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Adding Relief to Maps: French and Indigenous Cartography at the Arkansas Post

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In 1744, Jacques Nicolas Bellin, cartographer for the French crown, carefully penned a map of the vast Louisiana territory, which France laid claim to in 1682. Bellin was assigned with the task of demonstrating how France fit into this new geopolitical North American landscape (see Figure 1). Bellin reduced the Native South's complex world of bands, tribes, and chiefdoms, by labeling the large diverse territory "La Louisiane" for the King of France, Louis XV.[1] Indeed, maps like these in the eighteenth century were commissioned with a direct political purpose: to make clear physical manifestations of colonial power over a wide swathe of space, and to erase previous history or claims to this land. Atlantic empires, including those of France, Britain and Spain, engaged in this type of "cartographic imperialism" in which colonial officials articulated how they viewed their sovereignty and control of space through the process of mapmaking.[2]

Europeans, however, were not the only ones to use maps as political extensions of control or declarations of power over space. An extant painted buffalo hide, called the "Three Villages Robe," represents how the Quapaw people native to southeastern Arkansas along the Mississippi River articulated *their* political landscape at the same time that France was endeavoring to colonize this region (see Figure 2). The painted buffalo hide depicts three Quapaw villages near where the French created a small settlement and trading post. It was painted sometime before 1749, although its exact origins are unknown.[3] This map had a similar purpose to Bellin's map: to validate Quapaw dominance and power in *their* perceived domain—the same territory that France now claimed, thus creating a Native-European cartographic competition.

Before delving into the specifics of the "Three Villages Robe," an overview of the Quapaw's history in southeastern Arkansas is necessary. Archaeologists and historians believe that the Quapaw people emigrated to southeastern Arkansas in the late seventeenth century, perhaps only

[1] Jacques Nicolas Bellin, "Carte de la Louisiane cours du Mississipi et pais voisins dédiée à M. Le comte de Maurepas, Ministre et Secretaire d'Etat commandeur des ordres du Roy," ca. 1744. Library of Congress. See Figure 1.
[2] Robert Paulett uses the term "cartographic imperialism" in his work *An Empire of Small Places: Mapping the Southeastern Anglo-Indian Trade, 1732-1795* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2012), 21.
[3] Morris Arnold convincingly argues that the painted buffalo hide's origins are from the Quapaw Indians of southeastern Arkansas. See Morris S. Arnold, "Eighteenth-Century Arkansas Illustrated," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 53, no. 2 (1994): 1–18 for an in-depth look at the historical context of this painted buffalo hide, and how he discovered it in a French art museum.

a few years before the arrival of the French in 1686.[4] As newcomers to the region, the Quapaw worked diligently to establish authority at the coveted location at the confluence of the Arkansas and Mississippi rivers, which connected the interior of the continent with the Gulf of Mexico to the south and Canada to the north. The Quapaw used the Mississippi and its tributaries to engage in local trading markets, and traded furs, ceramics, copper and other goods with the Caddo, Yazoo, Taensa, and Osage, among others.[5]

The Quapaw entered the Lower Mississippi River Valley at a precarious time when massive changes to the Native geopolitical landscape were already underway. Spanish involvement in the Southwest, French involvement in the Great Lakes region, and British colonization rapidly unfolding along the eastern seaboard created ripples that affected the Indigenous inhabitants in the middle of North America, though at different rates.[6] Warfare, disease, and the Native slave trade instigated by Europeans, paired with intertribal violence and wars, made the Lower Mississippi River Valley a violent, unstable place where alliances, whether with other Native Americans or Europeans, were essential for preservation. Therefore, when the first French settlers arrived in 1686, the Quapaw welcomed these European visitors with alacrity, and viewed these newcomers as potential allies and a boon to maintain political and economic stability. The Quapaw viewed the French as equals when the French arrived; as another tribe or band to conduct business with—not a threat.[7]

The Chickasaw, who lived in north Mississippi near present-day Memphis, represented the largest threat to the Quapaw people at the time of French colonization, and plagued both Quapaw people and French settlers throughout the Arkansas region. The Chickasaw became involved with the British in the late seventeenth century, who armed them with muskets to engage in the Native slave trade. Chickasaw hunters and warriors raided the Quapaw villages, since they could supply the British with captured Natives living west of the Mississippi, who then sold these captives to traders in South Carolina.[8] We know from historical records that the Chickasaw remained a long-standing threat and enemy of the Quapaw, and even contemporary European

