Serialized Virginia: The Representational Format for Comparative Ethnology, c. 1600
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The Virginia watercolours by John White from the Earl of Charlemont’s album, now in the British Museum, and the True Pictures and Fashions of Virginia, engraved by Theodor de Bry after another set of models by John White, both claim to show how the Virginians actually lived. At the same time the two collections make an argument about the Virginian way of life. To understand the argument the viewer must not merely look at the images individually, but also concern himself with the sequence in which they have been placed. He has to study the grouping of images according to visual topic, conceptual theme, or both. He must determine how the groups are connected – visually and conceptually – into a coherent series and establish the relationship between the Virginia sequence and the preliminary and additional images. In the case of the engravings he has in addition to analyze the relationship between the images and the accompanying texts.

In both collections the nine images showing the costumes of the Virginians make up one group; in the album these are supplemented with the man and woman ‘sitting at meate’ and with the Florida couple by way of comparative digression. The views of Secotan and Pomeiooc and the related images, showing details of these overviews, constitute another group. It consists of five images in the album of watercolours and seven in the book of engravings. The book of engravings contains a third group of images, five in all, dealing with the procurement, preparation and the consumption of food; they are based on four watercolours in the album. In both series the major groups are preceded by two introductory images: a coastal map-cum-view, showing English ships, indigenous canoes and diverse small figures, and a closer view showing in more detail human activity in the coastal waters (Figs 1–4).

The introductory images locate the scenes that follow in space and indicate the occasion on which the English made their observations. In the rest of the series the English remain out of view, while the figures from the costume group reappear throughout, thus connecting the groups into a coherent series. The observer is led to understand that what the images offer is an ethnography (not a colonial encounter) and that he is supposed to immerse himself fully in a foreign society. The grouping indicates that the images are not merely representations of specific ethnographic observations, but

Figure 1 La Virginea Pars: map of the East coast of North America from Chesapeake Bay to Cape Lookout, John White (BM 1906, 0509.1.3.)

Figure 2 Indians fishing, John White (BM 1906.0509.1.6)
should also be looked at as parts of a more general ethnographic classification. The alteration of overview and details in the introduction and in the village views suggests the same intention.

In both the album and the book the preliminary and additional images indicate further dimensions of the ethnographic format. The images of the Picts (in the album accompanied by inhabitants of Florida, Inuit and diverse Asians) are a sign that the ethnographic interest shared by the artists, patrons and buyers of these works was comparative, historical and evaluative. By drawing parallels between ancient Britons and contemporary Americans they made the New World young and the Old World modern. In the English album the numerous pictures of plants and animals extend the comparative interest to the natural environment of the diverse parts of the earth. The sunflowers and pumpkins in the engraved view of Secoton, perhaps added on suggestion of the botanist Carolus Clusius, indicate a similar curiosity to be found in Frankfurt where the de Bry book was published. Finally, the Adam and Eve that accompanied the foreword to the plate section of the de Bry edition warned the readers that they should study and discuss the customs of the peoples of the world with Christian as well as secular concerns in mind, a preoccupation certainly shared by the English viewers of the album, although it does not contain a specific warning on this point.

The watercolours have been repeatedly contrasted with the engravings, because it was assumed that they represented an earlier version. They were considered to be closer to the field sketches, truer to the observed facts, less distorted by colonialist interests and Eurocentric preconceptions than the engravings. This encouraged a study of the watercolours as individual, documentary images, not as parts of a series presenting an argument. Particular attention was given to questions of mimetic accuracy, less to questions of representational construction. 5 In this paper I re-address the question of the format in which the images were presented in both the album and the de Bry publication and of the intellectual concerns to which they testify.

What I will term the nine costume images offer probably the easiest access to the visual and conceptual framework of the series. They show erect individual men and women seen from the front in the watercolours, while in the engravings six of them are shown from the front and back and all are set against a landscape background. 6 Most of these figures do not perform any clear action. They pose to express their social position. Their clothes are rudimentary and made of animal skins instead of textiles. The men have their hair ‘cut like a cokes combe’. Some of the men and women, occasionally accompanied by a child, constitute couples. They represent the household, which affectively and educationally binds together the two sexes and the different age groups, while at the same time uniting them for production and consumption. In addition, the men and women represent different social statuses. Most of them are described as nobles, distinguished by elaborate necklaces and copper ornaments. The old man from Pomeiooc and the woman with toddler may be examples of commoners, carrying simpler ornaments. In this regard the couples demonstrate the social hierarchy and the political bond between rulers and ruled. Two men are designated as priests. The one who maintains a dignified pose reappears in the group of village views as the priest taking care of the tomb of the chiefs. The other gesticulates wildly. He is a ‘coniuerer’ who consorts with evil spirits. They refer to the religious ties binding the Virginians. The men and women in this first group of costume images embody the institutions that, according to anthropological notions current at the time but derived from classical and Christian traditions, were believed to be universal characteristics of human society: household, polity and religion. 7 Taken together the figures in the costume images represent Virginian social structure, held together by domestic, political and religious bonds.

