

## Native American Pipes in the Art of Charles Bird King, George Catlin, and Karl Bodmer

The ceremonial use of tobacco is ubiquitous throughout North America, except for the Arctic (Paper 1988, 3, 13). The earliest pipe dates from around 2000 BCE (Rafferty and Mann 2004, xi). The familiar elbow shape became common after the eleventh century CE, although tubular-shaped pipes occasionally are used today (Paper 1988, 66). Often, Euro-Americans call ceremonial pipes “peace pipes,” a somewhat misleading term considering that pipe rituals also signified war (Mandelbaum 1979; Rafferty and Mann 2004, xiii). Pipe smoking rituals are similar among many tribes. A pipe was featured in every Sioux ceremony, and different pipes were used at different ceremonies (De Barthe 1958, 70). Traditionally, the bowl and the stem are stored apart, and are joined only during the smoking ceremony. The ritual joining of the stem to the bowl signifies intercourse between male and female, or the Earth (Paper 1988, 9-12, 74). Typically, a pipe ceremony begins with a symbolic offering of smoke to the spirits, by pointing the stem to the four cardinal points, to the sky, and to the earth. Then, the pipe is passed around to the people that have gathered in a circle, always in the same direction (De Barthe 1958, 70; Paper 1988, 2).

### Typology of Native American Pipes

A typology of Native American pipes helps to discuss their depiction in art. The following typology has been summarized from Paper (1988, 68-70):

(i) Elbow (bent at right angles to the stem), with a bowl that is straight, curved, double tapered, or conical. At the front end there may be either a pointed projection, or a slight projection that may be rounded or flat. Variants of the elbow type are: elbow with long projection, T-shape, and effigy. The elbow design and its variants have dominated during the last millennium.

(ii) Keel, with a keel-like protrusion at the bottom.

(iii) Disc, an archaic type. The disk is horizontal, or more rarely vertical.

(iv) Straight, a tubular pipe used with a stem. Generally, tubular pipes are awkward, because the tobacco tends to fall off.

Pipe stems are made of wood (sumac, ash, or poplar), and may be either round or flat. Stem length varies. As a rule of thumb, it is three times the length of the pipe bowl (Hazell 2006), although considerably longer stems have been depicted. The long stem of Native American pipes is so that they can be ritually offered with both hands (Paper 1988, 9).



Fig. 1. Native American pipes in the collection of the Sam Noble Museum in Norman, Oklahoma.

Some stems are ornately decorated with feathers, porcupine quills, and incised designs. Often, pipes with ornate stems are called calumets. However, many stems are plain, or are simply finished with red ochre or beeswax. Most pipes that are intended for ritual use are undecorated (Paper 1988, 12, 73-75). As pipes became items of trade with Euro-Americans, Native Americans started to add decorative designs, carvings, and metal inlays. In the late nineteenth century CE, pipes became tourist items, often decorated with European playing card decors (hearts, diamonds, clubs, and spades) and romantic Western themes (Paper 1988, 71, 74). The pipes collected by the artist George Catlin were not found in a ritual context, rather they were the subjects of "whiskey trade." One should question whether Natives would consider selling or trading sacred items to non-Natives, aside from those being offered as presents (Paper 1988, 74). Most pipes in the collection of the Sam Noble Museum in Norman, Oklahoma, are relatively unadorned (Fig. 1).

### The Artists

Charles Bird King was one of the first artists to skillfully portray Native Americans. King painted portraits of Indian leaders who visited Washington, DC. The portraits were first published in McKenney and Hall's *History of the Indian Tribes of North America*, 1836-44. George Catlin and Karl Bodmer, on the other hand, were among the first artists to travel west to portray Native Americans in their native environment. George Catlin worked for himself, whereas Karl Bodmer was hired by Maximilian, Prince of Wied. The common objective of the three artists was to preserve images of what they believed was a vanishing race. They all worked between 1820 and 1840, before Euro-Americans stepped up the mass westward expansion of their nation, according to what became known as Manifest Destiny. After that, Native cultures would never be as pure, as independent, or as abundant (Moore 1997, 8).

