



1. Detail of Four Bears's Mandan medicine robe. A photograph of the complete robe is in Bolz and Sanner (1999:77). Courtesy of Staatliche Museen zu Berlin—Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin, Germany. Cat. No. IV B198.

European Influence in the Mandan-Hidatsa Graphic Works Collected by Prince Maximilian of Wied

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I

n 1833–1834, the German aristocrat and naturalist Prince Maximilian of Wied assembled an important record of life on the American frontier. He traveled along the Missouri River almost to its Rocky Mountain source with Karl Bodmer, a highly trained scientific illustrator from Switzerland. Of the dozen or so Indian tribes they encountered, the two travelers came to know the Mandan and Hidatsa best. They wintered at Fort Clark, a fur-trading post in the neighborhood of the five villages of the closely affiliated Mandan-Hidatsa in present-day North Dakota. During that five-and-a-half-month period, Bodmer painted the portraits of Mandan-Hidatsa artists who, in turn, executed paintings for the prince's collection. This convergence of pictorial traditions has given rise to a number of questions regarding the effect of Bodmer's painting on Mandan-Hidatsa artists.

In 1957, ethnologist John Ewers was the first to seriously consider this topic. His conclusions hinged on stylistic differences between a set of Mandan paintings executed during the Europeans' stay at Fort Clark and two Mandan paintings thought to predate the Europeans' arrival. However, in 1992, researcher Bill Holm demonstrated that one of the early paintings, a shirt attributed to the Mandan chief Four Bears, was not painted by an Indian but rather by George Catlin, the frontier artist (Holm 1992). The second early painting was a robe long considered to have been collected by explorers Meriwether Lewis and William Clark in 1804–1805 when they wintered in the Mandan village. It also turned out to have an unreliable collection history. Scholar Castle McLaughlin carefully reviewed the documentation and found that the robe was just as likely to have been collected from the Sioux in 1825 by George C. Hutter, a member of the

Atkinson-Fallon expedition (2003). With the publication in 2012 of the third and final volume of Maximilian's journals detailing his travels in North America, this topic can now be re-examined in light of new information on the Indian paintings collected by the prince and the circumstances surrounding their execution (Maximilian 2012). It should be noted that most of the painted robes considered in this article appear as graphic illustrations rather than photographs, so as to permit a clear view of the robes' details and their placement in the overall composition.¹

Among Plains peoples, women traditionally produced abstract geometric paintings, whereas men executed figurative works. The latter may be divided into three categories: medicine paintings, tallies and depictions of war exploits. As records of a man's achievements in the performance of supernatural acts, gift giving and warfare, these paintings signified his elevated social position. Maximilian collected figurative paintings in all three traditional categories and several nontraditional types.

Maximilian acquired his first painting on June 19, 1833, when he "traded with les Quatre Ours, that is, Four Bears for his buffalo blanket" on the westward leg of the journey while his keelboat stopped briefly before a crowd of Mandan onlookers (Maximilian 2010:207). At the time, Four Bears had the greatest war record in his tribe and was "perhaps the best known Indian on the Upper Missouri" (Truettner 1979:22). Maximilian noted that the robe had been Four Bears's "medicine (i.e. charm), which he

highly valued as a souvenir of his brother, who had been shot by the enemy" (1906, Part I:359). No doubt this is the robe identified on the list of objects sold by Maximilian to the Royal German Art Chamber in 1844 as a "Medicine robe of the Mandan Chief [Four Bears], coat of buffalo hide, on the back a buffalo is painted" (Fig. 1).²

Medicine-type paintings generally depicted animals as they appeared in dreams or visions and functioned as medicine helpers, usually to achieve success in war. They were executed on tipi covers, shields and, less frequently, on robes. Anthropologist Alfred Bowers may have learned the story behind Four Bears's medicine robe while conducting fieldwork among the Mandan (1950:166). An informant told him that after an Arikara killed his younger brother, Four Bears went on a fast, during which he received a vision identifying the location of his brother's killer. The vision occurred under a large oak tree in which a raven had nested and hatched its young. It has been suggested that the raven led Four Bears to the Arikara man, enabling him to avenge his brother's death (Taylor 1998:45). The raven depicted on the robe may thus be connected to Maximilian's comment that Four Bears's robe was a "souvenir of his brother."

From the above journal entry, it is clear that Four Bears painted this robe prior to his exposure to Bodmer's work, but after he had seen Catlin's. During the previous year, between July 20 and mid-August, 1832, Catlin resided at Fort Clark, where he portrayed the Mandan people and their customs (Truettner 1979:22). Four Bears,



2. Illustration of the painted passages of a Mandan buffalo robe. A photograph of the robe is in Krickeberg (1954:Pl. 3). This robe is now in the Ethnologisches Museum Berlin, Germany. Cat. No. IV B205.



3. Illustration of the painted passages of a European-painted horsehide. A photograph of the hide is in Brassler (1976:82). This hide is now in the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Gatineau, Quebec. Cat. No. V-E-281.

Catlin's principal contact there, thus had many opportunities to observe the artist at work and study his paintings. However, Four Bears's highly expressive buffalo and backward-looking raven are surely representative of a fine tradition of animal depiction that developed independently among Plains Indians. In this regard, the Swiss painter Rudolph Kurz noted that Plains Indian painters tended toward abstract conventionalization in rendering the human figure, while their animals were considerably more lifelike (1937:301; Wissler 1938:244–245).

Animals were also the subjects of a second Mandan robe collected by Maximilian, but it is almost certainly not a medicine painting. Although not noted in his journals, it is identified on the 1844 list from the Royal German Art Chamber as "a small Mandan robe, painted with all kinds of animals." The painted passages of the robe, illustrated in Figure 2, contain no fewer than thirty-nine animals, representing at least a dozen species, interspersed with human figures, including Buffalo Bull Society dancers. The painting is remarkable for its seemingly random array of figures. Only a few groupings convey a coherent narrative, including a row of buffalo, several of which are shown eliminating bodily waste, and two converging skunks releasing their scents. In contrast, the figures on medicine paintings do tend to create a unified narrative.

In general, I believe that imagery of this sort was calculated to please European viewers. More to the point, the painter of this robe seems to have tailored its content to appeal to Maximilian, in view of the numerous natural-history study skins he collected, not to mention Bodmer's illustrations of local faunal life and Mandan ceremonials, including the Buffalo Bull Society dance.

