



The Story Behind the Bronze

Historical Accounts:

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Lakota Thunder

The bronze depicts documented battle action at the Little Bighorn (Custer) Battle where on the second day of the battle an Indian sharpshooter was shooting 800 to 1000 yards into the Reno-Benteen defensive position with amazing accuracy.

The sharpshooter's rifle is a 50 cal. Sharps and decorated with brass tacks. The buffalo skull it rests on was mentioned by PVT., Windolph in his recollections of the battle. The cut feather indicates he has cut the throat of his enemy and has taken his scalp - the two dots on the other feather represent two coups. His leggings are leather decorated with beadwork as is his knife sheath. The Oglala warrior reaches for a reload while looking toward his partner for an indication on where his last shot has hit.

The spotter wears a Sgts., jacket along with pistol, holster and cartridge belt all of which were taken off the Custer field on the first day of the battle. The binocular case is decorated with Sioux beadwork indicating that he probably had them for some time - possibly he and the sharpshooter have worked together before developing a long range shooting technique. He is using sign language to indicate the distance the shooter has missed the target to the right - the left hand held straight indicates the target while the cupped tells the distance. His feather is decorated with three dots indicating three coups, a trade mirror is attached to its base. A portion of his scalplock shows as it also does on the shooter.

The third Indian, also a Sioux, has just arrived at the ridge and is observing the distant action with binoculars taken from the Custer field the previous day - this is indicated by the case which is laying next to a 52 cal. Spencer carbine. The warrior wears a wolf headdress decorated with hawk feathers and grizzly claw on one side while on the other side is a quilled medicine wheel. His shirt is cloth as are the leggings whose edge has a lighter undyed strip running the length of the leggings. Attached to a commercial belt is a beaded bullet pouch and knife sheath - the sheath's design (horse hooves) represents stolen horses. His bow and quiver case is made of leather and decorated with fringes and beadwork. He wears trade bracelets of brass and a bone choker, while suspended from his neck is an eagle wingbone war whistle not only used to signal during battle but also to frighten and confuse the enemy.

"The Arikara"
Pachutuwa-Chta 1834

The following is some basic information obtained in an interview with an Ankara historian prior to completion of the sculpture "The Arikara". Bodmer's image of him appears on page 283 of "Karl Bodmer's America" along with Prince Maximillian's notes. A copy of the descriptive text will be sent when completed.

Face Paint: Society or possibly clan related Hair Style: probably society related especially the area squared off by jaw line (Fox Society)

Small Braids: killing an enemy in battle hand to hand.

Tapered Sticks in Hair: symbolize trade gun -barrels and indicate that he has been wounded by a trade gun

Split Feathers: reddish tint, hawk feathers represents wounds

Quilled Feathers: Killed an enemy in battle while wounded (red slash indicates wound)

Red Pouch: on robe contained his personal "medicine"

Black Slashes: (on arm) represent coups, probably paint instead of tattoos and tapered like bear claws (bear is his medicine)

Black Circles: (on chest) wounded by trade gun, blood flowing

Red Robe: red ochered, a blessed/ceremonial robe — invokes power and possibly a fight during a special adoption ceremony (maybe by Four Bears)

Robe Fringe: meaning unknown at this time but see Bodmer's painting of "Four Bears" robe showing same treatment — actually is buffalo's leg

Leggings: (circles) indicates warrior has acquired spiritual power— is carrying Power, probably received through a vision quest — (stripes) fighting in battle while wounded

Plain Feathers: are status feathers (in headdress)

Blanket Strip: beaded, if has meaning unknown at this time

Moccasins: soft sole of the side-seam type — blue & white beads in shape of bear claw

Club: wood with painted blade (metal) — called a "gunstock war club" due to the wood's shape resemblance to a gunstock

Gallant Warrior

Please Note:

I will be doing a descriptive text for the bronze however page 186 in Karl Bodmer's America has quite a little information

Some additional notes would be that the red and yellow hair drops on his shirt probably represent horses taken in raids/battle and given away as gifts. The shirt itself designates that he is an individual of high military and social status, the colors representing the earth powers. They were called "shirt wearers — leaders of men" who were responsible for the people of their tribe, they were men of high warrior status who could also act as an influential diplomats in times of negotiations with other tribes and their leaders.