In the series of engravings a separate group of images more specifically shows the economic bonds, the preserve of the household. We see mostly undorned people, supposedly commoners. Men are making a canoe through the skilful application of fire and with the help of stone tools. This is followed by three ways of fishing in one image. Men spear them or catch them in a weir during the day. During the night they attract them by fire in a canoe and catch them in a net. 8 Next, two ways of preparing food for consumption are depicted: men grill fish above a fire and a man and a woman cook meat and corn in a large ceramic pot, made by the woman.
according to the caption. A couple, seated on a simple mat on the ground, takes the cooked food with their hands from a common plate, but in an orderly manner. The sequence of the plates follows the logic of the subsistence economy: making the tools for the work that keeps one alive, hunting or growing what one needs to survive, and consuming what one has hunted or grown.

The group of images constructed around the views of Pomeiooc and Secotan are visually connected by the two town views, but it is harder to determine what conceptually connects these different types of settled communities (Figs 5–6). The View of Pomeiooc centres on a communal celebration, described in the engraving showing it in more detail as *Their manner of praigne with Rattels abowt te fyer*. The caption explains that the gathering is a thanksgiving after surviving calamities of nature and war. In the de Bry series the legend to the village view directs the attention first to the ‘Temple’ (letter A), then to the ‘King’s lodginge’ (letter B). Letter C points to the artificial pond outside the palisade, more an economic than a religious or political feature. The View of Secotan lacks a central scene. The legend of this engraving equally combines religious, political and economic features. It starts with the religious building ‘wherin are the tombes of their kings and princes’ (letter A), followed by a place where they make their solemn prayers (letter B). The circle dance around posts ‘carved with heads like to the faces of nonnes’ (letter C) is probably a thanksgiving for the harvest, a celebration uniting several neighbouring villages in dances and a common meal (letter D). Letter K indicates another place for solemn feasts. The other letters point to agricultural activities. The texts inscribed in the watercolour versions of the views of Pomeiooc and Secotan contain a similar mixture of social dimensions.

In the watercolour series the village views constitute the first group of images and may have been intended as the general overview of Virginian social structure, just like the costume plates in the series of engravings. The enclosed village could represent the community as a defence against death, the open village the community as the conduit of life. The costume plates in the watercolour series may either be seen as a closer look at the diverse types of people shown in the village views, highlighting the political and religious bonds or as an alternative way of presenting Virginian social structure. The final watercolour, the man and woman sitting ‘at meate’, catches the attention by forming a contrast to the standing figures preceding it (Fig. 7). In this position it is the counterpart of the introductory image showing communal fishing and may represent the household meal as metaphor of the social bond. In the watercolour series the diverse dimensions of social structure are recognizably represented, but what is emphasized is their interconnection, not their specificity.

In the series of engravings the specificity of the social dimensions receives stronger emphasis. Two plates were added to the group connected to the views of Pomeiooc and Secotan: the idol Kiwasa, a close-up from the *Tombe of their Werowans*, and – as the final plate – the warrior with bow, referring to the small figure shown on the first plate, the introductory coastal map. Depicted from behind, the warrior flaunts the tattoo of
his chief (Fig. 8). The plate looks out of place, a last minute addition. But it is not. The back marks are referred to in the caption to Their dances which they use at their hyghe feastes. The caption to the preceding plate, the Tombe of their Werowans, mentions the reverence of the Virginians for their 'princes' even after their death. The back marks demonstrate the inscription of this loyalty while the chiefs are alive. Thus, the plate undoubtedly belongs to this group and stresses the civil character of the cult of the dead chiefs and Kiwasa. The two additions give this group a stronger religious and political accent than in the series of watercolours.

The series of engravings then consists first of the group of costume plates giving an overview of Virginian social structure, followed by a group dealing with the dimension of the household and a group primarily focused on the religious and political dimensions. The addition of landscape backgrounds in the costume plates multiplies the visual cross-references between plates belonging to different groups. These links instruct the viewer to keep the general theme of the series in mind, while at the same time familiarizing him with the foreign ways.

