

Seven War-Exploit Paintings

A Search for their Origins

Arni Brownstone

In 1851, the frontier artist Rudolph Friedrich Kurz (1937: 301) noted that in Plains Indian painting “the human form is not represented in the same manner by all nations; on the contrary, each nation has its own conventional manner.” In contrast, Norman Feder (1967) rightly emphasized the difficulty for today’s scholars in distinguishing between tribal pictorial styles. In tandem, these observers support the notion that the art of Plains tribes is simultaneously pulled in two directions: conservatism and insularity on the one hand, homogeneity and assimilation within a larger multicultural community on the other. Norman Feder was well aware of this dichotomy in his research into questions of tribal style. In his studies he placed special emphasis on the minutiae of visual vocabulary, the formalistic building blocks of images. These captivated his interest and inspired him to make innumerable illustrative schemata to solve the puzzle of their significance by means of the comparative method. It is with great respect for Norman Feder’s formal approach to the problem of tribal style that I dedicate the following search for the cultural origins of seven Plains war-exploit paintings.

The first work in the set (Fig. 1)¹ is a war-exploit robe in the Berne Historical Museum (cat.no. N.A. 4), acquired by Lorenz Schoch in the area of St. Louis, Missouri, in 1837. In his brief description of the Schoch collection, Bushnell (1908: 3) mentioned this item along with a robe presently thought to have belonged to the Mandan chief Mato Tope. Bushnell stated that the latter painting bore the inscription “Crow I,” but provided no cultural information on the painting under consideration. Several years later, however, Vatter (1927: 64) quoted museum records indicating that the Berne robe was Crow. He also believed that it shared common origins with a robe in the National Museum in Copenhagen (cat.no. Hd60), the second painting in the set (Fig. 2),

which was purchased without documentation in 1861.² By comparing stylistic features of both paintings with the robe of the Hidatsa Two Ravens in Berlin and with Kurz’s illustrations of two Hidatsa robes, Vatter (1927: 79) concluded that they must all be Hidatsa in origin. Ewers (1982: 45) studied a robe in the National Museum of the American Indian (cat.no. 1/2558), the third in the set, and found that it too was similar to the Kurz sketches (Fig. 3). However, Ewers considered the robe to be Crow, partly because it bore figures resembling those in petroglyphs in Crow country, and thought that its similarity to Kurz’s sketches suggested that the Crow and Hidatsa shared a similar graphic style. Galante (1984: 55) also considered the NMAI robe to be Crow. He noted that it bore human forms resembling those on the Berne and Copenhagen robes and discovered that the distinct conical shape surmounting many of the forms was identical to that on the figure engraved on a well-documented Crow mirror frame. The documentation accompanying the NMAI robe stated that it was collected by William Schiefflin from a Cree or Blackfoot in Fort Benton, Montana, in 1861. Dorsey added to the catalog record his opinion that while the quill strip was probably made by the Nez

Arni Brownstone was born in the prairie province of Saskatchewan, Canada. After graduating from York University’s Visual Arts Programme in 1974, he began working in the Anthropology Department of the Royal Ontario Museum and continues to be employed there in the position of Assistant Curator. In the intervening years his interest in painting and exhibiting his own work has shifted to the study of Plains Indian painting.

Author’s address: Royal Ontario Museum, 100 Queen’s Park, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5S 2C6.

1. I produced illustrations of the paintings studied here either by tracing the originals onto plastic film and photostatically reducing the image, or by tracing from slides. I scanned the tracings into a computer graphic program where I colored, isolated, scaled, and juxtaposed details. In this way, the characteristics of the originals, including thickness of line and proportion, were carefully preserved.
2. A recent study identified chrome yellow in the Copenhagen robe, a pigment first produced commercially around 1815 (Moffat et al. 1997).

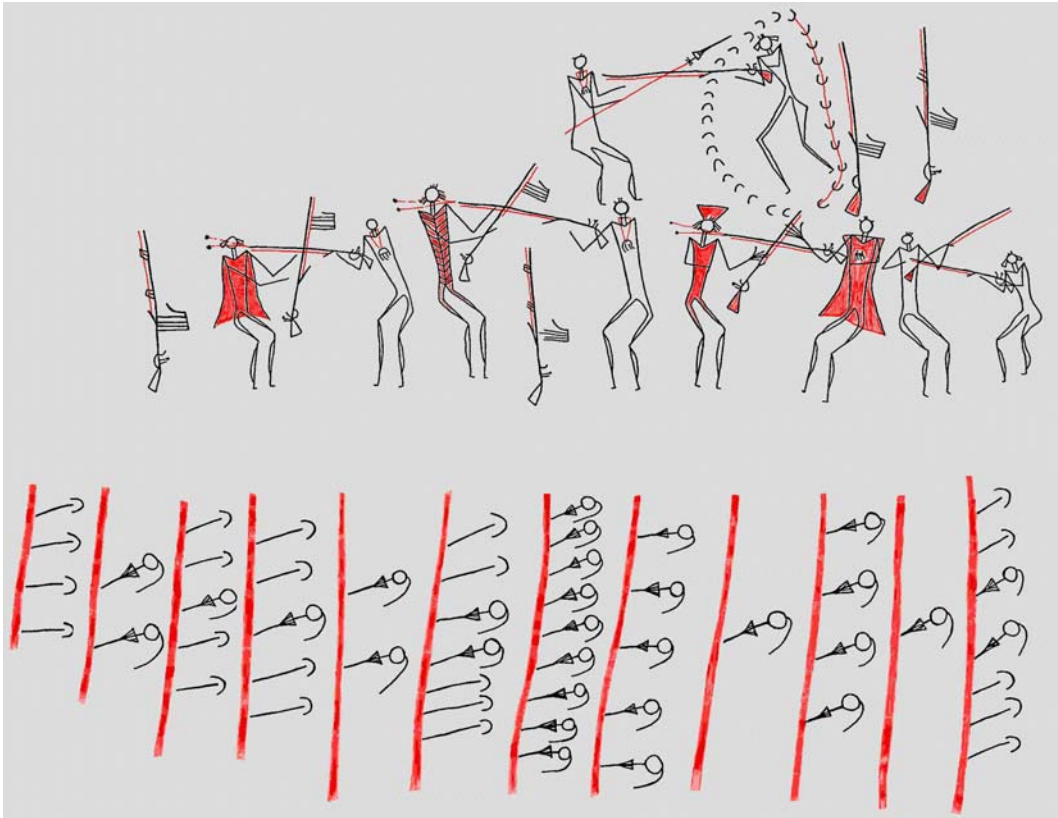


Fig. 1 Redrawing of painted bison robe, collected before 1837. Bernisches Historisches Museum (Berne), cat.no. N.A. 4 (Lorenz A. Schoch coll., possibly ex Clark Museum, St. Louis, MO).



Fig. 2 Redrawing of painted bison robe, purchased without documentation in 1861. Nationalmuseet (Copenhagen), cat.no. Hd60.

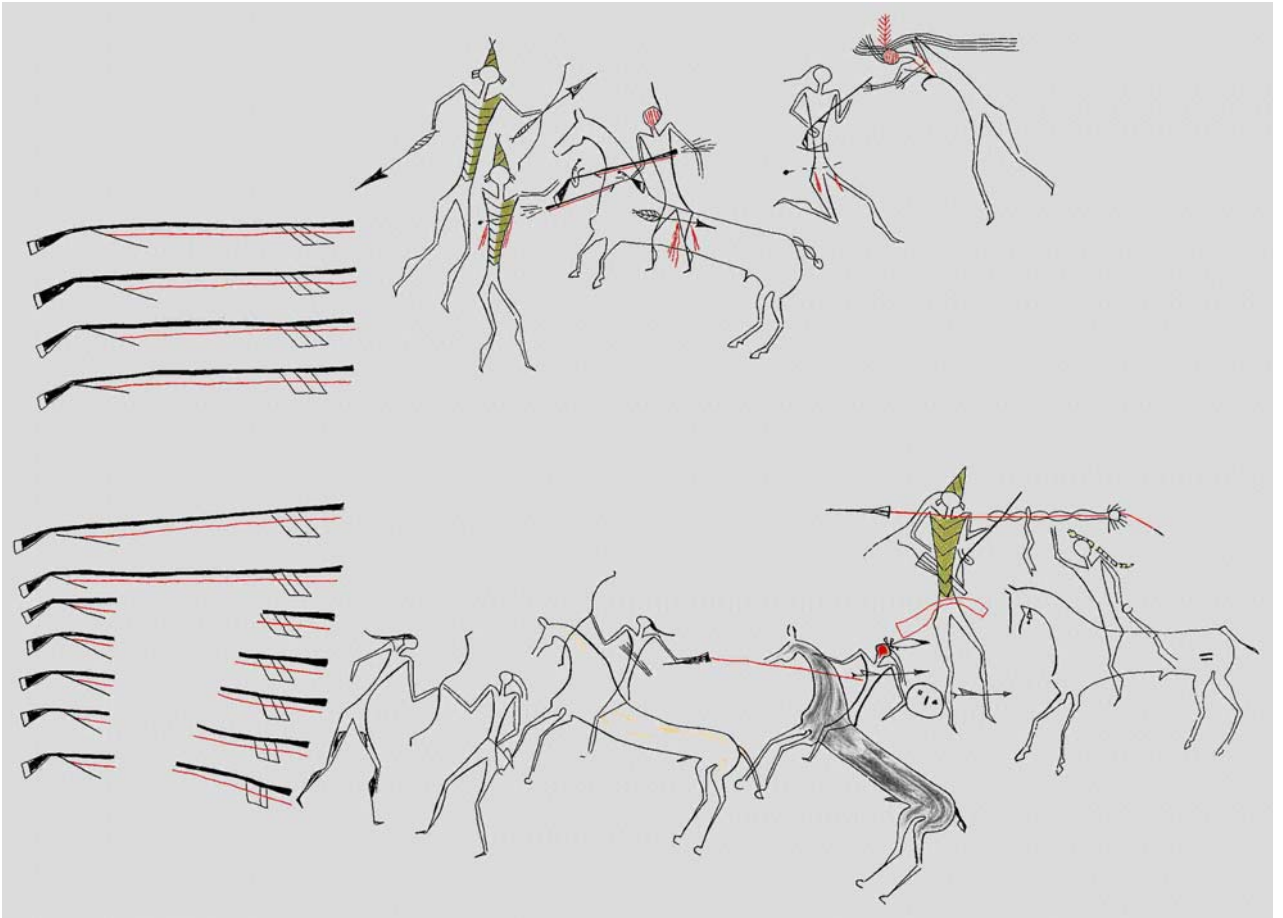
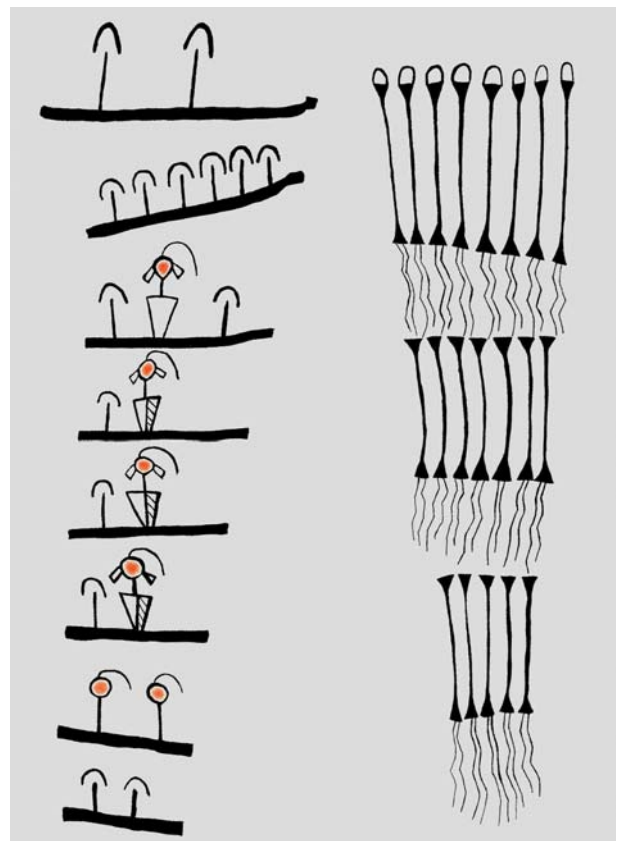