Beginning with the Jefferson Peace Medal (which is silver and the first of that type), which Lewis and Clark gave to Indian leaders during their expedition of 1804-06, the image of the President in office appears on one side of the medal. Looking closely at the medal in Bodmer's painting it clearly shows the President's image facing left. In the period from 1803 to 1833 (the year Gallant Warrior was painted) only two images face left, that of Thomas Jefferson and his successor James Madison, all others face right. Lewis & Clark gave five Jefferson Medals to the Yankton Sioux so it is very probable that the medal Gallant Warrior wears is one of them.

A note on the shirt I should have mentioned earlier is that although the upper half appears darker in the Bodmer painting, it does have a greenish tinge which is what it would have been originally, darkening with age and use over time.

Lastly (for now) the stripes on his leggings indicate war honors (coups) while the crosses usually indicate the number of times he has been wounded in battle.

Broken Silence
(Blackfeet – 1833)

This sculpture continues the Bodmer Series with images from the 1833-34 expedition up the Missouri River which recorded from life the Native Peoples, their culture and the landscape they lived in before it was changed forever.

The image of "Broken Silence" was one of the few paintings Bodmer did from his field sketches "after returning to Germany" as most were completed on location —therefore this image does not appear in "Karl Bodmer's America". This he usually did only with more complex or multiple subjects who were in motion. His painting of the Blackfeet on horseback was from a preliminary sketch he did while at Fort McKenzie, a fur trading post on the Upper Missouri, located just down river from present day Fort Benton, Montana. The image depicts a Blackfeet warrior on horseback whose attention is suddenly commanded by another who is riding at a full gallop, yelling and gesturing for him to come quickly — most probably indicating that their village was under attack. A Cree and Assiniboine attack on a Blackfeet village, which was encamped near Fort McKenzie, was witnessed and painted by Bodmer (page 12 Karl Bodmer's America).

The warrior rides a gray Indian pony which he momentarily pulls to a halt using body language and a single rein. He uses a typical Blackfeet man's saddle with wood and rawhide stirrups. Over the saddle he has placed, as a decorative pad, a large mountain lion pelt edged with red trade cloth. Around the horses rump is what's called a "crupper" which goes under the horses tail and attaches to the saddle. Although quite decorative, its main function was to keep the saddle from sliding forward.

The warrior is dressed in full buckskins with quillwork decoration, his honor (coup) marks are indicated by black stripes painted on his leggings along with scalp locks from enemy warriors. His long war shirt (an early style) is bunched up in front of him behind the saddles pommel and a quirt, probably made from mountain goat horn, hangs from his wrist by a otter fur strap. For weapons he carries what is called a Northwest trade gun, a flintlock, which for the time is "state of the art" weaponry among the warriors of the Northern Plains. The Northwest gun was instantly recognizable by its oversize trigger guard, brass butt plate and round circular cartouche on the stock, but perhaps its most telling feature was its lock plate (which held the flintlock firing mechanism in place) that was made of brass in the shape of a coiled sea serpent which came to be known as the "golden dragon" among the tribes. These were traded by both the Hudson Bay Company of Canada and the American Fur Company who owned and operated Fort McKenzie. He also carries (to accompany the trade gun) a powder horn and pouch which contains lead balls. These are slung over his back on top of the bow and quiver case which is made of highly prized otter. The tail of the otter, decorated with beadwork forms a long and decorative drop or pendant. His method of carrying them, with the straps across his chest and both shoulders is a Northern Plains tradition. When needed to be brought into action one shoulder is lowered and the strap slips over and under the arm to quickly bring the weapon in front of him making it easily accessible. An added advantage with the straps worn this way, across the chest and both shoulders, is that the bow case and quiver, etc, can be quickly removed.