The fact that King, Catlin, and Bodmer completed their work before the mass westward expansion does not guarantee that their work is ethnographically authentic. Often, artists took license to idealize and conform their subjects to preconceived notions, as they saw fit. Charles Bird King idealized the facial features of his subjects to give them a more classic, Caucasian appearance. George Catlin

added imagined details such as tepees in his painting of the Mandan village. Karl Bodmer was artist for hire, so his ethnographic detail was only as good as Maximilian's judgement in collecting props and costumes. When the paintings were turned into prints, lithographers added yet more changes of their own. Because Indian pipes often were trade items rather than for ritual use, it is difficult to say whether portrayals of pipes in Western art are ethnographically accurate. For example, Catlin and Bodmer painted tomahawk pipes, a European invention, often fabricated in England, and offered to Native Americans as treaty presents (Paper 1999, 67). Although Native people sometimes used these pipes in their own treaty ceremonies, tomahawk pipes seem to be more part of western mythology than reality.

The skill of Charles Bird King – and consequently his pipes – is far superior to Catlin's, who lacked formal academic training. Often, Catlin seemed to rush through his paintings, using spontaneous and assertive lines, as opposed to the meticulous, organic lines of King. Catlin only had a rudimentary grasp of chiaroscuro, whereas King used skillful shading to give proper volume to his figures, obviously spending far more time on each canvas. Karl Bodmer's drafting and coloring skills often matched King's, at least in his more finished works. Although Bodmer worked fast like Catlin, he later reworked many of his paintings, and his formal academic training ensured a level of craft unmatched by Catlin.

#### Native American Pipes in the Work of Charles Bird King

*Naw-Kaw, A Winnebago Chief*, copied from an 1827 James Otto Lewis original, shows the chief carrying a ceremonial pipe with an elbow-shaped, conical catlinite bowl, with a slight rounded projection. The bowl has some decoration in the form of rings, a rim at the top, and straight white lines. The wooden, round stem has impressive decoration of green feathers, beads, and human hair (Moore 1997, 73).



Fig. 2. *Naw-Kaw, A Winnebago Chief* (photo courtesy of the Edward E. Ayer Collection, The Newberry Library, Chicago).

*Okee-Makee-Quid, A Chippeway Chief*, copied from an 1826 James Otto Lewis original. The chief holds a ceremonial pipe with an elbow-shaped, conical catlinite

bowl, and a long, round stem, almost equal to the height of his leg. The stem is decorated with three red ribbons (Moore 1997, 92).



Fig. 3. *Okee-Makee-Quid, A Chippeway Chief* (photo courtesy of the Edward E. Ayer Collection, The Newberry Library, Chicago).

*Pee-Che-Kir, Ojibwa Chief*, copied from an 1826 James Otto Lewis original. The chief holds a pipe with an elbow-shaped, conical catlinite bowl, with a pointed projection. The only decoration is a rim at the top of the bowl. The wooden stem is flat, with minimal decoration, in the form of porcupine quills wrapped around the stem (Moore 1997, 96).



Fig. 4. *Pee-Che-Kir, Ojibwa Chief* (photo courtesy of the Edward E. Ayer Collection, The Newberry Library, Chicago).

*Wa-Em-Boesh-Kaa, A Chippeway Chief*, copied from an 1826 James Otto Lewis original. The chief smokes a pipe with a rare effigy bowl, carved in the shape of a bird's head. The bowl is white, possibly not made of pipestone. The round stem is decorated with white and red feathers and ribbons (Moore 1997, 97).



Fig. 5. *Wa-Em-Boesh-Kaa, A Chippeway Chief* (photo courtesy of the Edward E. Ayer Collection, The Newberry Library, Chicago).

*No-way-Ke-Sug-Ga, Otoe*, was one the last Indians that Charles Bird King painted for the government in 1837. He holds a pipe with a bowl in the unusual shape of an inverted bell, with a pointed projection. The stem is not visible (Moore 1997, 109).



Fig. 6. *No-way-Ke-Sug-Ga, Otoe* (photo courtesy of the Edward E. Ayer Collection, The Newberry Library, Chicago).

*Ne-O-Mon-Ne, An Ioway Chief*, 1837. The chief holds a pipe whose conical bowl seems to be penetrating the stem. The top third of the stem is decorated with green and red ribbons, and porcupine quills (Moore 1997, 111).



Fig. 7. *Ne-O-Mon-Ne, An Ioway Chief* (photo courtesy of the Edward E. Ayer Collection, The Newberry Library, Chicago).

