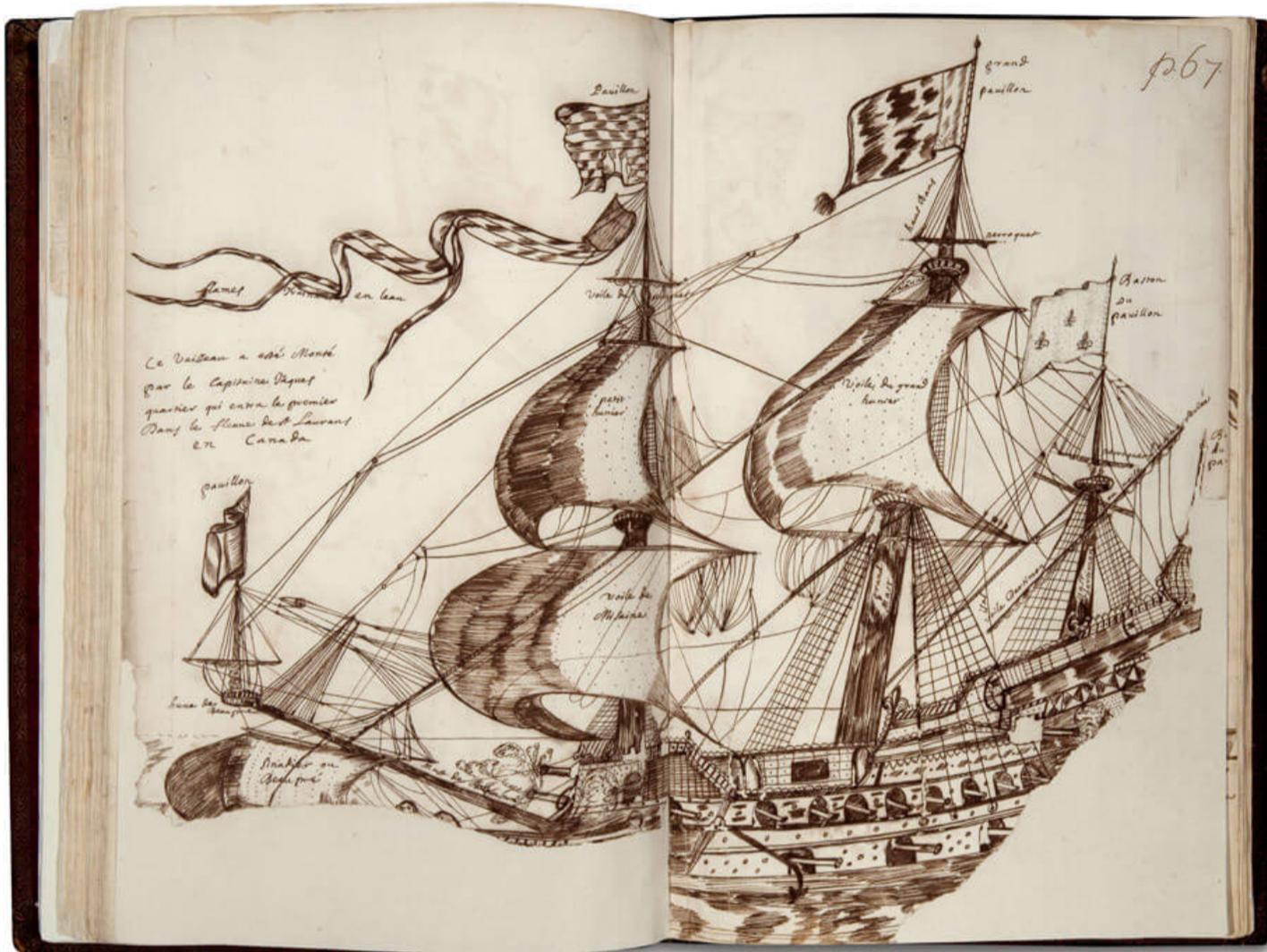
The “very poisonous tailed frog [*grenouille a cue fort venimeuse*],” found on the banks of the Saint Lawrence, indicates that Nicolas was unaware of the metamorphosis of the frog (number 3). It is normal for frogs to have tails before they reach their adult form, but this biological fact was not well established until the end of the eighteenth century, when Bernard Germain, Comte de Lacépède, a disciple of the French naturalist George-Louis Leclerc



Buffon, recorded the frog's metamorphosis in his *General and Special History of Oviparous Quadrupeds and Snakes (Histoire générale et particulière des quadrupèdes ovipares et des serpents)* (1788-89).

The "big green frog" (*grosse grenouille verte*) at the bottom of the page can, the caption boasts, "be heard from a distance of two leagues" when it croaks. Altogether, these four extraordinary creatures indicate that the former Jesuit, despite his learning and extensive travels, could also be a victim of his beliefs.

## JACQUES CARTIER'S SHIP N.D.



Louis Nicolas, *Jacques Cartier's Ship*, n.d.  
 Ink on paper, 33.7 x 43.2 cm  
*Codex Canadensis*, page 67  
 Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma

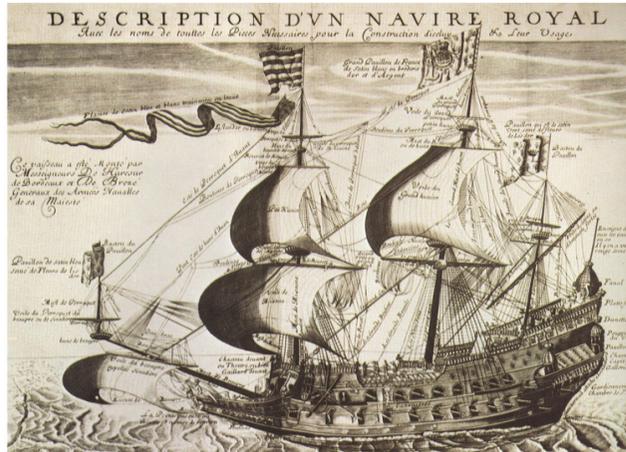
Nicolas likely chose to represent the “vessel of Jacques Cartier, the first to enter the St. Lawrence River in Canada,” to contrast the magnificence of this vessel, especially in its ability to cross the ocean, with the kayak and small canoes described earlier in the *Codex Canadensis*. It was common at that time for the French to contrast the “primitive arms or tools” of the Indigenous peoples with what they considered to be French technical feats, and thereby to confirm their idea that European civilization was superior to that of the lands they were conquering.

In this illustration, Nicolas has drawn a splendid vessel on a double sheet of folded paper—one twice as wide as his usual 21.6 centimetres. With its billowing sails, banners, and flags all brilliantly drawn in ink with detailed hatching and markings, it seems to be speeding through the water. Its guns are at the ready, and at least three are firing. The sails and rigging are carefully labelled.

Nicolas's depiction of this ship is directly inspired by the "Description of a Royal Ship" ("Description d'un Navire Royal") that formed the frontispiece of *Hydrography Containing the Theory and Practice of All Parts of Navigation* (*Hydrographie contenant la théorie et la pratique de toutes les parties de la navigation*) (1643) by the Jesuit geographer Georges Fournier.<sup>1</sup> Fournier's illustration is of a vessel named *The Crown* (*La Couronne*), which was commissioned by the French Navy in 1636 as a war galleon. It was built by the French as part of Cardinal Richelieu's efforts to ensure that the French Navy dominated the seas, and had nothing to do with Cartier's ships in 1534 and 1542.

On page 68 of the *Codex*, Nicolas includes a sketch of a well-dressed Cartier accompanied by a robed female figure—perhaps a muse leading him in his explorations in the New World. This image is purely imaginary because no known portrait of Cartier exists, except perhaps for the finely coloured drawing of him with his well-armed explorer-colonists included in the *Vallard Atlas* (1547).

Nicolas concludes the *Codex* with a series of domestic animals—including ducks, roosters, cats, dogs, cows, and one of the fine stallions Louis XIV had sent to New France for breeding purposes "more than thirty years before." Given that history records the arrival of these horses in 1667, this image is important in dating the *Codex Canadensis* to around 1697.



LEFT: The Jesuit priest Georges Fournier depicts *The Crown* (*La Couronne*) in *Hydrography Containing the Theory and Practice of All Parts of Navigation* (*Hydrographie contenant la théorie et la pratique de toutes les parties de la navigation*) (1643). RIGHT: Louis Nicolas, *Jacques Cartier* (*Jacques quartier*), *Codex Canadensis*, page 68, n.d., ink on paper, 33.7 x 21.6 cm, Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma.



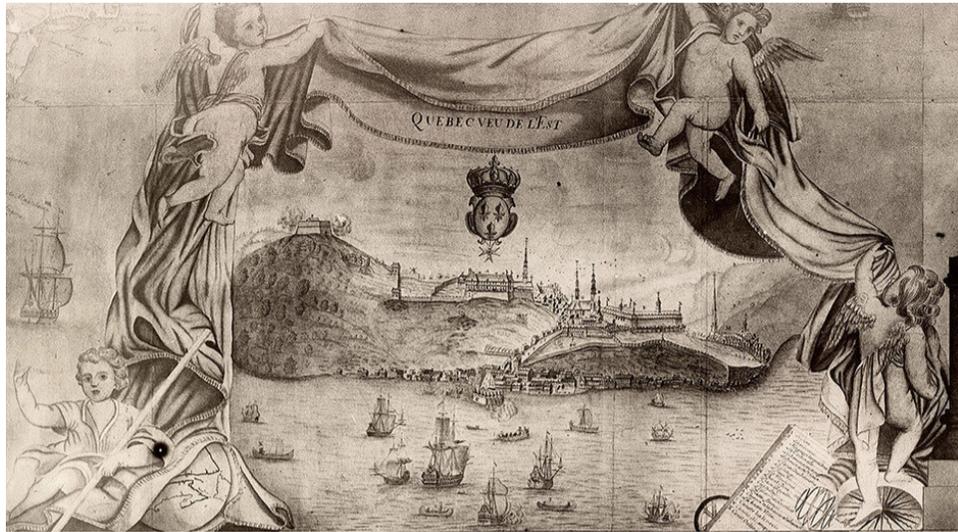


# SIGNIFICANCE & CRITICAL ISSUES

The drawings by Louis Nicolas, now collected in the *Codex Canadensis*, are among the most significant examples of colonial art of New France. Artwork from New France focused almost exclusively on religious subjects and portraits of dignitaries. Nicolas's art, in contrast, depicts the Indigenous peoples and the plants and animals he observed during his eleven years in the colony. As such, it stands apart from other European representations of North America. Nicolas's drawings provide a unique resource for art historians and for scholars of natural history.