The naturalistic depictions are meant to convince the viewer that the Virginians are shown in a matter-of-fact way. At the same time, the images, and even more so the captions, present evaluations. By showing that the Virginians lived in households, maintained a social hierarchy and respected political and religious authority, the plates indicated that these people clothed in animal skins and sporting animal-like haircuts were nevertheless fully human and possessed the same mental capacities as the English. Simultaneously, the position of the Virginians on the scale of civility is established by grading them according to criteria of social organization, technological and intellectual skill, material wealth and morality.

The images showed their knowledge of basic skills. The Virginians knew how to light, maintain and control a fire, a feature stressed in the village views. The plates demonstrate their capacity to make tools for obtaining food and building shelter. Nonetheless, the viewers must have noticed that their skills were rather limited. The Virginians did know how to make pots of clay, but were ignorant of spinning and weaving. While they had obtained metal from other tribes, they did not know how to use it in making tools. They had domesticated plants, but did not breed cattle or horses. The absence of domesticated animals in the village views, except for the English (?) dog in the view of Pomeiooc, would have struck any 16th-century European viewer. Virginians held few, if any possessions that were valuable in European eyes. They lacked writing, in 16th-century anthropological theory the necessary tool for any form of higher learning and advanced technology. These technical and economic deficiencies were one of the reasons why the Virginians were called savages in the captions, although more often neutral designations like the ‘inhabitants of this country’ were used.

The political and religious arrangements of the Virginians were not depicted or described as particularly savage in the sense of extremely cruel or otherwise devilishly deranged. No sacrifice of a first-born to the king is shown, nor the scalping of captive enemies, as occur in the Le Moyne album on Florida, known to White, Harriot and de Bry at the time when the designs for the engravings were created. The worship of the dead chiefs and the anthropomorphic idol Kiwasa were undoubtedly pagan, but probably somewhat less so than the adoration of the sun by the people of Florida. Some of the mores of the Virginians were quite respectable, even superior to those of the English, according to the captions of the engravings. They did not desire riches nor hanker after novelties. On the contrary, they were ‘free of all care of heapinge opp riches for their posteritie, content with their state, and living frendlye together of those thinges which god of his bountie hath given unto them’. But not all was said about the mores of the Virginians. ‘The ‘coniuerer,’ who consorted with evil spirits and the palisades of Pomeiooc, indicates that were some facets of the religious and political life of the Virginians that were not described.

Not only are the description and evaluation of the Virginians in the True Pictures and Fashions incomplete, but also at closer inspection the viewer notices discrepancies between the images and the accompanying texts. In line with the promotional character of Harriot’s A briefe and true report, the captions of the True Pictures and Fashions repeatedly suggest that the Virginians were a people easy to befriend, eager to learn from the more civil English and ripe for conversion to Christianity. The images, however, do not show any Indians stunned by admiration for English guns and perspective glasses or stroking their bodies with the bible, merely a girl showing off the exotic trifles handed out at first contact. Nor does the visual program of the True Pictures and
**Fashions**, in which after the introductory images the English are absent, play heavily on the contrast between 'civilized' us and 'savage' them, far less so than the numerous images in Le Moyne's album in which well-dressed French observers watch some stunningly savage actions performed by naked Floridians.

Instead, the images of the *True Pictures and Fashions* immerse the viewer in the customs of the Virginians and make him aware of a Virginian point of view. Would the Virginians be willing to convert to Christianity, if it meant giving up worshipping the chiefs to whom they were devoted, he might ask himself after reading the comments that suggest that they would? Would the chiefs encourage this change? The viewer might notice that the warrior who on the first plate faces the English ships approaching the coast in the final picture turns his back to the overseas public, showing the tattoo that testifies to his devotion to the indigenous chief. The discrepancy between the visual program and the accompanying texts indicates that the series was not narrowly conceived to turn the viewer into an unquestioning believer in the English colonial enterprise. In fact, the plate of *Adam and Eve*, the comparisons with the people of Florida in the captions, the images and texts on the Picts suggested a number of other topics that he might consider.

The format of the two Virginia series is open-ended and on certain points deliberately indeterminate to encourage the viewer's curiosity and independent judgement. Partly, this is a consequence of the abstract and general character of its subject: society in its diverse dimensions. What can be shown at the same time highly critical of the Conquista and many aspects of Spanish colonial policy.

