

JAQUES LE MOYNE, FIRST ZOOLOGICAL ARTIST IN
AMERICA

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Plate 6

THE contribution of French travellers to American ornithology is well substantiated in our early annals. From Jacques Cartier to Charles Lucien Bonaparte many names come quickly to mind, among them the Récollect missionary Sagard-Théodat, the haughty French officer Baron La Hontan, and the dynamic man of action Samuel de Champlain. These, and many others, are familiar figures closely identified with the early history of our science. There is, however, a place unfilled in our records, a place which should bear the name of a talented French artist who studied American birds even before that ill-fated Roanoke Colony had its inception in 1585. The work of the English artist John White of the Roanoke Colony was the subject of a previous paper,¹ and it seems fitting that some account of this Jaques Le Moyne, who antedated White, should be brought to the attention of American ornithologists.

Many of the French writers, and those of other nationalities as well, have left journals of their experience in America from which can be garnered interesting, though incomplete descriptions of American birds. But the pre-colonial traveller who, in addition to the usual journalistic account, attempted to make some pictorial record of our bird life was rare indeed and should be treated in some detail. It is unfortunate that this is not more fully possible (since most of the ornithological material appears to be lost), but the artist gathers great importance, nevertheless, from the fact of his priority in America as a painter and sketcher of birds, and also from the fact of his contribution of a very early account² of America, including the first map of our southeastern coast. Effort has been made, therefore, to assemble from several obscure sources what has been recorded on Jaques le Moyne, or James De Morgues, as he was also called, the earliest pioneer in zoological art in America.

Some twenty years before Sir Walter Raleigh's better-known attempt to found a colony at Roanoke, the French, having failed in their effort to colonize in Brazil, began to consider a colony in North America which should serve as a haven for the persecuted Huguenots or Protestants of France. Admiral Coligny, who was himself a convert to Protestantism, was in charge of the enterprise, and he named Captain Jean Ribault as the

¹ Allen, Elsa G. 'Some sixteenth century paintings of American birds.' *The Auk*, vol. 53, January 1936.

² 'Brevis Narratorio,' Part II, De Bry Voyages, Frankfort a. Main, 1591.



LIFE AT FORT CAROLINE AS SEEN BY THE FRENCH ARTIST JACQUES LE MOYNE IN 1564

commanding officer of the first of three expeditions by the French to the east coast of Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina. This was in 1562, and although the purpose of the expedition was primarily to reconnoiter, with future colonization in mind, Ribault nevertheless found the country so alluring that he could not forego establishing a small colony of thirty men on the Port Royal River near what is now Beaufort, South Carolina. Of his impression of the fine country to which he had come, he says: "And the sight of the faire meadows is a pleasure not able to be expressed with tongue, full of Hernes, Curlues, Bitters, Mallards, Egrepths, Woodcocks, and all other kinds of small birds."

Having left this group of thirty men he found he was short of help and supplies, and had to return to France without continuing up the coast, as had his predecessor Verrazanno, whom he had planned to follow. One of Ribault's officers, René Laudonnière, accordingly was put in charge of the second expedition in 1564, and it is of special interest to modern naturalists that one of his officers was Jaques Le Moyne, called a "special painter and mathematician," who was chosen by Coligny, as the latter said, "to make an accurate description and map of the country and drawings of all curious objects." So far as is known this was the first time that an artist had been commissioned to study and delineate the objects of our natural history. It is disappointing that so little of an ornithological nature appears to have been done, but it is exceedingly interesting that nearly 400 years ago and over 150 years before Mark Catesby set foot on American soil, a French artist lived for nearly a year in the wilderness of South Carolina, devoting his time to drawing and observation.

Le Moyne is known also to have written an account of his stay in America. This narrative, 'Brevis Narratorio,' forms the second part of Theodore De Bry's collection of 'Great Voyages' and was published in 1591. It is illustrated by drawings done by Le Moyne, most of which represent the Indians, their customs and ceremonies, and many depict the barbarous treatment of the Huguenots by the neighboring Catholic settlers of New Spain or Florida. But it is of particular interest to us that one of the large illustrations of the 'Brevis Narratorio' includes several figures of Wild Turkeys (Plate 6), one of which is represented in full display with spread tail, dropped wings and drooping wattle. Alligators, manatees, stags and shells also are pictured in the same scene, as well as the natives' method of stalking wild animals by disguising themselves under deer hides.