### ATTRIBUTION OF THE CODEX CANADENSIS

The drawings and maps in the *Codex Canadensis* are not signed or dated, and there is no record of where the album was kept for more than two centuries after Nicolas had it bound. Then, in 1930, Maurice Chamonal, a Parisian antiquarian bookseller well known for his interest in Americana, published a facsimile of an old illustrated manuscript called *Les Raretés des Indes*. The original was an album of ink drawings on paper bound in leather and adorned with gold fleurs-de-lys, indicating that the volume may have been destined for the Royal Library (Bibliothèque du Roi) during the reign of Louis XIV. Nobody knew who had created these curious drawings.

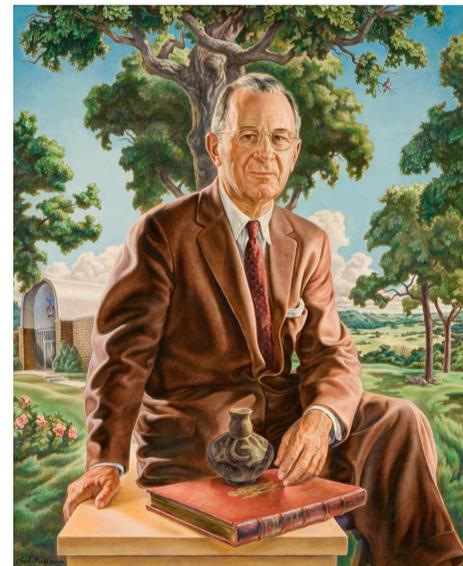


Charles Bécart de Granville et de Fonville, *Quebec, View from the East (Québec, vue de l'est)* (detail), 16 x 11 cm, 1699.

The man who contributed the introductory essay to the 1930 edition, Baron Marc de Villiers, had already written a history of the founding of Louisiana. Based on the maps and the information he deduced from the second dedication in the manuscript (page 2), he dated the book to 1700 and attributed it to Charles Bécart de Granville (1675-1703)—the only person there at the time, he argued, with enough training in cartography to draw the two maps in the album. The best known of the few existing maps by Bécart is his *Quebec, View from the East (Québec, vue de l'est)* (1699). De Villiers also gave the facsimile volume the title *Codex Canadiensis*—now corrected to *Codex Canadensis*, the name it is known by today—even though it was titled *Les Raretés des Indes* on the spine of the original manuscript volume.

In 1949 the oil baron Thomas Gilcrease bought the original bound manuscript and placed it in his museum—now called the Gilcrease Museum—in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Over the last five decades, scholars in many different disciplines—Renaissance-era natural history, New France religious history, patronage, cartography, paleography, and manuscript study—have researched its origins and concluded that it was produced in France in 1700 at the latest by Louis Nicolas, a Jesuit missionary priest who had served in New France from 1664 to 1675.

The attribution is based on links found in four manuscripts now considered to be by Nicolas: the *Algonquin Grammar (Grammaire algonquine)*,<sup>1</sup> *Treatise on Four-footed Animals (Traité des animaux à quatre pieds)*, *The Natural History of the New World (Histoire naturelle des Indes occidentales)*, and the *Codex Canadensis*. Although *The Natural History* and the *Codex* are taken to be closely related, the few small schematic notations in *The Natural History* are not sufficient to confirm a common author. Rather, the clues come from the references to the “traité des figures” in this same work, where Nicolas declares several times that he has drawn the figures in the *Codex* himself.



Charles Banks Wilson, *Thomas Gilcrease*, 1958, oil on canvas, 101.6 x 81.3 cm, Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Nicolas signed what is probably his first work, the *Algonquin Grammar*, likely in 1672-74, with the initials L.N.P.M., for "Louis Nicolas prêtre missionnaire" (Louis Nicolas, Missionary Priest). *The Natural History* is signed with the initials M.L.N.P.—the same letters but in a slightly different order and with the meaning "Messire Louis Nicolas prêtre," indicating that he was no longer in the Jesuit Order but a simple parish priest. Based on similarities in the handwriting, scholars have concluded that Nicolas is responsible for both *The Natural History* and the *Codex Canadensis*, including the captions. The close correspondence in the content of these two volumes strongly supports that view.

Although the drawings in the *Codex Canadensis* are not dated, the captions can be traced to the year 1700 (or early 1701). The clue is found in one of the three images dedicated to the French monarchy at the beginning of the manuscript (pages 1 to 3). In the *Royal Crown of France* (*Couronne royale*), n.d., the caption refers to Philip V, the grandson of Louis XIV, as the new king of Spain. He was the first member of the French House of Bourbon to sit on the Spanish throne. Philip's accession soon provoked a major European conflict, known as the War of Spanish Succession (1701-14), because the other powers feared that the potential union of France and Spain under one monarch would upset the balance of power. There is, however, no mention of this war in the caption. For that reason, Nicolas must have written his commentary of this image late in 1700 or very early in 1701.



Louis Nicolas, *One of the Stallions that Louis the Great Sent . . .* (*Un des Etalons que Louis Le grand fit Envoyer*), *Codex Canadensis*, page 77, n.d., ink on paper, 33.7 x 21.6 cm, Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

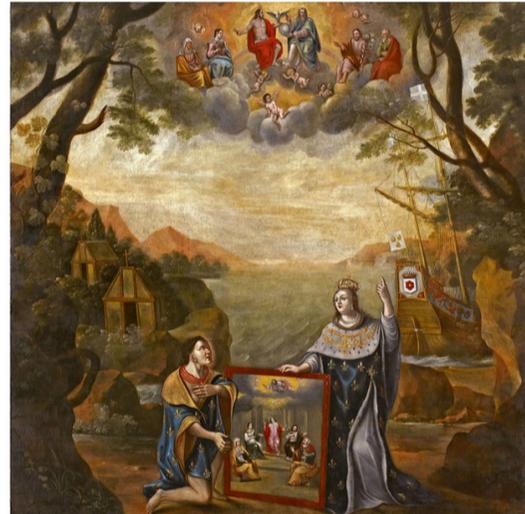
It seems that the captions and the page and figure numbers in the *Codex* were added after the drawings were completed. These items never overlap the images and, when there are multiple images on one page, they fill the gaps between them. The drawings themselves probably belong to the 1690s. The caption for the fine stallion states that it is one of the horses Louis XIV sent to New France “more than thirty years ago.” The horses arrived in 1667, so Nicolas wrote these words in 1697 at the earliest.

Nicolas created the *Codex Canadensis* as the illustrated companion volume to *The Natural History*—a book he seems to have begun in the late 1670s, before he left the Jesuit Order, and which he hoped to publish. As he wrote at the beginning of *The Natural History*: “My God, how I regret embarking on an enterprise as difficult as this one of making an account of the New World, where there are so many things to say.”<sup>2</sup> It is quite possible that he had the leather binding of the *Codex* stamped with the fleurs-de-lys in the hope that, by presenting it to the royal library, he would attract a favour from the king that would allow him to fulfil his dream for *The Natural History*.

### NICOLAS’S SINGULAR VISION

Most of the art Nicolas would have seen in New France was either political (portraits of dignitaries) or religious—whether paintings, sculpture, or church decoration. In light of this fact, Nicolas’s talent as an illustrator of natural history themes stands out as being particularly original and unique for his times.

Only certain pieces of art were created in the colony: the French government, wanting to keep France prosperous and the colony dependent, stipulated that paintings and other objects that were easy to transport should all be created in France and exported across the Atlantic. Sculpture, which was heavy, was an exception, allowing Noël Levasseur (c. 1680–1740) and many members of his family to flourish in Quebec for more than a century.<sup>3</sup>



LEFT: Claude François (Frère Luc), *The Assumption (L'Assomption)*, 1671, oil on canvas, 205.7 x 157.5 cm, collection of the Monastère des Augustines, chapelle de l'Hôpital Général, Quebec City. RIGHT: Anonymous, *France Bringing Faith to the Hurons of New France (La France apportant la foi aux Hurons de la Nouvelle-France)*, c. 1670, oil on canvas, 229.5 x 229.5 cm, collection of the Monastère des Ursulines de Québec, Quebec City.

A few French artist priests created paintings on religious themes during their time in New France. Claude François (Frère Luc, 1614–1685) was the most accomplished, producing a portrait of Bishop François de Laval as well as his best-known work, *The Assumption* (*L'Assomption*), 1671, for the Récollet chapel in Quebec (now at the Hôpital Général).<sup>4</sup> Hugues Pommier (1637–1686) also liked to paint, and he may well have been called on to create a posthumous image of Marie de l'Incarnation. The Jesuits Jean Pierron (1631–1700) and Claude Chauchetière (1645–1709) also painted religious scenes used to convert the Indigenous peoples they worked among.<sup>5</sup>



LEFT: Anonymous, *Ex-voto of the Sick Child* (*Ex-voto de l'enfant malade*), 1697, oil on paper, 30 x 40.5 cm, collection of the Musée régional de Vaudreuil-Soulanges, Quebec City. RIGHT: Anonymous, *Ex-voto of the Three Shipwrecked at Lévis* (*Ex-voto des trois naufragés à Lévis*), 1754, oil on canvas, 31.7 x 52.1 cm, collection of the Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré Shrine, Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré, Quebec City.

One of the most famous paintings from the period, *France Bringing Faith to the Hurons of New France* (*La France apportant la foi aux Hurons de la Nouvelle-France*), c. 1670, was commissioned by the Hurons from a painter (unknown) in France and given to the Jesuits for their new chapel in Quebec.<sup>6</sup> It depicts a Huron kneeling before Anne d'Autriche, the mother of Louis XIV, and presenting a framed painting of the so-called extended Holy Family, including Joachim and Anne, the grandparents of Jesus. A French ship is docked in the bay in the background, surrounded by two small chapels and some highly conventional landscape. Several engravings depicting the Jesuit martyrs Jean de Brébeuf and Gabriel Lalemant at Sainte-Marie among the Hurons were also popular, the most famous by Grégoire Huret (1606–1670).<sup>7</sup>

Life was harsh in the early years of this colony, and the small settler community was preoccupied with survival, trade, and business. Art was a luxury, serving mainly to address the religious needs of French Catholics in New France. Individuals who had survived a severe illness, a storm at sea, or some other danger sometimes gave thanks to God by ordering from an artist a votive painting that depicted the scene—or by making it themselves (the Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré museum in Quebec holds many of these naïve and often charming images).