[4] Kathleen DuVal, *The Native Ground: Indians and Colonists in the Heart of the Continent* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 68.
[5] W. David Baird, *The Quapaw Indians: A History of the Downstream People* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980), 12–13.
[6] Historians call these massive changes to the Native South the "Mississippian Shatter Zone," since European involvement with Native peoples, along with disease, warfare, and the Native slave trade, massively reshaped Native society and broke down ancient chiefdoms that once dominated the South. Marvin D. Jeter argues that the Mississippian shatter zone came to the Arkansas region and the Lower Mississippi River Valley relatively late, because the major changes in the Native South were more centralized along the eastern seaboard where British colonists armed Native Americans and used ancient intertribal feuds to fuel the slave trade. See Marvin D. Jeter's chapter "Shatter Zone Shock Waves along the Lower Mississippi," in *Mapping the Mississippian Shatter Zone: The Colonial Indian Slave Trade and Regional Instability in the American South* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), for his analysis of the Lower Mississippi River Valley and the Mississippian shatter zone.
[7] Kathleen DuVal's *The Native Ground* describes in exacting detail the Quapaw's relationships with the French and Spanish at the Arkansas Post, along with the other Arkansas River Valley Indians.
[8] Alan Gallay, *The Indian Slave Trade: The Rise of the English Empire in the American South, 1670–1717* (Yale University Press, 2002), 170.

cartographers highlighted their power and reflected the fear the Chickasaw instilled on their neighbors—Native and European alike.[9]

As previously stated, historians believe that the Quapaw people created the painted buffalo hide sometime after 1749, during which time tensions between the Quapaw and Chickasaw were at an all-time high.[10] That year, the Chickasaw attacked the French at their Arkansas Post settlement, which was especially vulnerable because their Quapaw allies had recently moved farther upstream because of flooding.[11] The Chickasaw saw the French settlers' vulnerability, especially without the Quapaw to aid them, and attacked, leading to French reprisals against the Chickasaw and no lasting peace. French leaders responded to this attack in spatial terms: Commandant Ensign Louis Xavier Martin de Lino de Chalmette, commander of the Arkansas Post, moved the physical location of the Arkansas Post village closer to the Quapaw village to ensure security and more distance from the Mississippi River, the main interstate the Chickasaw used to easily access the Post from their homes on the Chickasaw Bluffs.[12]

The "Three Villages Robe" depicts a scene following a battle, most likely a Quapaw victory over the Chickasaw. In this particular scene Quapaw warriors are exchanging arrows with an enemy, while other figures are rejoicing and celebrating a presumed win in battle. The Sun and Moon are at the center of this painting, reflecting the Quapaw people's cosmology.[13] Three villages of Native construction, complete with round houses and long houses, are clearly depicted in the painting, representing the three Quapaw villages: Osotouy, Tourima, and Kappa.[14] Tucked in the corner of the buffalo hide are four European-style structures, with pitched roofs and church steeples, most likely representing the French village at the Arkansas Post. Striking in this ethnocentric map is where the Quapaw cartographer placed the French village: it is obviously peripheral to the Quapaw's core.[15]

In comparison with European-created maps, historians argue that Native maps were often more ephemeral, because they were etched using chalk, or ash from a fire, or inscribed into the sand. Despite the fact that few Native maps have survived, this omission in the archive does not mean

