



Young woman (Needles, California, 1900; 31 x 23 cm.).

Mohave Indian Images and the Artist Maynard Dixon

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THE northern part of the Colorado River Valley which today serves as the Arizona-California border was the center of the homeland of the Mohave Indians in the time before first Spanish contact with the River Indians shortly after 1540. The Mohave geographical situation in a way ran parallel to their cultural position, that is, they shared customs with groups which could be described properly and separately as Californians, to the west, or peoples of the Southwest, on the east. What traditionally sets the Mohave apart from most California Indians, for example, is that they practiced a form of floodplain riverine agriculture, had a fairly definite national social organization rather than an idea of small tribelet independence, and emphasized use of pottery much more than basketry for their various storage, carrying, or cooking vessels. In addition, they were certainly much more warlike than any of their California neighbors to the west and north.

Since the Mohave suffered only indirectly from missionization and the enervating influences of the subsequent Gold Rush in northern California, they have survived to the twentieth century as a much reduced, but still cohesive, group and have been the subject of many studies by anthropologists or other scholars. Chief among these have been A.L. Kroeber, George Devereux, K.M. Stewart, and W.J. Wallace. One result of Kroeber's Mohave research, begun about 70 years ago, was the

comprehensive summary of their culture, which formed a chapter or chapters in his *Handbook of the Indians of California*, first published in 1925. Following Kroeber by many years, Devereux produced a number of monographs during a 25-year period beginning about 1937, most of his work pertaining to the psychology or psychiatry of the Mohave (e.g., Devereux 1967). More recently, Stewart and Wallace have written numbers of articles on material aspects of Mohave culture.

Despite their isolated position along a river which, like the Nile, here runs through a region extremely arid on either side, it happens that the Mohave, or at least their close Yuman kinsmen to the south along the Colorado, were the subject of one of the earliest substantial accounts of California Indians. Father Pedro Font, chaplain and chronicler of Juan Bautista de Anza's second expedition to California in 1775, produced some useful factual descriptions of the Colorado River peoples, although his references to their spiritual qualities were superficial and surely not very accurate when compared to those of later reporters. Unfortunately, no portrait sketches of any of the River Indians are known from this time.

Probably the first significant notice of the Colorado River peoples by Anglo-Americans involved the Mohave, for a Yuman Yavapai group, sometimes called "Mohave-Apache," had, in 1851, taken captive an immigrant wagon traversing their territory. They made

off with two White girls, the Oatman sisters, who later came to the Mohave proper. Olive, the older of the two girls, survived the ordeal, and about four years after the capture was returned to Fort Yuma. Subsequently, an illustrated book (Stratton 1859) was published which described Olive's life with the Mohave; the illustrations were naive and schematic drawings, having little to do with the true appearance of the Mohave.

About 1856, Charles Nahl, one of the most renowned artists or illustrators of life in California in the 1850's and 1860's, especially in the Mother Lode country, recreated the scene of the attack on the Oatman family by "Mohave-Apache." The Indians in this painting (cf. Stevens and Arkelian 1976) are easily recognizable as in the style of Nahl, that is, they resemble or are almost identical with natives of Central California with whom Nahl was most closely familiar. In any case, his painting of the massacre scene was surely based upon impression only.

Before Nahl, in 1853-54, H.B. Möllhausen, a German artist, did some excellent drawings of the Mohave in connection with several expeditions sponsored by the United States Government. One of his pictures appeared later in an official government publication (Ives 1861); this included portraits of three Mohave Indians, one of them *Irretabe* (also spelled *Irataba*, among others), a well-known and remembered chief of the tribe (cf. Woodward 1950). His was surely among the first *named* likenesses of California Indians ever published; a woodcut portrait of him, taken after a photograph, appeared in *Harper's Weekly* in 1864. There were several other capable artists who depicted the Colorado River Indians around this time, but Möllhausen probably was best known among them. His drawings were copied and imitated in many journals until the advent of photo-engraving about forty years later. By this time interest in western Indians (even the Mohaves) by Anglo-Americans may be said to have

languished, probably because they were then thought to be effectively dispossessed of their land or safely out of the way in reservations. One exception to this was in the sometimes ludicrous or even perjorative drawings of Mohave Indians by Lt. A.G. Tassin, who in 1877 submitted a casual sort of report, never formally published, apparently, on the "Forestry, Elevation, Rainfall and Drainage of the Colorado Valley" to the U.S. Government.

