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THE HISTORY OF THE GIANI

Proprietor, Engined by CAPT. FITZ-ROY 1831.



HAYTER, John.

The three Fuegians brought to England by Capt'n Fitz-Roy, 1831...

Lithograph on tinted paper, 240 x 350 mm (plate), mounted. London, J. Dickinson, 114 New Bond Street, Printed by W. Sharp, August 1831.

CHARLES DARWIN & THE YAHGANS FROM TIERRA DEL FUEGO

A rare and very striking group portrait: Fuegia Basket, Jemmy Button and York Minster, the three Yahgan natives of Tierra del Fuego taken back to England by Robert FitzRoy in 1830 and returned on the *Beagle's* second and most famous expedition in 1833. Jemmy Button, the centre figure in this group portrait by Hayter, became Darwin's "particular friend" on the long voyage. Jemmy Button 'was very Merry', Darwin noted in his *Journal*, 'and often laughed, and was remarkably sympathetic with anyone in pain: when the water was rough, I was often a little sea-sick, and he would used to come to me and say in a plaintive voice, "Poor, poor fellow!"'.

Darwin and the "Fuegians"

His observations of the three Yahgans (always referred to at the time by the ethnically inexact term "Fuegians") and his comparison with both their compatriots and indeed themselves in the native way of life to which they returned had significance for Darwin. The voyage of the *Beagle* was, he later said, "by far the most important event in my life and has determined my whole career". His experience with the Yahgans both on the voyage and in their homeland can be singled out as formative in his development of ideas for both the *Origin* and for *The Descent of Man*.

Joseph Yannielli has shown how the encounter with the Yahgans had an important influence on Darwin's later scientific work, while Matt Ridley in less academic context has interestingly maintained that it was Darwin's encounter with the Yahgans that

first had him thinking around ideas of evolution: the native people, he wrote, 'struck Darwin so forcibly in their animal 'state of nature'. For it was this encounter — far more than the finches of the Galapagos — that seems to have first shocked Darwin into thinking that species could change into other species. Darwin spent much longer in Tierra del Fuego than he did in Galapagos.

'Remember that the first hunter-gatherer he met, Jemmy Button, was wearing a frock coat. Seeing Jemmy's cousins naked, painted and wild was a shock: 'It was without exception the most curious and interesting spectacle I ever beheld: I could not have believed how wide was the difference between savage and civilised man: it is greater than between a wild and domesticated animal, in as much as in man there is a greater power of improvement... it seems yet wonderful to me, when I think over all [Jemmy's] many good qualities, that he should have been of the same race, and doubtless partaken of the same character, with the miserable, degraded savages whom we first met here.'

Capture and return

When the *Beagle* had been in Tierra del Fuego in the middle of her first voyage, FitzRoy had captured four Yahgan natives after a boat was stolen. He decided to take them back to England, in order to 'civilise' the 'savages', teaching them "English... the plainer truths of Christianity... and the use of common tools" before returning them as missionaries. One of the four died, but the three survivors were presented at court in the summer of 1831. On the second voyage of the *Beagle* they were returned along with a trainee missionary, and Charles Darwin was able to compare their newly 'civilised' behaviour with the primitive tribes he saw once the ship reached Patagonia.

When the *Beagle* called again, fifteen months after the Yahgans had been returned to their homeland, all the acquired "civilisation" of the three had fallen away. Darwin would later write that he had been 'incessantly struck, whilst living with the Fuegians



THE THREE YOUNG MEN.

Taken in England by CAPT. FITZROY 1861.

*From the collection of the British Museum
Engraved by J. G. Smith
London 1861*

on board the *Beagle*, with the many little traits of character, showing how similar their minds were to ours.’ However the quick reversion to their previous natural state echoed his first meeting with the local native people which he described as ‘without exception the most curious and interesting spectacle I ever beheld’.

John Hayter

John Hayter (1800–1895) was an English portrait painter. He was the second son of the miniaturist Charles Hayter and brother of Sir George Hayter, also a portraitist. He entered the Royal Academy schools in 1815, and began to exhibit at the Royal Academy in the same year. He also exhibited work at the British Institution and the Royal Society of British Artists. Hayter established himself during the 1820s, with portraits of notable figures such as the Duke of Wellington and the opera singer, Giuditta Pasta. His portrait drawings, in chalks or crayons, became particularly popular, a number of them being engraved for *The Court Album, Portraits of the female aristocracy* (1850–57).

Hayter seems also to have specialised in the “exotic” portrait as his better-known portrait lithographs include those of the Hawaiian King Queen and Prime Minister published during their visit to London in 1824 (“Tamehameha 2d. His Majesty the King of the Sandwich Islands”, “Tamehamalu. Her Majesty the Queen of the Sandwich Islands”, and “Na Poki Prime Minister of the Sandwich Islands and his wife Liliha”).

Rarity

Despite an immense literature on the three Fuegian natives, images of them have always been derived from the three portraits by FitzRoy engraved by Landseer as one plate for the official account of the *Beagle* voyage (“York Minster in 1832”, “Jemmy Button in 1833”, and “Fuegia Basket. 1833”).

Those images are very familiar; on the other hand this striking Hayter group portrait seems never to have been reproduced in

the literature on Darwin and the *Beagle*. Indeed it is so rare on the market that we have traced only the example acquired by the State Library of New South Wales in 2007: that copy, without the printed caption present in this example transcribed above, is attributed in the Library’s cataloguing “to artist and lithographer John Hayter from another print held in a private collection inscribed at lower centre...”. That copy “in a private collection” is the example that we now offer for sale.

PROVENANCE: Private collection (New South Wales).

\$24,500

Matt Ridley, “The real origins of Darwin’s theory”, in *The Spectator*, 23 September 2009; Joseph Yannielli, “A Yabgan for the killing: murder, memory and Charles Darwin”, in *The British Journal for the History of Science*, 46 (3), 2013.



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