Fig. 3 Redrawing of painted bison robe, collected by William Schiefflin from a Cree or Blackfoot in Fort Benton, Montana, in 1861. National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution (Washington, DC), cat.no. 1/2558.

Fig. 4 Redrawing of painted leggings, collected by Josef II Colloredo-Mansfeld on his trip to Wyoming in 1905. Opo'no Castle Museum, cat.no. 6916.



Perce, the painted figures and the beaded cloth triangular emblem on the flank were typical of the Crow. The Copenhagen robe is also embellished with the triangular insignia. Taylor (1987: 307) and Holm (pers. comm., 1996) concurred that triangular patches were an indication of Crow origins. However, this feature may have found wider distribution, since Cutter Woman, wife of the Blackfoot chief Crowfoot, was photographed in 1907 wearing a buffalo robe bearing such an insignia, slightly more elongated but with the typical diminutive triangles accenting each corner (Public Archives of Canada, Morris Collection #497). Feder (1980) found that rosette designs such as those on the quill strips decorating the three above robes were typical of the Mandan, Hidatsa, Crow, Nez Perce, and a number of

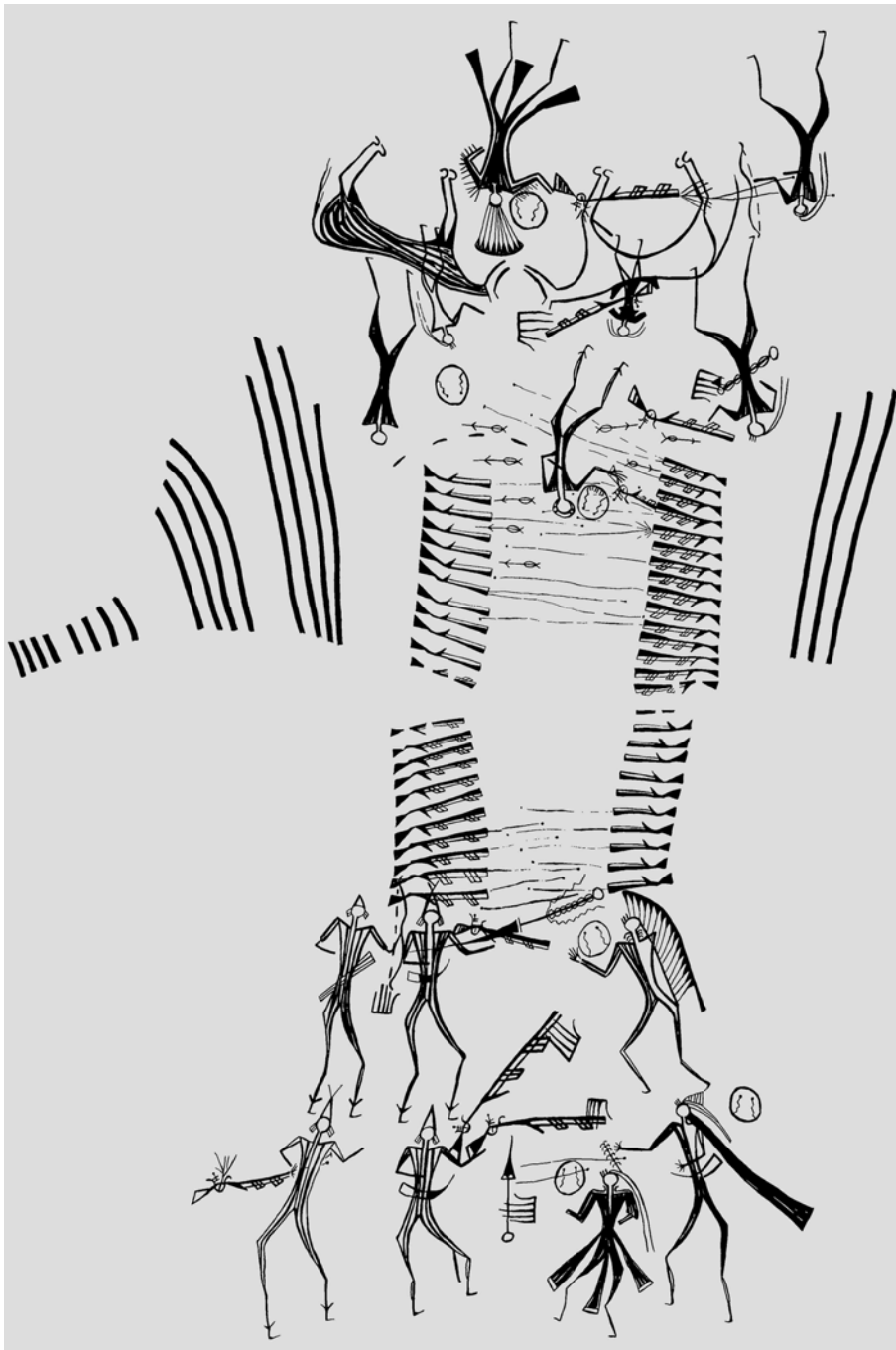


Fig. 5 Redrawing of painted shirt, acquired without documentation. National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution (Washington, DC), cat.no. 17/6345.

neighboring Plateau and Great Basin tribes. The strips are elaborated in multiple-quill plaiting, a technique that Taylor (1987: 307) and Galante (1984: 55) associated particularly with the Crow, but that Holm (pers. comm., 1996) thought to have had a wider distribution. The quilled strips on the fourth hide painting in this study (Fig. 5), a shirt in the National Museum of the

American Indian (cat.no. 17/6345), were also executed in the multiple-quill plaiting technique. Holm (1992: 49) observed that this shirt, acquired without documentation, shared a number of distinctive pictorial features with the Copenhagen and Berne robes. The shirt bears an epaulet-like feature on the shoulders which is thought by Taylor (1987: 304) to be a definite Crow feature, but by Holm to be an element shared by the Crow and Plateau tribes. Taylor (1987: 309) first published the fifth painting in the set (Fig. 4), a pair of leggings in the Opočno Castle Museum in the Czech Republic (cat.no. 6916), documented only as having been collected by Josef II Colloredo-Mansfeld on his trip to Wyoming in 1905, and noted that it bore painted figures resembling those on the three above robes. In 1991 Rolf Krusche kindly brought to my attention a shirt in the Opočno Castle Museum (cat.no. 6915), apparently with the same collection history as the leggings and displaying distinctive graphic elements characteristic of the five preceding paintings (Fig. 6). It bears multiple-quill plaiting and,

like the leggings, double-lane quill-wrapped horsehair decorative strips. Taylor (1962: 60; 1981: 51) considered the latter quillwork technique to have been practiced predominantly by the Crow, specifically the Mountain Crow (Taylor 1987: 310), while Holm (1987) contended that the Nez Perce may have used this technique as extensively as the Crow. Bill Holm kindly guided me