In the early 1890's, Ben Wittick, one of the pioneer photographers of the Southwest, took some excellent pictures of the Mohave—today most of them seem to be in the collections of the Museum of New Mexico (founded 1909). These pictures, whether classified as portraits or scenes from everyday life, had not, so far as I know, been published until several years ago. K.M. Stewart (1968) for example, reproduced some of Wittick's pictures as background for an article on the Mohave.

Other series of Mohave photographs from around 1900, taken by various persons, ultimately came into the Southwest Museum in Los Angeles, founded in 1907. These also were not published until years later, at least as a collection. In *Almost Ancestors* (1968), Theodora Kroeber and Robert Heizer presented the fruits of a thorough search of likely California sources (with a few exceptions) of old portrait photographs of Indians which were still in good enough condition to be legibly reproduced. Included in this volume were some 25 pictures of Mohave Indians out of a total of 117 for all of California natives.

During the course of his ethnographic study of Mohave people in or around 1905, A.L. Kroeber photographed some of his informants, giving to several the native Mohave name, and to others European names by which they were known, such as "Paul." The Southwest Museum pictures presented by Theodora Kroeber and Heizer do not give any personal names to the Mohave at all, perhaps because the subjects were simply not asked their names in the beginning. Some of A.L. Kroeber's 1908

pictures appear in his *Handbook* (1925), and these were included, where possible, with additional pictures taken by him of the Mohave, in *Almost Ancestors*.

The sketches by Maynard Dixon photocopied for the present article were all done in 1900. They form an admirable supplement to the photographic series of the Southwest Museum and of the A.L. Kroeber pictures catalogued in the University of California's Lowie Museum of Anthropology, Berkeley. The Dixon pictures of the Mohave (and of one Yuma Indian) have never before been exhibited or published in a group. Many of them are of identifiable persons, the names executed in the simple orthography employed by Dixon. Their greatest significance probably lies in the bold depiction of character, strength, and often sadness shown in the subjects' faces, which cannot be captured by the relatively impersonal and unstudied camera snapshot. They also represent a footnote in the biography of a man who after about 1914 became known as one of the most prominent painters of the American Southwest or of Indians elsewhere in North America; in a true sense he was among the worthy successors of George Catlin (1796-1872) or Frederick Remington (1861-1909).

Maynard Dixon (1875-1946) began his professional artistic career as a newspaper and magazine illustrator in San Francisco. His first published drawing appeared in *Overland Monthly* in 1893. When he was barely 21 years old he visited the foothills of the Sierra Nevada and there made some excellent sketches (see Lummis 1898) of surviving members of the Maidu tribe, the first notable casualties of the Anglo-American depredations of the Gold Rush years. Four or five years later Dixon was in the vicinity of Fort Mohave, Arizona (on the eastern bank of the Colorado River) at the suggestion of his friend C.F. Lummis, editor of the magazine *Land of Sunshine* and founder of the Southwest Museum. At about this time (1900) Lummis took some Mohave photo-

graphs which were later deposited in that museum. The Dixon sketches reproduced here are part of the collection of Edith Hamlin (Dixon), a painter in her own right and widow of Maynard, who has preserved them and kindly allowed their presentation in these pages. Some 21 drawings, in pencil or crayon were all done during a period of but one or two weeks in or near Fort Mohave or at Needles, California.

These Mohave pictures, together with the earlier Sierra Nevada Indian drawings, thus are the earliest Indian sketches made by Dixon. They already foreshadow or perhaps in a way strengthen the idea of the major talent for which he was widely recognized fifteen or so years later and up to the time of his death in 1946. The definitive biographical book on Dixon by Burnside (1974) does not include any of these Mohave or Maidu drawings, but concentrates more on Dixon's work during his better-known period as a painter and distinguished muralist rather than a free-lance illustrator. Comparison of these Mohave drawings with the photographs in the book *Almost Ancestors* will allow the reader to appreciate readily both the accuracy and truth made possible by the mind and hand of a sensitive observer and the achievement almost of another dimension not often apparent in photographic portraiture. The drawings are at once a contribution to the developmental picture of a great artist and to ethnographic studies of the Mohave Indian as well.

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Ny-ól-t-h, grinding maize. Note metal pail at side (Ft. Mohave, 1900; 28 x 20 cm.).



Tattooed woman, unnamed. Note that most women in portraits shown here have chin tattooing. (Ft. Mohave, 1900; 24 x 24 cm.).



Two heads (Needles, California, 1900; 16 x 14 cm.).



Woman resting (Ft. Mohave, 1900; 19 x 23.5 cm.).



Ko-mo-lo-ne-vák (Ft. Mohave, 1900; 33 x 24 cm.).



Ti-fl-eh (Ft. Mohave, 1900; 19 x 13 cm.).