In these early exercises in comparative ethnology the authors drew on the same stock of anthropological topics as were used in constructing the format of the Virginia images. Eager to defend man's pre-eminent position in the natural world, they were concerned with distinctions between man and beast. These distinctions they found in the social institutions of household, polity and communal religion, all dependent on the productive and communicative technologies created by man's god-given ingenuity. They graded indigenous societies according to degrees of civility and paganism to gauge their capacity for perfectibility and Christianization. Special attention was given to the techniques of domesticating plants and animals, the skills of constructing shelter and means of transport and the arts of producing ceramics, textiles and metal tools. They also considered the arrangements through which the indigenous peoples organized social control of the sexual and aggressive passions. Did they know publicly sanctioned matrimony? Did rulers dispense justice and organize armies? Did priests officiate in communal celebrations and give moral instructions to the community of believers? By observing the clothing, ornaments and tools with which people appeared in public it was possible to collect information on many of these topics, even during a short visit. The arrangements of public space in the indigenous settlements provided another source of information. Were there palaces, noble houses, temples and markets? The growing stream of manuscript and printed reports on New World societies were eagerly studied to collect information on these topics.

A format consisting of costume plates as the core group and one or more groups of other plates was particularly suitable for the illustration of the more theoretically-oriented ethnographic descriptions. The grouping of scenes would encourage the viewers to figure out the general concepts that were used for the groupings. As argued above, costume plates offered an easily understandable representation of the very general concept of *res publica*, the structure of social bonds that then could be treated more specifically in the other groups of plates. They presented the cast of players that in the other groups acted in the economic, political and religious scenes. Moreover, the repetition of couples of costumed men and women invited comparison and surreptitiously introduced a criterion for evaluation. The extent to which a figure was covered in textiles gave a rough indication of his place on the scale of civility: the more covered, the more civil.

The format combining a group of costume plates with groups of other scenes seems initially to have been used for comparison between societies. If one applies a minimalist definition, one can recognize the format in the woodcuts by Hans Burgkmair that accompany Balthasar Sprenger's report of his journey to India, published in 1508. *Four couples, some standing erect, others sitting, are shown accompanied by child. They represent the inhabitants of three regions in Africa and of Malabar in India. To this group is added the large plate depicting the King of Cochin in procession and a scene of scarcely clad herdsmen. This work was copied and remodelled several times in the early 16th century, i.e., for the broadsheet *De Novo Mondo* by the Antwerp printer Jan van Doesborch, published c. 1520 in a Latin, Dutch and English version.*

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format resurfaces in the middle of the century in the Codex Casanatense, a large series of watercolours. The costume plates show representatives of most of the peoples of Portuguese Asia. Regions in India are singled out for more extensive treatment through scenes dealing with agriculture, commerce, trades, the public appearance of rulers and religious ceremonies. During the century, however, the format does not seem to have become a well-established formula. Rather, it seems to have been reinvented, when the occasion called for it.  

This changed with the publication of the True Pictures and Fashions. This time the format was mainly used for the representation of a single society. In 1591 followed a similar application in the illustrations of the Relatione del reame di Congo by Duarte Lopez and Filippo Pigafetta, published in Rome. The de Bry edition of the True Pictures and Fashions made the format popular in the Northern Netherlands. The illustrative program of Jan Huygen van Linschoten’s Itinerario (Amsterdam, 1595–6) used it again for comparative purposes. The artfully constructed series invited the viewer to systematically compare the societies of China, Portuguese Goa, the Kingdom of Ballagate, east of Goa, and the principalities of Malabar. The comparative use was repeated in the illustrations of the reports of the first and second Dutch fleets to Asia in the following years. In Pieter de Marees’ Beschrijving ende historische verhael vant Goutkoninrijck van Gunea (Amsterdam 1602) it served the extensive representation of a single society on the African Gold Coast. Between 1598 and 1609 all these works, together with the Relatione del reame di Congo, were republished by Theodor de Bry’s sons in their India Orientalis series. By this time the format had gained acceptance as the leading formula for ethnographic representation.

Notes


2 Hulton, 1985, supra n. 1, 130–3, Sloan, 2007, supra n. 1, 93–103, 146–223. In The True Pictures and Fashions of Virginia the inhabitants of Florida are not depicted, but are referred to several times in the captions to the plates. They were to be the subject of the second volume of de Bry’s America series.