Indians of that era were in the practice of selling painted robes at trading posts such as Fort Clark. Maximilian noted that a beautifully painted robe would bring as much as two unpainted ones (2010:426, 2012:151). The artist Alfred Jacob Miller observed in 1837 that Indians were not only trading their used robes to the fur company but were also painting new robes specifically for that purpose (1973:132). It seems clear that at this time there was a non-Native market for a hybrid form of the pictorial-painted Indian wearing robe, one that would serve as a souvenir of Indian life and also function as a lap robe. In this regard, scholar David Gebhard noted that Anglo consumers "wished to have the best of three worlds" (1974:13). They wanted Indian paintings to be ideographic so as to tell a story and appear "Indian," yet also feature some European drawing conventions.

During the same period, there were also European artists on the Plains who capitalized on that same mar-

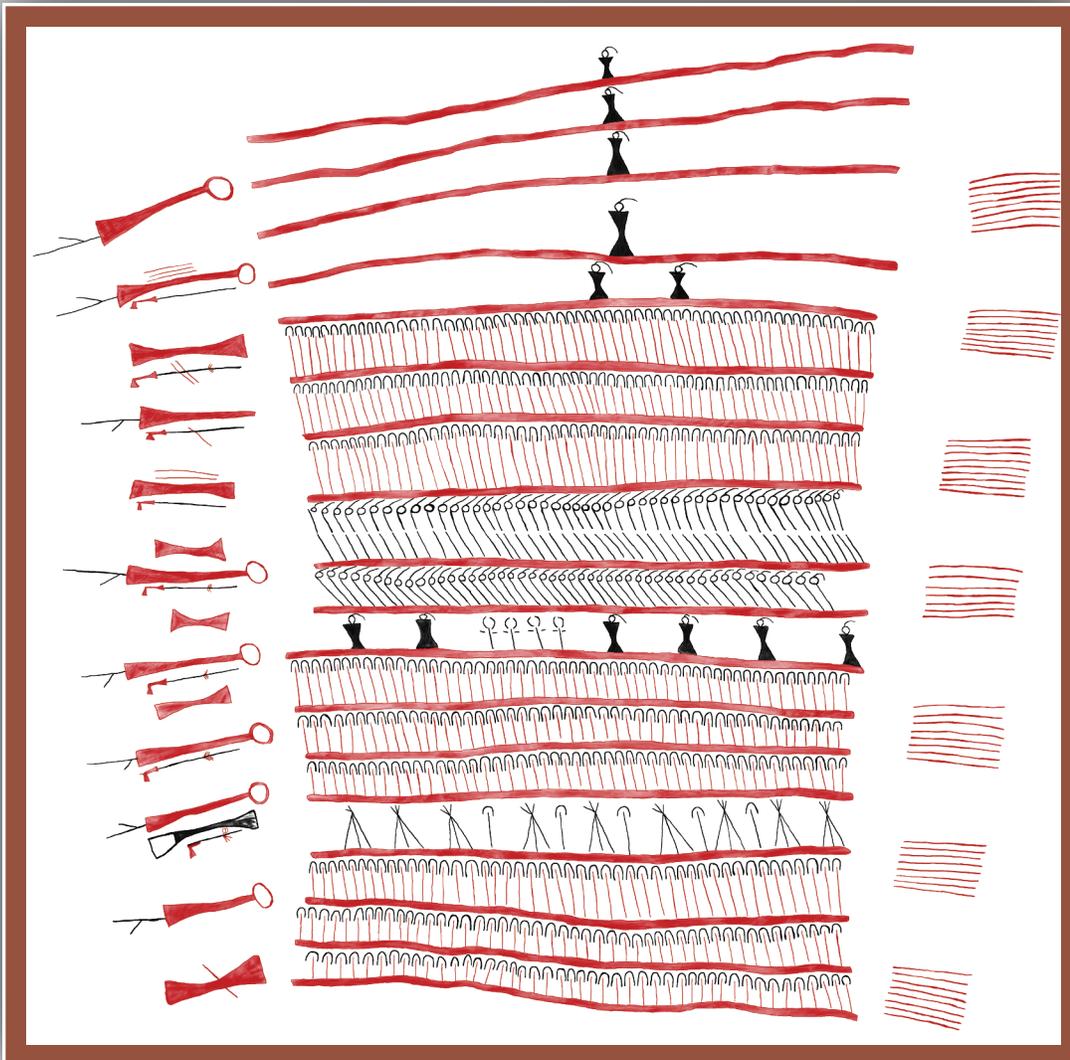
ket and painted animal hides in a quasi-Plains Indian style. In his diary, novelist, traveler and artist Balduin Mölhausen stated that he made “friends with the Indians and makes drawings in their manner on Bison robes for which the fur trade companies pay him well” (Graf 1991: 88). Catlin painted such a buffalo robe with a random assortment of imagery, including wild animals, taking an enemy scalp, a painted tipi village and ceremonial motifs (Brownstone 2004:11–12).

An excellent example of this type of hide painting is illustrated in Figure 3. Around 1841, Honoré Picotte, a trader in the Mandan region, took this robe to St. Louis, Missouri, where he sold it to Gabriel Andreae, who took it to Europe. It is now in the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Gatineau, Quebec, where it is cataloged as Sioux style.³ Its feathered-circle motifs were first worked out using a pressed-in outline. They were executed at a level of skill that surely reveals the hand of an experienced woman of Native ancestry. However, the hunting scenes, landscape elements and tipi village seen in the painting are subjects foreign to traditional Plains Indian painting. The rendering of figures in space, level of realism and tell-

tale signs of three-dimensional treatment clearly indicate the work of a European. Furthermore, it is painted on horsehide, a material not found in Plains Indian robes.