Very few artists or mapmakers gave any thought to recording the natural wonders of this astonishing new country. Louis Nicolas was the exception. He appreciated the novelty of the subject matter all around him and determined to make it known to everyone—from Louis XIV down. As he wrote in *The Natural History*:

What likelihood is there that, even after twenty years of assiduous work and repeated great travels, I can say all that is necessary about so many fine curiosities of a foreign country, where everything is different from ours? How can I reduce into small space so many vast lands, and speak in few words of so many different objects about which, if I tried to speak thoroughly, I would never finish?<sup>8</sup>

Although Nicolas left New France in 1675, it seems that it was not until the 1680s that he began seriously to record his observations in *The Natural History*. When he found that words alone were insufficient to fulfill his purpose, he produced a book of drawings, *Les Raretés des Indes*, known now as the *Codex Canadensis*, in which he illustrated the same plants and animals he had mentioned in *The Natural History*. These two volumes should be regarded as different works, but they are strongly enough related for scholars to attribute them to the same author.



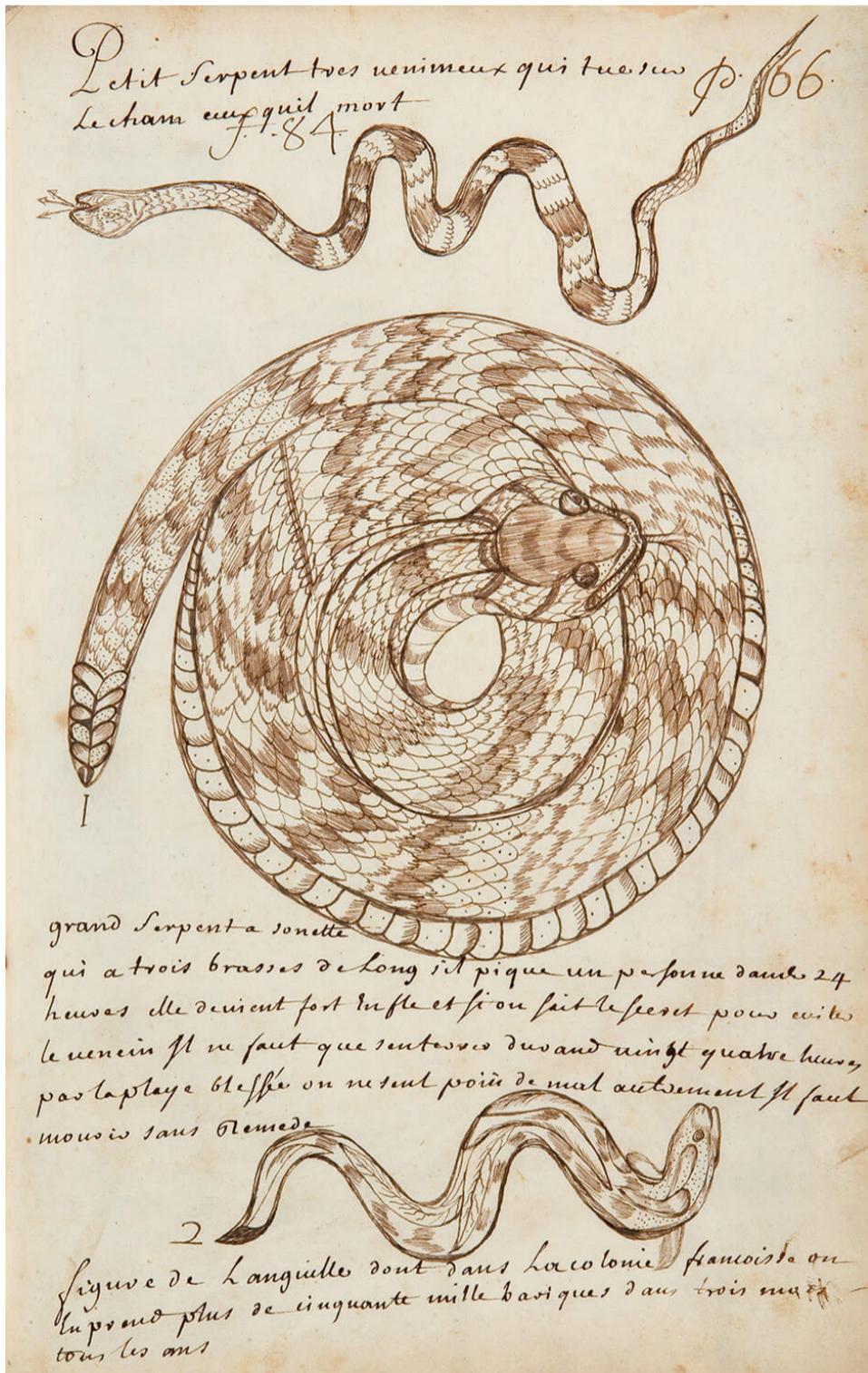
LEFT: Louis Nicolas, *Tripe de Roche, or Moss (Tripe de roche ou mousse)*, *Codex Canadensis*, page 24, n.d., ink on paper, 33.7 x 21.6 cm, Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma. RIGHT: Louis Nicolas, *The Shark, from Whose Skin Shagreen Is Made (Le Requiem de la peau du quel on fait le chagrin)*, *Codex Canadensis*, page 65, n.d., ink on paper, 33.7 x 21.6 cm, Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

### THE ARTIST AS NATURALIST

During his eleven years in New France as a missionary priest, from 1664 to 1675, Louis Nicolas travelled extensively. It appears, though, that his main interest was not to convert souls to the Catholic faith but to document the natural history of this land by observing the local inhabitants, plants, animals, birds, insects, and fish he encountered.

The *Codex Canadensis*, the only illustrated manuscript among Nicolas's major works, ranks as one of the most significant documents of the late seventeenth century in North America—a work of art that is also an example of graphic scientific reporting. All the plants illustrated in the *Codex*, except for the passion flower (*passiflora*), and all the animals, even the *Unicorn of the Red Sea* (*Licorne de La mer rouge*), n.d., are mentioned and described in *The Natural History*. The same is generally true for the mammals, birds, and fish. Sometimes the animals are presented in exactly the same order and described with the same terminology. The only parallel section in the *Codex* that does not exist in *The Natural History* is the ethnographic material—the portraits and sketches of Indigenous peoples and their ways of life. Nicolas may well have drafted this material, but it has not yet been found. All told, the seventy-nine-page *Codex* is illustrated with 180 pen-and-ink drawings on paper, including some with watercolour (or perhaps tempera) tinting.

In the latter seventeenth century, Western Europe and Britain were on the brink of the Enlightenment—a period devoted to intense colonial activity and to discovery and learning about the natural world, the past, and other civilizations. Nicolas, however, lived before the Swedish naturalist Carl Linnaeus (1707–1778), who formalized the modern classification system, and the Jesuit organized his illustrations according to the hierarchy he had learned during his education: first the humans, the highest beings in the natural order; then plants, animals, fish, birds; and finally a few images recording the French arrival in North America and some domestic animals they brought with them. Nicolas claimed that he had seen every specimen he drew (even though he included a unicorn amongst his animals). His approach fits with the prevailing religious, anthropocentric view of nature in which all has been made by God as a resource for humanity. For instance, the glands of the beaver (the *castoreum*)



Louis Nicolas, *Small, Very Poisonous Snake That Kills Immediately Those That It Bites* (*Petit serpent tres venimeux qui tue sur le cham ceux quil mort*), *Codex Canadensis*, page 66, n.d., ink on paper, 33.7 x 21.6 cm, Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

are seen as producing a substance that is useful to people rather than for marking the animal's territory. His illustration of a rattlesnake includes instructions about how to treat a bite, and of the eel featured on the same page, Nicolas tells readers, "more than fifty thousand barrels of them are caught in three months every year."

Nicolas approached his drawings of plants (18 in all), animals (67), fish (33), birds (56), and reptiles and insects (10) with care; and in classifying those he selected, he emphasized what was most useful to humans. He valued the pharmaceutical properties of certain plants and illustrated their roots, fruits, and flowers—for example the edible roots of the broadleaf arrowhead (*ounonnata*), which were used extensively by Indigenous peoples. The details he provides are far greater and more reliable than those in the writings of explorers such as Jacques Cartier and Samuel de Champlain or governor Pierre Boucher, author of *A True and Natural History of the Customs and Productions of the Country of New France Vulgarly Called Canada (Histoire véritable et naturelle des moeurs et productions du pays de la Nouvelle-France vulgairement dite le Canada)* (1664).

Nicolas groups his animals, fish, and birds according to size, from smallest to largest: from the mouse to the moose, the hummingbird to the owl, the white fish to the whale (for Nicolas, the whale is a fish, as are all creatures that live exclusively in water—otters, turtles, seahorses). This organizing principle is perhaps more logical than the alphabetical order used by his most famous source of inspiration, the prolific Swiss natural scientist Conrad Gessner (1516–1565), in his five-volume illustrated encyclopedia *The History of Animals (Historiae Animalium)* (1551–58, 1587). Nicolas's animal images are often astonishing for their realism and individuality, as with his moose, and he depicted them from different angles and in varied poses—standing, eating, lying down. Many artists of his period had the opportunity to see only dead animals, and they portrayed them with stiff bodies and their tongues hanging out: Gessner drew his beaver that way, and Nicolas followed suit in the *Codex*.

The birds, too, are among the most accurate and endearing images. Nicolas drew most of them in ink only, using cross-hatching and short straight or shaped strokes effectively to catch the effect of feathers, plumed heads, and clawed feet, but some are highly coloured. The page showing owls is particularly fine. Many of these bird drawings are also remarkably accurate. At a meeting of the Society of Canadian Ornithologists in Saskatoon in



LEFT: Louis Nicolas, *Manitou or Nigani, Devil's Child (Manitou ou nigani Enfant du diable)*, *Codex Canadensis*, page 31, n.d., ink on paper, 33.7 x 21.6 cm, Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma. RIGHT: Louis Nicolas, *Coucoucouou*, *Codex Canadensis*, page 52, n.d., ink on paper, 33.7 x 21.6 cm, Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

October 2003, members were shown a reproduction of the opening page of the bird images in the *Codex* (the hummingbird, red finch, American ortolan, and others) and they easily identified the species without reading the captions.

Nicolas included two ornate and carefully drawn maps in the *Codex* to illustrate the large area he travelled during his time in New France. The first is a general map of the Saint Lawrence Basin—the French colonial territory in North America, including New France, Nova Scotia, New England, New York, Newfoundland, and the Great Lakes region. The second is a detailed map of “Manitounie”—the Mississippi region as explored by the Jesuit missionary Father Jacques Marquette and the French trader Louis Joliette in 1673. Like other maps produced by explorers and travellers in the seventeenth century, they show place names, rivers, and lakes. The interior map is also embellished with drawings of a rattlesnake with its tongue flicking and a Longnose gar (“chausarou”) swimming through rippling water.

The *Codex Canadensis* is an unparalleled creation of its time, a work of art rare in quality and in its depictions of plants and animals. Pictorial representations from New France in the 1600s are extremely rare. For that reason alone, the detailed and accurate images of the plants and animals that Louis Nicolas created in the *Codex Canadensis* are invaluable.