[9] For example, the aforementioned map by Jacques Nicolas Bellin demarcated the "Grand village du Chicachas," or the Grand Chickasaw Village in large script, hovering over a large area of space (see Figure 1).
[10] Kathleen DuVal, *The Native Ground*, 96. For the Quapaw-Chickasaw alliance that occurred in the 1760s, Wendy St. Jean, "The Chickasaw-Quapaw Alliance in the Revolutionary Era." *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 68, no. 3 (2009): 272–82.
[11] DuVal, *The Native Ground*, 99.
[12] Ibid.
[13] The Quapaw were divided into two intermarrying clans, or moieties: the Sky People (Hanka) and Earth People (Tiju), with twenty-one subclans within these two, each with a spiritual identity (usual an animal). The Sky People and Earth People lived on opposite sides of the village, with ceremonial spaces in between shared by both clans. Each clan had a chief who made decisions, but the chiefs often consulted warriors and tribal elders to make more democratic decisions. For more on Quapaw cosmology, see George Sabo III, "Rituals of Encounter: Interpreting Native American Views of European Explorers," in *Cultural Encounters in the Early South: Indians and Europeans in Arkansas* (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1995), 77.
[14] Morris S Arnold, "Eighteenth-Century Arkansas Illustrated." *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 53, no. 2 (1994), 120.
[15] The French first established a small trading post at the Arkansas Post and occupied it from 1686-1763. Spain acquired the Post following the Seven Years' War, when France ceded half of the Louisiana territory to Spain, who occupied the Post from 1763-1802. Spain gave it back to France in 1800, and the United States acquired the Arkansas Post with the Louisiana Purchase in 1804.

that Native people did not visualize and organize space. Historians have argued that Native Americans perceived space differently than Europeans, though their separate understandings of space were still commensurate. During colonization, the creation of maps is a highly political process, wherein those who had the power to determine and draw boundaries often held control, as in the case of European empires in the Americas. However, that does not mean that demarcations of space were realized and recognized by all members of colonial society.

Maps can be useful sources for understanding shifting colonial interactions among residents at the Indigenous and French Arkansas Post. Historians of colonial empires discuss the importance of maps as extensions of colonial control, since colonial powers often erased prior claims to the land or inhabitants.[16] Historians of Indigenous cartography define two types of Indigenous maps: event transcriptions and sociograms.[17] Event transcriptions were the most similar to European-styled maps, since they contained information and names that were most likely given by Native informants. Sociograms, on the other hand, were ethnocentric maps indicating relationships among towns and polities, typically using concentric circles or lines, and rarely contained scientific knowledge. The Catawba Deerskin Map, created in 1721 for the governor of South Carolina, is an example of a sociogram.[18] The Native cartographer used concentric circles to represent Native nations with whom the Catawba traded, and rectangular boxes to represent the English colonies of Virginia and Charleston. Similar to the Quapaw "Three Villages Robe," this deerskin map incorporated either Catawba or Cherokee creation stories (there is a current debate on the origins of the Catawba Deerskin Map).[19] These Indigenous maps are rare. With the exception of the extant "Three Villages Robe" and the Catawba Deerskin Map, few Southeastern Natives created permanent maps, and even fewer survived. The "Three Villages Robe" does not neatly fit into the definition of an event transcription or sociogram, but rather incorporates characteristics of both.

The Quapaw-created map effectively captures an event—the presumed win in battle against their enemies—yet also demonstrates where the French colonists fit into their own physical space. According to historian Julianne Barr, Spanish colonists in northern New Spain in the eighteenth century tried to erase Native geography and notions of space, thus exerting their new claim to power through the manipulation of the landscape.[20] Interestingly, Barr also found numerous examples of Spanish settlers recognizing and confirming spatial dimensions to Native power: well-known trade routes, Native highways, and boundaries between various Native confederacies

[16] Angèle Smith, "Mapped Landscapes: The Politics of Metaphor, Knowledge, and Representation on Nineteenth-Century Irish Ordnance Survey Maps,: *Historical Archaeology* 41, no. 1 (2007): 81–91.
[17] Charles Cobb, *The Archaeology of Southeastern Native American Landscapes of the Colonial Era* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2019), 58.
[18] Ibid.
[19] The Catawba Deerskin Map, created for the Governor of South Carolina, Francis Nicholson, was created sometime in 1721, and used images of circles to indicate paths the Catawba took to different tribes for trading purposes, while also included the important trade colonies of Virginia and Charleston. Its origins have been questioned recently, however, and may in fact be a Cherokee map, not Catawba. See Ian Chambers "A Cherokee Origin for the 'Catawba' Deerskin Map, 1721," *Imago Mundi: The International Journal for the History of Cartography* 65, no.2 (2013): 207–16.
[20] Juliana Barr, "Geographies of Power: Mapping Indian Borders in the Borderlands' of the Early Southwest" *The William and Mary Quarterly* 68, no. 1 (2011): 6.