Figure 4 shows a painted robe that may have been painted specifically for Maximilian, yet shows no signs of having been influenced by its purchaser. Currently at the Ethnologisches Museum Berlin, it is identified on the Royal German Art Chamber list as “[Hidatsa] buffalo robe with depictions of objects that have been given away.” This must be the same robe that Maximilian saw upon entering Yellow Bear’s tipi in the Hidatsa village on November 28, 1833:

The old chief (Yellow Bear) was completely naked except for his breechcloth, sitting on a willow bench. He was painting a new buffalo skin with vermilion and black colors, which he had prepared in old shards [potsherds]. He dipped a sharp piece of wood in [the pigment] and drew the figures....They paint on their hides all [kinds of] objects and [indicate] how many [of these] they have given away as presents; they become great and respected because of such presents [given in large] numbers. One sees, for instance, many whips [depicted] (which signify horses given away), rifles, woolen blankets, etc., [all] portrayed in rows (Maximilian 2012:84).



4. Illustration of the painted passages of a Hidatsa tally robe painted by Yellow Bear. A photograph of the robe is in Krickeberg (1954:Pl. 4). This robe is now in the Ethnologisches Museum Berlin, Germany. Cat. No. IV B202.

The public enumeration of gifts given away was an important means to achieve elevated social status in the Hidatsa community. Bowers learned that men of high status also enumerated goods received and, in the years after middle age, might get back the goods given “several times over” (1965:289). Maximilian, on the other hand, believed that high-ranking men were “mostly poor,” and made no mention of the significance of received gifts. According to his sources, robes like Yellow Bear’s displayed only objects that were given away, and the robes received such exacting public scrutiny that even a small exaggeration in the tally would meet with public mockery (Maximilian 2012:183–184).

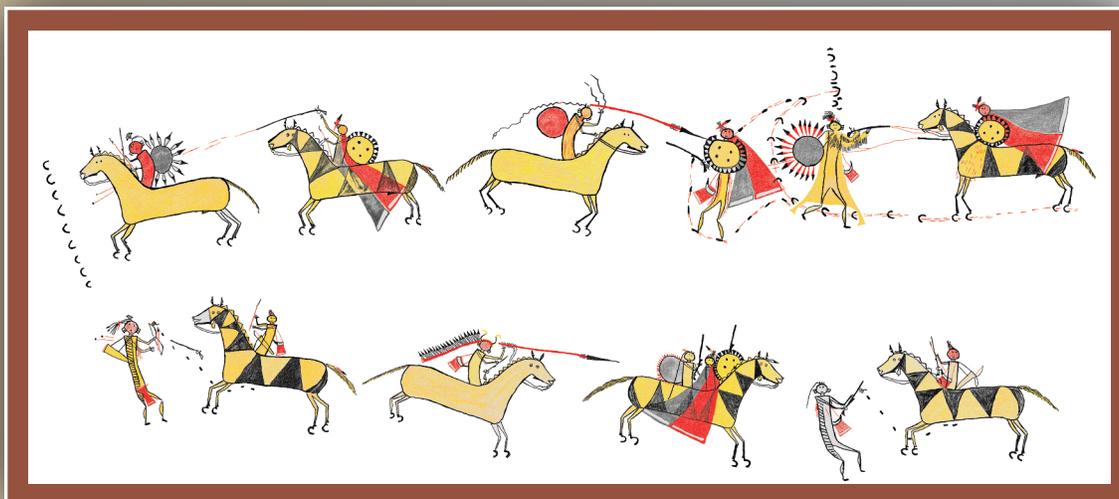
Yellow Bear’s robe is the largest and most-complex tally painting in existence (Fig. 4). It contains the basic features that characterized tallies of this type: rows of repeated ideographic motifs and schematically depicted objects anchored to thick base lines. The vertical row to the left tallies gifted blankets or lengths of cloth represented by concave-sided rectangles, long-stemmed pipes and whips with circular wrist straps that were given away along with horses. The vertical row on the right apparently enumerates guns given away (Maximilian 2012:84, 150). According to minister and ethnologist Gilbert Wilson, who collected ethnographic information from the Hidatsa in the early 1900s, the repeated pin-and-cup motifs aligned to a thick baseline, as found in the center of Yellow Bear’s robe, signified leadership in a successful horse raid.⁴ Correspondingly, the repeated pin-and-circle motifs aligned to bars may signify leadership in successful scalp raids, no doubt a visual reference to carrying scalps on long poles in victory ceremonies (Maximilian 2012:202; Bowers 1965: 279). According to Mandan-Hidatsa tradition, a war party’s success was attributed to its leader, and all captured scalps and horses belonged to him; he would distribute these and other captured objects as gifts to members of the community (Maximilian 2012:202–203; Bowers 1950:72, 1965:279). This practice enabled a war-party leader to enumerate the deeds of his followers on his robe, and it helps to explain the inordinate

number of motifs on Yellow Bear’s robe.

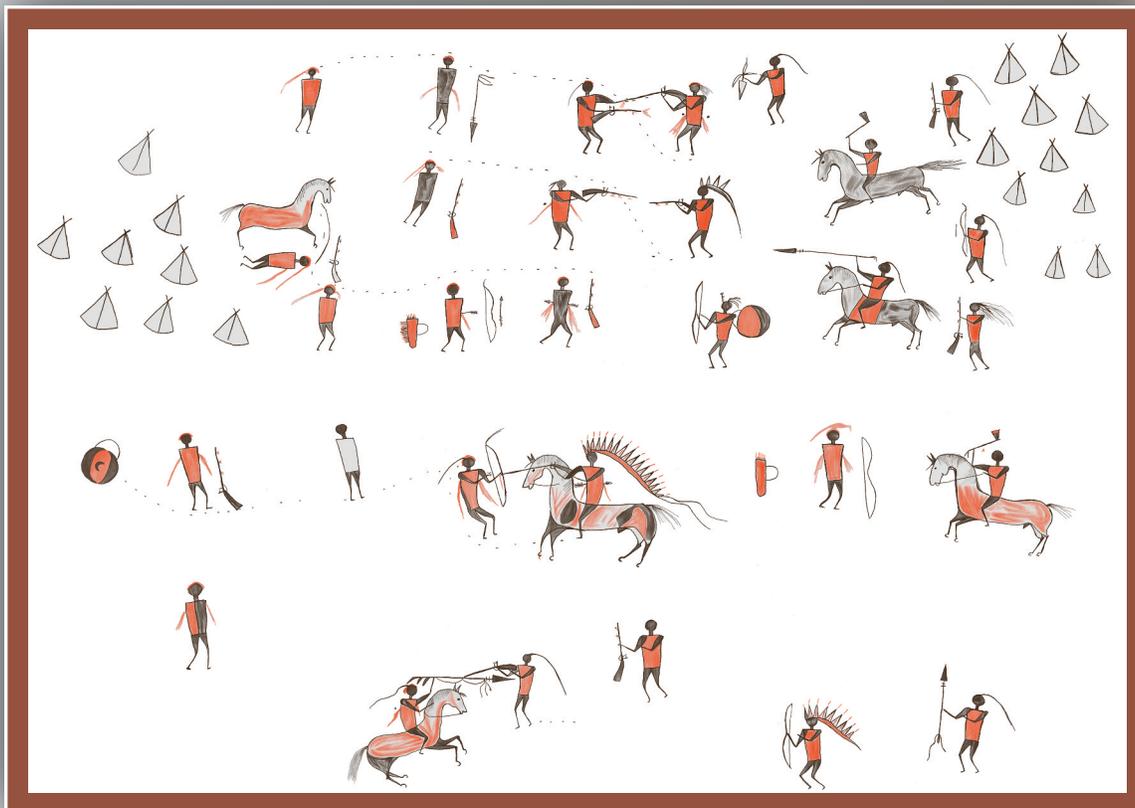
However, Maximilian noted in his journal that Yellow Bear wore another robe painted “with suns (feather bonnets)” (2012:254). Although the robe has not survived, Maximilian made a sketch of it with a German inscription, as follows: “drawn by chief Yellow Bear depicting things he gave away—quirts, headdresses, guns and red blankets.”⁵ The number and types of objects depicted on the two Yellow Bear robes differ significantly. These circumstances suggest that the old chief painted the extant robe expressly for Maximilian. If so, it was probably more than a coincidence that Yellow Bear happened to be painting the robe just as the prince walked into his tipi.