Louis Nicolas, *Map, Codex Canadensis*, n.d., ink on paper, 33.7 x 43.2 cm, Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma. The lower right box indicates this is a “general map of the great St. Lawrence River, which has been explored more than 900 leagues inland in the West Indies.”

## REPRESENTATIONS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

The nineteen pages Nicolas devotes in the *Codex Canadensis* to multiple images and explanatory captions of the Indigenous peoples he met during his missionary travels provide a vital visual record of late-seventeenth-century Indigenous life. These images are not portraits, per se, but represent “types” of people Nicolas encountered; however the illustration on page 14 is of Iscouakité, a one-eyed Ottawa warrior chief who had encouraged his people “to pray.” This drawing is one of only two known portraits of Indigenous peoples created in New France.

In total, eleven different nations are depicted in the *Codex*.<sup>9</sup> Nicolas drew their ceremonial costumes, hairstyles, pipes, tomahawks, shields, tobacco pouches, and other objects. No other illustrations from seventeenth-century North America show the body paintings of Indigenous peoples in such detail. The man from the village of Gannachiou-aé, for instance, is heavily painted and smoking a long, elaborate pipe. He has come to a neighbouring Iroquois village to invite the men to a game. The snake he holds, the “god of fire,” is even taller than he is, but as the participants dance and sing, they hold this strong serpent in their hands.



LEFT: Louis Nicolas, *Iroquois of the Gandaouaguehaga Nation in Virginia (Savage hyroquois de La Nation de gandaouaguehaga En virginie)*, *Codex Canadensis*, page 7, n.d., ink on paper, 33.7 x 21.6 cm, Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma. RIGHT: Louis Nicolas, *This Is a Representative Sent by the Village of Gannachiou-aé . . . (C'est icy un député du bourg de gannachiou = aré...)*, *Codex Canadensis*, page 11, n.d., ink on paper, 33.7 x 21.6 cm, Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma.



The remaining images depict several dwellings and means of transportation (snowshoes, canoes, kayak) of Indigenous peoples and a variety of fishing and fighting techniques. Unique from this period, Nicolas attempts to portray the masks worn by members of the False Face Society—an Iroquois medicine or “curing” group. He also includes the torture of a captive woman (likely a Huron), which he witnessed when he was working in Iroquois territory. Even though he would have disapproved of the longstanding and deadly rivalry between these two powerful groups (especially because the Jesuits Jean de Brébeuf and Gabriel Lalemant had been cruelly martyred at the Sainte-Marie among the Hurons Mission a few decades before), the caption for this scene is curiously devoid of judgment: “Drawing of a woman captured in war, whose nails were all pulled out with teeth. I saw her burned in the village of Toniotogéhaga for six hours during which she was slowly flayed. She was eaten partly by the Iroquois and by their dogs.”

Nicolas's depictions of the Indigenous population were influenced by the period in which he lived. Yet Nicolas seems to have appreciated the richness of the human and natural life he observed on his travels, all so different from what he knew in Europe. He packed *The Natural History* with information about Indigenous peoples of New France, their ways of living, and details such as their care of the sick and the medicinal plants they treasured. He described how the women used porcupine quills for decorative work. No other writer, including his superiors who assembled the reports in the *Jesuit Relations* (*Relations des Jésuites*), provided so much valuable ethnographic content about northeastern North America at this time.

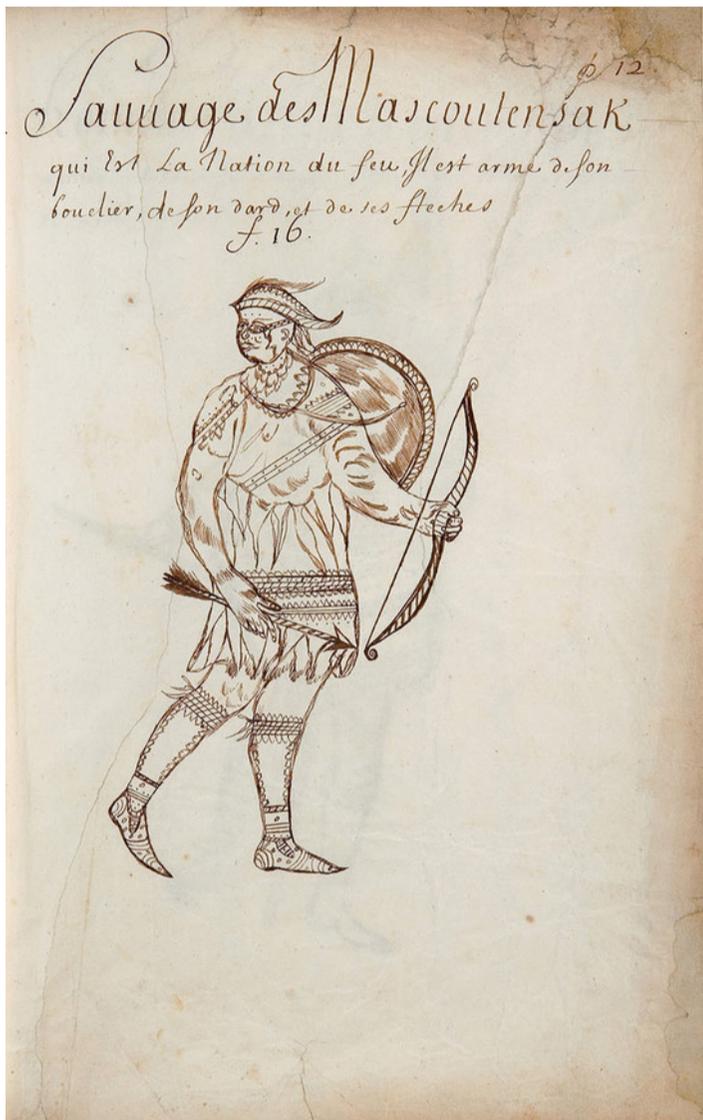


LEFT: Louis Nicolas, *Means of Transportation and Habitations*, *Codex Canadensis*, page 19, n.d., ink on paper, 33.7 x 21.6 cm, Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma. RIGHT: Louis Nicolas, *Torture, Medicine, and Death*, *Codex Canadensis*, page 22, n.d., ink on paper, 33.7 x 21.6 cm, Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma.



Nonetheless, in *The Natural History*, Nicolas, like most of his contemporaries, is occasionally disparaging about the habits of the people and nations he encountered. He calls the Indigenous people "*les sauvages*" or "*les barbares*" and despised their religious rituals. Like his fellow missionaries, he was convinced that he possessed the truth and that the Indigenous peoples' beliefs were but false inventions of the Devil. If they failed to convert, they were doomed to spend eternity in hell.

Yet he also described Indigenous peoples as "brave warriors, great hunters, entirely detached from what is servile . . . and certainly very noble, at least in their own way."<sup>10</sup> How influential was Louis Nicolas in shaping views about the Indigenous people of northeastern North America? We know that he hoped *The Natural History*, once it was printed, would reach a wide audience of knowledgeable people of his time—and for that reason he wrote it in French, not Latin. But because it remained in manuscript form, it was probably not consulted by more than a select few. It seems that Nicolas arranged for the binding of the *Codex Canadensis*, and he clearly designed it for presentation to Louis XIV and a home in the Royal Library. We have no proof that it ever went there, and it seems soon to have disappeared for more than two centuries. It is unlikely, then, to have had any influence before it was published in a facsimile volume in 1930 and before the original entered the collection of the Gilcrease Museum in 1949.



LEFT: Louis Nicolas, *Man of the Mascoutensak, Which Is the Fire Nation (Sauvage des Mascoutensak qui Est La Nation du feu)*, *Codex Canadensis*, page 12, n.d., ink on paper, 33.7 x 21.6 cm, Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma. RIGHT: Louis Nicolas, *Man of the Outaouak Nation (Sauvage de La Nation outaouaks)*, *Codex Canadensis*, page 6, n.d., ink on paper, 33.7 x 21.6 cm, Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma.



No evidence exists of Louis Nicolas having had a formal training in art. However, he developed his own distinctive style of pen-and-ink drawing—detailed and energetic—and worked with seventeenth-century techniques of building compositions from engravings he found in natural history books. Although art by Nicolas appears simplistic and crowded compared to other works of his time, his sketches are usually accurate, though they can be fanciful too.

### AN UNTRAINED STYLE

As a Jesuit priest, Louis Nicolas received a first-rate classical education focused on philosophy and languages. At the time, the Jesuit Order was renowned for its mathematical and science studies, but not for training in art. We can only guess how some of Nicolas's artistic Jesuit contemporaries developed their natural talent and received their training. We know that some Jesuit missionaries in New France, such as Jean Pierron (1631-1700) and Claude Chauchetière (1645-1709), painted religious scenes to use in their efforts to convert Indigenous peoples, though no images by them have survived. One

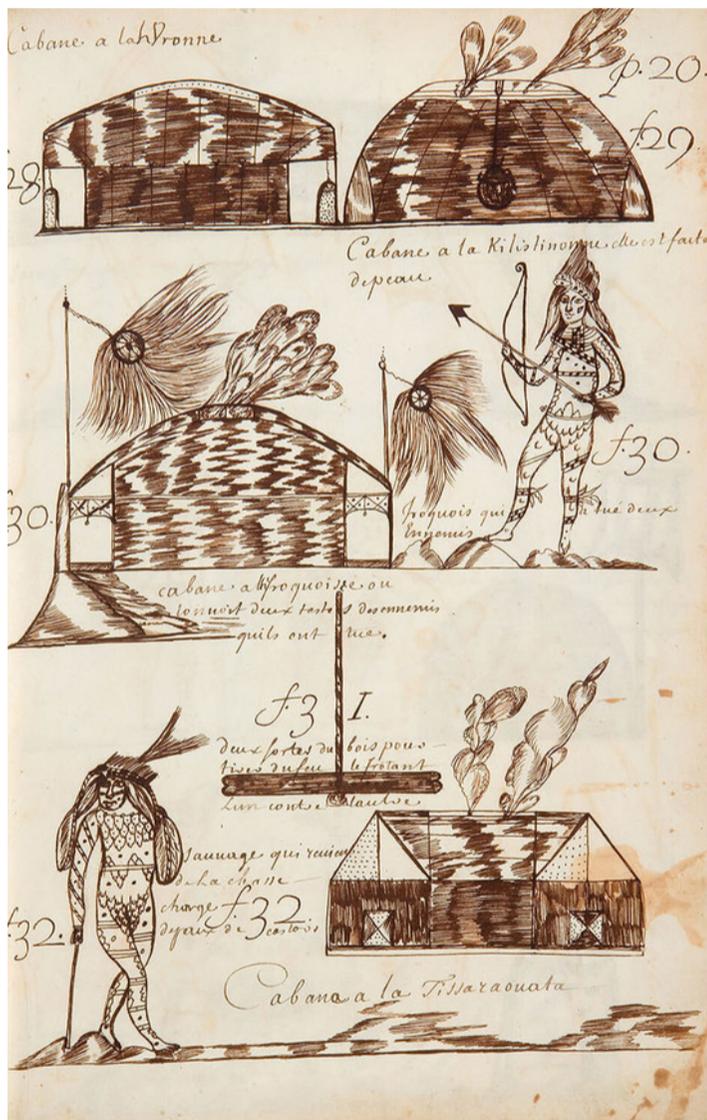
anonymous oil painting from the period shows a chained man engulfed in flames. An inscription written in Algonquin in the lower right of the canvas reads: "Look at me. See how I suffer in these flames. You will suffer the same if you don't convert. Suffer during your lifetime; courage as long as you are on earth."<sup>1</sup>



Anonymous, *Purgatory (Le Purgatoire)*, n.d., oil on canvas, 60.5 x 84.3 cm, oil on canvas, collection of the Society of the Priests of Saint-Sulpice, Montreal.