### Native American Pipes in the Work of George Catlin

*Ojibwa Troupe in London* is a composite drawing and a series of portrait studies executed in 1844 in London. One of the men smokes a long-stemmed pipe, about two-thirds of his height. The bowl is elbow-shaped, with slight, rounded projection. Another man holds a tomahawk pipe, a European invention (Moore 1997, 120-121).

*Sioux Indian Council*, painted from sketches made in 1832, depicts a Sioux man lighting a long-stemmed pipe from the campfire. The bowl is elbow-shaped with projection, probably made of catlinite (Moore 1997, 123).

*Strikes Two At Once, Oto*, 1832. Although this canvas is unfinished, an elbow-shaped pipe with projection is visible (Moore 1997, 125).



Fig. 8. *Strikes Two At Once, Oto* (photo courtesy of Luce Foundation Center for American Art, gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr., Smithsonian American Art Museum).

*Sioux Dog Feast* depicts Sioux men lighting long-stemmed pipes, signaling the end of the feast (Moore 1997, 137).



Fig. 9. *Sioux Dog Feast* (photo courtesy of Luce Foundation Center for American Art, gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr., Smithsonian American Art Museum).

*He Who Kills the Osages, Missouri*, 1832. This painting depicts one of the most elaborately carved pipes in Catlin's work. The catlinite bowl is elbow-shaped with pointed projection, and includes an animal effigy carved by the Missouri chief. The stem is decorated with stripes and rhombus (Moore 1997, 150).



Fig. 10. *He Who Kills the Osages, Missouri* (photo courtesy of Luce Foundation Center for American Art, gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr., Smithsonian American Art Museum).

*Pipestone Quarry on the Coteau Des Prairies, Minnesota*, 1836-37. This is the painting of the sacred quarry where his namesake rock was mined. Catlin rearranged some of the landscape elements to fit his composition (Moore 1997, 154).



Fig. 11. *Pipestone Quarry on the Coteau Des Prairies, Minnesota* (photo courtesy of Luce Foundation Center for American Art, gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr., Smithsonian American Art Museum).

*The Cheyenne, A Republican Pawnee*, 1832. The pipe depicted is elbow-shaped with conical bowl and slight projection. The stem is decorated with paint and a red ribbon (Moore 1997, 154).



Fig. 12. *The Cheyenne, A Republican Pawnee* (photo courtesy of Luce Foundation Center for American Art, gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr., Smithsonian American Art Museum).

*Double Walker, Omaha*, 1832. The pipe that the man smokes is elbow-shaped with conical bowl and pointed projection. The long, round stem is elaborately decorated with paint and red ribbons (Moore 1997, 155).





Fig. 13. *Double Walker, Omaha* (photo courtesy of Luce Foundation Center for American Art, gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr., Smithsonian American Art Museum).

*Pigeon's Egg Head (The Light), Assiniboin, Going to and Returning from Washington, 1837-39.* In the left half of the picture, where the Assiniboin wears his Native clothes, he holds an elbow-shaped pipe with conical bowl and pointed projection. The long, round stem is painted blue, red, and yellow (Moore 1997, 159).



Fig. 14. *Pigeon's Egg Head (The Light), Assiniboin, Going to and Returning from Washington* (photo courtesy of Luce Foundation Center for American Art, gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr., Smithsonian American Art Museum).

*Scalp Dance, Lakota, 1835-37.* The dance scene shows at least one man smoking a long-stemmed pipe with an elbow-shaped bowl (Moore 1997, 174).



Fig. 15. *Scalp Dance, Lakota* (photo courtesy of Luce Foundation Center for American Art, gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr., Smithsonian American Art Museum).

*Wolf Chief, Head of the Mandan Tribe*, 1832. The chief holds what looks like two highly ornamented pipes. The elbow-shaped, conical bowls are joined to stems that are richly decorated with colorful feathers and ribbons or scalp locks (Moore 1997, 184).



Fig. 16. *Wolf Chief, Head of the Mandan Tribe* (photo courtesy of Luce Foundation Center for American Art, gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr., Smithsonian American Art Museum).

*Mandan Foot War Party in Council*, 1832. The warriors smoke long-stemmed pipes around a campfire. The bowls are elbow-shaped with projection (Moore 1997, 186).



