

Miss America's Brother and His Club

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IN 1959, THE MUSEUM RECEIVED more than 150 objects of decorative and fine arts in practically all media—prints, ceramics, metalwork, glass, and textiles—as a gift from the estate of James Hazen Hyde. As a collector, Hyde had specialized in a particularly charming subject matter: allegorical personifications of the four parts of the world, Africa, America, Asia, and Europe.

As the continents bear female names (never mind that America was named after a man, Amerigo Vespucci), it is not surprising that most of the personifications are beautiful women. And it was therefore only natural that, when Clare Le Corbeiller published a significant selection of the James Hazen Hyde gift in the April 1961 *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, the delightfully whimsical title chosen was “Miss America and Her Sisters.”

One of the most alluring of the “Misses America” is on a relief plaque, one of a set of four from about 1580–90 by an unknown German medalist (Figure 1). She is a svelte Indian maiden, identified as an American by her feather headdress; otherwise she wears only lavish jewelry of shells and pearls, and a skimpy bustle of plumes. Clearly she is meant to be an Amazon from the Amazon River (discovered in 1541), because she is armed with bow and quiver and also carries a huge club. The grip of this long-shafted club is decorated with tufts of feathers, and its globular head is incised with a banded zigzag pattern.

Allegories of America also appear in a manuscript in the Department of Arms and Armor at the Metropolitan Museum; the volume contains 125 drawings in watercolor, arranged in five different sections. In the first section are knights in various tournament equipments copied from the woodcut series of *The Triumph of Maximilian I* (designed ca. 1515, printed 1526). The second section is a pictorial record of an undated costumed Shrovetide parade, while the third presents the participants of tournaments held at Nuremberg between 1446 and 1561. In the fourth section, on

pages 73 through 97, are fanciful designs for parade sleighs, but in the fifth, on pages 98 through 125, are shown sleighs that actually participated in a parade, in 1599. Like floats in the Mardi Gras of New Orleans and the carnival of Rio de Janeiro, all these sleighs compete in their inventiveness in depicting often exuberantly imaginative themes.

As is to be expected for a Shrovetide parade, many sleighs have good-naturedly bawdy themes, but many others—befitting a well-educated bourgeois society—take their cues from classical mythology and allegory, including the almost obligatory personifications of the four parts of the world. America, as the continent most recently discovered by Europeans, must have seemed the most excitingly new and romantically exotic part of the world and is therefore represented twice, on pages 86 and 116 (Figures 2, 3). Its representatives, however, are not beautiful “Misses America” but males characterized as Americans by their colorful costumes of feathers. As a hint at their lifestyle as hunters, they carry bows and arrows.

The driver of the sleigh in Figure 2 wears nothing but a multicolored feather skirt and a conical feather hat. Bashford Dean, in his essay about this tournament book in the Metropolitan Museum's *Bulletin* (1922), wondered about the scanty costumes of many of the participants in the sleigh parade, and whether they survived the ride. It is to be hoped that the “American” driver was permitted to wear at least a warm body stocking. Most intriguingly, this “American” is featured not as an *Indi-
aner* but as a coal-black *Neger*.

The sleigh in Figure 3—which did participate in the parade of 1599—has as a kind of figurehead a statuette costumed like the “American” driver of the sleigh in Figure 2. This figurine also is portrayed as a black man and is armed with bow and quiver, and it holds a long-shafted club that is practically a twin to the one borne by the Amazonian “Miss America” of Figure 1, with a tasseled grip and the head decorated with an intricate pattern of angular bands.

The designers—of both the “Miss America” plaque and the “America” statuette—did serious research to



Figure 1. Plaque with a representation of America, German, ca. 1580–90. Lead and gilding, diam. 6 7/8 in. (17.5 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1960 (60.70.4)

make their “Americans” look authentic. Their immediate source must have been the *Trachtenbuch* by Hans Weigel (Nuremberg, 1577). In this collection claiming to present “costumes of almost all the most important nations that are known today” is a picture labeled “man from Brazil in America” in feather cloak and feather breechclout (Figure 4). His shell necklace is exactly the same as the one “Miss America” is wearing. This “man

from Brazil” shoulders a long-shafted club with tasseled feather trim at its grip and angular banded decoration on its head. The caption says: “This is how men in America go about—with a club like this, so that they might slay their enemies and beat them dead.”