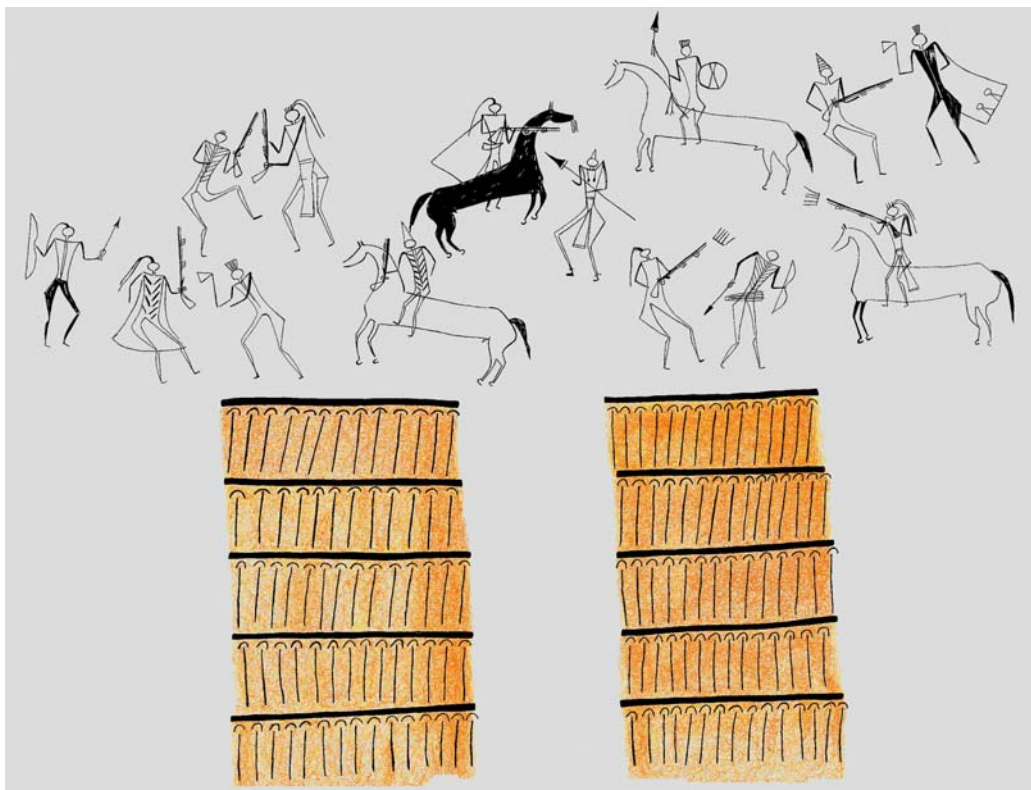
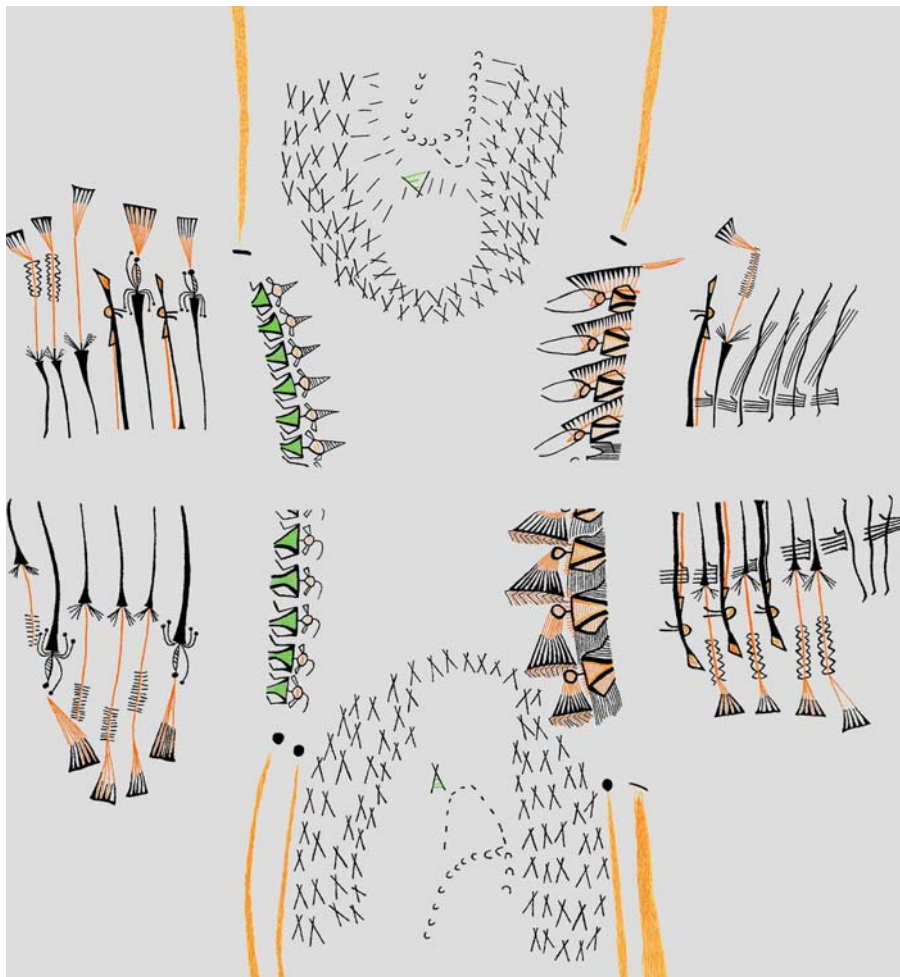
to the final hide painting in the set, a buffalo robe in a private collection with no documentation (Fig. 7).

While scholars agree that the seven paintings share enough stylistic features to indicate common origins, there is no clear consensus on who executed them. The present study is thus a contribution to the search for the creators of these works.

Kurz's observation that the human form in Plains Indian pictorials was highly subject to conventionaliza-

Fig. 6 Redrawing of painted shirt, collected by Josef II Colloredo-Mansfeld on his trip to Wyoming in 1905. Opočno Castle Museum, cat.no. 6915.

Fig. 7 Redrawing of undocumented painted bison robe. Laura Fisher collection.



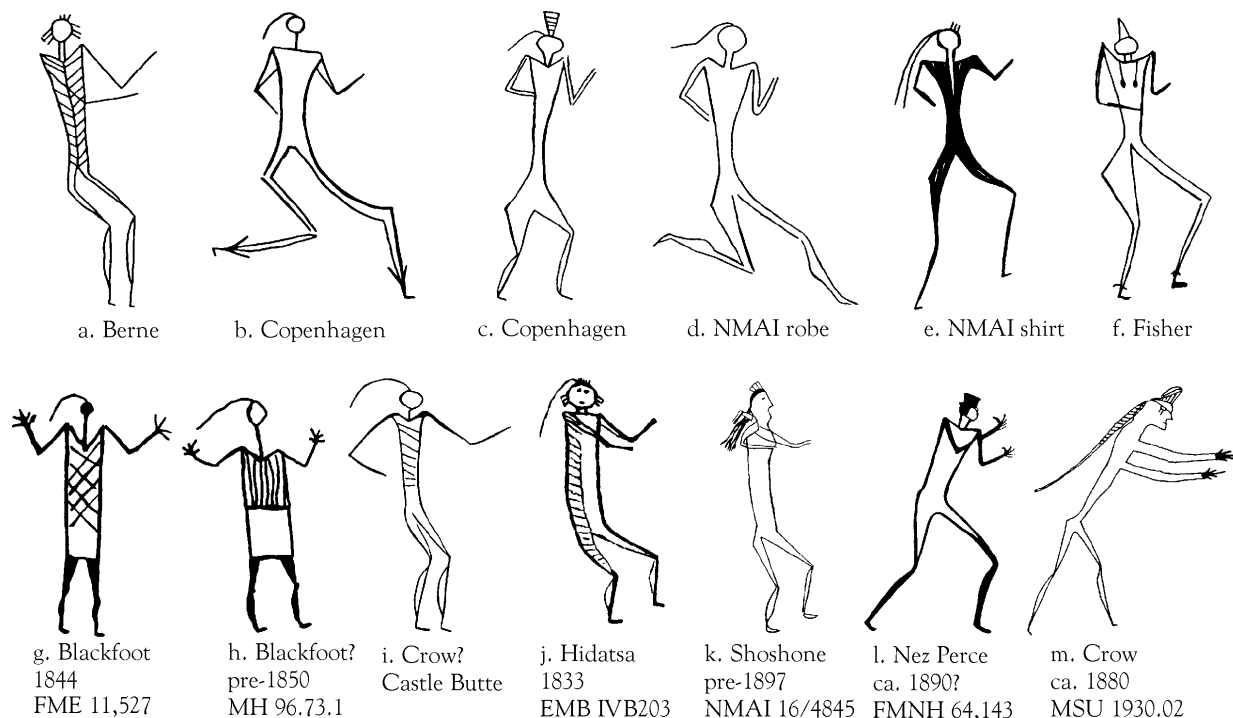


Fig. 8 Human body shapes.³

tion rings particularly true with regard to the assured, graceful warriors in the seven paintings (Fig. 8a-f).⁴ These unique figures sometimes convey a remarkable sense of movement and at other times stand their ground, arms raised like boxers. They display a number of other distinguishing features including extreme elongation, a strong sense of line alternating between curves and angles, broad shoulders with tapering torso, V-neck shoulder lines, well-defined calf muscles, the absence of hands, and angular hip formations. Apart from those on the seven paintings, V-neck figures are almost exclusively found on painted hides thought to be Blackfoot (Brownstone 1993: 16) and rock-art sites in former Crow and Blackfoot territory (Conner and Conner 1971: 20). However, Blackfoot V-neck figures are comparatively wooden and almost always with arms uplifted and hands outstretched in “postures of epiphany” (Barry 1991: 51; Fig. 8g-h). Of the early pictorials, the warriors on a petroglyph in Crow country (Fig. 8i) and Two Ravens’s robe (Fig. 8j) most closely resemble those on the seven paintings. The few comparable human figures painted in the late nineteenth century include a Shoshone figure, a figure on a Nez Perce robe, and a drawing of Medicine Crow (Fig. 8k-m).