As previously mentioned, Bodmer's preliminary sketch does not appear in "Karl Bodmer's America" as the book only shows the watercolors that were completed on location during the expedition. However the warrior does appear on page 251, when the watercolors were being selected and studied there was speculation as to whether the warrior was Blackfeet or Atsina (Gros Ventre) due mainly to the robe he was wearing. Recent research however has confirmed that the original notation was correct and that he was a prominent Blackfeet whose name was "Mikotsotskina" (Red Horn).

Below the rider incised into the rocks are pictographs. A silent language of the Northern Plains with each symbol or image carrying its own special meaning, some of which were perhaps only know to their creator.

Traditions

Her name is Chan - Cha - Uia - Teuin, a Teton Sioux lady whose name translates to "Woman of the Crow Nation". She was painted by Karl Bodmer of the Prince Maximillian expedition in June of 1833 while at Fort Pierre (South Dakota).

The dress she wears is called a "side- fold dress", an early style that is made from one tanned hide. The hide is folded around the person's body with the only seam being on her left - that is indicated by the two tab extensions with beads and tin cones, the hide is folded over to create the top of the dress. This style of dress was worn for special occasions, ceremonies, etc. - it was not an everyday dress. Lewis and Clark collected dresses of this style on their expedition (1804-05). Her leggings are red ochered (a sacred color) and decorated with beadwork, just below them the cuff of her moccasin appears. The title "Traditions" refers mainly to the robe but also to a degree, the dress. The robe is from buffalo, probably a cow as their hide is lighter than the bulls, it also has the hair removed. It is what it's called the "Box and Border" design, which has been said to represent the outline of the buffalo, and its internal features - very powerful symbolism, the design itself is painted. When a girl reached puberty she would wear a similar but much less elaborate robe and while in public the robe was worn over her head like a hood signifying that she is unmarried and of age. The woman's robe, which this one is, is much more elaborate with this particular one being one of the finest. She wears it as a married woman would, just above the base of the head or higher - signifying that she is taken. This particular robe that she is wearing was purchased by Maximillian and is now in a museum collection in Germany. Try as he might he could not purchase her dress.

Her hairstyle is also unique for the early 1800's and one I had not seen before with her hair following the jaw line but also braided in the normal manner - one of those interesting details that Bodmer captured so many times in his paintings.

The Honor Society
-Assiniboine 1833-

The year is 1833 at Fort Union, the American Fur Company's trading post located near the juncture of the Missouri and Yellowstone rivers, where they are temporarily hosting the expedition of Prince Maximilian of New Wied (a German principality). The expedition is scientific in nature with its main purpose being to accurately record the Native Peoples of the Upper Missouri, their customs and the landscape before it forever changes. In his employ is Karl Bodmer, a young Swiss artist, who is to produce images to correspond with the Prince's scientific notes. Bodmer's watercolors will ultimately come to be considered the finest and most accurate of any of the early artist explorers — for it was not only his skill at portraying with accuracy the details of the People's clothing and their facial features but also his ability to capture the very essence of the person he was painting that gives his work its uniqueness.

While at Fort Union, Bodmer and Maximilian were especially taken by the fine clothing and features of an Assiniboine (pronounced A1-SIN-AH-BOYNE) warrior leader by the name of NOAPFH — apparently a formidable foe in battle — his name meant "troop of soldiers". Dressed in his finery that relates many of his war honors, Noapeh patiently sat for his portrait while Bodmer rendered it in watercolor. Later upon the expeditions return to Germany his portrait would be redone into an exquisite engraving with aquatint.

