



"White Bear Fighting with Pawnees" by an anonymous Kiowa artist
Cincinnati Art Museum. Gift of Merritt A. Boyle. Accession #1954.195

EVERY PICTURE TELLS A STORY...BUT *WHICH* STORY? SEEKING MEANING IN A KIOWA WARRIOR DRAWING

by
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Sometime in the 1870s, an anonymous Kiowa living in Indian Territory—now Oklahoma—made the drawing that accompanies this article with pencil and crayon on a piece of paper. This Plains Indian tradition, creating representational illustrations of warriors' heroic deeds, dated to antiquity.¹

Known as "warrior art" or "warrior drawings," these vivid records immortalized bravery: counting coup—touching the living opponent—killing foes, rescuing comrades, taking enemies' horses, and other activities which gained warriors the admiration of their compatriots and earned them high status. Warrior art was displayed on buffalo robes, clothing, tipis, and rocks. During the Plains Indian Wars of the 1860s and 1870s new surfaces were used for these graphic chronicles: pages of ledger books and other paper produced by the Euroamerican society that ended the Plains Indians' way of life.

Portraiture in the Western sense did not exist in Plains Indian art. Instead, warrior-artists incorporated illustrations of objects the intended audience associated with a particular individual: a painted shield, unusual weapon, or special face paint design. Unfortunately, many details associated with these drawings remain beyond our ken because we lack the background information available to the original tribal audience. In warrior art, every picture tells a story...but *which* story? Fortunately, the means are at hand to unravel some of the meaning in this particular drawing.

This image is part of a collection of Kiowa drawings acquired by a U.S. Army officer who served among the Kiowas between 1878-1880.² It is mounted on a larger piece of paper on which appears a handwritten notation in ink, likely penned by the officer acting on information provided by a Kiowa informant (possibly the artist): "White Bear fighting with Pawnees, himself and horse being wounded with the same arrow. White Bear kills both Pawnees with his lance. Observe the blood flowing from their wounds and mouths."

So who is White Bear, the English language translation of the Kiowa name *Set-tainte*? A man of that name, known historically as Satanta (c. 1830?-1878), was one of the most notable Kiowas of his generation.³ More than one

Kiowa might bear a given name, but this mounted warrior is definitely the famed Satanta. Identification rests on two points: the shield he carries and the weapon he wields.

The shield is the Goose Shield, or Crane Shield, originally owned by Black Horse (*Tsenkonkya*), who died in a fight with the Sae and Fox in 1854. The previous winter he gave his shield to Satanta.⁴ The mounted Kiowa is armed with a *zebat*, or sacred arrow-lance. Only two such weapons existed in the tribe: one belonged to Satanta.⁵

The warrior in the drawing is therefore one of two Kiowas who owned an arrow-lance; the only arrow-lance owner who also carried the Crane Shield. Only one person could possibly be associated with this unique combination of objects: the renowned Satanta.

But what about the incident that is shown in this drawing? Is there any way to find out when it took place? This is one of the most frustrating questions confronting those who try to tease out the details of these pictographic chronicles. Yet sometimes—and this is one of those times—a warrior drawing can be linked to a known event.

Stumbling Bear (*Set-Imkia*) went to war with Satanta many times and often watched him dispatch enemies with his arrow-lance. In the early 1890s he told James Mooney, a Smithsonian Institution anthropologist, about the incident shown in this drawing. Until now, his brief but telling account lay buried in Mooney's unpublished field notes. Soon after the tribe's 1861 summertime Sun Dance, held near the great bend of the Arkansas River in Kansas, Stumbling Bear said:

the Kiowas were on the move and Settainti [Satanta] and some boys saw buffalos [sic], ran after them and they ran into a party of Pawnees hiding in the timber. Settainti send boys back for his shield and arrow lance. They bring them and Kiowas come and Pawnees retreat to a creek, fight and Settainti kill two.⁶

And what of Satanta? Soldiers arrested him in May 1871 at Fort Sill and transported him to Texas where he was sentenced to life in prison for killing whites. Paroled in August 1873, he returned to his people. At the 1874 Sun Dance, Satanta laid aside his role as a warrior and gave away his arrow-lance. Soon after, he was rearrested to serve out his sentence at Huntsville Penitentiary in Texas. On October 11, 1878, he committed suicide by hurling

himself from one of the prison's second-story windows. At about the same time, Texans shot and killed a Kiowa buffalo hunter: White Cow Bird (*Aototain*), the man who received Satanta's arrow-lance at the 1874 Sun Dance.⁷

NOTES

1. Typically, Plains Indian males specialized in representational art, females in geometric forms.
2. The collector was Meritt A. Barber (1838-1906). Eleven drawings are at the Cincinnati Art Museum, three at Williams College in Vermont (Barber's alma mater), and one at an Ohio high school. Ron McCoy, "Searching for Clues in Kiowa Ledger Drawings: Combining James Mooney's Fieldwork and the Barber Collection at the Cincinnati Art Museum," *American Indian Art* 21 (3) (Summer 1996), 57.
3. For an outline of Satanta's career see James Mooney, "Calendar History of the Kiowa Indians, *17th Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology for 1895-96*, Pt. 1 (Washington, D.C.: 1898), 177, 206-210, ff.
4. James Mooney, *Field Notes and Correspondence (1891-1906)*, National Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., MS 1887, 47.
5. Mooney, "Calendar History," 325-326.
6. Mooney, *Field Notes and Correspondence*, MS 1887, 47.
7. Mooney, "Calendar History," 343-344.

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