and jurisdictions.[21] The process of erasing Native identity and power was never complete. Native groups continued to recognize their competing ideas of boundaries and territories, and Spanish officials were forced to employ new diplomatic tactics and agree upon demarcations of space defined by both colonial and Native groups.[22] Barr argues that the Spanish recognized the Native landscape and Native management of land and would not destroy these boundaries until the end of the eighteenth century.[23] Barr's work on mapping and colonization in the contested Spanish borderlands provides a useful framework for understanding early interactions at the Arkansas Post, since Natives often drew their own boundaries and asserted dominance over French settlers in the eighteenth century. We see this very clearly in the Quapaw "Three Villages" cartograph in relation to French colonization in Quapaw territory.

Bellin's French map, paired with the Quapaw buffalo hide, offer two differing interpretations of colonialization as it unfolded on the ground in southeastern Arkansas, a location on the fringes of both the French and Spanish colonial borderlands. These two maps reveal how Quapaw and French powers organized their space, how they portrayed their enemies and allies, and how they inserted themselves into a dynamic, complex world that functioned as both a colonial experiment and a Native American borderland. Both maps fail, however, to reveal the extent to which these two groups relied upon each other for information and even survival.[24] These maps flatten the interactions between the Quapaw people and the French settlers, and the cartographers of these maps ignore important exchanges of knowledge and the mutual reliance that defined social and political interactions at the Arkansas Post in the late seventeenth to mid-eighteenth century.

Nowhere is imperialist cartography clearer than in the work of French mapmaker Guillaume Delisle, a member of the Académie Royale des Sciences and an appointed royal cartographer for Louis XIV. Although Delisle relied upon travelers' accounts and explorers to detail North America (all second-hand accounts), his maps, particularly his 1718 "Map of Louisiana and the Course of the Mississippi" was surprisingly accurate (see Figure 3). Delisle portrayed the Lower Mississippi River Valley precisely, and this map and the information imbedded in this document were circulated widely in both Europe and North America.[25] In fact, other European cartographers used Delisle's map as a blueprint to which they added more detail and inserted rival political claims to the Louisiana territory.

Delisle's map placed European exploration and colonization endeavors on the North American landscape. He included the routes of famed explorers, notably De Soto's famous 1540 route

[21] Barr discusses this phenomenon in her article "Geographies of Power: Mapping Indian Borders in the Borderlands' of the Early Southwest," and recently historians of Native Americans in Florida also determined that Native ideas of space, paths, and roads influenced European and subsequently American ideology of space. See Angela Pulley Hudson, *Creek Paths and Federal Roads: Indians, Settlers, and Slaves and the Making of the American South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).
[22] Juliana Barr, "Geographies of Power: Mapping Indian Borders in the Borderlands' of the Early Southwest" *The William and Mary Quarterly* 68, no. 1 (2011): 7.
[23] Ibid, 18.
[24] Additionally, Paul Mapp talks about the lack of knowledge that European had about North America, west of the Mississippi River in part, because of their inability to communicate with diverse Native Americans. See *The Elusive West and the Contest for Empire, 1713–1763* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011).
[25] See Figure 2.

through the Americas, in addition to France's claims in North America. In a bold political statement, Delisle extended France's holdings in North America from the Lower Mississippi River Valley to the Carolinas, thus erasing the British claims in North America. This declaration sparked a cartographic war between Delisle and English cartographers, who published maps in response to Delisle's claims for the next fifteen years, clearly illustrating how important these maps were not only in intellectual circles, but in the political sphere, too.[26]

Delisle and Bellin, among other cartographers, failed to explain *how* they gathered information about the natural world in their newly depicted political landscapes—information they included in their maps, but did not cite. These cartographers included text about salt mines, iron mines, navigable rivers, potable water, hostile Native tribes, friendly Native American tribes where game was plentiful, and historic trade paths used by various Native Americans, which European colonists could try to infiltrate. These maps did not include what type of interactions occurred for these transfers of knowledge to unfold, but fortunately, travel accounts do.

