

UNEXPLAINED PHENOMENA ARCHIVE · PHYSICAL TRACE SERIES

VIII

The *Trans-en-Provence Encounter**Renato Nicolai Witnesses a Landing and Departure on His Farm; French Government Scientists**Confirm Physical Evidence — January 8, 1981*

DATE January 8, 1981	LOCATION Trans-en-Provence, Var, France	WITNESS Renato Nicolai, 55, retired technician	OFFICIAL INVESTIGATION GEPAN — French government
PHYSICAL EVIDENCE Yes — confirmed by analysis	STATUS Officially unexplained		

VIII.01 // BACKGROUND

A Retired Technician in Provence

Renato Nicolai was fifty-five years old in January 1981, a retired technician living with his wife on a small farm in Trans-en-Provence, a village in the Var department of southeastern France. He had no history of unusual claims and no particular interest in the subject of aerial phenomena. On the afternoon of January 8, 1981, he was working in his garden when he heard a whistling sound and looked up.

Nicolai reported seeing a lead-grey disc-shaped object, approximately 2.5 metres in diameter and 1.5 metres tall, descend and land on a terrace approximately forty metres from where he was standing. The object remained on the ground for a short time — he estimated a few seconds — then rose, produced a whistling sound, and departed rapidly. As it rose, he observed a circular groove or channel around its lower rim and what appeared to be small landing pads or apertures on its underside.

Nicolai immediately told his wife and, on her encouragement, reported the incident to the Gendarmerie the following morning. Officers attended the site and found a circular trace in the soil. They took samples.

"I saw the thing on the ground and I thought it was some kind of machine, some experimental aircraft perhaps. It left a mark. You can see where it was."

— RENATO NICOLAI, STATEMENT TO GENDARMERIE, TRANS-EN-PROVENCE, JANUARY 9, 1981

The Only Official Government Scientific Confirmation

The case was referred to GEPAN — the Groupe d'Etude des Phénomènes Aérospatiaux Non-Identifiés — the official French government body established within the national space agency CNES to investigate unidentified aerial phenomena. GEPAN conducted a formal scientific analysis of the landing site, examining soil samples and plant material from inside and outside the trace area.

The GEPAN analysis produced findings that remain without parallel in the official government record of UAP investigations. The soil at the landing trace showed compression consistent with a load of between four and five tonnes. The crystalline structure of the soil had been altered by heat estimated at between 300 and 600 degrees Celsius. Alfalfa plants from inside the trace area

showed chlorophyll degradation of between 30 and 50 percent compared to control samples from outside the trace. The plants had not been burned; they showed biochemical stress consistent with exposure to an unknown mechanism.

GEPAN's conclusion, written in its official report, used a phrase that has no equivalent in any other government document in the history of UAP investigation: "*Something physical occurred here.*"

GROUND COMPRESSION Consistent with 4-5 tonne load	SOIL HEAT SIGNATURE 300-600°C estimated exposure	CRYSTALLINE ALTERATION Confirmed in trace soil samples
PLANT CHLOROPHYLL LOSS 30-50% reduction vs control samples	GEPAN CONCLUSION "Something physical occurred here"	MECHANISM IDENTIFIED No — unknown

VIII.04 // SIGNIFICANCE *The Only Case of Its Kind*

The Trans-en-Provence case is unique in the global record of UAP investigation: it is the only case in which a government scientific agency, using rigorous laboratory analysis of physical samples collected in a controlled manner shortly after the reported event, formally concluded that an unknown physical event had occurred at the reported location. Every other official government conclusion — in the United States, the United Kingdom, France in other cases, and elsewhere — has stopped short of this. GEPAN did not.

Renato Nicolai was assessed by investigators as a credible witness with no apparent motive for fabrication. He had not publicised his sighting; he had reported it to local police and then waited. The mark on his land was there when investigators arrived. The science was the science.

HISTORICAL NOTE

The GEPAN report on Trans-en-Provence is available in the French national archives. It is the most unambiguous physical-evidence document in the history of government UAP investigation. It has never been retracted.