According to the noted antiquarian, Henry Stevens of Vermont, to whom I am indebted for my introduction to the early artists, John White and Jaques Le Moyne, the Sloane Manuscript No. 5270, now housed in the Department of Prints and Drawings of the British Museum, contains a mixture of originals by these artists but we do not know precisely which ones are by Le Moyne.

Although Le Moyne's name has been omitted from the usual dictionaries of painting and biography, he does appear very briefly in the German publication 'Thieme-Becker Kunster Lexicon,' vol. 23, and from this I learned of the whereabouts of the water colors hereinafter described. We know from Johann G. Kohl writing in the 'Documentary History of the State of Maine,' 1869, and from Henry Stevens's work on 'Hariot and his Associates,' 1900, that Le Moyne was a prominent man, well known as an artist; that he spent a year (1564-65) in and around Fort Caroline, and was one of the few who with René Laudonnière and Nicolas Le Challeaux, a carpenter, escaped the Spanish massacre under Menendez. We gather also that he accompanied Laudonnière on his exploring trips up the river from Fort Caroline which must have given him impressions of bird and animal life which he committed to paper. That he was able to save any of his drawings done at Fort Caroline is questioned by the American historian, Jared Sparks, for Le Moyne but narrowly escaped the massacre and wandered for several days in the swamps and wilderness before being picked up by the French ship 'La Perle' on her way to France. Sparks asserts that such drawings as Le Moyne did must have been done from memory after his return, aided by the accounts written by Laudonnière and the aforementioned carpenter of the expedition, Nicolas Le Challeaux. On the other hand, Henry Stevens, one of the greatest authorities on early American history, maintains that Le Moyne not only wrote an account of his experience in America but also brought drawings back to England in November, 1565. It appears that the 'Perle' was driven to Wales by storms and Le Moyne with others bound for France disembarked at Swansea in Wales, where they remained for some time until their strength was restored, and then crossed over to Rochelle. This was during the height of religious wars in France, and Le Moyne, being a Protestant, probably spent more or less time in London. He is said to have gathered up his drawings and art materials during the massacre of St. Bartholomew in 1572 and to have fled to London. No report of his return to France has been found.

It should be mentioned that another member of the Huguenot group who escaped from the Spaniards at Fort Caroline was a young man named De Bry who is thought to have been a kinsman of the De Bry family of engravers of Frankfort-am-Main. It was through him that Laudonnière's account of the Florida experience edited by Bassanier became known to Theodore De Bry and Richard Hakluyt. These two enterprising minds were evidently in accord and when Hakluyt heard through Bassanier that Le Moyne had some paintings and drawings of Florida life and conditions, he persuaded De Bry to approach Le Moyne on the subject of providing illustrations for Laudonnière's Journal. Accordingly De Bry went to

London in 1587 to see Le Moyne and found him living in Blackfriars (one of the old historic sections of London) as Stevens says, "in the service of Raleigh acting as painter, engraver on wood, a teacher, art publisher and book seller." De Bry hoped to secure all of Le Moyne's drawings for a publication on Florida but Le Moyne was unwilling to part with the entire lot, probably because he had a plan of his own for their publication, but being in the service of Raleigh who at this time had a patent for colonization in America, he did not feel free to carry it through.

It is not clear how many of Le Moyne's drawings were secured by De Bry on his first trip to London but he evidently kept the scheme in mind, for the following year, 1588, after Le Moyne's death, De Bry opened negotiations with the widow for more, but apparently not all, of her husband's drawings together with his journal on Florida. De Bry thus came into possession of materials for the second part of his 'Perigrinations' or 'Great Voyages' and was already planning to use John White's account and his drawings as the first part.

Le Moyne by these circumstances had become very closely associated with Sir Richard Hakluyt, Sir Walter Raleigh, Captain John White, Sir Thomas Hariot, and De Bry, and is seen as a key figure in the English enterprise of western planting. By a series of several incidents which turned his findings to the uses of Raleigh, Le Moyne, the French artist and portrayer of the aboriginal American scene, became the one who was responsible more than any other man for the rise of English influence and the wane of French on our Atlantic seaboard during the infancy of our history.