There is no mention in the *Jesuit Relations (Relations des Jésuites)*, the volumes recording the missionary endeavours in New France, of Nicolas using art in his work, though he did accompany Pierron to his mission in Iroquois territory.<sup>2</sup> Judging by the only artwork that exists from Nicolas's hand, the drawings of the *Codex Canadensis* in the Gilcrease Museum in Tulsa, Oklahoma, it appears that Nicolas had little, if any, formal training in art. His sketches of Indigenous peoples engaged in their daily activities lack the skills of a trained seventeenth-century artist—techniques such as a proper use of perspective and a sophisticated use of light and dark shading to render drama. However, Nicolas was a talented and idiosyncratic amateur. In his enthusiasm to record as many examples as he could for his readers, he filled his pages with aesthetically original and pleasing sketches. These compositions, which face in a variety of directions, are more like trophies than observations from nature.

Throughout the *Codex Canadensis*, Nicolas's drawings are consistent and do not reveal any significant evolution in style. They were probably created over a relatively short span of time in the 1690s and were bound together in the same volume. Yet every detail is carefully rendered in pen and ink, whether the paint on men's bodies, the webbing on snowshoes, the scales on fish, the hairs on seals, the plumes on birds, or the long, flowing tails of the horses. Moreover, Nicolas frequently worked with signature techniques, including cross-hatching, which he used to give his figures a three-dimensional look. He also favoured a zigzag pattern to depict ripples in water or fur and feathers, as in his drawings of owls.



LEFT: Louis Nicolas, *Habitations*, *Codex Canadensis*, page 20, n.d., ink on paper, 33.7 x 21.6 cm, Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma.  
RIGHT: Louis Nicolas, *The Swift (Le Martinet)*, *Codex Canadensis*, page 43, n.d., ink on paper, 33.7 x 21.6 cm, Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Colour is another attribute used in a few of the sketches. For example, Nicolas (or perhaps someone else later) tinted the drawings of amphibians with blue watercolour, to make clear they could live in water, and added bright red tongues to a few of the animals. The opening page of the section on birds has particularly vivid hues. The red heart that appears on the wing of the "Characaro" on another of the pages in this section is obviously an artistic rendition of the red patch formed by the bird's feathers.

## ENGRAVINGS BY OTHERS AS MODELS

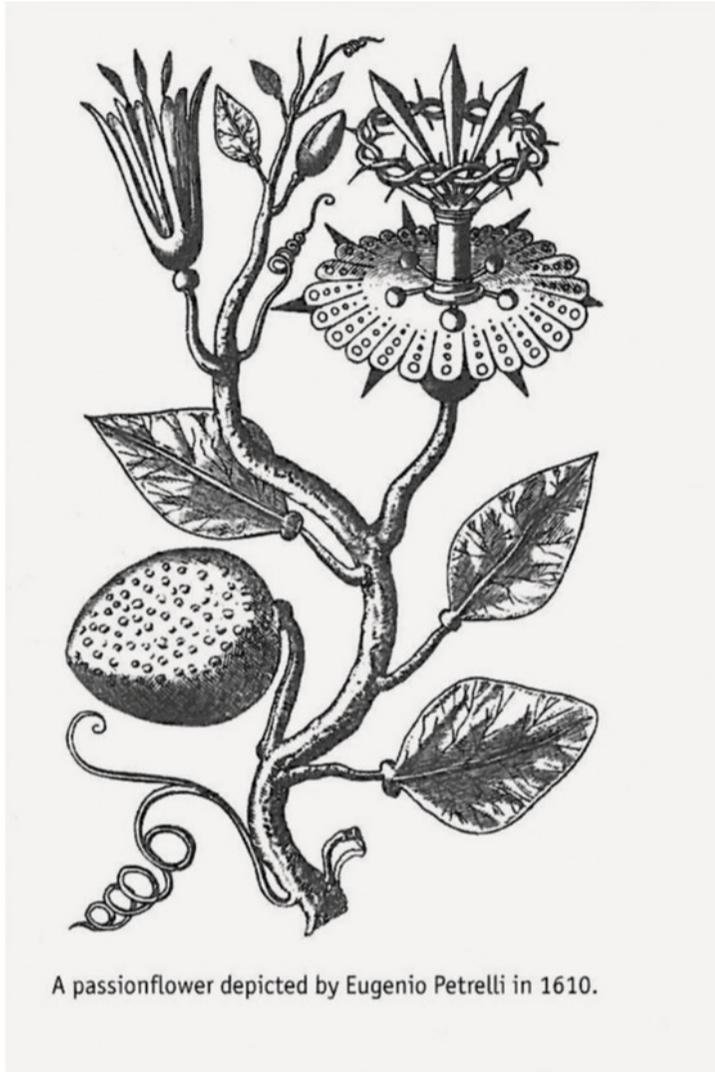
Evidence indicates that the drawings in the *Codex Canadensis* were created after Nicolas returned to France in 1675—most likely during the 1690s. He never refers to any sketches that he made in New France. Rather, in Book Nine of *The Natural History of the New World (Histoire naturelle des Indes occidentales)*, he writes that he wished he had “deeply imprinted in [his] imagination” all the animals he “has observed ... on the sea, on lakes, on rivers, on land, and on the trees of America.”<sup>3</sup>

Possibly to compensate for the lack of preparatory sketches, he drew the scenes of Indigenous life from memory. When necessary, especially for the “portraits” of kings or captains of various nations—for example, his *King of the Great Nation of the Nadouessiouek (Roy de La grande Nation des Nadouessiouek)*, n.d.—he took the outlines from the engravings he found in the *History of Canada, or of New France (Historiae Canadensis seu Novae Franciae Libri Decem)* (1664) by Father François Du Creux (1596–1666).

The five volumes of *The History of Animals (Historiae Animalium)* (1551–58, 1587) by Conrad Gessner (1516–1565) may also have helped Nicolas recognize the animals he had seen in Canada. He likely drew on those engravings to create his own versions of them—for example, his otter and beaver. The only exception to this technique seems to be his depiction of plants. As source material, Nicolas turned to the vegetation available in gardens in France for many of his examples. Likely using European models combined with the memories of what he had seen in North America, Nicolas created an inventory of plant drawings for the *Codex*. Occasionally, however, as for the passion flower (*passiflora*), Nicolas was influenced by published illustrations.



Interior of Conrad Gessner's *The History of Animals (Historiae Animalium)* (1551–58, 1587), vol. 1.



LEFT: Drawing of a *passiflora* by Eugenio Petrelli which served as a frontispiece in a book published in 1610 by the Jesuit Antonio Possevino. RIGHT: Louis Nicolas, *Branch of the White Cedar of Canada (Branche du cedre blanc du Canada)*, *Codex Canadensis*, page 26, n.d., ink on paper, 33.7 x 21.6 cm, Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma./figcaption>

Nicolas was not alone in operating this way: in the late seventeenth century, most natural history illustrators worked from published examples, embellishing them with their own artistic flourish. Although he copied some compositions and ideas from the engravings he found in books, the details he added make his illustrations look quite different from the models that inspired him. His Noupiming warrior, for instance, though based on Du Creux's warrior, is holding a hatchet rather than a pipe and wears no magnificent cape. In general, Nicolas's illustrations are more informative than the somewhat conventional models he followed: his Indigenous figures are painted, festooned with other decorative pieces, and surrounded by useful implements: tomahawks, shields, tobacco pouches, and bows and arrows.

Nicolas also used European animals and birds as his models and adapted them to the species he had seen in New France—as he did with his *Papace*, or *Grey Partridge* (*Papace ou perdris grise*), n.d., taken from Gessner's ptarmigan, but now featuring a fantastic plumage around the head, throat, and tail. He also used the same source image to depict two different animals, as with the “Virginia rat” (*Rat de La Virginie*) and the “rat common in the whole country” (*Rat commun dans tout Le pais*), both on page 28 of the *Codex*. These two rats look remarkably similar, but one is smaller than the other and the ears and tails are different. Most important, Nicolas was willing to break with the tradition of creating stiff, isolated specimens and, instead, made his creatures look alive, whether sitting on the ground eating a fish, like his otter, or swimming in the water like his beaver.



LEFT: Louis Nicolas, *Squirrels and Rats* (*Écureuils et rats*), *Codex Canadensis*, page 28, n.d., ink on paper, 33.7 x 21.6 cm, Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma. RIGHT: Louis Nicolas, *Ducks* (*Canards*), *Codex Canadensis*, page 70, n.d., ink on paper, 33.7 x 21.6 cm, Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

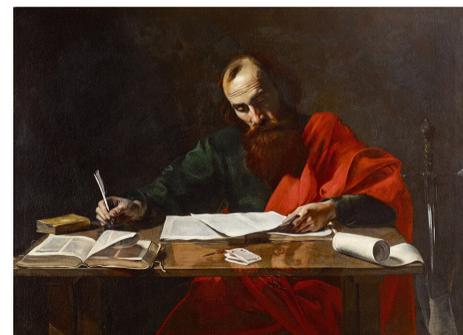


Nicolas also turned to the maps of others as source material. The outline and some of the place names in his detailed second map, of “Manitounie” (the Mississippi region) are taken from Du Creux and from *Collection of Voyages* (*Recueil de voyages*) (1681) by Melchisédec Thévenot. But once again Nicolas has updated the information and added his own stamp through his drawings and lettering.

