

Codsiogo: A Shoshone Artist

The Harry L. George Collection contains thousands of cultural items from the indigenous people of North America. From baskets to pots, shirts to dresses, moccasins to boots and leggings, the vast majority of these items have not been displayed for some time if at all. Several of those items represent only a few like them known to be in any collections worldwide. Four of those items are paintings and designs on animal hides and of those, one hide painting draws our attention (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Codsiogo/Cadzi Cody, *Hide painting of Ceremonies and Hunts*, c. 1890-1900. Elk hide, ink, oil paints. Eastern Shoshone (Wind River Reservation, WY), item number 143/3372, St. Joseph Museum, Missouri.

Initially collected by George with a Crow/Apsaalooke attribution, recent examination confirmed Codsiogo as the artist. Codsiogo (Eastern Shoshone; pronounced "co SEE ko"), known more popularly by his Anglicized name, Cadzi Cody, painted on elk, deer, or buffalo hides. Starting in the 1880s, his work was done mostly for sale, and several examples of his work are collected around the country and overseas. Most of the scenes he depicted captured Shoshone life before and after they were confined to reservation lands in 1868. Unlike the often-seen painted robes worn by men and women, Codsiogo's works were not clothing but rather a medium to tell of Shoshone life. The style is in the traditional Plains/Plateau warrior style of art, mostly in pictographic form that tell the culture of the people.

Born in 1866, he was a son of Washakie, the renowned Shoshone leader. Washakie was for a long time believed to be the only Indian to be interred with military honors upon his death in 1900. In Washakie's case this honor was for his support of the U. S. Army in the Battle of the Rosebud in June 1876, a week before the more famous Little Big Horn battle in Montana. Washakie led over 100 Shoshone warriors against the Lakota and Cheyenne forces that attacked the army column. When Codsiogo reached fighting age, the intertribal war days were over. Little else about his life has been recorded. Codsiogo's most productive artistic period dates from about 1885 until the early 1900s. He passed away in 1912.

Three photographs of Codsiogo are collected in the American Heritage Center of the University of Wyoming. All three were taken by Charles Baker and Eli Johnston,

photographers in Evanston, Wyoming. These portraits are believed to have been taken before 1898 and one is shown in Figure 2. It has not often been used in discussions of him or his art.

In each of the several collected hides, Codsiogo constructed his paintings using the same themes throughout. The central scene in all his works depicts two celebrations – a sacred Sun Dance and a Wolf Dance or Hot Dance as it was later known. Along with those dances, he added along the periphery scenes of buffalo hunts which included preparing the buffalo carcass for skinning and butchering. In the village scenes, women are shown preparing food, hides for use, and other facets of daily life. The hide in the George collection shows all these standard scenes.



Figure 2. *Portrait of Shoshone Warrior (Codsiogo) Before 1898*. Photograph by Charles S. Baker and Eli Johnston. Item number 180373. American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

The tall pole in the center of the dancing male figures represents the Sun Dance but only through the soon to be raised buffalo head and the eagle atop the pole. No actual Sun Dance participants are shown as the U. S. Government forbade this and most other dances, until the 1930s or 1940s. The dancing figures display their celebrations by dancing around the poles indicating in some versions one or the other or both of the Wolf or Hot Dance. In this version, only the Hot Dance is shown. The drummers seated around the drum should be familiar to most modern viewers and is seen today in Pow Wow celebrations around the country. Seated with the drummers are women and children, an integral part of the celebrations.

On some paintings Codsiogo portrayed work and life in and around the camp, such as warriors returning successfully from a war party, hunters leaving and returning, and tending horses. While the Sun Dance depictions were included to tell of the old days, the buffalo hunting scenes were included to increase popularity with tourists. In this version, the periphery of the arrangement is taken up with scenes from buffalo hunts and caring for horses. Both men and women are shown on horseback as being involved in the hunt and aftermath. There are no returning warriors depicted, at least clearly, although he may have used a shorthand representation with a couple of the men on horseback.

There is no detailed biography or catalog of Codsiogo's known works. Some of his artwork has been sold at auction and their locations are unknown. The uniqueness of his work, especially his seemingly similar construct, is that each painting is a stand-alone depiction of like events. Shorthand portrayal of events, more like a mnemonic aide for the artist, is a trait of Plains/Plateau artists, and Codsiogo uses it masterfully. Codsiogo's paintings portray a view of him in the past and present times of his life providing a superb view into both periods. A biography as well as an in-depth analysis of his art is needed. The hide painting in the St. Joseph Museum would be a great piece with which to start.

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