Noapeh's fine war shirt made of brain tanned hide is decorated with blue and white beadwork strips and a fabulous target or rosette of quillwork adorns his chest just below a neckpiece of red trade cloth. Painted black lines, each representing a major war coup of honor, decorates the shirts sides and sleeve area as do scalp locks taken from slain enemies. His leggings of tanned hide are also decorated with blue and white beadwork strips, scalp locks and quilled designs of green horseshoe shapes which represent successful horse raids he has led while the "X" indicates he has been wounded in battle two times — the leggings are red ochered, a protective (power) color. The unique headdress he wears is sacred, its head strap of buffalo is covered with red trade cloth, attached to the sides are tips of antelope horns that have been thinned and trimmed with dyed yellow horse hair — between the horns are clipped magpie feathers — qualities of these animals imparting their powers to the owners of the headdress. Below the horns are quilled rosettes to which are attached leather drops with red quillwork sections. The back panel is entirely quilled with leather/quillwork drops beginning below decorations of brass buttons. The inverted blue "IT on the large quill work panel represents horse hooves (horse stealing medicine) while the red square represents a parflech with blue insert at its center indicating it is full (hunting medicine).

Wrapped about him is a finely tanned buffalo robe, the holes at its edge are a result of it being staked to the ground during the fleshing process — they also give the robes edge an artistic flowing appearance. His bow, short for horseback use, is of the double recurve type and made of ash — its ends are decorated with red trade cloth, quillwork and tipped with yellow dyed horsehair. The bow is very powerful being backed with buffalo sinew, giving it the ability to drive one of the steel tipped arrows entirely through a full-grown bull.

Assiniboine warrior/leader such a Noapeh were a force to be reckoned with on the Northern Plains. Once, in the long distant past a division of the Sioux, they raided far and wide in quest of horses and war honors — the nucleus of their territory covered what are now Eastern Montana, Western North Dakota and Southern Canada.

The original works of Karl Bodmer along with Prince Maximilian's journals are now housed in the permanent collection of the Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha Nebraska. This bronze created from Bodmer's exquisite water color is part of a series that is in tribute to the Prince Maximilian —Karl Bodmer expedition and the Native Peoples who shared with them their lives and culture.

Time of Valor

In preparing research material for the bronze I felt it was necessary to personally experience Water Carriers Ravine if at all possible. Permission was granted and on a hot July day in 1989 former Custer Battlefield Superintendent Jim Court and I descended the ravine to the banks of the Little Bighorn River. The feeling I experienced was something I will not soon forget and was called upon time and again during the creation of the sculpture. The trip was also made so as to portray the embankment as accurately as possible even though over 100 years had passed since the battle. The strata or line of rocks which appear approximately halfway up the bank on the bronze is an actual feature.

Of the men portrayed, only of Deetline was there a photograph to work from. Interestingly he holds his right hand to show a ring on the little finger. This was included in the sculpture in an effort to make it more personal in nature. No photographs were known to exist of Harris and Tolan however height, weight, etc. were obtained from information on their enlistment records.

The men wear regulation clothing and equipment except for the knives and cartridge belts which at that time were not army issue. The following is a detail of some of the equipment;

Deetline: He is shown with spurs removed as some men did for comfort. His knife sheath is of Indian manufacture, made of rawhide and painted. The insignia on his cap is correct for the time period - crossed sabers for cavalry with the letter "D" beneath indicating his Company. It was not yet regulation for the cavalry to wear the regiment number above the sabers. His pistol is the army issue .45 caliber Colt with 72" barrel.

Harris: His knife sheath is of commercial manufacture and was purchased with the knife. He wears a carbine sling whose swivel snap clips onto a ring in the side of the issue Springfield Carbine. Attached to the left side of his cartridge belt is a small loop containing pistol cartridges - an item of personal choice. Although issue trousers were reinforced on the seat and legs his show a different texture indicating they have been repaired with flour sacks - a common practice on the plains. His hat is regulation although it carries no insignia.

Tolan: His knife sheath is made of saddle leather. The shirt he wears shows a repair on its left elbow area which was made in the field. The canteens used during the battle are of Civil War issue as was some of the other equipment and clothing.