Other elements of costume worn by “Miss America” and the “Americans” in the sleigh parade appear in a second picture in the *Trachtenbuch* showing a family of “Sav-

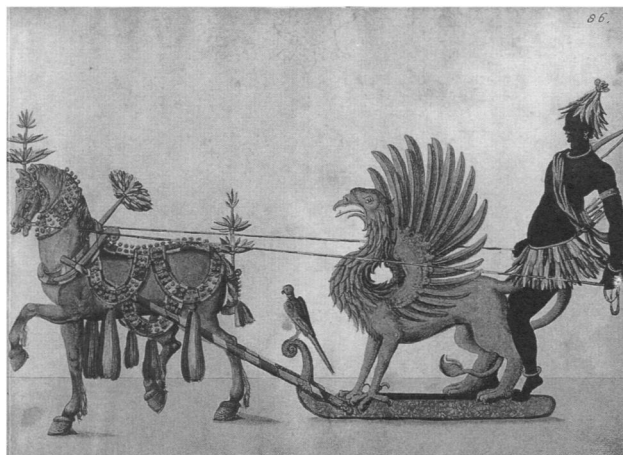


Figure 2. Watercolor drawing of a parade sleigh with a representation of America, German (Nuremberg), ca. 1600. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Thomas J. Watson Library (959.4 T64, p. 86)



Figure 3. Watercolor drawing of a parade sleigh with a representation of America, German (Nuremberg), ca. 1600. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Thomas J. Watson Library (959.4 T64, p. 116)



Figure 4. A Man from Brazil in America. Woodcut from Hans Weigel's *Trachtenbuch* (Nuremberg, 1577)



Figure 5. The Savage People from Brazil or the New Islands. Woodcut from Hans Weigel's *Trachtenbuch* (Nuremberg, 1577)

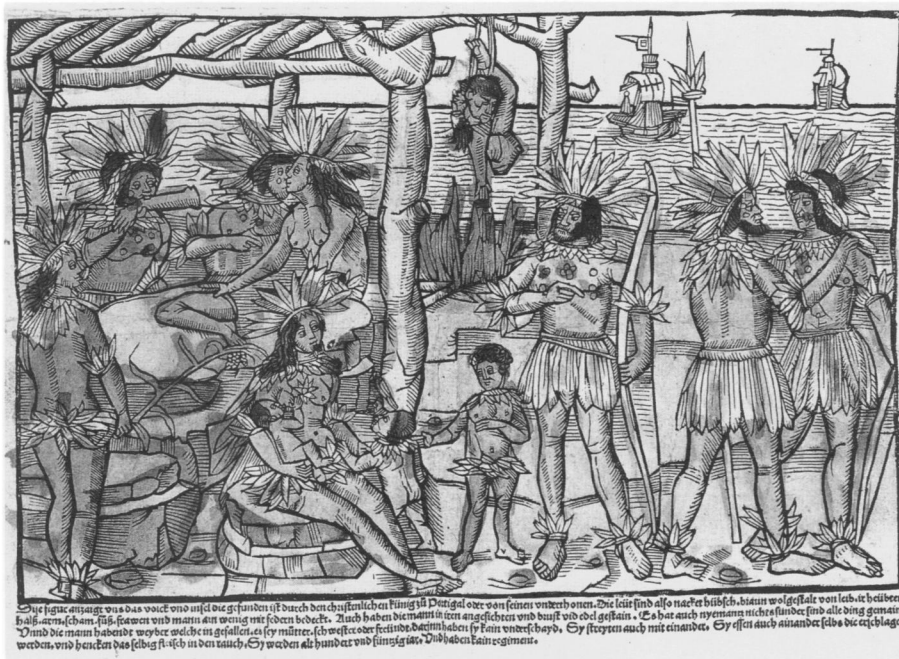


Figure 6. Colored woodcut of a New World scene, German (probably Augsburg), ca. 1505. The New York Public Library, Spencer Collection



Figure 7. Hans Burgkmair (German), *Folk from Far-off Lands*, ca. 1515. Woodcut, detail from the series depicting the Triumph of Maximilian I



Figure 8. Hans Burgkmair (German), *Folk from Far-off Lands*, ca. 1515. Woodcut, detail from the series depicting The Triumph of Maximilian I

age People from Brazil or the New Islands" (Figure 5). Here, the man wears a feather skirt with a large bustle of plumes, while the woman wears nothing but a coquettish little feather headdress and a rebozo in which she carries her baby. The medalist adopted as minimal clothing for his "Miss America" a drastically reduced version of the man's bustle, and the designer of the sleighs gave the three-tiered feather skirt to his two "Americans."

Both men in the *Trachtenbuch* figures shown here wear their hair cropped short, but the woman in the family of "Savage People from Brazil" has flowing locks. Her head was transplanted onto the shapely body of "Miss America" to leave no doubt about her gender in spite of bustle, bow, quiver, and club.