In the 1800s, when warfare was a prominent activity in Plains Indian culture, a man’s position depended largely on his success as a warrior. To better ensure his public recognition, a successful warrior would paint a record of his war exploits. At the time, this was the most frequently depicted subject of Plains Indian figurative painting. To best communicate the nature of his achievements, the warrior/artist developed a visual language that integrated elements of pictorialism and narration.

On April 3, 1834, Maximilian purchased a buffalo robe and vermilion paint at Fort Clark, gave these to Two Ravens, a distinguished Hidatsa warrior, and commissioned him to paint his war exploits (Maximilian 2012: 279). The resulting robe, preserved in the Ethnologisches Museum Berlin, displays a number of features that typified Plains Indian exploit paintings (Fig. 5). It employs a limited color palette—in this case, the typical Hidatsa combination of red, black and yellow (Maximilian 2012: 213). The depicted scenes remain faithful to the fundamental two-dimensionality of the painting surface, rarely employing conventions that suggest depth, such as diminishing the size of distant objects and the overlapping of figures. The painting also does not depict a single time and place; instead, Two Ravens—identified on his robe by his two-tone cape and pinto horse—is shown in six events that occurred at different times in his life as a warrior.



5. Illustration of the painted passages of a Hidatsa buffalo robe executed by Two Ravens. A photograph of the robe is in Bolz and Sanner (1999:79). This robe is now in the Ethnologisches Museum Berlin, Germany. Cat. No. IV B203.



6. Illustration of the painted passages of a Hidatsa buffalo robe. A photograph of the robe is in Feder (1980:58). This robe is now in the Linden-Museum Stuttgart, Germany. Cat. No. 36.125a.

Plains Indian painting is highly economical, employing schematized figures and ideographic devices to carry the narrative. Footprints and hoofprints were used to sequentially connect a series of actions occurring at different times and places. For example, in the two scenes bracketing the lower tier of his robe, Two Ravens uses footprints terminating with a stylized hand, to show how he jumped off his horse and captured enemy weapons. Painters also exaggerated salient features for ease of recognition. For example, they noted that the horse differed from other ungulates, such as deer and buffalo, in having undivided hooves, and so early painters represented that feature as hoofprints. On the upper right of Two Ravens's robe are bloody trails of hoofprints and footprints that link two sequential deeds. First, the protagonist and his horse were wounded during a fight with a warrior in a yellow shirt. Then, he was off his horse, confronting a mounted enemy. Finally, Two Ravens apparently reunited with his horse and joined his war party, signified by the vertical row of hoofprints and footprints. Such scenes gave rise to the European application of the terms "pictography" and "picture-writing" to Plains Indian painting.

Two Ravens first encountered European art when Catlin painted his portrait in 1832. The following year, Two Ravens visited Bodmer and Maximilian's room at Fort Clark three days after their arrival, looking with interest at the Swiss artist's Indian portraits. He visited the two Europeans on a total of twenty-one days, including the days when he sat for Bodmer's two portraits of him. Before he agreed to be painted, Two Ravens insisted that Bodmer make a drawing of his two medicine birds, "the

white-headed eagle and the eagle owl, so that he could keep these figures [and have them with him] when he perished" (Maximilian 2012:225). He painted his war-exploit robe less than two weeks before Bodmer and Maximilian's departure. Although by then Two Ravens was well acquainted with European painting, his style of depiction remained traditional. Two Ravens traced his horses from a single stencil, which may suggest a lack of interest in extending his virtuosity as a graphic artist.

A second war-exploit robe was among those items that were collected by Maximilian and donated by his family to the Linden-Museum Stuttgart, Germany, in 1904 (Fig. 6). The list accompanying the donation states, "painted buffalo hide from Mönitarris [Hidatsa], the Swallow with the white belly, with quill work." Although not written in his hand, in all likelihood this information was based on labels written by Maximilian (Feest 2003). Maximilian's journal briefly mentions Bodmer's portrayal of Swallow with White Belly but says nothing about acquiring a robe from him. It does, however, note the purchase of a war-exploit robe belonging to another Hidatsa individual:

The old Hidatsa chief [Black Buffalo] was still present this morning. He is one of the most respected men of his nation, a famous partisan [i.e. war party leader] and warrior. His robe was painted with all his heroic feats: how many horses he had stolen, how many times he had been partisan, how many scalps he had brought home from [raids], how many enemies he had killed, and so on. I bought it from him for a new white robe that cost me 5 dollars in the fort's store (2012:261).