4 This is the Quinn/Hulton approach to which the late William C. Sturtevant made important ethnographic contributions. Their admirable scholarship made it the reigning paradigm for half a century. The approach was a major inspiration for what Karen O. Kupperman wrote about the watercolours and engravings and has largely been followed, though not uncritically, in the catalogue of the recent BM exhibition. U. Kuhlemann, ‘Between reproduction, invention and propaganda: Theodor de Bry’s engravings after John White’s watercolours’, in Sloan, 2007, supra n. 1, 79–89. According to this perspective Harriott and White contributed significantly to objective, scientific knowledge and depiction of American topography, plants, animals and people. Through empirical inquiry and naturalistic representation they discarded the cobweb of literary and pictorial traditions that prevented up to then a clear view of the realities of the New World. Instigations for a revision of the Quinn/Hulton approach have come from different sides and have addressed various issues, all pointing out the socially determined relativity of Harriot’s and White’s objectivity. The image of The flyer has been used to elucidate diverging scientific styles at the Elizabethan court. White’s and de Bry’s images have been interpreted as demonstrations of ‘coloniology’ or illustrating shifts in the rhetorical strategies of the Virginia project. S. Grewe teaches us to consider ‘invisible bullets’, in M. Payne, ed., The Greenbblad Reader, Oxford, 2005 and in the defense of Harriot, the scientist, by B.J. Sokol, ‘The problem of assessing Thomas Harriot’s A briefe and true report of his discoveries in North America’, Annals of Science, 51, 1994, 1–16; J.R. Solomon, “To know, to fly, to conjure”: situating Baconian science at the juncture of early modern modes of reading’, in Renaissance Quarterly, 44, 1991, 53–8. M.B. Campbell, Wonder and Science: Imaging Worlds in Early Modern Europe, Ithaca, NY, 1999, 51–67; S. Miller, Invested with Meaning: the Raleigh Circle in the New World, Philadelphia, 1998, 114–52.

5 The groupings within the series of engravings have of course been noted earlier. The series, however, has not been discussed as a format with a topical structure that was used more widely. A. Grewe, Die Konstruktion Amerikas: Bildertechnik und menschliche Darstellung in den Grands Voyages aus der Werkstatt de Bry, Cologne, Weinmar and Berlin, 2004, 94–6. Kuhlemann, 2007, supra n. 4, 85.

6 The view from the rear is unusual in costume plates. In a plate in Linschoten’s Itinerario it was used to refer to homosexuality among Muslim men. E. van den Boogaart, Civil and Corrupt Asia: Image and Text in the Itinerario and Icons of Jan Huygen van Linschoten, Chicago and London, 2003, 12. The image could be no indication that this might be the intention in the Virginia series. Its function in this case is not entirely clear, especially since only in the final engraving the marks on the back are shown.

7 Remarkably enough only the Weroan or great Lorde of Virginia is shown with bow and arrows, the other males are unarmed. The designations nobleman, prince and king may be somewhat jocular just as the Renaissance pose of the ‘great Lorde’. J. Spicer, ‘The Renaissance elow’, in J. Bremmer and H. Roodeburg, eds, A Cultural History of Costume, London, 1993, 84–128. The uses of the term Weroan teaches the viewer that there is an indigenous way of speaking about social rank.


9 De Bry shows a less strict division of labour between the sexes. In the engraving the figure to the right of the fire in the canoe is a woman, instead of the man, recognizable as such by his haircut, in the watercolour.


11 Hulton, 1985, supra n. 1, 110.

12 Just as other early English sources, Harriot and White did not excessively idealize or demonize the Indians and were able to make fair assessments. K.O. Kupperman, Indians & English. Facing Off in Early America, Ithaca and London, 2000. See for the use of

The social position of the makers of images such as the Virginia watercolours is discussed in Sloan, 2007, supra n. 1, 23–37. Solomon, 1991, supra n. 4.


Alternative ways of illustrating ethnographical descriptions are briefly surveyed in C. Feest, 'John White's New World', in Sloan, 2007, supra n. 1, 65–9. As Feest remarks, during the 16th century there was no clearly defined canon of the emerging field of visual ethnographic representation.


The paradoxical link between flexible and polysemic ways of representation and the formation of canons has been attributed to the accumulation and increased circulation of images facilitated by the expansion of the printing industry and – more generally – of international capitalism. S. Burghartz, 'Mimetisches Kapital und die Aneignung Neuer Welten. Zur europäischen Repräsentationspraxis um 1600', in *Werkstattgeschichte*, 13, 2004, 24–48.