### PEN, INK, AND PAPER

Nicolas made all his drawings in pen and ink—most likely using a feather quill (as the painter Valentin de Boulogne [1591–1632] depicted in his *Saint Paul Writing His Epistles* [*Saint Paul écrit ses épîtres*], c. 1616–20). The ink commonly used at the time was iron gall ink (also known as iron gall nut ink, oak gall ink, or common ink), made from iron salts and tannic acids. These acids came from a vegetable source, giving the ink a purple-black or brown-black colour. Over time, the ink has taken on a warm nutty-brown shade that is reminiscent of sepia, an ink derived from cuttlefish.

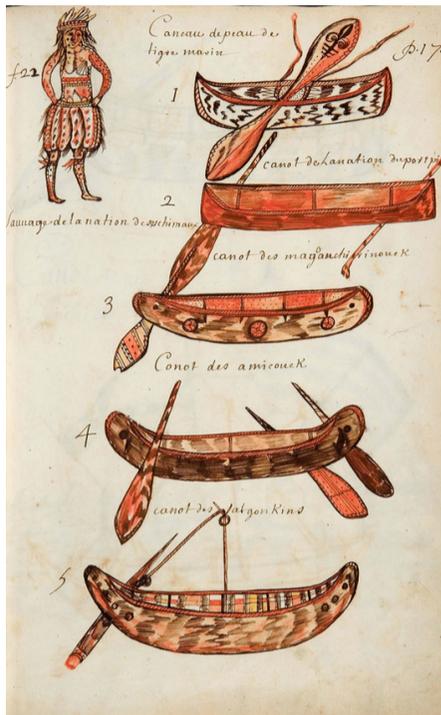
A few of the drawings are tinted in watercolour, or perhaps tempera, applied with a brush, as in *Man of the Esquimaux Nation* (*Sauvage de la nation des eschimaux*), n.d., and *Large Ox of New Denmark in America* (*grand Boeuf du nouveau D’Anemar En amerique*), n.d. As was customary at the time, the colouring may have been added by someone else at a later date. Whoever applied the colour did so sparingly: it always covers Nicolas’s usual elaborate



Valentin de Boulogne, *Saint Paul Writing His Epistles* (*Saint Paul écrit ses épîtres*), c. 1616–20, oil on canvas, 99.3 x 133 cm, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

pen-and-ink markings and is used on selected areas only, as in the grouping of canoes around *Man of the Esquimaux Nation*, or the brightly coloured assembly in *Birds*, n.d.

Nicolas would have created his drawings over many months if not a few years in the 1690s, but he chose his paper carefully—every page is exactly the same size and quality. He drew on separate sheets of folded paper, and when he took them all to a skilled bookbinder to have them bound into one volume, the craftsman sewed them together very tightly: the left edges on some of the images were caught in the central fold (where the paper is bound into the spine): on page 20, for example, the letter “f” before the figure numbers has almost disappeared. The paper that Nicolas used was made of linen, flax, or other vegetable material—a material that preserves well. The manuscript we know as the *Codex Canadensis* has the freshness of a recently completed book, despite its date.



LEFT: Louis Nicolas, *Man of the Esquimaux Nation* (*Sauvage de la nation des esquimaux*), *Codex Canadensis*, page 17, n.d., ink and watercolour on paper, 33.7 x 21.6 cm, Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma. RIGHT: Louis Nicolas, *Large Ox of New Denmark in America* (*grand Boeuf du nouveau D'Anemar En amerique*), *Codex Canadensis*, page 79, n.d., ink and watercolour on paper, 33.7 x 21.6 cm, Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Each individual page measures 33.7 by 21.6 centimetres—one half of a folded double page. Only one illustration—Cartier’s ship—occupies a full double page. Both of the maps were also drawn on double pages. They have no trace of any original stitching, but, rather, seem to have been “tipped in” to the spine—simply caught into the fold rather than stitched. Binders commonly treated maps in this way so they could be detached easily from the volume and mounted separately.

### BINDING THE CODEX

The *Codex Canadensis*’s binding is rich red leather decorated with gilded rules, fleurs-de-lys, and, in the centre of the front cover, the armorial stamp of Louis XIV. Did Nicolas choose this material himself? There have been suggestions that to make the album more valuable in the nineteenth-century French rare-book trade, someone had the original pages inserted into a royal binding that had been removed from another book. Such expert re-boxing (*remboîtage*) was quite common—and easy to accomplish for a book like this one with no known provenance.

Professor Germaine Warkentin has, however, studied the *Codex* at the Gilcrease Museum and, from her careful visual inspection, concluded that the present leather binding is likely the authentic original. In addition, she cites two pieces of evidence to support her view. First, the armorial stamp is the one Louis XIV used between 1688 and 1694 and probably later—close to the time when Nicolas must have devised the dedicatory pages. Second, given Nicolas’s earlier attempts to send gifts to the royal family and place himself in the king’s good graces, it is quite probable that, when he took his manuscript pages to the binder, he requested this particular design. At the time it was not unusual for petitioning authors to make formal presentations of their books to the monarch.<sup>4</sup> Until we have expert evidence to the contrary, it’s safe to assume that the bound leather cover of the *Codex Canadensis* is the original one selected by Nicolas himself.



**LEFT:** *Codex Canadensis*, n.d., spine, Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma. The original title, *Les Raretés des Indes*, can be seen on the spine. **RIGHT:** *Codex Canadensis*, n.d., cover, Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma.



The drawings by Louis Nicolas featured in this book are part of the bound volume known today as the *Codex Canadensis*. The book is in the permanent collection of the Gilcrease Museum in Tulsa, Oklahoma, though it may not always be on view.



## GILCREASE MUSEUM

Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art  
1400 N. Gilcrease Museum Road  
Tulsa, Oklahoma, U.S.A.  
918-596-2700  
gilcrease.org



***Codex Canadensis*, n.d.**

Ink on paper  
34.5 x 23 cm

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### NOTES

#### BIOGRAPHY

1. For the biography of Louis Nicolas, the principle source is Guy Tremblay, "Louis Nicolas, sa vie et son œuvre. Les divers modes de transport des Indiens américains," paper presented at the Department of Art History, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Université de Montréal, 1983.
2. Nicolas's date of birth is confirmed by the Archives of the Jesuits in Rome, *Tolos*, 10ii, 302v and 385v. His date of death is unknown.
3. Microfilm of the Parish Registers of the city of Aubenas (1612-46). Property of the Church of J.C. of Latter-Day Saints, Salt Lake City, Film 5 Mi 3; volume R64.
4. See Germaine Warkentin, "Aristotle in New France: Louis Nicolas and the Making of the *Codex Canadensis*," *French Colonial History* 11 (2010): 71-107.
5. When Nicolas had his illustrations bound into a volume, probably in 1700, he had the title *Les Raretés des Indes* placed on the spine.
6. R.G. Thwaites, *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents. Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France, 1610-1791. The Original French, Latin, and Italian Text, with English Translation and Notes: Illustrated by Portraits, Maps, and Facsimiles*, in 73 vols (Cleveland: The Burrows Brothers, 1896-1901).
7. Honoré Laverdière and Henri-Raymond Casgrain, *Le Journal des Jésuites* (Montréal and Laval: Éditions François-Xavier, 1871, 1913).
8. *Catalogue restauré des Jésuites de la Nouvelle France*, Archives of the Society of Jesus, St. Jerome, Quebec. Algonquin is a distinct language, closely related to Ojibwe, and is a subgroup of the Algonquian language family, which also includes Atikamekw, Blackfoot, Cree, Innu, Maliseet, Mi'kmaq, Naskapi, Oji-Cree, and others. The Algonquin peoples are part of the Anishinaabe cultural group. The Algonquin call themselves Omàmiwinini and their language Omàmiwininimowin. Today there are ten Algonquin First Nations (one reserve in Ontario, nine in Quebec). For more information see <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/algonquin/>.
9. General Archives of the Jesuits in Rome, *Catalogue de France*, vol. 23, 246-B.
10. Bernard Hoffman, "The Codex Canadensis: An Important Document for Great Lakes Ethnography," *Ethnohistory* 8, no. 4 (1961): 386.
11. See *Jesuit Relations*, vol. 51, 71, and 73.
12. Marie de l'Incarnation, *Correspondance*, ed. Dom Guy Oury (Solesmes: Abbaye Saint-Pierre, 1971), 788; see Warkentin, "Aristotle in New France," 81.



13. Alet's tract is reproduced in *La Morale pratique des Jésuites* by Antoine Arnauld, in *Œuvres* (Paris: Sigismond D'Arnay & compagnie, 1780), vol. 34, 729-34.

14. See François-Marc Gagnon, Nancy Senior, and Réal Ouellet, *The Codex Canadensis and the Writings of Louis Nicolas* (Tulsa, OK: Gilcrease Museum; Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011).

15. Jesuits Archives in Rome, Gall. 110 45. Letter of F. Le Mercier to F. General, dated from Quebec, September 1, 1668.

16. On Pierron, see Thibault Finet, *Jean Pierron (1631-1700): missionnaire, diplomate, et peintre en Amérique*, MA, Département d'histoire, Faculté des études supérieures, Université de Montréal, 2012 (under the supervision of Dominique Deslandres). Unfortunately Pierron's paintings have not been saved.

17. On Chauchetière, see François-Marc Gagnon and Nicole Cloutier, *Premiers peintres de la Nouvelle-France* (Québec: Ministère des Affaires culturelles, 1978), vol. 1, 29-54. See also Laurier Lacroix, *Les arts en Nouvelle-France* (Québec: Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, 2012), 75-79, with repr. of some of his works, 76-77.

18. *Jesuit Relations*, vol. 53, 202.

19. *Jesuit Relations*, vol. 55, 41, and 43.

20. According to the larger of the two maps Nicolas included at the beginning of the *Codex Canadensis*, "Virginia" was certainly not the British colony of Virginia.

21. The text of this *Memorandum* is reproduced and translated in *Jesuit Relations*, vol. 59, 56-63. In it he complains about not always remembering the names of the twenty-six Indigenous individuals he has baptized. Nicolas gives a list of the converts at the end of his *Memorandum*.

22. *The Natural History of the New World (Histoire naturelle des Indes occidentales)*, folios 49 and 74.

23. *L'algonquin au XVIIe siècle : Une édition critique, analysée et commentée de la grammaire algonquine du Père Louis Nicolas*, ed. Diane Daviault (Sainte-Foy: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 1994), 17-18.

24. *The Treatise on Four-footed Animals*, also attributed to Nicolas, is considered to be the first draft of *The Natural History*.

25. Warkentin, "Aristotle in New France," 88.

26. J.B.A. Allaire, *Dictionnaire biographique du clergé canadien-français* (Montréal: Imprimerie de l'École catholique des sourds-muets, 1908-34), vol. 1 (1910), 399.