Although this entry describes the content of the robe in generic rather than actual terms, it suggests that Black Buffalo, rather than Swallow with White Belly, may

7. Comparison of figures.

Left: illustration of figures from the shirt collected from Chief Wanata. A photograph of the shirt is in Feder (1980:55). This shirt is now in the National Museums of Scotland, Edinburgh. Acc. No. 1942.1a.
Right: illustration of figures on a Hidatsa robe painted by the same artist. A photograph of the robe is in Feder (1980:58). This robe is now in the Linden-Museum Stuttgart, Germany. Cat. No. 36.125a.



specimens” (1926:28). Linking the documentation on the shirt and the robe, we might consider the likelihood that Wanata captured this shirt from a slain Hidatsa.

There are distinct differences in the two paintings, as exemplified in Figure 7. The horses on the shirt (Fig. 7 left) are more realistically proportioned, and their movement is more successfully portrayed. Unlike the two-colored robe (Fig. 7 right), the shirt employs an increased number of European-manufactured colors. Whereas the robe was likely painted using a traditional porous, bone tool, the shirt was probably painted

have been its owner. Furthermore, in contrast to Black Buffalo, Swallow with White Belly was a young man at the time of Bodmer and Maximilian’s visit, perhaps too young to have accrued sufficient exploits for a robe (Maximilian 2012:n37). In addition, the robe appears to be well worn and was probably made a number of years before its acquisition. Even if Black Buffalo were its owner, he may not have actually painted the robe, as it was not uncommon for a warrior to commission a more-skilled painter to record his deeds.

The robe in Figure 6 features several groupings in which footprints link sequential events. The events are portrayed with great economy, providing little context for the protagonist’s deeds. However, he would have had numerous opportunities to verbally elaborate upon his exploits during the many social and ceremonial gatherings of his community.

The human figures on the robe are characterized by relatively stout torsos, slightly bent knees and diminutive feet. Vanquished enemies are often shown with both arms missing; several figures have only a single arm. The horses are shown in a variety of poses, some quite animated. The mounted warrior in the center of the painting, whose arms overlap his horse’s neck, departs from the two-dimensionality typical of the period. Similarly, the high-spirited horse in the lower left shows an unusual degree of movement.

Based on stylistic considerations, there are three extant shirts that were almost certainly painted by the same man who created this robe (Feder 1980; Holm 1992: 49).⁶ Only one of the shirts, preserved in the National Museums of Scotland, has substantial collection documentation. The shirt’s accession record states that it was collected from the famous Sioux chief, Wanata, shortly after he successfully fought a battle with the Hidatsa and before he died in an 1837 smallpox epidemic. This brings to mind an observation made by William Wildschut, an important field collector in the early 1900s: “It is well known that Indians usually prefer to offer for sale objects made by members of other tribes, a tendency which has often led to error in judging the origin of certain

ed with a more-refined, perhaps European-made, implement. Thus, the robe may predate the shirt, and the stylistic differences in the two paintings may reflect the influence of Maximilian and Bodmer’s visit to Fort Clark.

Perhaps the Europeans’ most important contact at the fort was Four Bears, second chief of the Mandan. In his journal, Maximilian notes six different robes painted by Four Bears. The chief wore two of these himself: the aforementioned medicine robe and a “very beautifully painted” war-exploit robe also worn by his wife on at least one occasion (2012:112). The other robes were painted for Europeans: one for a trader named Michel Belhumeur,⁷ two for Catlin and one for Maximilian. It is said that Catlin’s robes were destroyed in a fire in Philadelphia sometime after they were exhibited in Europe (Smith 1943:174–175). However, Catlin made a fairly faithful illustration of his war-exploit robe and recorded explanations of the twelve deeds depicted on the robe. These explanations were given verbally by Four Bears and translated by trader James Kipp (Catlin 1841, Vol. 1:148–154).⁸ In turn, those explanations illuminate most of the events recorded on Four Bears’s two extant war-exploit robes.⁹

One of Four Bears’s war robes is preserved in the Bernisches Historisches Museum (BHM), Bern, Switzerland (Fig. 8). Swiss merchant Lorenz Schoch collected it in St. Louis in 1837, apparently without documentation. It features an immense, geometric, sunburst-like design, a popular motif among the Upper Missouri tribes that symbolizes both the sun and the eagle-feather war bonnet (Maximilian 2012:148). Four Bears’s wife, The Mink, most likely painted the feathered circle, then the chief surrounded it with delineations of his war deeds. I could find no additional extant robes painted by American Indians and predating the late 1800s that combine the sunburst motif with surrounding figurative images, though Catlin made a drawing featuring the same general composition and captioned it Mandan (Catlin 1841, Vol. 2:249, Fig. 312).¹⁰ He may have loosely based it on the BHM robe, mixing several traditional-looking war events with other Indian-looking images.

Four Bears's painting shows a level of refinement and interest in individualizing human figures that contrasts sharply with the works previously discussed. Plains Indian painters of the day conventionally depicted the human figure with the upper body in frontal view and lower body in profile. Such a configuration presents the torso in its most recognizable position, while the placement of legs and feet communicates the figure's direction of movement. Four Bears's figures essentially conform to this format yet differ from those of his contemporaries in their wider repertoire of poses, higher degree of upper-body mobility, frequency of heads in profile and greater detailing of facial features, elements of clothing and regalia. In short, they exhibit greater realism.

Apart from the figurative elements on the robe, there are several clusters of graphic ideograms: dismembered heads, a semicircular fortification, bullet trails, footprints and hoofprints. On each side of the painting is a group of three elements comprising a cutaway view of Four Bears's ceremonial lance, his red-and-black painted drum¹¹ and, not shown in the illustration, an elongated rectangular patch of red wool hung with a fringe of horsehair locks in various colors. The ceremonial nature of these painted elements brings to mind Bowers's observation that when publicly enumerating his war achievements, a Mandan

man often gave credit to the role played by his personal medicine bundles (1965:288).

Four Bears's second extant war-exploit robe is among the items collected by Maximilian that were donated to the Linden-Museum Stuttgart (Fig. 9). Although the robe is not identified as such, Maximilian almost certainly commissioned it from the chief.¹² The characteristics that distinguish Four Bears's painting on the BHM robe are amplified in the Linden robe. In both paintings, Four Bears depicted footprints realistically, unlike the simple dashes of his contemporaries. His rendering of the flash of the firing gun, usually with the hammer correctly in the down position, is also unique to both paintings. Other realistic details are found only on the Linden robe, such as the flexed right biceps in Four Bears's hand-to-hand fight with the Cheyenne chief. The mottled treatment of his eagle feathers is also an innovation.