Travel accounts are helpful in finding examples of where French explorers relied upon Native knowledge that European cartographers omitted. French explorer Henri Joutel wrote an account in 1713 about his explorations in the Louisiana territory, in which he mentions that the French employed Native American guides for language translations, and for safety when traveling from one region to the next. In fact, Joutel's writings explicitly mention how they relied upon Quapaw guides while they were in Arkansas, telling them when and where to hunt certain game like deer and buffalo, which rivers were navigable, which water was potable, and which locations to avoid because of the Chickasaw.[27] One French map even states, in French, that: "the alligators don't come any further North" than the Arkansas Post, leading one to wonder what type of interaction unfolded to get *that* type of information, and why it was considered important enough to translate onto a map?[28] Indeed, without the help of Quapaw guides helping the French navigate the physical landscape of the Lower Mississippi River Valley and the older, Native political landscape, many of these early French explorers would have been unsuccessful in their explorations. Since cartography was, and still is, a tool for political control used to demonstrate power *on the ground*, perhaps it is not a surprise that these French cartographers chose to omit key information about the importance of Native allies and knowledge-bearers, even if their livelihood depended on it, since it surely would have shown French weakness and vulnerability.

French cartographers, however, were not the only ones who painted a picture of their power existing in a social and political vacuum. The Quapaw-created "Three Villages Robe" also had political motivation: to highlight Quapaw strength and power, in spite of their relatively short history in southeastern Arkansas, their dwindling population in the eighteenth century, and their challenges from both European and Native groups. The geopolitical landscape of the Native Arkansas Post witnessed many changes, some of which were brought by Europeans in the late seventeenth century, while many stemmed from Quapaw interactions with other Native nations

[26] See Robert Paulett, *An Empire of Small Places*, 16, for more information on the cartographic wars between English and French cartographers in the eighteenth century.
[27] Henri Joutel. *Joutel's Journal of La Salle's Last Voyage: a reprint.* (London: 1713), 150.
[28] Zebulon Montgomery, "*Première partie de la Carte de l'Intérieur de la Louisiane"* 1801. Archives nationales d'outre-mer (ANOM).

in the Lower Mississippi River Valley before European colonization. The Quapaw exercised delicate diplomacy and made pragmatic decisions to maintain sovereignty over their territory, with other Native nations and subsequent Europeans. However, over time these diplomatic attempts became more difficult to negotiate as the Quapaw population decreased in the mid-eighteenth century (even at its height, estimates of their initial population range from 3,000 to 7,500), and massive changes were underway regarding the political, economic, and social structures of the Native South.[29]

Despite the French settlers' role in supporting the Quapaw as they fought battles against the Chickasaw, the Quapaw, as demonstrated from their buffalo hide cartograph, still viewed the French as peripheral to their core, quite different from how the diplomatic and political history of the French and Quapaw interactions actually unfolded. With help from the French, the Quapaw were able to wage some successful battles against the Chickasaw, despite their small numbers. The "Three Villages Robe" cartograph served as a physical demonstration of how the Quapaw viewed their powered relationships and centrality to make a clear point to their European allies and their Native rivals. With a Quapaw victory, it seemed that the potential major enemies of the Quapaw people were minimized in the 1750s and 1760s, thanks in large part to the French settlers at the Arkansas Post buttressing the Quapaw people—though this information did not get transferred to the buffalo hide cartograph.

Cartographers—both European and Native—tried to erase and minimize the political and social interactions among Europeans and Native peoples in the eighteenth century, as evident at the Arkansas Post. Neither French nor Quapaw mapmakers wanted to concede dominance to the other's group: According to these maps, either the French or Quapaw were central to this colonial story, and the other group peripheral. However, interactions found on the ground from historical records reveal a different story, with mutual dependency and complex interactions that cannot be adequately transferred to a one-dimensional map. These political landscapes, as envisioned by French and Quapaw cartographers, are therefore incomplete when more historical context is taken into consideration, which adds the historical nuance needed to understand these lived experiences on the ground.