**KEY WORKS: KING OF THE GREAT NATION OF THE NADOUESSIOUEK**

1. The Spanish called the place where the Mississippi River ended the Mar Vermejo, in French, Mer Vermeille. Today it is known as the Gulf of Mexico. This information was provided by Christian Morissonneau, a former professor at the Université Laval, Quebec City.

2. R.G. Thwaites, *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents. Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France, 1610-1791. The Original French, Latin, and Italian Text, with English Translation and Notes: Illustrated by Portraits, Maps, and Facsimiles*, in 73 vols. (Cleveland: The Burrows Brothers, 1896-1901).

**KEY WORKS: PORTRAIT OF A FAMOUS ONE-EYED MAN**

1. In an earlier publication, I suggested that Iscouakité might be the Algonquin known historically as Paul Tessouat. See "L'expérience ethnographique de Louis Nicolas," *Recherches amérindiennes au Québec* 8, no. 4 (1979): 288; Anne-Marie Sioui (Anne-Marie Blouin), has since corrected me. See her "Les onze portraits d'Indiens," *Recherches amérindiennes au Québec* 11, no 4 (1981): 287.

**KEY WORKS: FISHING BY THE PASSINASSIOUEK**

1. Many of his portraits of Indigenous figures, such as his *King of the Great Nation of the Nadouessiouek* (*Roy de La grande Nation des Nadouessiouek*), n.d., in contrast, were inspired by engravings he found in *The History of Canada, or of New France (Historiae Canadensis seu Novae Franciae Libri Decem)* (1664) by Father François Du Creux (1596-1666). See F.-M. Gagnon, "L'expérience ethnographique de Louis Nicolas," *Recherches amérindiennes au Québec* 8, no. 4: 280-95 for a complete list of these occurrences.

2. *The Natural History of the New World (Histoire naturelle des Indes occidentales)*, folio 181.

3. It is seen also in the section on fish in the *Codex Canadensis*, page 60, fig. 77: "Atticamec, the large white fish."

4. *The Natural History of the New World (Histoire naturelle des Indes occidentales)*, folio 177.

**KEY WORKS: PLANTS**

1. See Marthe Faribault, "Phytonymes nord-américains: étude onomasiologique de la terminologie des racines alimentaires," *Actes du XXe Congrès International de Linguistique et de Philologie Romanes*, Zürich University (April 6-11, 1992), published also in Basel (Francke Verlag, 1993), vol. 4, section 6, 115-16.

**KEY WORKS: UNICORN OF THE RED SEA**

1. "The pen-drawn figure that I provide of this animal, perfectly representing the one that I saw killed . . ." *The Natural History of the New World (Histoire naturelle des Indes occidentales)*, folio 86.



2. *Codex Canadensis*, page 26, fig. 2.

3. F.-M. Gagnon, "Experientia est magistra rerum: Savoir empirique et culture savante chez les premiers voyageurs au Canada," *Questions de culture* (Québec: Institut québécois de recherche sur la culture, 1981) vol. 1, "Cette culture que l'on appelle savante," 47-62.

4. *The Natural History*, folio 85.

### KEY WORKS: AMPHIBIANS

1. Pierre Belon du Mans, *La Nature et la diversité des poissons avec leurs pourtraicts représentez au plus près du naturel* (Paris: Ch. Estienne, 1555), 27.

### KEY WORKS: BIRDS

1. Michel Gosselin, "Le Traité des Oyseaux," *QuébecOiseaux* 24, no. 1 (Autumn 2012): 28-33.

### KEY WORKS: PAPACE, OR GREY PARTRIDGE

1. See François-Marc Gagnon, "Figures hors-texte. Note sur l'*Histoire naturelle des Indes occidentales* du père Louis Nicolas, Jésuite," *Journal of Canadian Art History* 10, no. 1 (1987): 1-15. *Codex Canadensis*, plate 55, fig. 72.

### KEY WORKS: SEA MONSTER KILLED BY THE FRENCH

1. Pierre Belon du Mans, in his *De Aquatilibus* I, 39; Conrad Gessner, in his *Nomenclator Aquatilium Animalium . . .*; Ambroise Paré, in the twenty-first book of his *Oeuvres . . .*; Gaspar Schott, a Jesuit author, *Physica curiosa*, fig. 31.

2. Pierre-François Xavier de Charlevoix, *Histoire et description générale de la Nouvelle France...*, vol. 3 (1744), 154.

3. *The Natural History of the New World (Histoire naturelle des Indes occidentales)*, folio 166.

### KEY WORKS: JACQUES CARTIER'S SHIP

1. Fournier is referred to for the first time, in my knowledge, by Auguste Vachon, then at the Picture Division of Library and Archives Canada, in his article "Flora and Fauna: Louis Nicolas and the *Codex canadensis*," *The Archivist* 12, no. 2 (March-April 1985): 2.

### SIGNIFICANCE & CRITICAL ISSUES

1. Algonquin is a distinct language, closely related to Ojibwe, and is a subgroup of the Algonquian language family, which also includes Atikamekw, Blackfoot, Cree, Innu, Maliseet, Mi'kmaq, Naskapi, Oji-Cree, and others. The Algonquin peoples are part of the Anishinaabe cultural group. The Algonquin call themselves Omàmiwinini and their language Omàmiwininimowin. Today there are ten Algonquin First Nations (one reserve in Ontario, nine in Quebec). For more information see <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/algonquin/>.

2. *The Natural History of the New World (Histoire naturelle des Indes occidentales)*, folio 1.

3. John R. Porter et Jean Bélisle, *La Sculpture ancienne au Québec. Trois siècles d'art religieux et profane* (Montréal: Les Éditions de l'homme, 1986).

4. François-Marc Gagnon, *Premiers peintres de la Nouvelle-France*, vol. 1, with Nicole Cloutier, and vol. 2 (Quebec City: Ministry of Cultural Affairs, 1976): on Frère Luc, vol. 1, 55-115; on Hugues Pommier, vol. 2, 93-110; on Jean Pierron, vol. 1, 9-27; on Claude Chauchetière, vol. 1, 29-54. For more recent information, see Laurier Lacroix et al., *Les Arts en Nouvelle-France* (Quebec City: Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, 2013).

5. François-Marc Gagnon, *La conversion par l'image. Un aspect de la mission de Jésuites auprès des Indiens du Canada au XVIIe siècle* (Montréal: Bellarmin, 1975).

6. On this painting, see François-Marc Gagnon and Laurier Lacroix, "La France apportant la foi aux Hurons de la Nouvelle France: un tableau conservé chez les Ursulines de Québec," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 18, no. 3 (1983): 5-20.

7. See François-Marc Gagnon, "L'iconographie classique des saints Martyrs canadiens," in Guy Laflèche, *Les saints martyrs canadiens. Histoire d'un mythe* (Laval: Singulier, 1988), 37-79.

8. François-Marc Gagnon, Nancy Senior, and Réal Ouellet, *The Codex Canadensis and the Writings of Louis Nicolas* (Tulsa, OK: Gilcrease Museum, and Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011), 265.

9. The nations Louis Nicolas depicts are labelled the Stonnontouanechaga (page 4); the Illinois (page 5); the Outaouak (page 6); an Iroquois of the Grandaouaguechaga (page 7); the Nadouessiouek (page 8); the Noupiming-dach-iriniouek (page 9); the Onneiothchaga (page 10); a representative from the village of Gannachiou-aé (page 11); the Mascoutensak (page 12); the Amikouek (page 13); the Esquimaux (page 17).

## STYLE & TECHNIQUE

1. Algonquin is a distinct language, closely related to Ojibwe, and is a subgroup of the Algonquian language family, which also includes Atikamekw, Blackfoot, Cree, Innu, Maliseet, Mi'kmaq, Naskapi, Oji-Cree, and others. The Algonquin peoples are part of the Anishinaabe cultural group. The Algonquin call themselves Omàmiwinini and their language Omàmiwininimowin. Today there are ten Algonquin First Nations (one reserve in Ontario, nine in Quebec). For more information see <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/algonquin/>.

2. R.G. Thwaites, *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents. Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France, 1610-1791. The Original French, Latin, and Italian Text, with English Translation and Notes: Illustrated by Portraits, Maps, and Facsimiles*, in 73 vols, (Cleveland: The Burrows Brothers, 1896-1901).



3. *The Natural History of the New World (Histoire naturelle des Indes occidentales)*, folio 129.

4. Germaine Warkentin, "From Archive to Author: Exploring the *Codex Canadensis*," in *Helmerich Center for American Research at Gilcrease Museum*, ed. Duane King (Tulsa, OK: Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art, 2016), 118.



### GLOSSARY

#### **Bécart de Granville, Charles (Canadian, 1675–1703)**

Born in New France, this mapmaker and draftsman was also an attorney of the King of France in the provost's court in Quebec City. Among his contemporaries his drawing skills were renowned; his talent as an artist continues to be recognized by historians of New France.

#### **Chauchetière, Claude (French, 1645–1709)**

A Jesuit priest, artist, author, and teacher of mathematics born in Aquitaine. By 1677 Chauchetière had arrived in New France to do missionary work; he spent sixteen years at La Prairie, working to convert Iroquois peoples and serving as pastor to French families.

#### **de Brébeuf, Jean (French, 1593–1649)**

A Jesuit priest and linguist who arrived in New France in 1625. He worked to convert the Montagnais, Huron, and Iroquois peoples over the next two decades, eventually learning the Huron language and creating a Huron grammar and dictionary. He was killed by the Iroquois in 1649 and canonized in 1930.

#### **Du Creux, François (French, 1596–1666)**

A priest and historian who entered into the Jesuit order in 1614. He is the author of the *Historiae Canadensis* (1664), an illustrated history of Canada that Du Creux compiled from conversations with missionaries who had been in New France, including Jean de Brébeuf and Father Paul Le Jeune.

#### **Frère Luc (French, 1614–1685)**

A Franciscan friar, painter, and architect, and the best-known of the artists of his religious order who travelled to New France. Luc arrived in New France in 1670, and planned the new chapel of the Récollets as well as made several church paintings.

#### **Gessner, Conrad (Swiss, 1516–1565)**

A physician, naturalist, and polymath, and a compiler of one of Renaissance Zurich's most important libraries. Gessner was a professor of natural history and ethics at the Reformed-Protestant theological college in Zurich. Among his most important scientific texts is the *Historiae Animalium* (1551–58, 1587), a richly illustrated five-volume study of the animal kingdom.

#### **Gilcrease, Thomas (American, 1890–1962)**

An oilman and collector from Tulsa, Oklahoma, who assembled the largest extant collection of art, rare documents, and artifacts related to the American West. The collection is now held in the Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma, which he founded in 1949.

#### **Huret, Grégoire (French, 1606–1670)**

A designer and engraver of religious subjects, portraits, frontispieces, and ornamental designs. Huret entered the Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture in 1663. He is the author of a two-part text on questions of perspective and optics.