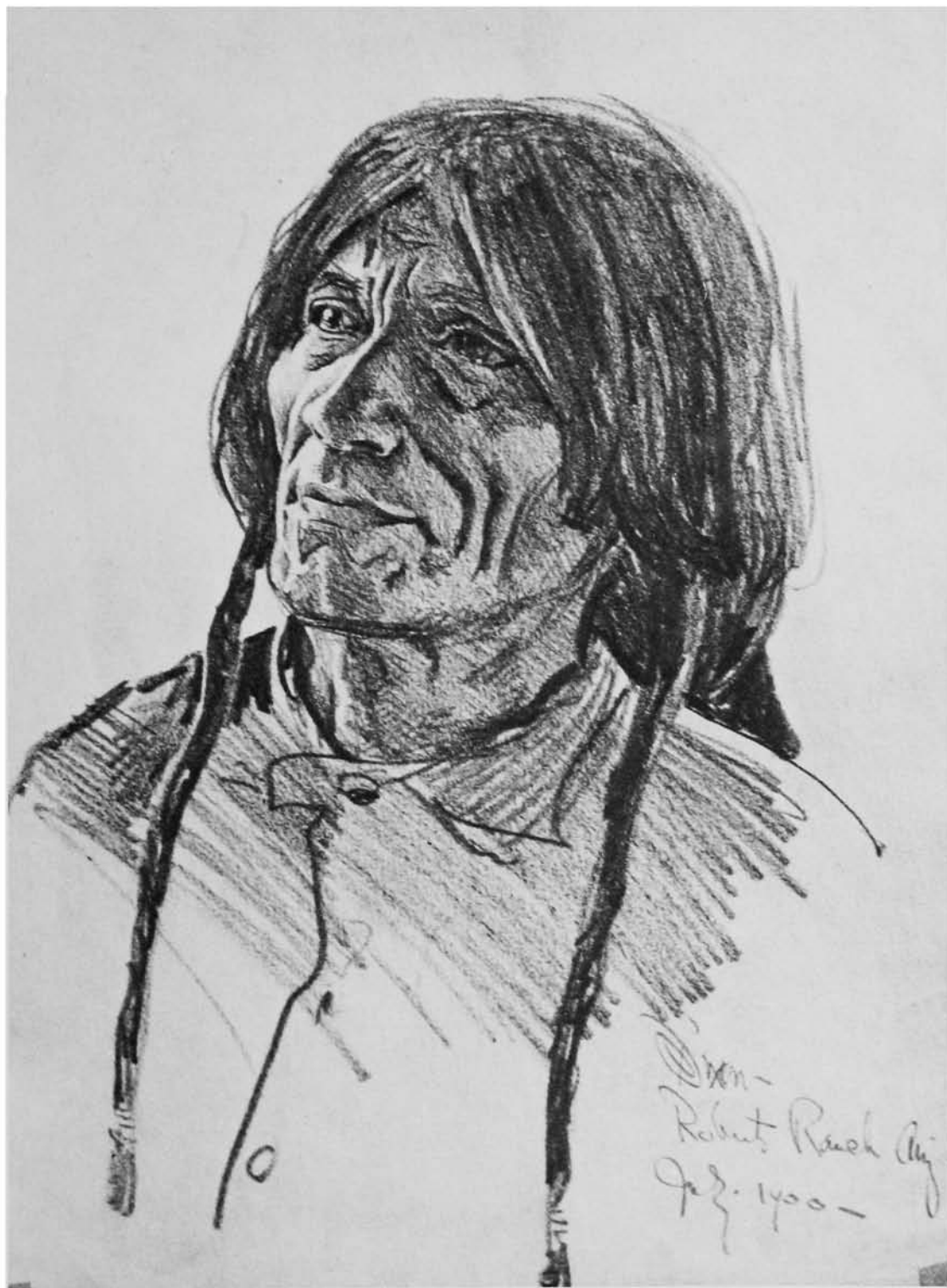
Five Indian head types (Needles, California, 1900; 22 x 16 cm.).



Mes-i-ké-ber (Ft. Mohave, 1900; 28 x 20 cm.).



A-há-kwa-mahta ("Muddy Water") (Ft. Mohave, 1900; 27 x 20 cm.).