Fig. 17. *Mandan Foot War Party in Council* (photo courtesy of Luce Foundation Center for American Art, gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr., Smithsonian American Art Museum).

*Big Eagle, Santee Sioux (Dakota)*, 1835. The man holds an elbow pipe with conical bowl and slight projection. The stem probably is flat, with painted stripes (Moore 1997, 199).



Fig. 18. *Big Eagle, Santee Sioux (Dakota)* (photo courtesy of Luce Foundation Center for American Art, gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr., Smithsonian American Art Museum).

### Native American Pipes in the Work of Karl Bodmer

*Wahktageli, Yankton Sioux Chief*, 1833. Although Maximilian claimed that the warrior was holding a tomahawk or “battle-axe” (Maximilian and Bodmer 2001, 58), most likely he was holding a tomahawk pipe, a trade item manufactured by Euro-Americans (Moore 1997, 235).



Fig. 19. *Wahktageli, Yankton Sioux Chief* (photo courtesy of Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, Nebraska).

*Piegian Blackfeet Man*, 1833. The man holds a long-stemmed pipe of characteristic Blackfoot design. The bowl tapers toward the top, and has a serrated keel on the bottom (Moore 1997, 249). The bowl is white, which suggests that it is made of soapstone, in typical Blackfoot fashion (Maximilian and Bodmer 2001, 28).



Fig. 20. *Piegian Blackfeet Man* (photo courtesy of Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, Nebraska).

*Hotokaueh-Hoh, Piegian Blackfeet*, 1833. This painting portrays a highly ornate medicine pipe. The bowl is not visible. The stem is decorated with colorful feathers of many types of birds, cloth, and beads (Moore 1997, 250).

*Pehriska-Ruhpa*, 1833. The man holds an enormous pipe, approximately three-quarters of his height. This has to be one the most massive pipes depicted in Western art. It is elbow-shaped, with a conical bowl, and a pointed projection. White stripes are painted around the bowl and around the stem opening (because the stripes are somewhat shiny, they could be metal inlays). The long, flat stem is profusely

decorated with colorful porcupine quills, hair, and beads (Maximilian and Bodmer 2001, 89).



Fig. 21. *Pehriska-Ruhpa* (photo courtesy of Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, Nebraska).

*Funeral Scaffold of a Sioux Chief Near Fort Pierre, 1832-34.* One of the Indians sitting in a circle smokes an elbow-shaped pipe with projection, and a long, cylindrical, unadorned stem (Maximilian and Bodmer 2001, 68-69).

*The Interior of the Hut of a Mandan Chief, 1832-34.* One of the men smokes an elbow-shaped pipe, with painted, conical bowl, and round wood stem (Maximilian and Bodmer 2001, 98-99).

*Indian Utensils and Arms, 1832-34.* This tableau depicts a collection of Native artifacts, including "The Pipe of Dipäuch," with a unique brownish-red clay bowl and a spindle-shaped wood stem. Maximilian claimed that this pipe had been in Mandan possession since ancient times (Maximilian and Bodmer 2001, 102-104). He may be correct, because this style of pipe resembles an archaic disk style (Paper 1988, plate 27).

*Encampment of the Piekann Indians, 1832-34.* In this broad vista of an Indian village, one man holds a pipe with a conical bowl and a serrated, keel-shaped bottom (Maximilian and Bodmer 2001, 178).

*Indian Utensils and Arms, 1832-34.* This is another tableau of Indian artifacts, depicting two elaborately decorated pipes. The first is a Dakota pipe from Maximilian's collection, now in the Linden-Museum of Stuttgart. This catlinite pipe is elbow-shaped with slight, flat projection, conical bowl, and lead inlay. The broad, flat stem is wood, with an openwork pattern, decorated with dyed porcupine quills and horsehair. The second pipe is a Blackfoot (Piegan) pipe that is similar to the first, except it has no inlays, and it has a serrated flange on top, near the stem hole. The stem is richly decorated with dyed porcupine quills, feathers of various kinds, hair locks, and red ribbons (Maximilian and Bodmer 2001, 188-191).

*Saukie and Fox Indians, 1832-34.* One of the Native deputies holds an elbow-shaped pipe with conical bowl and a slight, flat projection (Maximilian and Bodmer 2001, 211).