Kurz’s sketches of war-exploit robes (Fig. 9) have long been recognized as accurately reflecting the style of

the paintings under study. Holm (pers. comm., 1996) pointed out the particular similarity between Kurz’s figures and those on the Fisher robe. The resemblance is particularly striking between the high-stepping warrior and figures with rifles around the lower border of

3. The following abbreviations will be used for museum collections referred to in the text:

- AMNH American Museum of Natural History (New York, NY)
- BHM Bernisches Historisches Museum (Berne, Switzerland)
- BM British Museum (London, United Kingdom)
- CM Carnegie Museum (Pittsburgh, PA)
- CMC Canadian Museum of Civilization (Hull, QC)
- CMRE Civici Musei Reggio Emilia (Italy)
- EMB Ethnologisches Museum, Berlin (Germany)
- FME Folkens Museum—etnografiska (Stockholm, Sweden)
- FMNH Field Museum of Natural History (Chicago, IL)
- JAM Joslyn Art Museum (Omaha, NE)
- LACMNH Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History (Los Angeles, CA)
- MH Musée de l’Homme (Paris, France)
- MMMN Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature (Winnipeg, MB)
- MSU Montana State University (Bozeman, MT)
- MVF Museum für Völkerkunde, Frankfurt am Main (Germany)
- NMD National Museum of Denmark (Copenhagen, Denmark)
- NMAI National Museum of the American Indian (Washington, DC)
- NMNH National Museum of Natural History (Washington, DC)
- PAC Public Archives of Canada (Ottawa, ON)
- ROM Royal Ontario Museum (Toronto, ON)
- SMA Snite Museum of Art (Notre Dame, IN)

4. Two figures from the Copenhagen robe are illustrated because two artists appear to have executed the painting, working on separate sides of the quill strip.

Kurz's robe (Fig. 9a), and the two warriors locked in combat in the upper left of the Fisher robe (Fig. 7). The fact that many Hidatsa believed European artists caused disease meant that Kurz had to be very circumspect in his sketching activities (1937: 76, 77, 81, 98, 116, 257). This circumstance, coupled with the technical difficulties in delineating the details of complex war-exploit robes, and further aggravated by severe near-sightedness (Kurz 1937: 80, 163, 181), meant that Kurz probably copied figures from actual robes onto his drawings some time after the initial sittings. His note, "In so much as scenes in my [present] neighborhood have little variation, I am now attempting to perfect my first sketches and therefore am paying especial attention to details" (Kurz 1937: 89), is likely an indication that he added details, such as figures on robes, to earlier sketches. This might explain why his drawing of a robe worn by an Omaha (Fig. 9c) bears such a close resemblance to those on his Hidatsa robes (Fig. 9a-b). Despite these drawbacks, Kurz's sketches are important pieces in the puzzle of the seven paintings.

Linear patterns on human torsos have a limited tribal distribution and tend to appear on hide paintings executed before 1860. Torso designs are found on six of the seven paintings (Fig. 10a-f). For the most part they feature oblique parallel lines, often converging along the vertical axis of the chest. Elsewhere, they appear most

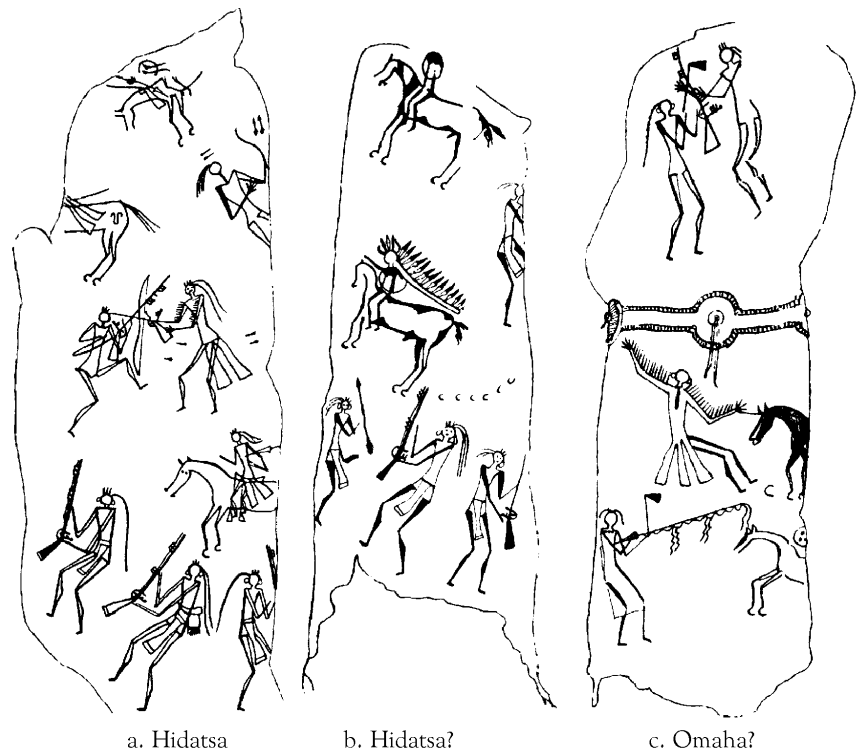


Fig. 9 Painted robes with war exploits, after drawings by Rudolph Friedrich Kurz.
a: [Fort Berthold,] "1. 8. 51." (Kurz 1937: pl. 4, bottom).
b: [Fort Berthold,] "31. 7. 51." (Kläy and Lång 1984: 150).
c: "23. 5. 51. Omahaw" (Kurz 1937: pl. 37, bottom; Kläy and Lång 1984: 149).

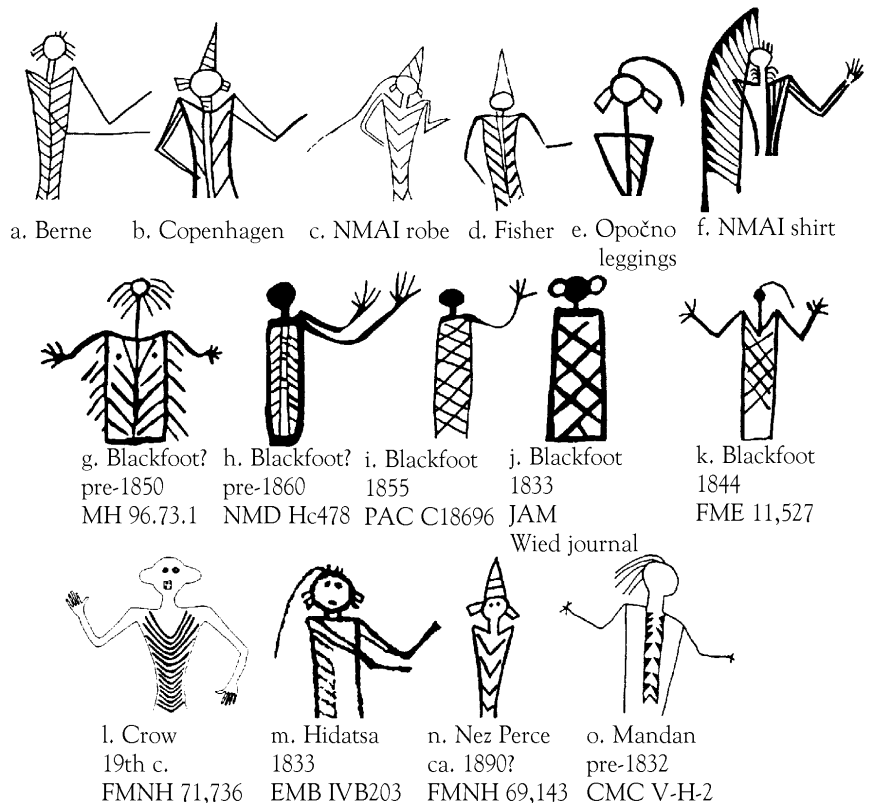


Fig. 10 Torso designs.

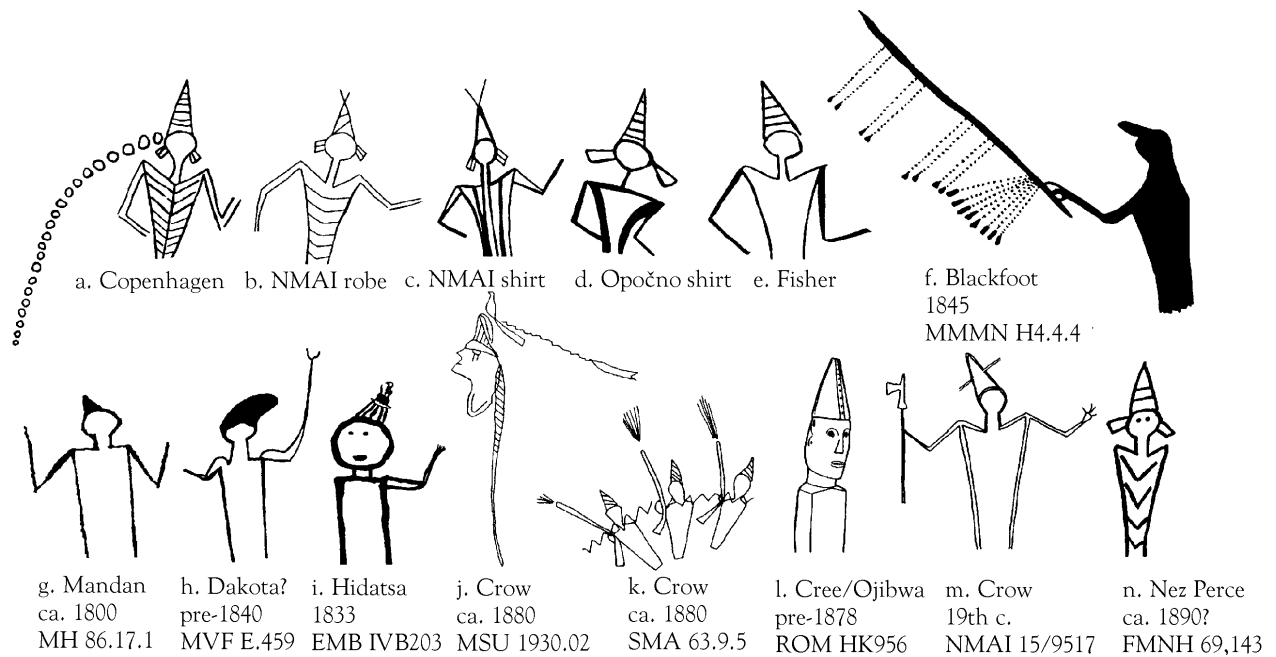


Fig. 11 Cone-shaped features on heads.

frequently on Blackfoot paintings, usually in the form of skewed crosshatching (Fig. 10g–k). Three works by the Crow, Hidatsa, and Nez Perce bear designs like those on the seven paintings (Fig. 10l–n). A few chest patterns, usually suggestive of tattoos, appear on early Mandan and Sioux paintings (Fig. 10o). Like tattoos on the Northern Plains (Light 1972; Kurz 1937: 173) and linear patterns on war shirts, torso designs on the seven paintings most probably signified war honors.