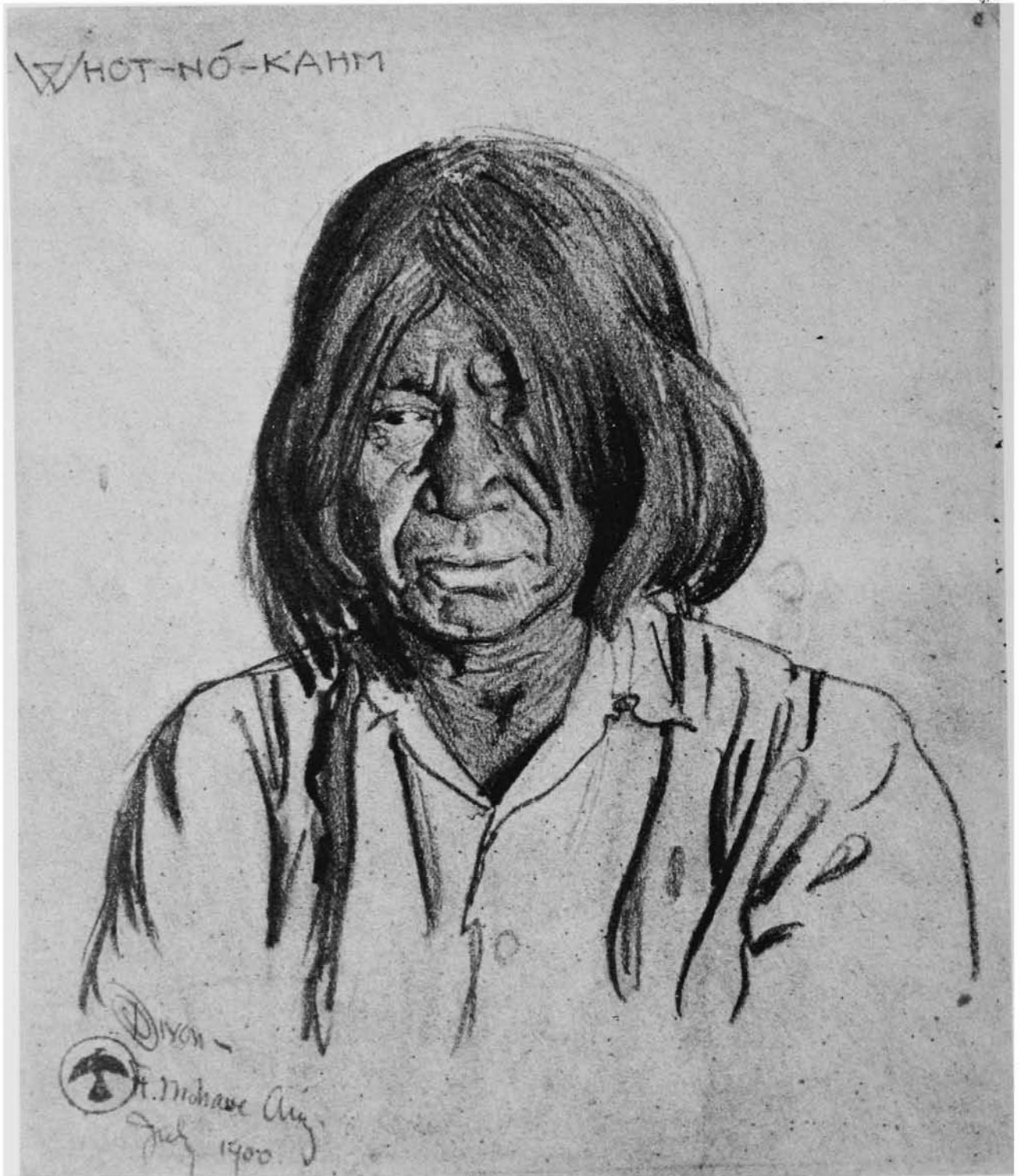
Yuma man, unnamed (Roberts Ranch, near Ft. Mohave, 1900; 27 x 20 cm.).



Sa-áh-nyi-mek (Ft. Mohave, 1900; 31 x 24 cm.).



Woman, unnamed, with little or no traces of tattooing on chin (Ft. Mohave, 1900; 32 x 24 cm.).



Whot-nó-kahm (Ft. Mohave, 1900; 25 x 20 cm.).



"Two heads" (Ft. Mohave, 1900; 21 x 18 cm.).



Kwi-lehp-i-lehp (Ft. Mohave, 1900; 26 x 18 cm.).



Mú-ss (Ft. Mohave, 1900; 28 x 20 cm.).



Pan-a-chi-ta (Ft. Mohave, 1900; 28 x 23 cm.).



O-li-án (Ft. Mohave, 1900; 26 x 24 cm.).



Woman coming to traders. Head load is carried in blanket tied by four corners. (Near Ft. Mohave, 1900; 20 x 28 cm.).

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Kám-ti (Ft. Mohave, 1900; 20 x 13 cm.).