## Carving a Native American Pipe

Native American pipes can be as plain as a tube made of hollowed stone, or as elaborate as effigy pipes carved in the shape of an animal. The pipe that I chose to carve has a contemporary elbow shape and a poplar stem, in Plains Indians fashion (Mandelbaum 1979). I let the shape and the impurities of the stone dictate the shape of the pipe, rather than closely adhering to a particular design. The stone is red pipestone or catlinite, named after George Catlin, one of the first Euro-Americans to visit the sacred pipestone quarry in southwestern Minnesota (Olton 2006). The red color of catlinite symbolizes the female life force, and was favored by the Lakota and the Dakota, whereas other tribes preferred black stone (Paper 1988, 56). The stem symbolizes male energy and creative potential, and is 14 inches (36 cm) long.

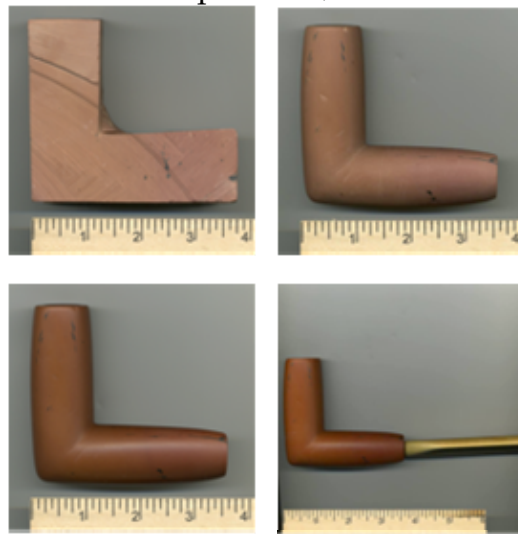


Fig. 22. Successive stages in pipe making. From left to right and top to bottom: raw catlinite; bowl finished with horseshoe rasp, half-round file, and coarse sandpaper; bowl finished with medium and fine sandpaper, and beeswax; finished pipe with stem.

The progress of pipe making is documented in Fig. 22. First, holes were drilled into the bowl for the tobacco and for the stem. The bowl was rounded with a horseshoe rasp. Deep scratches and irregularities were smoothed with a half-round file. The bowl and the stem were sanded with three grades of successively finer sandpaper, coarse-to-medium-to-fine. The end of the stem was filed to fit snugly into the bowl. Finally, the bowl and the stem were finished in beeswax, and buffed with soft cloth. Detailed instructions about this method of pipe construction are in Hazell (2006).

## Discussion

Native American pipes, somewhat misleadingly called “peace pipes,” had entered Western mythology before the first Euro-American artists traveled west. Charles Bird King, George Catlin, and Karl Bodmer substantially contributed to this mythology, by painting pipes in the portraits of Native American leaders, and in

genre scenes of Native life. Each artist contributed differently. Undoubtedly, King and Bodmer were superior draftsmen and colorists, showing a deep understanding of dark/light composition, and obviously finishing their paintings to a higher degree. King had a restricted repertoire of subjects, the Indian chiefs who visited Washington, DC. Catlin and Bodmer had a wider repertoire because they actually traveled west, and could observe more Native people and varied scenes of Native life. On the other hand, Catlin and Bodmer did not have the luxury of a studio, and often painted out of quickly executed field sketches. As a result, the amount of detail included in their finished work was limited by their personal recollection, and by the artifacts that they brought home.

Some of the elaborate pipe designs that became tourist items in late nineteenth century CE are absent from the works of King, Catlin, and Bodmer. Only one or two pipes have metal inlays, as these metals were obtained from Europeans at a later time. On the other hand, Native Americans had extensive contact with fur traders long before Catlin and Bodmer traveled west. As a result, we do not know how many of the pipes displayed were made by Native Americans for ritual use, and how many were for trade or for show purposes. King obviously took license classicizing the facial features of his subjects, so it is conceivable that he took license in selecting his props. Catlin was known to collect pipes that were unlikely to have been used by Natives (Paper 1988, 74). It is conceivable that he was tempted to depict pipes from his private, unrepresentative collection, rather than the plain pipes that Indians would actually use. Catlin added imaginary tepees to his painting of the Mandan village, so there was nothing to prevent him from beautifying other details such as pipes. Both Catlin and Bodmer have portrayed post-Colombian tomahawk pipes, intended for trade rather than for ceremonial use.

