

14. THE FRENCH SCIENTIFIC EXPEDITION TO CALIFORNIA, 1877-1879

Editor's Preface

Part I of the following account is a translation of those portions of E.T. Hamy's account of the Pinart and de Cessac expedition which concerns the activities of the two explorers in California.¹ Part II, which is somewhat longer and more detailed, is a translation of de Cessac's report of his experiences on the same expedition.² De Cessac seems to have been in California from the end of 1877 to the middle of 1879; Pinart, on this expedition, did not stay for as long in California.

The translation from the French is by my wife, Nancy E. Heizer, and I here express my appreciation for her willingness to perform this favor.

Except for the most vague references to the activities of de Cessac at Santa Barbara, and to a single citation seen by me to de Cessac's published article on the sculpture stone "fetishes" from San Nicolas Island, the French expedition of 1877-1879 has gone unnoticed, and often unknown. Of de Cessac's controversy with the unnamed representative of the Smithsonian Institution (identifiable as Paul Schumacher), little seems to be known, though the correspondence files of the Smithsonian Institution and local California newspapers of the period might contain illuminating sidelights.

The linguistic recording of de Cessac and Pinart has not completely vanished. The Bancroft Library possesses copies of Pinart's vocabulary lists, and they are of sufficient importance today to warrant publication, permission for which has been granted me by Dr. George P. Hammond, Director of the Bancroft Library. Of de Cessac's ethnographic notes on language and customs of the Chumash and Costanoan tribes, nothing has been published, and presumably they still rest somewhere in the archives of some museum in Paris.

The archaeological⁴ collection amassed by de Cessac remains unpublished⁵, but it is today of great importance and deserves study. For one thing, the collection was made nearly 75 years ago and was immediately taken off to France. It therefore represents a single discrete lot of material culture which might serve as a check sample with which we could judge the reliability of some of the elaborately carved stone objects which in recent years have been making their appearance. One may hear convincing arguments that these specimens are fraudulent antiquities, but only a careful comparison with the older Santa Barbara collections made 50 or more years ago, and now deposited in Berkeley, Washington, Cambridge and Berlin would settle the question satisfactorily. A second reason why de Cessac's collection deserves publication is because there accompanies the individual specimens a record of their identification according to the Chumash natives to whom de Cessac displayed the materials. Such a record, in view of the extreme paucity of cultural information on the Chumash tribe, would be invaluable.

In addition to the above points, and the general justification for calling attention to this little known expedition, de Cessac's report is of interest in containing information on the acquisition of the famous Boscana account of the Juaneno Indians attached to Mission San Juan Capistrano.

1. See "Notes and bibliography" at end of article.

Let us hope that some enterprising student will show the necessary energy and initiative to locate the de Cessac records and make them, at long last, available to everyone, and that he, or some other, will find it possible to study and publish the archaeological collection.

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I. Hamy's Report of the Pinart-de Cessac Expedition

"Upon arriving in California, M. Pinart found his collaborator in possession of all sorts of documents, no less important nor precious than those he himself had brought. M. de Cessac, who Admiral Serres had transferred to San Francisco, after having provided him the means of ending his explorations begun at Ancon, established himself in the California base, and being even more fortunate than his American predecessors, in this curious region, had in a few months assembled an incomparable collection of objects of all sorts, used by the Indians before the quite recent importation of metals.

After having excavated for four months with a perseverance frequently crowned with success in the stations and the caves of Santa Cruz, and having discovered at Ana Capa, which had always been supposed to be deserted, a little ruined town, which was a fishing place for tribes which have completely disappeared today, our traveler followed the coast of Santa Barbara county for more than 100 kilometers, exploring the remains of destroyed villages at Cape Concepcion, the workshops for the manufacture of the stone weapons of Point Pedernal; then crossing the Sierra of Santa Ynez, he came across the lengthy valley at Purissima. He collected ethnographic objects of the Choumas Indians by hundreds.

Meanwhile he drew up the geologic map of the islands of the neighboring coast, made a considerable botanical collection, and finally collected numerous conchological, carcinological and ichthyological, specimens.

We shall not follow M. de Cessac in his crossing and recrossing of the Sierras, where he lived the life of the Indians in the company of old Raphael, whose confidence he had gained, and through whose aid he tried to reconstruct the past of the people of Samala.

We find him a little later at San Miguel, [and] at San Nicolas, where he gathered new ethnographic collections, which were even more important than the previous ones, and where he made up the geologic map. Still later, he was at Santa Barbara where he copied the most interesting manuscripts on the old missions, and where he procured Boscana's unpublished text, which is so precious to the ethnographer, the linguist, etc., on the San Juan Capistrano tribe.