Although so little by Le Moyne relating to birds can be definitely identified, it is interesting to know that other samples of his art as a painter of natural-history subjects have recently come to light. These are a series of fifty-nine water-color drawings mostly of flowers and fruits but a few moths and butterflies also appear. This folio album is now housed in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, where it was exhibited about twelve years ago as a sample of early bookbinding. I was hopeful of finding some of his work on birds when I finally learned the whereabouts of this collection, but unfortunately there is not a single one among them. The drawings are beautifully executed with great detail and give the impression of miniatures; the colors are perfectly preserved and the antiquity of the paintings makes them of great interest to the modern water colorist and also to the modern naturalist.

In the 'Gardener's Chronicle,' an English publication, for January 28, 1922, there is an article by one S. Savage on "The Discovery of some of Jaques Le Moyne's Botanical Drawings." According to this commentator the plants are the common garden varieties of England and France and he

points out also that the paper on which the drawings were done bears a watermark which identifies the paper as having been made at Paris and Arras in 1568. From this Savage deduces that the drawings were done after Le Moyne's return from America, which was in 1565. The drawings are further authenticated by the presence of the name "domorgures" on one of the folios.

While in London, I took opportunity to examine another work by Le Moyne, an exceedingly rare little book of woodcuts of beasts, birds, flowers, and fruits with their names in Latin, French, German and English, known as 'Le Clef des Champs' ('The Key of the Fields'), printed in Blackfriars in 1586. Here I must confess to being struck with the great discrepancy between the crude artistry of these drawings as compared with the beautiful technique evidenced in those recently discovered and housed in the Victoria and Albert Museum. The little book is an oblong quarto containing twenty-four mammals, twenty-four birds, twenty flowers, and twenty-four fruits. No American species appear in the section on birds except the introduced and now ubiquitous House Sparrow and Starling. The sparrow in particular is rather well drawn but the work, especially in so far as the bird matter is concerned, is clearly only a picture book of but little scientific value or artistic merit and must represent some youthful work by the artist. However, it is interesting as a very early example of a natural-history book and it gathers enhancement by being exceedingly rare (only three copies are known) and by having been done probably by the first artist who worked on American natural-history subjects. Furthermore, the fact that other work by Le Moyne has so recently come to light, leads us to hope that more drawings of birds, which we are assured he did in America, may yet be found.

The dedication of this little book, 'Le Clef des Champs,' throws some light on the artist's connections in London. Far from being a nonentity, too obscure to merit inclusion in dictionaries of art and biography, he appears to have been well known, if not indeed important, and so closely in touch with leading figures of the romantic years of Elizabeth's reign, that he naturally became acquainted with some of the most prominent and royally favored in London. As testimony of this, 'Le Clef des Champs' bears the dedication "À ma dame Madame de Sidney," signed "votre très affectionné Jaques Le Moine dit de morques peintre." On the reverse of the second leaf there is a sonnet 'à Elle même' with the initials J. L. M. The lady was none other than Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke, the beautiful and talented sister of Sir Philip Sidney, and collaborator with him in writing poetry as well as a poet and writer in her own name. This links Le Moyne with one of England's most aristocratic and gifted families. It has been suggested that he may have been in the Sidney home in a

tutorial capacity, but be this as it may, the quest for biographical notes on this very early pioneer in zoological art should furnish a task of unusual zest to the ornithologist with an interest in the history of his science.

A few fragmentary notes may be added. Le Moyne was a native of Dieppe, a shipping town on the north coast of France, as were also Jean Ribault, Laudonnière, and many others of the French Huguenot expeditions. He was born probably about 1530 and was therefore about thirty-five years of age when he visited America. He died in London in 1588, and a search of the registers of the Huguenot Society of London reveals the fact that he was listed in the 'Return of Aliens' living in the Blackfriars district of London in 1582. The entry is as follows: "James Le Moyne, alias Morgen, paynter, borne under the obedience of the French Kinge, and his wife came for religion and are of the Frenche Church. He hath one child borne in England" (Huguenot Society of London Publications, vol. 10, pt. 2, p. 354).

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