Bodmer's accuracy and precision in illustrating ethnographic detail is undisputed, as many of the original objects that he painted can be seen in museum collections (Wood et al. 2002, 13). On the other hand, Bodmer was artist for hire, so he was instructed what to paint. There is evidence that Native Americans misled Prince Maximilian by their conduct, and shaped his anthropological research with their answers. Native Americans scrupulously prepared themselves to control how they appeared during Bodmer's portrait sessions (Wood et al. 2002, 50). By the 1830s, Lakota dress style had been drastically influenced by trade with Euro-American, yet Maximilian purchased one of those dresses as authentic (Wood et al. 2002, 55-56). Likewise, the pipes that Maximilian collected may have not been representative of what the Natives smoked.

Another reason to question ethnographic accuracy is that the pipes in the posed portraits of the three artists are richly decorated, whereas the pipes depicted in genre scenes (such as Catlin's *Sioux Indian Council* or Bodmer's *Funeral Scaffold of a Sioux Chief Near Fort Pierre*) are relatively unadorned. By the time Catlin and Bodmer traveled west, there had been enough contact between the two cultures to shape how Native American artifacts were perceived, manufactured, and traded. To identify genuine pre-Colombian pipe styles, one would probably have to resort to archaeological evidence, such as presented by Job and Hollinger (2006).

## Conclusions

The depiction of Native pipes in the works of Charles Bird King, George Catlin, and Karl Bodmer certainly has some ethnographic authenticity, although to what degree it cannot be conclusively ascertained. Although King, Catlin, and Bodmer were among the earliest artists to visually document Native American people, most Native Americans have been in contact with fur traders for centuries, so that their pipe styles may have been influenced as well. The artists may have been misled, or simply opted to portray more elaborate pipe styles than were representative at the time. Although the work of King, Catlin, and Bodmer undoubtedly succeeded in preserving some ethnographic authenticity, it also reinforced established stereotypes and perpetuated a western mythology that had already begun to take shape.

## References

- De Barthe, Joseph. 1958. *Life and adventures of Frank Grouard*. Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Hazell, Gloria. 2006. Pipe making directions. <http://littlefeathercenter.50megs.com/Catlinite.html> (accessed November 22, 2006).
- Job, Jayme J., and Eric Hollinger. 2006. Pipestone provenance: Sourcing prehistoric pipestone artifacts within museum collections using reflectance spectroscopy. Virtual poster presented at the 2006 Research Training Program, at the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History, Washington, District of Columbia. <http://www.mnh.si.edu/NHRE/RTP2006.html#Job> (accessed November 23, 2006).
- Mandelbaum, David G. 1979. The Plains Cree. Part two – A comparative study of the Eastern Plains Cree culture. Regina, Saskatchewan: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina. <http://www.publications.gov.sk.ca/details.cfm?p=11940> (accessed 23 November 23, 2006).
- Maximilian Prince of Wied, and Karl Bodmer. 2001. *Travels in the interior of North America*. Köln, Germany: Taschen.
- Moore, Robert J. 1997. *Native Americans: A portrait. The art and travels of Charles Bird King, George Catlin, and Karl Bodmer*. New York: Stewart, Tabori & Chang.
- Olton, Bert. 2006. Pipestone. <http://www.pt-magazine.com/backissues/winter2003/story1.asp> (accessed November 23, 2006).
- Paper, Jordan. 1988. *Offering smoke: The sacred pipe and Native American religion*. Moscow, Idaho: University of Idaho Press.
- Rafferty, Sean M., and Rob Mann. 2004. Smoking pipes and culture. In *Smoking and culture: The archaeology of tobacco pipes in eastern North America*, ed. Sean M. Rafferty and Rob Mann, xi-xx. Knoxville, Tennessee: University of Tennessee Press.



Wood, W. Raymond, Joseph C. Porter, and David C. Hunt. 2002. *Karl Bodmer's studio art: The Newberry Library Bodmer Collection*. Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press.

GERAKIS, Argyrios.

University of Oklahoma School of Art & Art History, USA.

Email: [gerakis@msu.edu](mailto:gerakis@msu.edu)