The geometrical cone shapes atop the heads of warriors are a distinctive feature common to five of the seven paintings (Fig. 11a–e). Heads surmounted by roughly conical shapes find fairly broad distribution in pictorials from both the first half of the nineteenth century (Fig. 11f–i) and the latter half (Fig. 11j). However, highly geometrical conical forms are limited to White Swan’s warriors (Fig. 11k), a Plains Cree/Ojibway carved elkhorn figure (Fig. 11l),⁵ a figure engraved on a Crow mirror frame (Fig. 11m), and torsos on a Nez Perce robe (Fig. 11n).

There are a number of references in the literature to hair coiled into roughly conical forms. John Macdonell (Wood and Thiessen 1985: 90) observed Assiniboines and Crees in the Red River area around 1793 with long hair coiled “like a cable on top of their heads in the form of a mitre.” Around 1845 Father De Smet (1905: 590) noted that “the ‘toque’ among the Blackfeet is a

tail, seven or eight feet long, made of horse and buffalo hair, interwoven with their own. But instead of floating behind in the ordinary way, this tail is located upon the party’s forehead and stands out spirally, something like a rhinoceros horn.”

Catlin’s “Indian Gallery” shows an elderly Hidatsa man with hair coiled into a conical form (Truettner 1979: 93). Bodmer depicted a Hidatsa, a Crow, two Atsinas, a Blackfoot, and a Mandan (Goetzman et al. 1984: 356, 16, 239, 320, 237, 248–249; Thomas and Ronnefeldt 1976: 39, 172, 2, 128–129, 132–133) wearing very long hair massed above the forehead. Around 1845 Nicolas Point (1967: 64, 183, 130, 139, 131) painted two men presumed to be Blackfoot, a Crow, four men of unknown origins from the Northern Plains/Intermontane area, and a Gros Ventre—all with hair similarly coiled or bunched up. Kurz (1937: pls. 25, 31, 38, 41) shows three men, apparently Hidatsas, with their hair coiled up, as does Gustav Sohon’s 1855

5. This figure has a hole above each ear, indicating that it may once have had projections socketed at the sides of the head. Several birchbark scrolls bear figures with conical “power projections” from the top of the head coupled with side projections, particularly in the shape of horns (Dewdney 1975: 18, 146). The horn figure was found in 1878 buried beside the Yellow Quill Trail in a box made without nails. In 1910 a Cree/Ojibway medicine man offered his opinion that the figure would once have been used by a medicine man (Morris 1985: 147). Drawing by Emil Huston.

depiction of the Peigan Chief White Bull (Nicandri 1986).

It is thus likely that the conical feature in each of the seven paintings depicts long trains of real and artificially added hair coiled or bunched up and tied above the forehead. The way a number of European artists rendered this hairdo strongly suggests that the internal striations in the conical head forms on the seven paintings depict the coiling effect.

Conically shaped hats also deserve consideration. In 1833 Bodmer portrayed the Hidatsa warrior Road-maker wearing a black (felt?) hat with a high crown encircled by a white band and with the brim turned down (Goetzman et al. 1984: 315). There is a similar Cree felt hat in the Glenbow Museum (cat.no. AP 180B), apparently dating to the same period, with two bands of brown and white weasel skins encircling the crown. The collection history states that the hat, together with a brass-studded wool jacket, was worn on the warpath to render bullets and arrows harmless. At the Ft. Laramie Council of 1867, several of the Crow delegation wore high-crowned black felt hats “Calabrian” style, like those of American generals, with a series of multicolored ribbons encircling the crown to its full height (Simonin 1966: 101; see also Campione 1995: 12; Howell 1975: 31). Kurz (1937: pls. 7, 27) portrayed traders Kipp and Culbertson on the Northern Plains in 1851 wearing Calabrese-style hats. The Ethnologisches Museum, Berlin, preserves a toque-like conical cap attributed to the Cree, which dates to about 1850 (cat.no. IVB8607). At least three Plains Crees were photographed wearing pointed caps, of both the European felt and the traditional Native tubular fur type (Silversides 1994: 78, 60, 28). Not long after 1884 Smith (1943: 21) observed that Hunkpapa and Blackfoot Sioux liked to tailor their felt stetsons by pulling them out of shape until they resem-

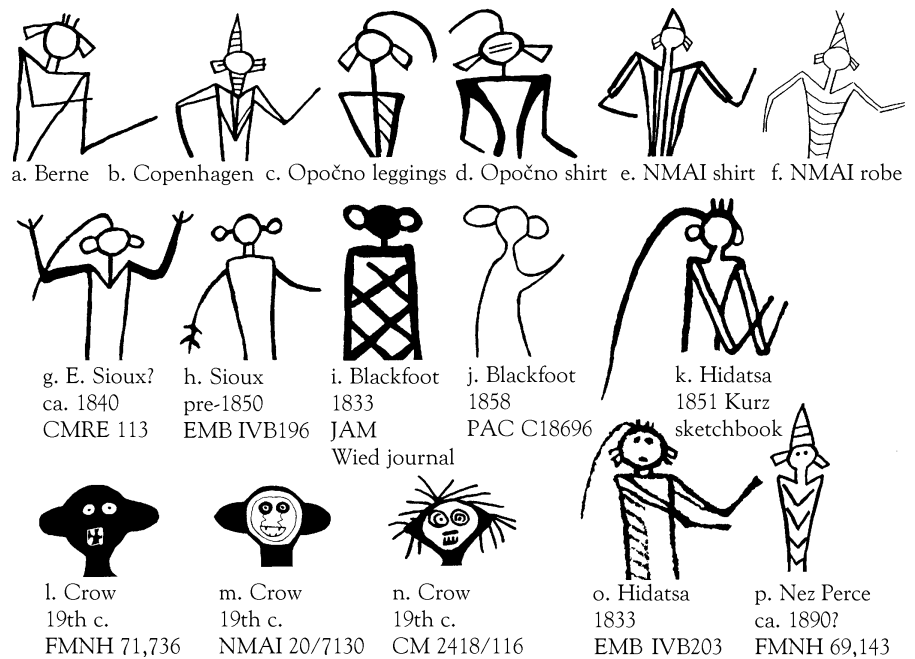


Fig. 12 Rectangular shapes at the sides of heads.

bled the “pointed headgear of a clown,” then scalloped the edges and tied a strip of otter skin around it. Possibly conical caps were popular among the Plains tribes because they could both accommodate and give the appearance of massive hair foretops.

Rectangular shapes at the sides of heads, often in combination with conical foretops, are a distinctive feature of the paintings, with the exception of the Fisher robe (Fig. 12a-f). Bulbous protrusions at the sides of the head are found in other Plains pictorials (Fig. 12g-n).⁶ This feature may relate to a practice that Shell Necklace described to Lowie (1922: 228), in which Crows on the warpath gathered and tied up their hair in front of each ear. Two examples display rectangular forms almost identical to those on the seven paintings (Fig. 12o-p). These rectangular shapes could represent the large shell or bead ear drops best described by Denig (1953: 35), but more likely they depict squared-off hair bangs at the sides of the head. This hair style gained considerable popularity on the Northern Plains and Plateau, judging from the pictures of Catlin (Truettner 1979: 180, 190, 194), Bodmer (Thomas and Ronnefeldt 1976: 189, 218, 222), and Kurz (1937: pls. 1, 27, 31).

The detached hand, characterized by outstretched rake-like fingers and curved-back hitchhiker-thumb, is a distinctive element in five of the seven works (Fig. 13a-f). This motif serves as a narrative device, indicat-

6. Bulbous forms at the sides of heads occur with considerable frequency on Midewewin scrolls (Dewdney 1975).

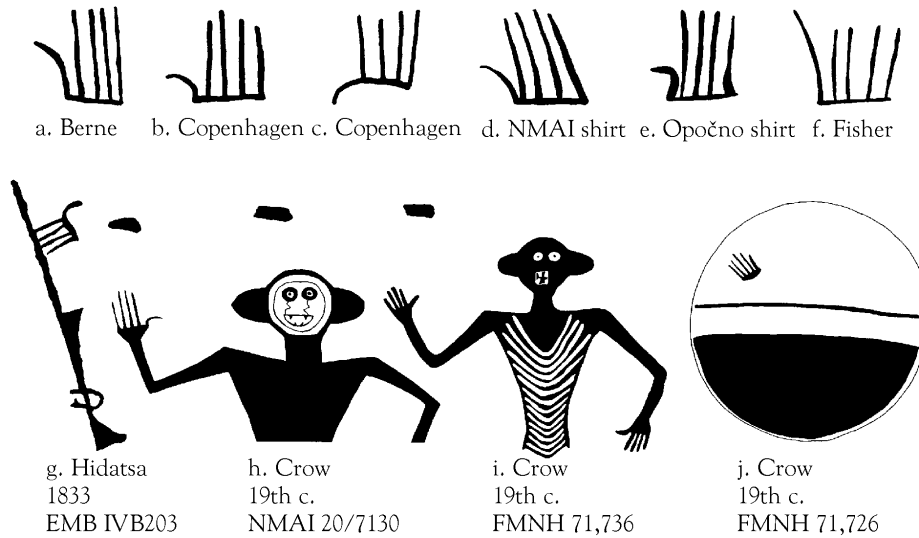


Fig. 13 Detached hands.

ing the capture of goods from the enemy. The hands on three Crow shields are similar in form only (Fig. 13h-j), while the detached hand on Two Ravens's robe (Fig. 13g), which is preceded by three footprints and is about to grasp a gun, is comparable in both form and function. Outside of these works only the Blackfoot, attested to by some twenty of their hide paintings, characteristically used a detached hand to denote the capture of objects (Brownstone 1993: 19). However, their form is unlike that of the hand motif in the seven paintings.