On the second of July, M. Pinart rejoined his companion at Santa Barbara, and the two travelers together started to study the remnants of the tribes of Monterey, Soledad, and San Antonio. M. Pinart reached Tulare Lake, where he collected a complete skeleton and some Yo-Kuts skulls, while M. de Cessac initiated a study of the coast of San Luis Obispo. The two investigators met again shortly afterward, at San Buenaventura, only to part once more."

E. T. Hamy

II. L. de Cessac's report on his activities in California.

"San Francisco - My stay in San Francisco was not of long duration. Desirous of making the best possible use of the long months which separated me from the time the Seignelay had to return, and not finding any truly useful scientific work to undertake in the immediate neighborhood of this great city, I decided to profit by an offer which had been made me by some compatriots to explore an island which the American archaeologists had made famous several years since, and of which a large part was in the hands of a French wool-merchants' company.

Santa Cruz [Island]. Santa Cruz, the name of this island, is situated 17 or 18 miles off the coast of California, from which it is separated by the Santa Barbara channel. The representatives of the Smithsonian Institution, to whom I just referred, limited themselves to exploring the shores where they made abundant collections. After having followed their footsteps for some time without success, I decided to go into the mountainous interior of the island, and was not long in discovering flint quarries which had not before been reported, near which were found workshops, some of which were established on the vast plateau and others of which were in numerous caves. I was the first to discover the existence of many caverns which had served for habitation as well as graveyards.

I also made, while pursuing my ethnographic studies, a geological relief map of the island, and my collections were enriched with quite a number of botanical samples and a larger number of specimens of the marine fauna.

Ana Capa [Island]. My trip to Santa Cruz took about four months. I then went to the neighboring islets known by the name of Ana Capa. The explorers who preceded me there believed this spot never to have been inhabited.⁶ I was immediately convinced that not only had this little group served as a gathering place for indigenous fishers from Santa Cruz, but that several families had even lived there. I discovered traces of a little village where I collected two skulls and a basin [mortar?], as well as a small number of collection objects.

The geology of these islands interested me particularly, the nature of the rocks being exclusively volcanic trachyte. Here again I made interesting collections.

Coast of Santa Barbara. I returned toward the month of January, 1878, to the neighboring mainland, and, coming up the coast of Santa Barbara, I discovered the sites of former Indian villages, but the success of my digging at Santa Cruz had excited the zeal of the members of the Smithsonian Institution, and their researches had very nearly exhausted the coastal sites. I succeeded, however, in collecting various skulls belonging to diverse tribes. At Point Concepcion I obtained quite a number of carved stone tools, pots, mortars, pestles, etc. and at Point Pedernal I discovered an important workshop for stone and jasper weapons.

Hoping to find unexplored cemeteries in the interior, I decided to cross the Santinez [Santa Ynez] mountains to go down the valley of Lompoc [Lampoc] and Purissima. In spite of a very careful exploration, it was impossible for me to discover a single trace of cemeteries or of former Indian villages, I found nothing but a small flint chipping workshop which did not yield a single piece of value.

Valley of Santinez [Santa Ynez]. Pushing further south and forward into the mountains I arrived at the valley of Santinez [Santa Ynez] which lies between the mountains of the same name and the San Rafael range. Here there stands a former mission which is still in quite good state and is even cared for by a curé. I went through, without any results however, the archives and library of this mission, As the priest had told me that quite a number of Indians lived in the neighborhood, through him I became acquainted with these natives. It was soon possible for me to discharge the Spanish Californians who had served as scouts and guides up till then and replace them by Indians. I even succeeded in gathering a vocabulary of the Samala language or the Santinez dialect. This vocabulary amounted to over 1200 words. Moreover, I put together the basis of a grammar which I hope to finish later. In addition I penetrated bit by bit into the confidence of my men, particularly one of them named Raphael, a man of about 60 years of age, very intelligent besides. His uncle, doctor and magician (sorcier) of the tribe had, before his death, been able to teach him the traditions, beliefs and religious ceremonies of their ancestors. My old Indian could, therefore, furnish me with the most precise and numerous data on the past of his people. His information was controlled by the help which I obtained afterward from 3 other Indians of the same group. When the Samala were at my complete devotion, I noted the location of the former villages, and visited these spots with them. They made me acquainted with the location of the cemeteries which were, however, recognizable as such because of limestone flagstones which protruded slightly from the ground.

Raphael consented, without great regret, to dig those of Hounhounata (vulgo Jonata), Anaboui and Socounoutmon with me. These 3 localities, yielded to me, among other precious pieces, magnificent utensils of large size. A part of the cemeteries only demonstrated a relatively very recent period, since, together with various glass beads (perles de verroterie) I collected iron instruments and indeed, even a pottery plate of Spanish manufacture. It was unfortunately impossible to find the smallest bone fragment of any value. The strongly alkaline condition of the soil had caused all organic material to disappear. This disappointment is very common in California, and such a cemetery where one notes the burial of 100 bodies never yields the smallest phalange.