Lastly, the sources for the feather costumes of these Brazilians go back to a broadsheet (Figure 6), printed



Figure 9. *How the Tupinamba Deal with Prisoners*, German, 1557. Woodcut, illustration to Hans Staden's *Wahrhaftige Historia* (photo: © the British Library)

probably at Augsburg, in about 1505. Here is presented the idyllic life of the “Folk of the Island Recently Found by the Christian King of Portugal.” The caption describes them as “naked, handsome, brown, good-looking of body and face; men and women [have] neck, arms, private parts, [and] feet bedecked with a few feathers.” Incongruously, two of these “wild men” from the New World have full beards like the hirsute wild men of European folklore. The caption informs us further that “they fight among themselves; and those slain they eat and hang the meat in the smoke for curing.” As for weapons, the men are shown with bows and a spear; none has a club, though.

Among the 137 woodcuts of *The Triumph of Maximilian I* are three, by Hans Burgkmair, that represent “people from Calicut” and other “folk from far-off.” In the first of the three woodcuts is an elephant with a turbaned mahout on its back and a troop of East Indian warriors, naked in loincloths and armed with shields, swords, bows, and spears. They are followed in the second woodcut (Figure 7) by a group of men in feather skirts carrying paddle-shaped clubs with feather-tufts decorating their long shafts. These men are doubtless meant to represent people from the New Indies, that is, “Americans.” One of them wears a full beard like the men of Brazil on the broadsheet. After them, in the third woodcut (Figure 8), comes a group of Africans (South African Khoikhoi, judging from their animal-skin cloaks and sandals) herding goats, cattle,



Figure 10. Theodore de Bry (German), *How the Club Iwera Pemme Is Prepared* (detail), 1592. Engraving, illustration to Hans Staden's *Wahrhaftige Historia*, part 3 of *Historia Americae* (photo: courtesy of Collier County Museum, Naples, Florida)

and fat-tailed sheep; intermingled with this group are two more befeathered Americans, carrying a macaw, a monkey and stalks of maize, the first recognizable representation of this exotic grain in European art.

The source for the distinctively decorated clubs in the hands of the “man from Brazil,” “Miss America,” and her brother “American” on the parade sleigh, however, would have been a best-seller with the intriguing title *Wahrhaftige Historia und beschreibung eyner Landtschafft der Wilden Nacketen Grimmigen Menschenfresser Leuthen in der Newenwelt America* (Truthful history and description of a land of savage, naked, ferocious man-eater people in the new world America). Printed at Marburg in 1557, it reported in lurid detail the adventures of Hans Staden, a German sailor stranded among the Tupinamba of Brazil. The text was accompanied by powerful but crude woodcuts (Figure 9).

Here we find the explanation for the representation of the “Americans” on the parade sleighs as black, though the broadsheet describes them as “brown.” This change in color was evidently inspired by Hans Staden's report that the Tupinamba painted their faces and bodies black to appear more fearsome in warfare. The bustles of plumes as attire of the Tupinamba warriors appeared for the first time in the woodcuts of the Marburg edition of the *Wahrhaftige Historia*. The woodcuts of the Marburg edition of the *Wahrhaftige Historia* were reshaped in a more polished style by the celebrated illustrator Theodore de Bry, in



Figure 11. Theodore de Bry (German), *King Satourioua Addressing His Warriors*, 1591. Engraving, illustration to *Brevis Narratio*, part 2 of *Historia Americae* (photo: courtesy of Collier County Museum, Naples, Florida)

his *Historia Americae* (Frankfurt am Main, 1590–92). The third part of this ambitious, multivolume work about the inhabitants of the New World is dedicated to Hans Staden’s tale. According to Hans Staden, the decorated club, first seen in the Marburg woodcuts, was a revered ceremonial object that bore the personal name Iwera Pemme. It was decorated with feather tassels, painted with its distinctive angular banded pattern by a woman (a shamaness?), and used for the ritual killing of a captive enemy, who then was eaten at a festive banquet (Figure 10).

In the second part of his *Historia Americae*, the *Brevis Narratio* (1591), De Bry depicted natives of Florida, Timucua, and Tequesta (Figure 11), whose piled-up hairdos with topknots seem to have been the models (although by misinterpretation) for the conical feather hats of the “Americans” in the sleigh parade depicted in the tournament volume. The Floridian war clubs, too, were paddle-shaped and plain, but the club that caught the fancy of Europeans as the fearsome weapon of the wild men of the New World was the unique, ceremonial Iwera Pemme of the *grimmige Menschenfresser*.

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