To my knowledge, the Field Museum Nez Perce robe (Fig. 14), together with the Fisher and Berne robes, are the only surviving examples in which the composition is split in half, isolating action scenes and tallies in sep-

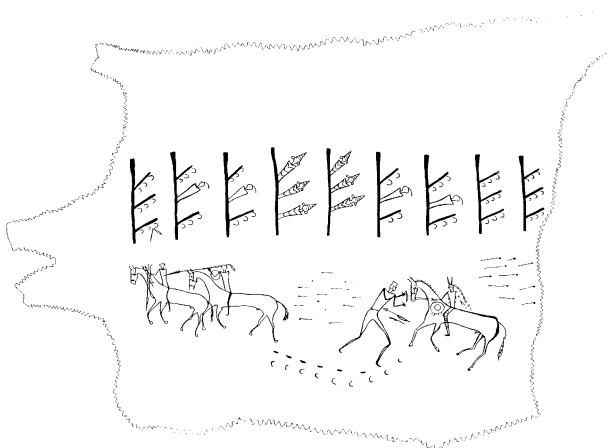


Fig. 14 Design on painted robe, Nez Perce, ca. 1890? Field Museum of Natural History (Chicago, IL), cat.no. 69,143.

arate registers.⁷ Bearing in mind his tendency to overgeneralize in his illustrations of Indian pictorial paintings, Catlin (1959: frontispiece, 129, 132, 142) illustrated six split-composition robes, three of which he attributed to the Crow, two to the Blackfoot, and one to the Apache. Kurz (1937: pl. 12) illustrated one split-composition robe, apparently worn by a Hidatsa.

The tallies or "honor charts" on the seven painted hides are of two types, termed here bar tallies and object tallies. Bar tallies are found on the Berne and Fisher robes and the Opočno leggings (Fig. 15a-c). They are characterized by rows of pin-and-cup motifs and conventionalized human torsos aligned at about ninety degrees to black or red bars. There are a limited number of bar tallies comparable to the seven paintings. Most impressive is the entire buffalo hide devoted to the honor chart of "donated treasures, through which Yellow Bear had become an honorable man" (Fig. 15d) (Peter Bolz, pers. comm., 1996). Bodmer portrayed Mato Tope with a partly visible bar tally on the left chest area of his shirt (Fig. 15e). A shirt collected by Lt. G. K. Warren bears a similar tally on the right chest area (Fig. 15f). Rudolph Kurz made a thumbnail sketch of a bar tally (Fig. 15g), and the Field Museum robe bears one as well (Fig. 15h). Gilbert Wilson collected a Mandan dress worn by Beaver and bearing a tally commemorating the war deeds of her husband, Red White Buffalo (Fig. 15i). Beaver explained that each bar plus associated pin-and-cup

7. Of all the surviving Plains Indian pictorials, the Field Museum robe is in many respects the most similar to the seven paintings. It was purchased in 1890 from Abraham Brooks, a Nez Perce scout for the U.S. Cavalry, who claimed that it had belonged to Chief Joseph. In a letter to the museum, Theodore Stern (January 1976) noted the unlikelihood that the exploits on the robe were those of the famous chief and suggested that it may even have been Brooks who painted the robe. The nature of the pigments, the scale of the figures, and the blanket-strip design suggest that it was painted around the time of acquisition, perhaps in imitation of or a throwback to earlier paintings of the type presently under study.

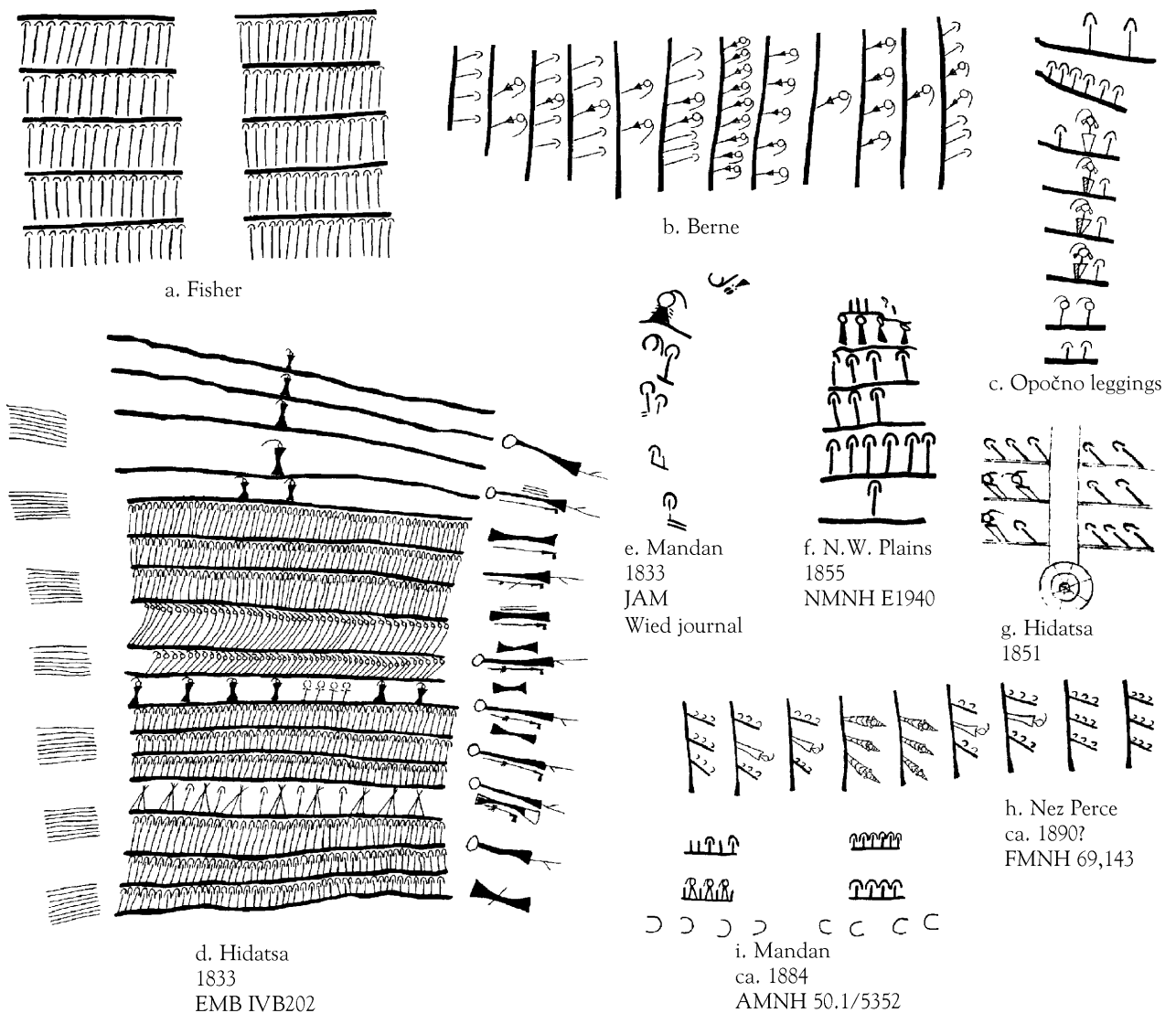


Fig. 15 Bar and object tallies.

8. Taylor (1994: 183) noted that the Opočno leggings and Berne robe are likely Crow and that the pin-and-cup motif probably represented the capturing of picketed horses. In contrast, Lowie (1912: 231) noted that, according to Yellow-brow, the Crow had no special symbol for recording the cutting of a picketed horse. However, there can be no doubt that the Crow gave special recognition for “cutting the halter” (Lowie 1922: 253; Medicine Crow 1992: 45; Nabokov 1967: 34). Chief Big Moon’s war exploits displayed on Panel no. 3 in the Glacier Park Hotel contained three pin-and-cup forms which, according to the explanatory label, represent sixty horses stolen (McAdams 1919: 1). In form the pin-and-cup symbol is similar to the arc and zigzag frequently used by the Blackfoot to denote a scouting mission (Brownstone 1993: 20). Wilson (1916, 22: 362) reported a Hidatsa hide scraper decorated with bored holes configured like the pin-and-cup motif. It represents a scouting mission; the number of dots in the arc stood for the number in the war party, and those forming the “pin” indicated whether he was first, second, etc., in sighting the enemy. The Hidatsa also marked scouting missions with straight bars and parallel rows of dashes (Gilman and Schneider 1987: 104), as did the Mandan (Gilbert Wilson notes for AMNH cat. no. 50.2/5352).

motifs stood for a successful horse raid led by Red White Buffalo. The bar with human torsos denoted a war party led by Red White Buffalo that killed Sioux.⁸ Not illustrated here are six pictures by Catlin that approximate human torso bar tallies, four of which he attributed to the Mandan.