Tessa Evans completed her doctorate in early American history at the University of Tennessee in 2020. Her research examines how diverse groups of people—including Native Americans, Europeans, and people of African descent—created radical counter-geographies in small, highly disputed locations in the Lower Mississippi River Valley by using interdisciplinary methods. Evans is an adjunct instructor at Germanna Community College

[29] For more information on the radical changes of the Native South wrought by Europeans (mainly in the form of disease and warfare), see Robbie Ethridge, *Mapping the Mississippian Shatter Zone: The Colonial Indian Slave Trade and Regional Instability in the American South* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009).

Appendix

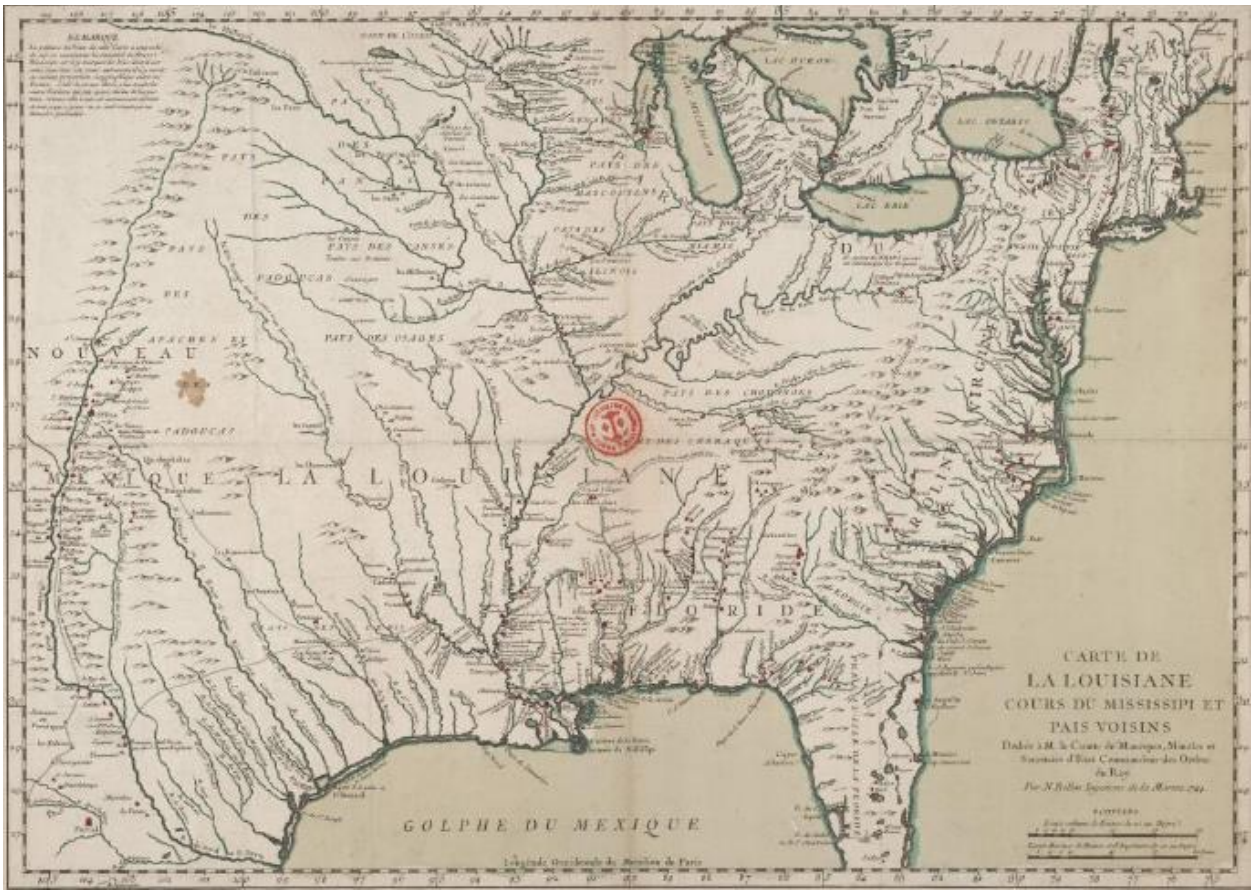

Figure 1: Jacques Nicolas Bellin, "Carte de la Louisiane cours du Mississipi et pais voisins dédiée à M. Le comte de Maurepas, Ministre et Secretaire d'Etat commandeur des ordres du Roy," ca. 1744. Map. Courtesy of the Library of Congress. https://www.loc.gov/item/2001624910/