It is interesting to compare equivalent events from one robe to the other, such as the image of Four Bears on his horse, representing the time he rode alone into the fire of a Sioux war party and was struck by an arrow that passed through his abdomen. The Linden rendition of this event shows considerably more detail and additional regalia and clothing (Fig. 9 bottom center) than the BHM robe (Fig. 8 top center). On the Linden robe, Four Bears



8. Illustration of the painted passages of a Mandan buffalo robe executed by Four Bears and an unidentified woman, possibly his wife, The Mink. A photograph of the robe is in Maurer (1992:191). This robe is now in the Bernisches Historisches Museum, Bern, Switzerland. Acc. No. 1890.410.8.

is shown astride his horse, whereas on the BHM painting, both of the rider's legs drop unnaturally from the far side of the horse. It was very rare for early Plains painters to position the legs of their mounted warriors realistically. Similarly, the BHM horse is unnaturally elongated and its hooves are rendered as hoofprints, whereas the Linden horse is more realistically proportioned and its hooves are anatomically correct. Nonetheless, the horses in both paintings display only two legs and impart little sense of movement, in keeping with the style of early Plains Indian painting.

Similar observations arise from a comparison of Four Bears's hand-to-hand fight with a Cheyenne chief. On both robes, Four Bears holds a war ax in one hand while the other is being deeply cut by a knife-wielding Cheyenne. Comparing the two protagonists, there are more than ten significant differences in their clothing and regalia. Overall, the Linden scene is much more detailed than its BHM counterpart. Four Bears made additional changes in his third version of the same episode, depicted on paper for Maximilian (Thomas and Ronnefeldt 1976:221). In the latter work, he put a large eagle-feather bonnet on himself, added fringe to his leggings and pendants on his moccasins. He also added fringe to his opponent's leggings, as well as moccasin trailers. Such changes in clothing clearly demonstrate that Four Bears's interest in ornamental detail and his pleasure in individualizing human figures overrode his concern for accuracy. As outside observers, we tend to view war-exploit paintings as bound by strict rules of veracity, failing to consider the role of artistic license among Plains Indian painters.

Four Bears's human figures are unique among the wide variety of types found in the paintings of northern

Plains tribes dating to the first half of the 1800s. As illustrated in Figure 10,¹³ human figures range from highly stylized to fairly naturalistic. Some figures appear motionless, while others are significantly animated. Some are delineated with the utmost economy, and others are relatively elaborate. In the midst of these figures, we note that Four Bears, wearing a green cape in the middle row, is distinct in his anatomical correctness and attention to detail. Although scaled to a uniform size in the illustration, in actuality Four Bears's figures are significantly larger than those of other Plains Indian painters. Their increased size permitted him to add more detail and create greater realism. It is clear from looking at the corpus of early Plains Indian paintings that both of the Four Bears paintings are closer to European representational painting, yet only in the Linden painting can we be sure of European influence.

Given Bodmer's proclivity toward lifelike and detailed figures, his finely wrought, realistic drawings must have been a revelation to Four Bears. That the chief took a special interest in the Europeans is well documented in Maximilian's journal. He visited their room on a total of fifty-six days, during which time he sat for two portraits, and derived "much pleasure" from looking over Bodmer's watercolors and watching him work (Maximilian 2012: 98). The journal also tells us that on four instances Four Bears received European art supplies, including paper, pencil, red pencils (or crayons), an eraser, various paints and tin cups for mixing paints (Maximilian 2012:74, 97, 98, 264). The presence of this material is evident on the Linden robe, where some fourteen colors may be found, most previously unseen in Plains Indian painting.¹⁴ Four Bears quickly and successfully adapted his broadened palette to his individ-

9. Illustration of the painted passages of a Mandan buffalo robe executed by Four Bears. A photograph of the robe is in Taylor (1998: 12–13). This robe is now in the Linden-Museum Stuttgart, Germany. Cat. No. 36125.



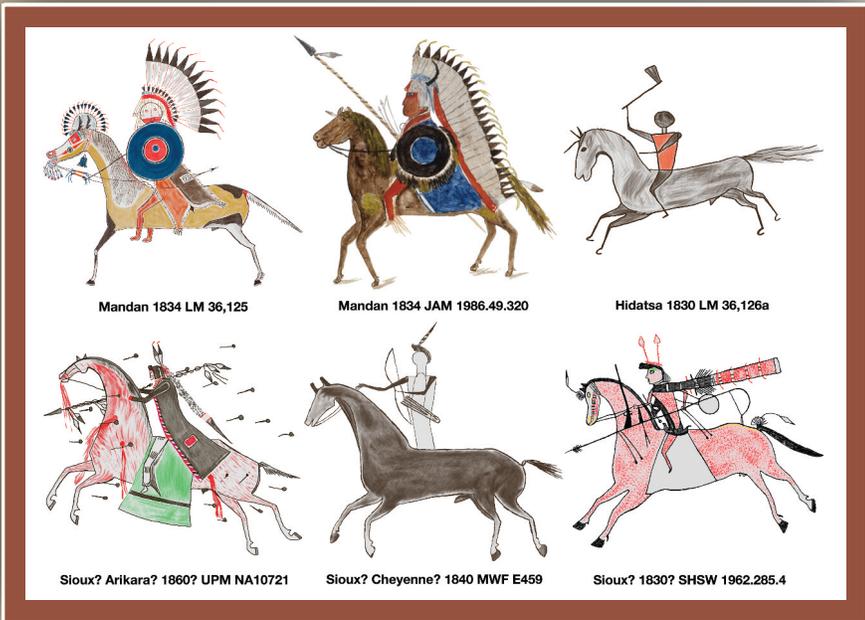


10. Human figures redrawn from early collected Plains Indian paintings. Four Bears is near the middle, wearing a green, feathered animal-skin cape.

ual aesthetic interests. In contrast, the BHM robe contains red, green, black and yellow—the typical Plains Indian color range employed at that time.