On the seven paintings, object tallies of goods captured and perhaps given away fall into two categories: repeated guns and assorted weapons. The Opočno shirt bears a tally of the latter type, comprising rows of various weapons aligned to both sides of the sleeve strips (Fig. 16a). Similar tallies are found on a Hidatsa robe drawn by Kurz, a Crow or Nez Perce robe in the Los Angeles Museum, and a petroglyph at the Nordstrom Bowen site in Crow country (Fig. 16b-d). The

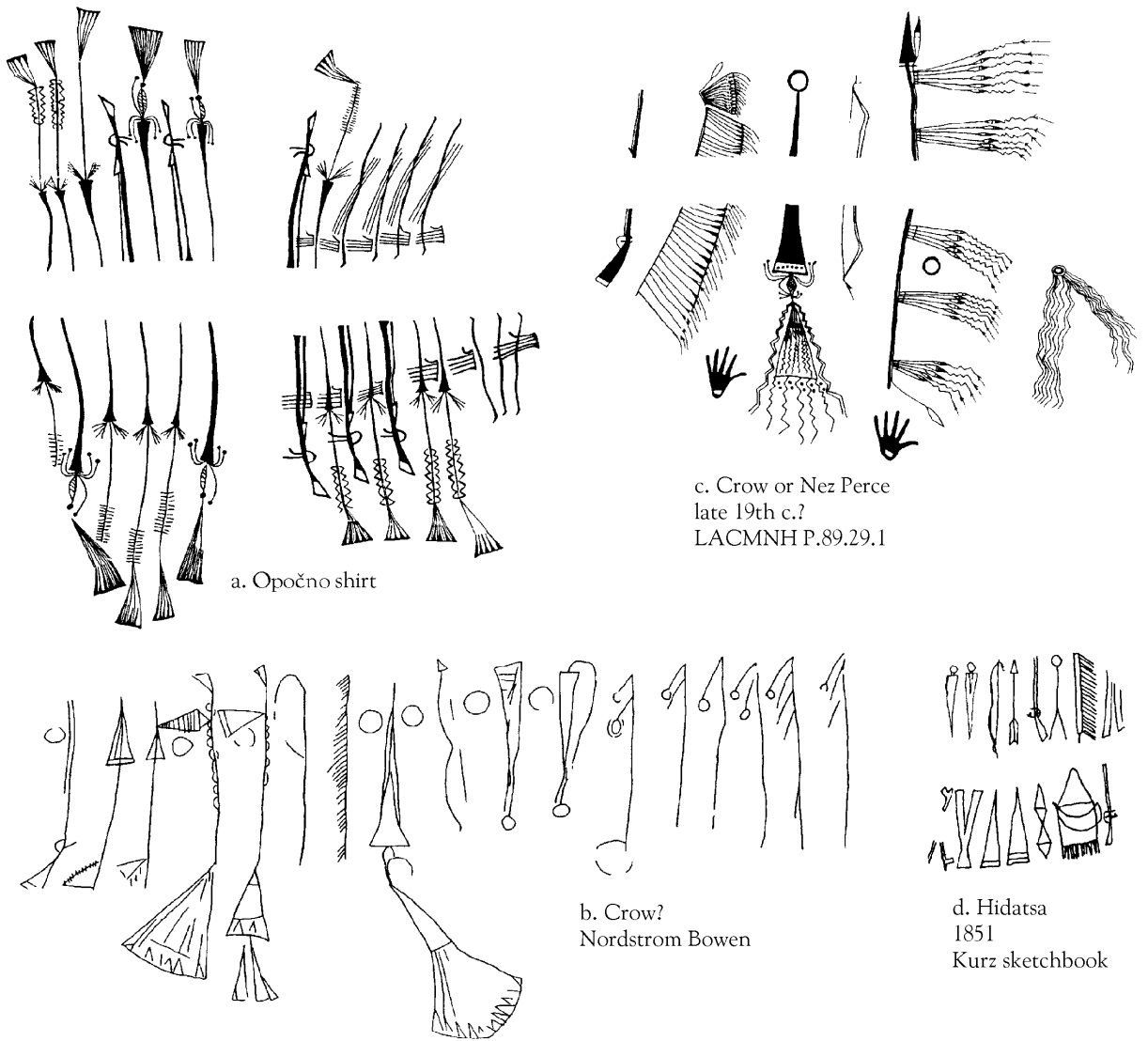


Fig. 16 Tallies: guns and other weapons.

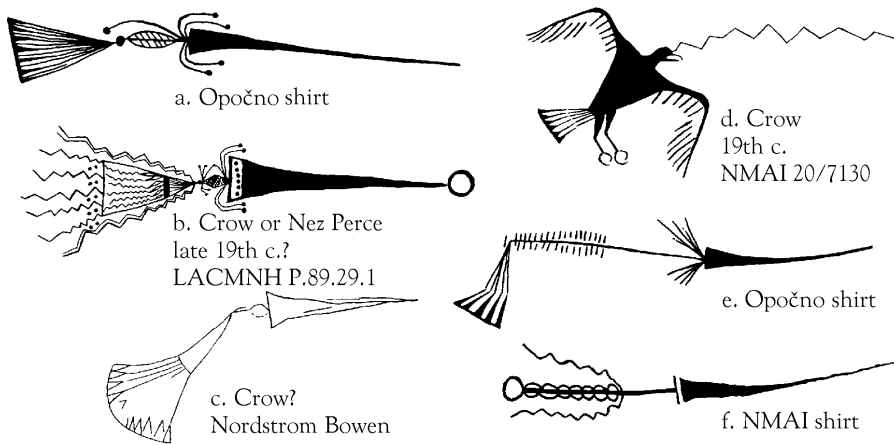


Fig. 17 Tallies: swords.

remaining comparable examples, not shown here, comprise five hide paintings devoted solely to object tallies and numerous war-exploit narrative paintings containing discrete object-tally subsections—all apparently executed by the Blackfoot (Brownstone 1993: 17).

Of particular note are the sword-like items on the Opočno shirt object tally (Fig. 17a). Comparable images are found on the Los Angeles

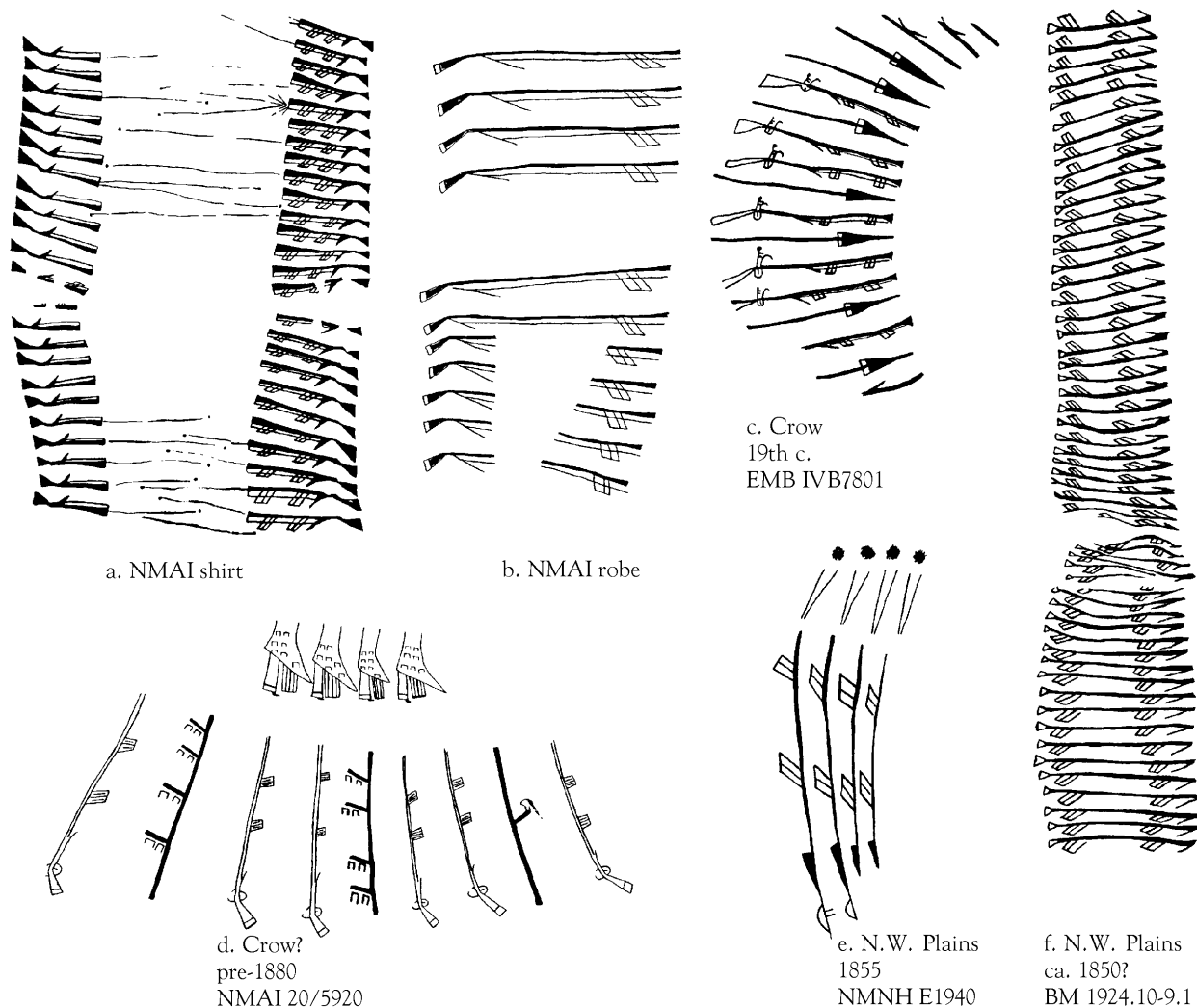


Fig. 18 Tallies: guns and lances.

robe⁹ and the Nordstrom Bowen petroglyph (Fig. 17b-c). This object is composed of three segments: a

9. The circles at the tip of the “sword” and beside the lance on the Los Angeles robe, as well as those on the Nordstrom Bowen tally, appear to be incidental to rather than a part of the adjacent objects. There is another seemingly “dissociated” circle on the flank of the horse on the upper left of the Copenhagen robe.

10. I am grateful to Bill Holm and to Cory Keeble, curator of the European arms and armor collection of the Royal Ontario Museum, for enumerating the sword-like attributes of the object in question.