The rainy season, which prevailed during this part of my explorations, contributed not a little toward making my researches difficult. I returned to Santa Barbara, recording on my way three Indian inscriptions painted on sandstone on the summit of the Santinez mountains.

I returned to Santa Cruz [Island] to get the ethnographic part of my collection which I had left in storage. I brought it back to Santa Barbara, and exhibited it in a large space, where, bringing my Indians and an old Indian woman who was the last survivor of the natives of Santa Cruz, whom I had the happy fortune to meet some time before, I showed them my treasures. I obtained thus the name and usage of practically the entirety of the objects.

Meanwhile my researches and their happy result, having awakened the "patriotic" or "interested" touchiness of various sorry souls, notably one of my archaeological competitors, I was forbidden to excavate a very important cemetery in the very town of Santa Barbara.⁷ I succeeded, however, thanks to the help of an Italian gardener who tilled this site in obtaining a number of skulls (seven or eight) which were almost enough for study. It was only a matter of money, discretion and whiskey.

Not content with paralyzing my efforts, my adversaries sought to force to make me leave the mainland and to restrict my researches solely to Santa Cruz Island. In this plot, I was officiously informed by several of the people with whom I had formed close relations, that there was a law forbidding the export of Indian antiquities. They would shut their eyes, I judged, if I limited myself to exploring Santa Cruz Island which was the property of a company which was exclusively French; but if I continued to collect on the mainland, nay, even on the neighboring islands other than Santa Cruz, I would run the risk of seeing my collections seized the moment I sent them off to France. Although little reassured, I confess, against the bad wishes which were thus expressed to me, I nevertheless put on a bold front, and supposing that with a little daring I might succeed, a technique which had already served me well in other countries. I chartered, as soon as possible, a schooner, and, with my men, was taken to San Miguel Island and later to San Nicolas Island.

San Miguel Island. The first of those islands is unusual because of its chipped flint jasper and agate arrowpoints. I could collect there a great number of skulls, some skeletons and isolated basins as well as very beautiful ornaments, numerous bone tools and an extremely interesting series of mortars ranging from the first rough draft to the perfect achievement.

My natural history collections received at the same time a notable addition.

After a stay of approximately three weeks which allowed me to make a geological map of the Island the schooner came to pick me up again, and toward the end of May I debarked at the island of San Nicolas.

San Nicolas Island. This island does not belong to the Santa Barbara group. Situated 40 miles further south and 57 miles from the coast, it belongs to the San Pedro channel group.

I observed immediately great differences between that which I discovered here and that which I had heretofore encountered. If a great many of the objects were similar to those of other localities which I had visited, there was also a great number which showed the stamp of quite special originality. I will cite, among others, the fetishes in bird and fish form of which I collected an important series of the greatest interest. One can follow in the collection which I brought back, the whole story of the workmanship of these amulets from the grossest first draft to the most finished production. The stone vases were also of a far from ordinary workmanship. The mortars and their pestles were first rate pieces and unique to this day for their beauty of profile and delicacy of execution.

The decorative ornaments of stone exhibited equally remarkable beauty. It is the same for the hooks of Haliotis shell in all stages of manufacture. I only speak from memory of the flutes, whistles and other bone implements.

It seems interesting to me, however, to mention the discovery on San Nicolas Island of several objects which are the incontestable proof of the trip which the Kodiaks made to this island during the first years of this century. The Russians had brought them here to use in the hunting of sea otters and seals.

I think that it is unnecessary to add that from the anthropological point of view, I obtained fine results on this island, of which the geologic map could lead equally to good ends. The marine fauna there contained species which I did not possess before (echinoderms and molluscs). The flora is practically absent, besides the flowering season was past, and I could collect no botanical specimen of any worth.

As to the terrestrial fauna, it is the same in all the California islands as that on the continent, poorer, however, than the latter. Now I had a number of specimens of the continental fauna; it seemed to me preferable to neglect momentarily this branch of the zoology. I feel sorry, however, I admit, not to have been able to obtain one type of fox which is considered unique to this island group.

The time which ended the charter contract for my schooner came, and I returned to Santa Barbara. I believed it was necessary to take certain precautions in the landing of my archaeological collections, because I was not without certain fears on the subject. All went in the best manner in the world. I was soon absolutely certain that no law of the United States forbade the export of Indian relics.

The point of departure for this whole story, was the step attempted by an American explorer, who was close to the secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, for the purpose of presenting a prohibitive law to the American Congress. The secretary refused, and exportation remained free (legal).

I did with my new collections the same that I had with previous ones. In placing them before the view of the Indians, I got exact information on the use of these objects, their method of manufacture, and so forth.