Although Four Bears depicted his killing of two Ojibwa women in the upper left of the BHM robe, he “expurgated” the incident from the Linden robe (Smith 1943: 174) after Catlin admonished him for including it (1841, Vol. 1:154), indicating that the BHM robe is the earlier of the two paintings. Four Bears began to paint Catlin’s robe after only one week of exposure to the European’s canvases, little time to have been significantly influenced. Since Catlin’s illustration indicates that the figures on his robe were much the same as those on the BHM robe, we may conclude that the latter robe’s figures do not reflect the influence of either Catlin or Bodmer. Four Bears’s realism was not entirely new in Plains Indian painting; there are several robes from the northern margins of the Plains dating to the late 1700s that contain well-proportioned, lively human figures in profile and correctly seated horsemen.¹⁵ Early examples similar to these may well have had a greater influence on Four Bears’s unique style than either Catlin or Bodmer.

The last painter under consideration here is Yellow Feather, son of the important Mandan chief Four Men. Maximilian gave Yellow Feather art supplies and collected eight extant works on paper by him.¹⁶ Four pieces have documentation that identifies Yellow Feather as the artist, while the others are attributed to him primarily on the basis of stylistic comparison. All his watercolors, probably self-portraits, show him in various prestigious religious and military outfits. In this regard, they are conceptually comparable to autobiographical war-exploit paintings. Two portray Yellow Feather on his horse, decked out for war and bravely riding into enemy fire. Figure 11¹⁷ illustrates one of those horse figures in the middle of the top row between mounted horsemen painted by Four Bears and the previously discussed Hidatsa painter. It is immediately clear that Yellow Feather achieved a degree of realism that was previously unknown on the northern Plains. At the same time, his figure, like that of Four Bears, is lacking in animation. In contrast, the horseman by the Hidatsa painter imparts considerable dynamism, largely a result of its strong contour line. The equestrian figures in the bottom row are harbingers of a stylistic



11. Mounted figures redrawn from early collected Plains Indian paintings. Yellow Feather's figure is in the middle of the upper row.

Yellow Feather's work, on the other hand, seems less interested in following trends in Plains Indian painting than in learning the techniques of European picture making. It would be unfair to compare the work of Yellow Feather to that of Bodmer; however, his watercolors would hold up alongside those of a less-skilled European painter. Figure 12 shows Yellow Feather's watercolor, presumably a self-portrait, next to Valentine Rowe's watercolor, *Onpahasca, Chief of the Issainte Dacotahs, Wood Mt. [Saskatchewan], 1874*. In 1873–1874, Rowe was a topographical draftsman with the royal engineers of the British army, attached to the North American Boundary Commission stationed in Canada. This blurring of the boundary between European and Native depiction mirrors the quasi-Indian style, European-made hide paintings noted earlier.

change in Plains figurative painting that has been described as “a shift from basic accounting to full description and to greater effect” (Peterson 1971:27; Rodee 1965: 222). A primary feature of the new trend was a greater emphasis on horses and an increased sense of their dynamism and speed. This quality was achieved by purposely distorting the form of the horse through strong linear stylization. The horses on the European-painted horsehide (Fig. 3) presage the formalistic features later adopted by Plains Indians. Although Four Bears's horses lacked dynamism, his human figures did reflect an aspect of the new style that saw a transition “from front view motionless pictures of people to animated side view, realistic art” (Conner and Conner 1971:12).

As a final comparison, let us consider one of Yellow Feather's self-portraits next to Bodmer's depiction of him (Fig. 13). Yellow Feather paid particular attention to his head, as witnessed by its excessive size and carefully delineated features. This represents a significant departure from his contemporaries, who generally drew the head as a small, featureless disk. More importantly, Yellow Feather showed a keen interest in creating a true likeness of his own face—probably inspired by Bodmer's portrait of him. Like the European artist, he embraced the notion of capturing individual facial features to impart a sense of personality. In so doing, he bridged a fundamental gap between the Plains Indian painting tradition of drawing using the mind's eye and the European tradition of sketching from life.

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12. Left: self-portrait presumably by Yellow Feather, Mandan, 1833–1834. Watercolor. 6" x 3 1/4" (15.2 cm x 8.3 cm). Courtesy of the Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, Nebraska. Acc. No. 1986.49.323. Right: Portrait of a Santee Sioux chief by Valentine Rowe, 1874. Watercolor. Photograph courtesy of the Boissevain Community Archives, Boissevain, Manitoba. Cat. No. MG1/B3.

There are a number of reasons that Yellow Feather experimented with European art more strenuously than his contemporaries. Like Four Bears and Two Ravens, he often visited the Europeans' room (on a total of thirty-seven occasions). Like them, he was the subject of portraits by both Bodmer and Catlin. He also asked the Europeans to make drawings for him: one of soldiers on paper and another of a bird on his shield. At the same time, he was superstitious about having his portrait painted, so he drew several full-length portraits of Bodmer to carry with him, "perhaps as protection" (Maximilian 2012:106). Unlike Four Bears and Two Ravens, Yellow Feather was young; at twenty-five, he was still an active warrior and perhaps had yet to paint his own war-exploit robe.¹⁸ His father, Four Men, was also an accomplished painter. Catlin collected Four Men's war-exploit robe and stated in the caption to his illustration of the robe that it was "one of the best and most significant" that he had seen (1850). Indeed, Catlin's "facsimile" of this no-longer-extant robe indicates that he was a painter much in the style of Four Bears. Furthermore, Kipp lived for an entire summer in the family tipi when Yellow Feather was at the impressionable age of fourteen; no doubt this exposure allowed the latter to better traverse the divide between European and Native American cultures. In this regard, Maximilian noted that Yellow Feather "is a good person [and is] used to whites, because he was brought up by Mr. Kipp" (2012: 65). Maximilian and Bodmer encouraged Yellow Feather to paint only with European media, whereas they asked the older warriors to paint on hide robes and replicate their own traditional-style paintings.