### Jesuits

The Society of Jesus, whose members are known as Jesuits, is a Roman-Catholic order that was founded five hundred years ago by Ignatius Loyola. They played a major role in the Counter-Reformation of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and as missionaries throughout the world.

### Lalemant, Gabriel (French, 1610–1649)

A Jesuit who, in taking his religious vows, requested to add a fourth vow to the usual three: to devote himself to foreign missions. He arrived in Quebec to do missionary work fourteen years later, in 1646. He was captured and killed by Iroquois at the Saint-Louis Mission, near Georgian Bay, and was canonized in 1930.

### Le Jeune, Paul (French, 1591–1664)

An indefatigable Jesuit priest regarded as a founder of the Jesuit missions in Canada. He spent ten years on missions in New France, and over ten more in France, as an administrator of Canadian missionary activities. He was the first editor of the *Relations des Jésuites de la Nouvelle-France* (1632-1673), an important tool of missionary propaganda and, later, source of Canadian history.

### Levasseur, Noël (Canadian, c. 1680–1740)

The leading wood sculptor of New France. After studying his craft in Saint-Joachim and Montreal, he settled in New France and opened a workshop in 1703. Levasseur specialized in religious furniture; his retable for the chapel of the Ursuline Monastery in Quebec City (1732-1736) is one of the major works in the history of Quebecois sculpture.

### Linnaeus, Carl (Swedish, 1707–1778)

One of the most important figures in modern science, who developed the concept and practice of taxonomy, or the ordering of living things. His system for naming and classifying organisms, though much revised, has been in use for over two hundred years. His work has been studied by all naturalists from his own time to the present.

### Marie de l'Incarnation (French, 1599–1672)

An Ursuline nun and missionary, and founder of the Ursuline Order in Canada. Wedded at fourteen and widowed at thirty-two, she took her orders on the death of her husband, entrusting her son to her sister. She left France for New France in 1639 in the company of fellow religious women. They would become the first female missionaries in North America. She never returned to France.

### New France

France's Canadian colony, now in part the province Quebec. New France was founded in 1534 when Jacques Cartier, the first explorer to claim the territory for the King of France, planted a cross on the Gaspé peninsula. The colony was dissolved in 1763, when France ceded Canada to Britain.



### **Pierron, Jean (French, 1631–1700)**

A Jesuit priest and missionary and talented draftsman and painter, who developed a method of conversion based upon didactic imagery. He arrived in New France in 1667 to assist with the reopening of the Iroquois missions around the Hudson Valley, and later travelled through New England. He returned to France in 1678.

### **Pommier, Hugues (French, 1637–1686)**

A priest, missionary, and painter, who spent fourteen years in New France working in six different developing parishes. Pommier has been called the only portrait painter in Quebec in his time; only three of his portraits survive, located in various Quebec institutions.

### **votive painting**

Votive paintings, ex-votos, are personal, narrative images that memorialize a religious vow or express gratitude to God or a saint, typically for a life-saving favour. A significant national collection of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century votive paintings is held in the Musée de sainte Anne, Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré, Quebec.



# SOURCES & RESOURCES

Louis Nicolas's *Codex Canadensis* and *The Natural History of the New World* have been fully digitized and are available online. In addition to these, there are many articles, books, and academic works exploring early colonial art in New France.

## SOURCES

The complete *Codex Canadensis* is available on the web at [www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/codex/index-e.html](http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/codex/index-e.html).

The entire manuscript of *The Natural History of the New World (Histoire naturelle des Indes occidentales)* is available on the web at [www.wdl.org/en/item/15526](http://www.wdl.org/en/item/15526).

## RESOURCES

### Books

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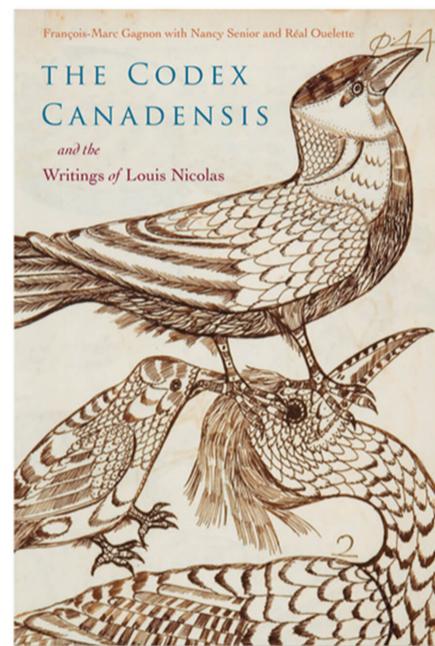
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François-Marc Gagnon viewing the *Codex Canadensis* at the Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma.



# LOUIS NICOLAS

Life & Work by François-Marc Gagnon

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### FRANÇOIS-MARC GAGNON

François-Marc Gagnon is one of Canada's most respected and prolific art historians. He has focused on two areas in particular: early Canadian art, especially the painters and sculptors of New France; and the 1940s-50s, writing on Paul-Émile Borduas, Jean-Paul Riopelle, Guido Molinari, and the automatist movement, among others. His work on New France led directly to his interest in Louis Nicolas and the publication of *The Codex Canadensis and the Writings of Louis Nicolas*, in collaboration with Nancy Senior and Réal Ouellet (2011).

After a long career in art history at the Université de Montréal, Gagnon was, until recently, the director of the Gail and Stephen A. Jarislowsky Institute for Studies in Canadian Art at Concordia University. He continues to research and to write, and his forthcoming titles include a small volume on Riopelle and a large *Bestiary of New France*, both in French.

In recognition of his contribution to Canadian art, Gagnon has been awarded many prizes, including the Raymond Klibansky Prize (2000), the Prix Gérard-Morisset (2010), and, with Nancy Senior and Réal Ouellet, the Canada Prize in the Humanities (2013). In 1999 he was honoured with the Order of Canada, and in 2015 with the Ordre national du Québec.



**“I became fascinated by Louis Nicolas when I realized that, astoundingly, only the religious paintings and official portraits in New France were being considered. Who, in the late seventeenth century, painted the incredible landscape? Had anybody been struck by the beauties of this new country, its Indigenous inhabitants, its flora and fauna? The cartographers and engravers included a few examples of this richness in their work, but they worked from afar, without ever visiting Canada. Then I discovered Louis Nicolas: the images collected in the album we know as the Codex Canadensis form a masterpiece, in art as well as in the natural sciences.”**



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#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

##### From the Author

To my dear wife Pnina, who painted a bestiary of her own; to my colleagues, Nancy Senior and Réal Ouellet; to Sarah Brohman and Rosemary Shipton; to Sara Angel and Kendra Ward; to Christine Poulin.

##### From the Art Canada Institute

The Art Canada Institute gratefully acknowledges the generosity of Salvatore Guerrero and Family, the Title Sponsors of this book.

The Art Canada Institute gratefully acknowledges the other sponsors for the 2016–17 Season: Aimia, Kiki and Ian Delaney, Esker Foundation, The McLean Foundation, Rosamond Ivey, The Richard and Beryl Ivey Fund within the London Community Foundation, Karen Schreiber and Marnie Schreiber, and TD Bank.

Much gratitude goes to the Founding Sponsor for the Canadian Online Art Book Project: BMO Financial Group; and to the Art Canada Institute Founding Patrons: Jalynn H. Bennett, the Butterfield Family Foundation, David and Vivian Campbell, Albert E. Cummings, Kiki and Ian Delaney, Jon and Lyne Dellandrea, the Fleck Family, Roger and Kevin Garland, the Gershon Iskowitz Foundation, The Scott Griffin Foundation, Michelle Koerner and Kevin Doyle, Jane Huh, Phil Lind, Sarah and Tom Milroy, Nancy McCain and Bill Morneau, Gerald Sheff and Shanitha Kachan, Sandra L. Simpson, Pam and Mike Stein, Nalini and Tim Stewart, Robin and David Young, Sara and Michael Angel; as well as its Founding Partner Patrons: the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation and Partners in Art.

The ACI gratefully acknowledges the support and assistance of the Gilcrease Museum (Diana Cox), Canadian Museum of History (Dominique Dufour, Vincent Lafond), Library and Archives Canada, The McCord Museum, Musée de la Civilisation (Ariane Fréchette), Musée régional de Vaudreuil-Soulanges (Sébastien Daviau), Le Monastère des Augustines (Ariane Blanchet-Robitaille), Musée des Ursulines de Québec (Véronique Dumont), National Library of Medicine, Priests of Saint-Sulpice of Montreal (Pascale Bergeron), Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré Shrine (François-Marie Héraud), Sarah Campbell Blaffer Foundation (Julie Timte). Special thanks also go to the anonymous peer reviewer and to Carmen Robertson for their reading.

#### SPONSOR ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Drawing of a *passiflora* by Eugenio Petrelli, which served as a frontispiece in a book published in 1610 by the Jesuit Antonio Possevino. Public domain.



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Depiction of the metamorphosis of a frog in Bernard Germain, Comte de Lacépède, disciple of Georges-Louis Leclerc Buffon, *General and Special History of Oviparous Quadrupeds and Snakes (Histoire générale et particulière des quadrupèdes ovipares et des serpents)* (1788-89), plate 31. Courtesy of Wikicommons.



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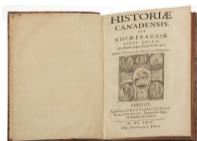
Illustrations of sea monsters in Gaspar Schott's *Physical Curiosities (Physica Curiosa)* (1697), 401. Courtesy of Wikicommons.



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Map of New France and First Nations territories showing the range of Louis Nicolas's missions. © Eric Leinberger.



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ISBN 978-1-4871-0134-3

Art Canada Institute  
Massey College, University of Toronto  
4 Devonshire Place  
Toronto, ON M5S 2E1

## Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Gagnon, François-Marc, 1935-

[Louis Nicolas. English]

Louis Nicolas: life & work / François-Marc Gagnon.

Includes bibliographical references.

Contents: Biography – Key works – Significance & critical issues – Style & technique – Sources & resources – Where to see.

Electronic monograph in HTML, PDF and mobile formats.

ISBN 978-1-4871-0134-3 (HTML). –ISBN 978-1-4871-0135-0 (PDF).

–ISBN 978-1-4871-0136-7 (mobile)

1. Nicolas, Louis, active 1667-1675. 2. Natural history illustrators–Canada–Biography. 3. Natural history illustration–Canada–History–17th century. I. Nicolas, Louis, active 1667-1675. Drawings. Selections. II. Art Canada Institute, issuing body III. Title. IV. Title: Louis Nicolas. English.

QH46.5.G3413 2017

508.71092

C2016-907904-X