11. The interpreters at the Fort Union National Historic Site termed the metal “lances, some up to three feet long” listed in Wood and Thiessen’s (1985: 322) summary of goods traded on the upper Missouri around 1800, “Assiniboine” lance heads. There are several accounts indicating the presence of European swords among Northern Plains Indians. Fidler (MacGregor 1998: 82-83) observed that in 1793 the Bloods and Snakes attacked the Mountain Crow, capturing “2 guns (Spanish), 20 swords, ...” Schultz and Donaldson (1930: 2) noted that as late as the 1870s the Peigans had in their possession a Toledo blade, a shirt of mail, and a lance—all assumed to have been raided from the Spanish in the Southwest at a much earlier date.

triangle with internal markings at one end, an elongated triangular blade at the other end, and a sword-hilt-like configuration in between. The triangular flap-like configuration in between. The triangular flap-like section is also found on the Opočno lances. The internal markings in corresponding sections of the Nordstrom Bowen and Los Angeles examples, coupled with the manner of depicting feathers on the tail of the bird on a Crow shield (Fig. 17d), suggest that the triangular section represents a feather attachment. The hilt section, with its configuration of free quillons, is highly suggestive of rapiers made at least a century before the painting of the shirt.¹⁰ The blade of this “sword” resembles the extra long spear points on the Opočno and NMAI shirts (Fig. 17e-f). Both spear points and “sword” blade points appear to be about the same size as the metal “Assiniboine” lance heads reported to have been several feet long.¹¹ Perhaps the hilt of the

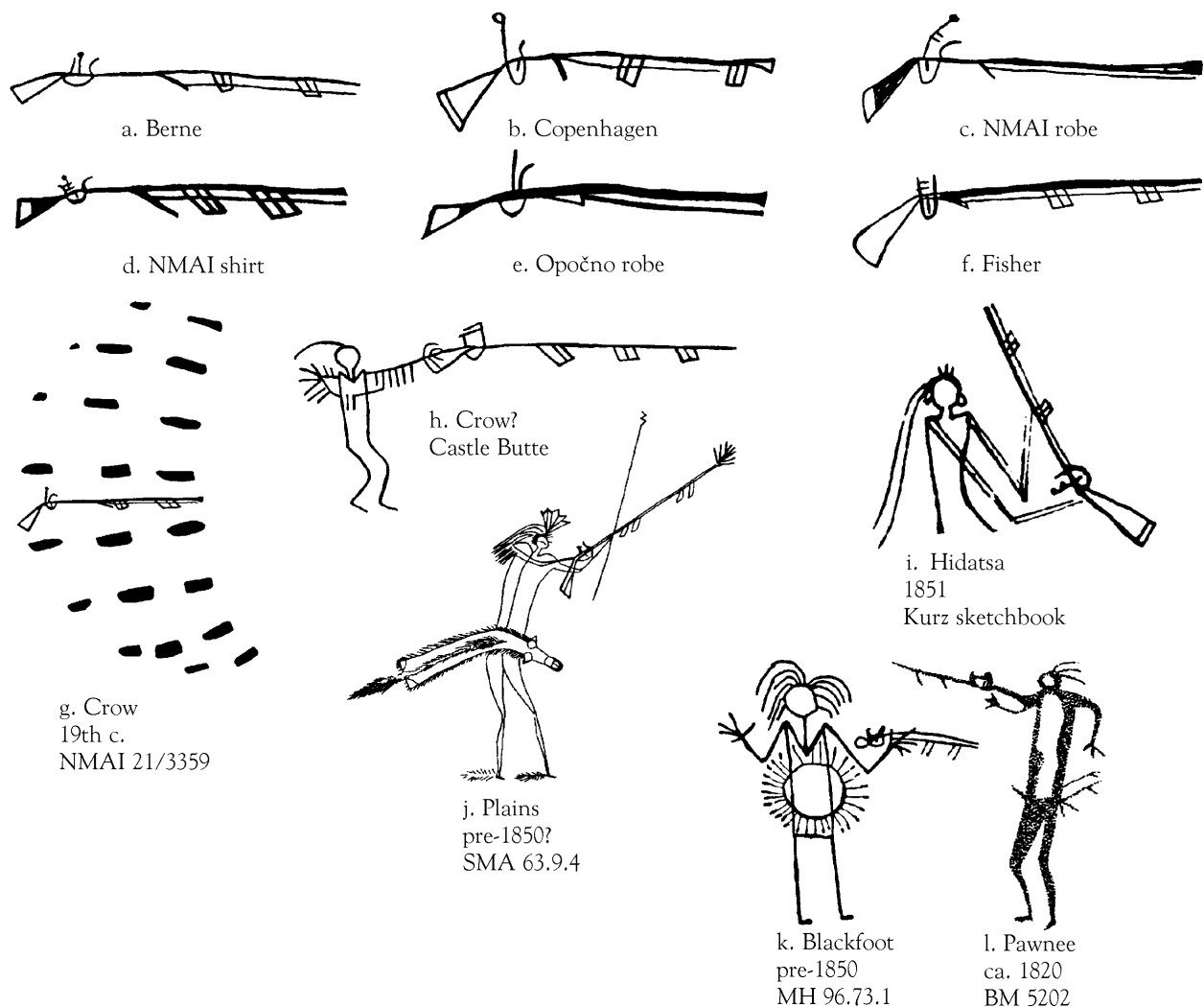


Fig. 19 Guns.

sword-like object was attached to such a spear point. This combination is not unlikely considering the practice of mounting straight sword blades onto lance shafts (Austerman 1990: 12–13) and sheathing sabers in “lance cases” (Galante 1980: 67–68).

Tallies featuring rows of guns in the seven paintings are found on the shirt and robe in the NMAI (Fig. 18a–b). Apart from these, a shield in the Berlin Museum bears a row of alternating guns and spears (Fig. 18c). Another robe in the NMAI displays a row of guns and bar tallies (Fig. 18d). Although it is undocumented, the figures wearing distinctive ceremonial regalia in the upper register are identical to a well-documented Crow drawing collected by Edwin Denig (Lessard 1984: 66). The shirt collected by Lt. Warren in 1855 has a row of guns, incompletely visible on the left chest area, oppo-

site the pin-and-cup tally noted earlier (Fig. 18e). An undocumented shirt in the British Museum bears a long continuous row of guns aligned to the quill strip falling over the left shoulder (Fig. 18f).

Guns in the seven paintings exhibit the following distinctive features: flared barrel openings, oversized ramrods often painted red, and exaggerated rectangular shapes representing ramrod rings (Fig. 19a–f). Comparable guns are found on a Crow shield (Fig. 19g), a petroglyph in Crow country (Fig. 19h), and in Kurz’s Hidatsa robes (Fig. 19i). Not illustrated here are four Crow examples that display guns of this type: a drawing executed around 1885 entitled “Crow Indians Hunting Bison” collected by Denig; a shield in the Field Museum (cat.no. 71,755); a drawing by Yellow Horse, held by the Foundation for the Preservation of

American Indian Art and Culture; and a shirt that belonged to Two Leggings (Powell 1988: 19). Catlin illustrated about thirteen hide paintings containing guns which approximate the ramrod-ring feature. He identified seven paintings as Crow, while assigning a different tribe to each of the remaining six. Several Shoshone hide paintings, apparently executed by Chief Washakie, contain guns exhibiting this feature. The practice of hanging bits of red cloth from the ramrod rings appears to be represented on several early undocumented robes and a Pawnee shield (Fig. 19j-l).¹² However, the shapes depending from the barrels differ from those on the seven paintings in that they lack the regularity and internal lines suggestive of the shape and striations of actual ramrod rings.

Having compared a number of distinctive characteristics of the seven paintings with similar features in other Plains Indian pictorials, it now remains to synthesize the data. The visual traits under discussion tend to have two aspects, one relating to form and the other to content. Massive foretops, for example, were both popular and had similar meaning to numerous tribes of the Plains. De Smet (1905: 590) noted that for the Blackfoot, the more massive the foretop, the greater was the bravery and distinction of its bearer. Kurz (1937: 88, 252; see also Wilson 1916: 129) observed that among the Hidatsa and Crow only those accredited with coups could attach false hair to their own, "coiled in a knot above the brow." Thus hair massed above the forehead was adopted by a broad community as a sign of success in warfare. However, only a few tribes graphically expressed this feature in a refined conical form.

Ramrods and ramrod rings also had a special meaning to many Plains tribes. For example, Hall (1926: 33) noted that on a war-exploit robe believed to be Teton, the lower edge of the victor's gun barrel, representing the ramrod, was painted red. Cree (Macdonnell 1985: 90) and Lakota warriors (Wied 1839-1841, 1: 359; 1906, 22: 326) used to tie pieces of wooden ramrods into their hair. Wied (1839-1841, 1: 442, 2: 202; 1906, 22: 389, 23: 357) observed in 1833 that the Assiniboine, Mandan, and Hidatsa liked to hang bits of red cloth from the ramrod rings. Many tribes associated

the gun with thunder. Perhaps they also likened the glint of brass ramrod rings to lightning which flashed from the eyes of the Thunderbird. In this context it is likely that both graphic stylization and decorating with red cloth were but different ways of symbolizing a common mythological theme.¹³ Again it appears that the distribution of a given form is more limited than that of its underlying content or meaning.

In addition to this quantitative aspect, there may be a qualitative dimension to the distribution of form and content. For example, the representation of captured goods by means of the object tally and detached-hand conventions appeared almost exclusively on works of the Blackfoot and the seven paintings examined here. Since the Blackfoot had no allies among the candidates presently under consideration, the artists of the seven paintings were probably their enemies. The paintings of these competing cultures are similar in terms of content but, as we saw earlier, they depart with regard to form. Similarly, the torso patterns on the seven paintings and works of the Blackfoot probably had a common meaning but differ stylistically. On the other hand, in strongly allied cultures—Crow, Hidatsa, Mandan, and Nez Perce—there is a marked convergence of formal features. The Crow were at the center of these tribes. They maintained a constant cycle of raiding and warfare with their Blackfoot neighbors to the north, and both tribes were renowned for their skill in capturing goods (Lowie 1922: 403; Wilson 1958: 2; Bonner 1965: 197; Lowie 1912: 230; Marquis 1928: 174-175; Morgan 1959: 191). The Hidatsa and the Awatixa to the east were the ancestral people of the Crow, and in many respects they remained as one tribe. At the same time, the Hidatsa and Crow have a long history of cohabitation and military cooperation with the Mandan. For much of the nineteenth century the Crow acted as middlemen in trade between the Nez Perce and Shoshone to the west and the Upper Missouri villages of the Mandan and Hidatsa. These associations clearly suggest that Crow artists executed the seven paintings. The conception of form in pictorial art as it relates to cultural identity observed by Kurz and Feder reminds us of two important additional considerations: The seven paintings preserve a marked stylistic integrity suggesting they were painted by one people, and the formal conventions typifying these works occur with greatest frequency in images of the Crow.

12. Adapted from David Williams's unpublished tracing of the Pawnee shield cover.

13. Bill Holm (pers. comm., 1998) suggested that cloth may also have been inserted in the rings to anchor the ramrod, as well as to add decoration.

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