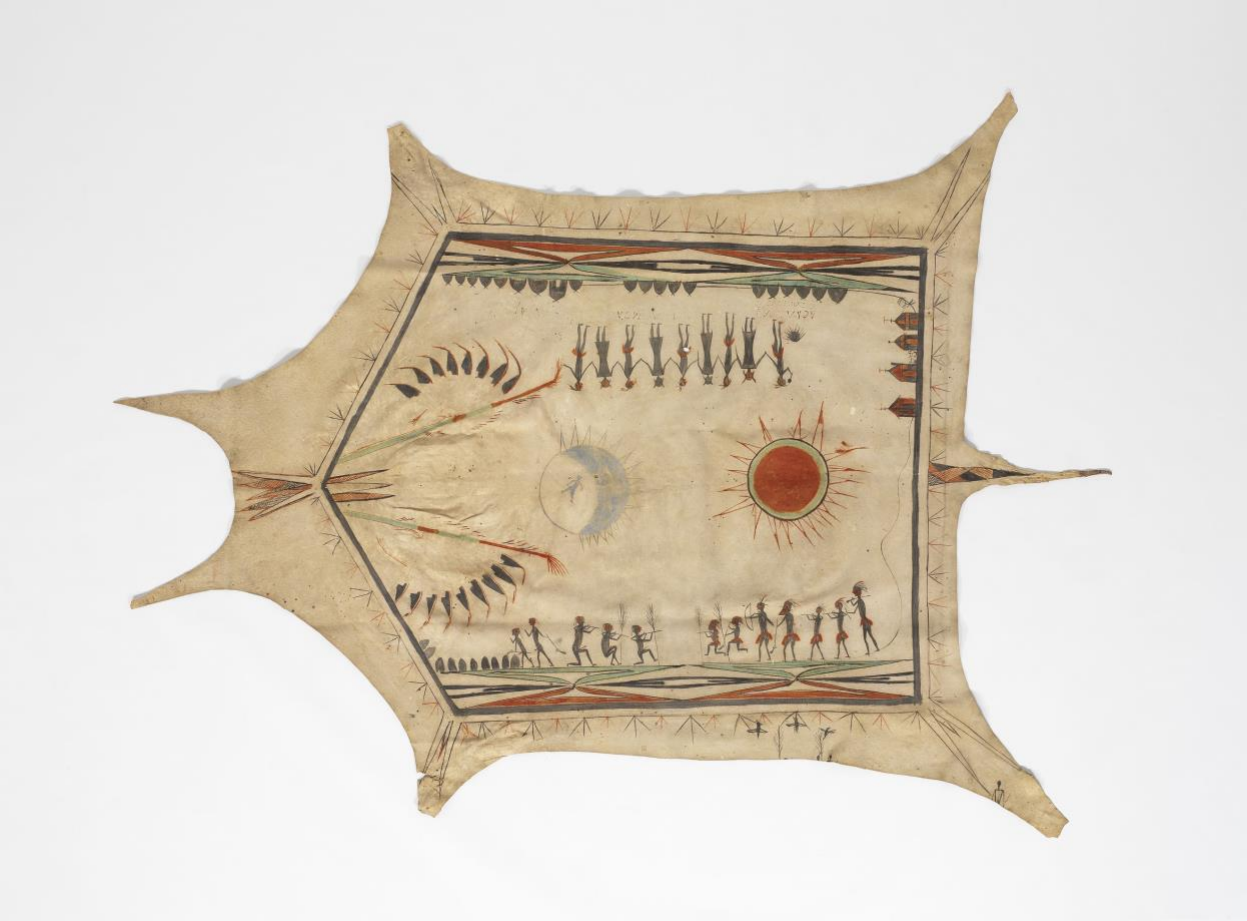

Figure 2: "Three Villages Robe," ca. 1749. Musée du Quai Branly – Jacques Chirac. Paris, France. Photo courtesy Art Resource.