The campaign had been rugged. In the midst of quicksand and frightful storms it had been accomplished. I needed a few weeks rest. I profited by it in doing in Santa Barbara mission, some research which was crowned with unexpected success. I found there some extremely important documents relating to the history of the Indians of the territory of the old California missions. I was able, besides, to obtain an original manuscript of Father Boscana, who was the missionary of the Old San Juan Capistrano Mission, a manuscript which was very valuable for the ethnography, the linguistics etc., of this land.⁶

Thus matters stood on the second of July, 1878, the date on which M. Pinart, came to rejoin me on returning from France where he had gone after coming back from Oceania. Together we left for San Francisco, where we stayed only a few days, only to go back down to Monterey, where I had been long awaited by one of my California friends. While my colleague occupied himself with linguistics, I collected through the Indians extensive information regarding the religious and cosmogonic beliefs of their ancestors, their habits, their manners, and their customs.

My friend took M. Pinart and me to the ruins of Soledad Mission, then to San Antonio, where the priest, a half breed Mexican gave us interesting information. He made us acquainted with the last Indians who lived in the neighborhood of the mission. My friend was able to gather from them vocabularies of their language, but it was practically impossible to get, at this time, any notion of their habits and customs. It was only during another trip that I made in this region for the purpose of making paleontological, botanical and zoological collections, that I succeeded in allying myself with two of these Indians. I hope to get from them some day quite complete and accurate details, if I can judge by those with which they already supplied me during the several hours that the farm work, with which they were occupied as laborers, permitted them to devote me.

San Luis. Our trip to San Antonio lasted approximately one week. Traveling always toward the south, I directed myself to San Luis Obispo, an interesting region, still unknown to me. As for my colleague, he turned toward the north to

continue his linguistic studies in the region of four or five missions located between San Francisco and Monterey. Arriving at San Luis early in August, I left at the beginning of September. I used this time to make a general reconnaissance of the county, and to make for myself connections which allowed me a month and a half later, to continue my studies more attentively and fruitfully in that place.

I returned to Santa Barbara then to take the most valuable part of my collections there and to send them to San Luis, which had to be for several months the center of my activities. At Santa Barbara I started a collection of ethnic types which was destined later to grow, and of which I bring back the plates.

I was preparing to return to San Luis when I received a telegram from my colleague, letting me know that he was at San Buenaventura, the seat of an old mission, situated about 20 kilometers to the south of Santa Barbara. Because of the desire which he expressed to me, I went to join him. M. Pinart informed me then of his imminent departure for Sonora. He advised me, during his five or six months absence, to return to France, where material and personal interests called me.

At Santa Barbara, coming upon the old Indian woman, of whom I have already spoken, as well as an old Indian man, who was the only remaining Santa Barbara native, I was able from their information to reconstruct the ethnography of the Chumash, who inhabited these islands.

Since my colleague was preparing to leave for Guaymas, I returned to San Luis and started the study of that region. The penurious financial situation in which I found myself from that time did not permit me to dream of undertaking a new important excavation. I had to limit my studies of this sort, but I was able, nevertheless, to procure a superb Tichos Indian skeleton as well as some skulls.

Léon de Cessac

NOTES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. J. P. Harrington, "Exploration of the Burton Mound at Santa Barbara, California". Bureau of American Ethnology, Annual Report No. 44, 1928 (p. 66). D.B. Rogers, Prehistoric Man of the Santa Barbara Coast. Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History, Santa Barbara, 1929 (p. 261).
2. E.T. Hamy, "Rapport sur la Mission de Mm. Pinart et de Cessac dans les deux Ameriques". Archives des Missions Scientifiques et Litteraires, Ser. 3, Vol. 9, pp. 323-332, 1882. The translation printed here is taken from pp. 328-329 of this article.
3. Léon de Cessac. "Rapport sur une Mission au Perou et en Californie." Archives des Missions Scientifiques et Litteraires, Ser. 3, Vol. 9, pp. 333-344, 1882. The translation printed here is from pp. 336-343 of this article.
4. De Cessac often uses the word "ethnographic" to mean archaeological research or specimens-- i.e. material culture items.
5. With, of course, the exception of his article on the San Nicolas Island "fetishes" printed elsewhere in this Report.
6. This claim was made, and is occasionally still made. De Cessac may have stated this observation partly to show his rival, Schumacher, was in error. A second account of an archaeological site on Anacapa Island is given by L. G. Yates. "Notes on the Geology and Scenery of the Islands Forming the Southerly Line of the Santa Barbara Channel." American Geologist, Vol. 14, pp. 43-52.
7. Probably the Burton Mound. See note 3.
8. De Cessac is strangely reticent of the way in which he accomplished the feat of acquiring the manuscript of the Boscana account. Perhaps, as in the case of the Italian gardener who tilled the site in Santa Barbara (probably the Burton Mound), it was only a matter of money, discretion and whiskey.