

HERPETOLOGICAL HISTORY

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The First Frog Logo in Advertising

The use of non-human animals to transmit human values is commonplace in the popular media and advertising. Animals thus speak or otherwise behave like humans, and it has been argued that humans subconsciously bond with animals, whether symbolic or real, a reflection of “innate tendency to focus on life and lifelike processes” (i.e., the Biophilia Hypothesis of Kellert and Wilson 1993). Further, zoomorphic figures may be acceptable to a large audience (including children) and enable the transmission of messages that bypass censorship rules and favorably represent multicultural societies (Williams 2014). Nevertheless, some media materials have been labeled anthropomorphic and may even be harmful for species conservation (Schneider 2012). Amphibians, particularly frogs, have featured prominently in human cultures worldwide (Adler 2003; Das 2011; Crump 2015), and some of the earliest use of amphibians in product advertisement can be found in the Victorian Era, chiefly the late 1800s, for European and U.S. products, ranging from throat lozenges to wines and liquors (see examples in Donaldson 1980). In this article, I discuss early use of frogs in product advertisement by Werner & Mertz, a German shoe-polish company, and arguably, the first use of a frog logo.

The most widely known frogs associated with a product must be the trio used by Budweiser Beer (Gentile et al. 2001). Introduced during the 1995 Super Bowl XXIX, the beer commercial is considered a classic, has a Wikipedia entry, and won several Clio Awards and a Silver Lion Award at the Cannes Film Festival. On the flip side, Chen et al. (2005) argued that perceived likeability of such advertisements, often involving animals, are a function of the positive affective responses evoked by such elements, and may predispose young people to consume alcohol.

The task of promoting beer was not the first, nor the only one, for amphibians in advertising. Frogs, and less frequently salamanders, have been used to sell a variety of products—from shoe polish (Erdal), shoes (Salamander), cars (BMW), car safety belts (Mazda), to wines (Le Faux Frog, Frog’s Leap, Toad Hollow), salsa (Frog Bone), cupcakes (Coqui), beer (Bad Frog, Blue Toad, Bullfrog, Hoppin’ Frog), software (G. Graphics), furniture (Rana), and many others (see examples in Fig. 1). Not all frog-related advertisements have been successful. When Coca-Cola was launched in China in the 1920s, it was not enthusiastically

received, the first translated phonetically phrased name being “bite the wax tadpole” (Alon et al. 2010).

Werner & Mertz was registered as a trading company in 1867 based in Mainz, Germany, for the manufacture of waxware. The company currently manufactures cleaning, personal care, and conservation products, with branches in Europe and the United States. After a series of fires that destroyed the factory, it was moved to Ingelheimer Aue on the left bank of Mainz in 1917 and, in the following year, the “Froschturm” (“frog tower” in German)



FIG. 1. Amphibians in product logos on a postcard issued to commemorate the Fifth International Bornean Frog Race, 2016.

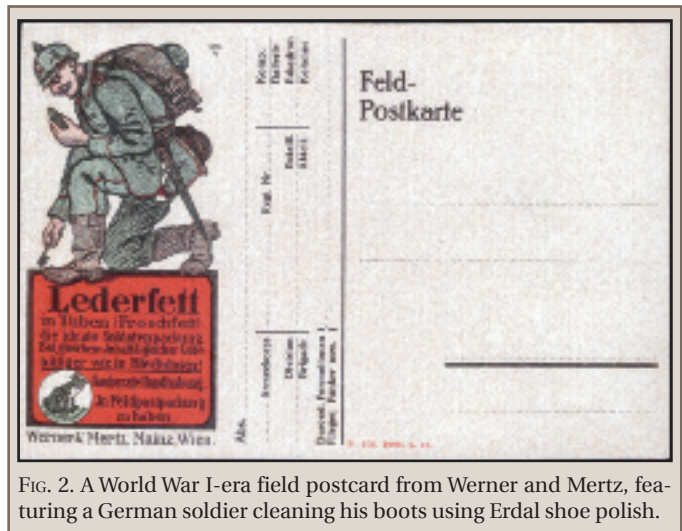


FIG. 2. A World War I-era field postcard from Werner and Mertz, featuring a German soldier cleaning his boots using Erdal shoe polish.

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