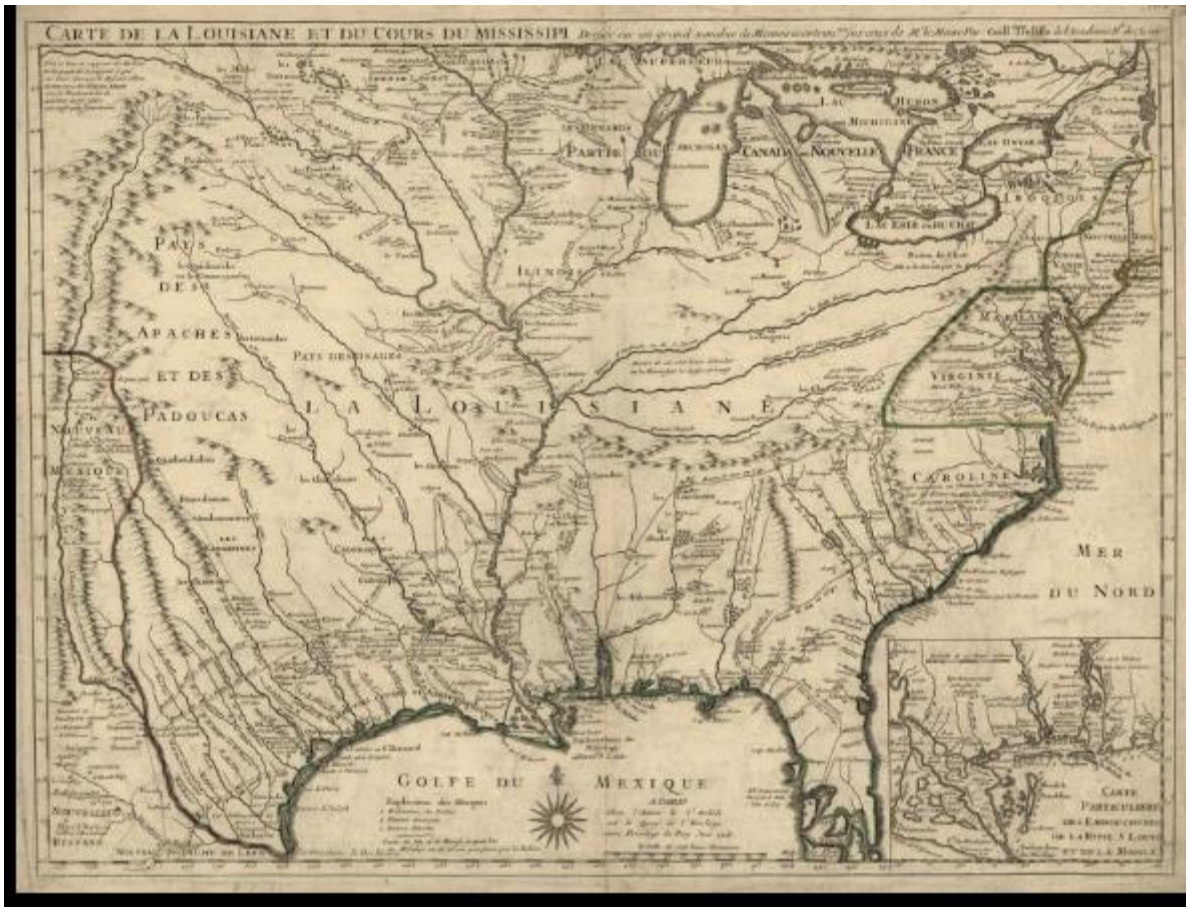

Figure 3: Guillaume De L'Isle, *"Carte de la Louisiane et du cours du Mississipi i.e. Mississippi: dressée sur un grand nombre de mémoires entrautres sur ceux de Mr. le Maire.* Paris: Chez l'auteur le Sr. Delisle sur le quay de l'horloge avec privilege du roy," ca. 1718. Map. Courtesy of the Library of Congress. https://www.loc.gov/item/2001624908

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“Three Villages Robe.” 1740. Quapaw jacket, sun and moon, ceremony, battle scene. Also called the 'Three Villages Cape.’ Arkansas, USA. Musée du Quai Branly – Jacques Chirac. Paris, France. Inventory number 71.1934.33.7D. Photo: Courtesy Art Resource.

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