Compared to Yellow Feather, Four Bears and Two Ravens, who had the best war records among the Mandan and Hidatsa, respectively, were much more circumspect in assimilating elements of European pictorialism. Their reluctance is understandable in light of some of the wider principles underlying Plains Indian painting. Ewers believed that the formal distortions in Plains painting were not due to a lack of ability to delineate figures in a realistic manner but instead were "intentionally motivated by aesthetic considerations" (1939:60). Furthermore, just as Ewers noted that Native artists tended to derive greater satisfaction from the repetition of conventionalized geometric forms rather than experiment with new ones (1939:61), Indians similarly stylized the human figure, refining and adjusting body proportions to meet local aesthetic expectations. In the same vein, Ewers's teacher, the influential anthropologist Clark Wissler, noted that "in certain phases of culture each social unit develops a style, or pattern, for its traits and...borrowed traits will be worked over to make them conform to this pattern" (Wissler 1917:344 in Freed 2012:625–633). In this context, the older painters chose to keep their well-established personal and cultural styles of depiction relatively intact, staying within the mainstream of their genre while adding incrementally to the ever-widening sphere of European influence over Plains Indian painting on the Upper Missouri River.



13. Left: painting attributed to Yellow Feather, presumably of himself wearing a buffalo robe atop a chief's coat, 1833–1834. Watercolor on paper. 5 $\frac{1}{8}$ " x 4" (14.3 cm x 10.2 cm). Courtesy of the Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, Nebraska. Gift of the Enron Art Foundation. Acc. No. 1986.49.322. Right: detail of *Sih-Chidä, Mandan Man* (Yellow Feather) by Karl Bodmer, 1833–1834. Watercolor on paper. 17 $\frac{1}{8}$ " x 11 $\frac{1}{8}$ " (43.5 cm x 30.2 cm). Courtesy of the Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, Nebraska. Gift of the Enron Art Foundation. Acc. No. 1986.49.267.

Footnotes

- ¹ I produced the illustrations in the article based on scaled-down tracings of the originals, resulting in precise proportions of both the figures and their spatial relations. To increase their legibility, I rendered faded lines as solid and fully saturated, while echoing with increased intensity the variation in tonality inside colored figures. Such illustrations also facilitate greater objectivity in comparing stylistic variation from one painting to another.
- ² The Royal German Art Chamber list itemizes the part of Maximilian's collection that is today held in the Ethnologisches Museum Berlin.
- ³ A similar robe featuring feathered circles and buffalo-hunting scenes painted on cowhide was sold at the Christie's New York auction, May 17, 2000, Lot 135. Another pre-1840 European hide painting is held in the Museum der Weltkulturen Frankfurt, Germany (Cat. No. E-461).
- ⁴ This was noted in the catalog record for a painted Mandan woman's dress collected by Wilson (American Museum of Natural History, New York, Cat. No. 50.2/5352).
- ⁵ The sketch (Cat. No. PM8) is in the Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, Nebraska (Gallagher 2006), and illustrated in Brownstone (2008:21).
- ⁶ Scholar Michael Johnson, however, believes that the similarity between the paintings reflects a local ethnic style of depiction rather than the work of a single man (2005:177).
- ⁷ According to Maximilian, Michel Belhumeur was of Ojibwa background and employed as the Mandan interpreter at Fort Clarke.
- ⁸ In 1823, James Kipp, a Canadian (Nova Scotian) of German or Dutch heritage, came to live among the Mandan as a trader. He built Fort Clark in 1831.
- ⁹ For a detailed correlation of the stories on Four Bears's robes, see Klann (2007:52–63).
- ¹⁰ There are several extant robes dating toward the end of the 1800s that feature a feathered circle surrounded by figures. One is apparently in the Kansas City Museum, Missouri (Cat. No. 1940.223). The other, documented as Sioux, is at the American Museum of Natural History, New York (Cat. No. 50.1/7348).
- ¹¹ Four Bears depicted what appears to be the same drum and staff in one of his two works on paper drawn for Maximilian (illustrated in Thomas and Ronnefeldt 1976:238). Both Bodmer and Maximilian also made sketches of this drum.
- ¹² The robe is briefly mentioned by Maximilian (1906, Part III:80–81).
- ¹³ Museum abbreviations: LAC Library and Archives Canada; FME Folkens Museum Ethnografiska; ROM Royal Ontario Museum; BHM Bernisches Historisches Museum; NMAI National Museum of the American Indian; PMAE Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology; NMNH National Museum of Natural History; EMB Ethnologisches Museum Berlin; SHSW State Historical Society of Wisconsin; LM Linden-Museum Stuttgart; HMV Hamburg Museum für Volkerkunde; SMA Snite Museum of Art; SGM Sheffield Galleries and Museums Trust; JAM Joslyn Art Museum; UPM University of Pennsylvania Museum; MWF Museum Weltkulturen Frankfurt.
- ¹⁴ The label text for the Linden robe in the 1998 exhibition *Die Kunst zu überleben*, at the Linden-Museum Stuttgart, also suggests that European pigments were used on the robe, and that Four Bears may have used a quill pen for drawing finer lines.

- ¹⁵ Several lively and realistically proportioned figures dancing with pipes are found on a robe that predates Four Bears's painting by about fifty years and probably originated among Algonquian speakers just north of the Mandan (Musée du quai Branly, Paris, Acc. No. 71.1934.33.1). A realistic-looking buffalo hunter is found on a robe that probably originated in the northeastern margins of the Plains during the second half of the 1700s (Musée du quai Branly, Paris, Acc. No. 71.1934.33.5). It portrays a mounted figure with legs correctly astride the horse. Both robes are decorated primarily with painted geometric designs.
- ¹⁶ Yellow Feather's eight extant drawings are at the Joslyn Art Museum. They include two images of Yellow Feather on horseback (Acc. Nos. 1986.49.319, 1986.49.320), a full-figure profile of a bowman wearing a chief's coat and Dog Soldier sash (Acc. No. 1986.49.321), a three-quarter-profile view of a warrior wearing a robe over a chief's coat (Fig. 13 left), a frontal view of a warrior holding a spear (Fig. 12 left), a man and woman riding double on a horse (Acc. No. 1986.49.324), a frontal view of an Okeepa ceremony dancer (Acc. No. 1986.49.325) and a profile view of the same Okeepa dancer (Acc. No. 1986.49.326).
- ¹⁷ See footnote 13.
- ¹⁸ According to Catlin, Yellow Feather was killed and scalped by a Sioux in 1834, less than a year after making the drawings illustrated here (Ewers 1957:10).

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