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# A. G. Tassin's 1877 Manuscript Account of the Mohave Indians

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*U.S. Army Lieutenant A. G. Tassin, stationed on the lower Colorado River in 1877, prepared this previously unpublished account of the Mohave Indians. Although Tassin's account reflects many of the ethnic stereotypes or misunderstandings of his era, it is among the earliest detailed ethnographic descriptions of the Mohave. It suggests interesting insights into their history, material culture, social organization, and belief systems.*

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AUGUSTUS GABRIEL DE VIVIER TASSIN'S 14-page treatise on the Mohave Indians, with its accompanying five pages of drawings, exists as an unpublished, handwritten manuscript (NAA MS 1122) at the National Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution. Originally entitled "Report on the Forestry, Elevation, Rainfall, and Drainage of the Colorado Valley Together with an Aperçu of Its Principal Inhabitants the Mahhaos Indians," it represents one of the earliest systematic ethnographic descriptions of the Mohave Indians and contributes significantly to a select corpus of early explorers' accounts, including Francisco Garcés in 1774–1775, Jedediah Smith in 1826, Lorenzo Sitgreaves in 1851, Amiel W. Whipple in 1854, Joseph C. Ives in 1858, and Balduin Möllhausen in 1854 and 1858. It was never published, however, and remains until now relatively unknown. A. L. Kroeber never appears to have come across it despite his keen interest in the Mohave. Kenneth M. Stewart (1983) overlooked it in his chapter in the *Handbook of North American Indians*, citing Bourke (1889) as the nearest thing to a nineteenth-century anthropological account.

Augustus Tassin (October 12, 1842–October 19, 1893) was born in Paris, France, and likely immigrated to the United States at a young age, but apparently not before receiving some military training (Thrapp 1988–1994:1403). He was living in Leopold, Indiana when the Civil War broke out. Just five months into the war and just short of his nineteenth birthday, he enlisted on September 15, 1861 as a first lieutenant in D Company of the 35th Indiana Infantry. By the end of the war he had

risen to the rank of full colonel, and was later awarded several honorary breveted ranks for his meritorious service in the Battle of Missionary Ridge and the Atlanta and Nashville campaigns. After the war he married Mary Tilley Tassin and had a daughter, Ethel, and two sons, Wirt and Algeron.

Tassin received a voluntary discharge from the U.S. Army on December 1, 1870 and served in the French Army during the Franco-Prussian War. After returning to the U.S., he reenlisted as a private in the Signal Corps in 1872 and was commissioned a second lieutenant in the 12th Infantry in 1873. He continued a military career for most of the rest of his life, attaining the rank of first lieutenant in 1878 and captain in 1890. Most of his deployments between 1872 and 1891 were in the West, as the U.S. Army sought to keep the peace between Native Americans and Euro-American settlers. In his early years, his duties apparently included extensive travel on horseback as an Indian scout. His assignments included Camp Halleck, Nevada; Camp Wright, California; Camp Mohave, Fort Whipple, Fort Thomas, and Camp Apache, Arizona Territory; Fort Sully, Dakota Territory; Fort Bennett, South Dakota; and Fort Yates, North Dakota, among others. There were also short stints in Virginia, New York, and Washington, D.C. during his military career. Military records indicate he received several leaves of absence in his later years due to poor health. He took an assignment as Indian Agent in 1890 with the Colorado River Indian Agency in Parker, Arizona, where he died at the age of 51. He is buried in Arlington National Cemetery, along with his wife and one son.

It was during his time with the 12th U.S. Infantry and as Commanding Officer of Company A, Camp Mojave (1876-1882), Arizona Territory, that in response to instructions from Pacific Division of the Military Engineering Office, he composed his treatise on the vegetation, hydrology, weather, human geography, and ethnography of the lower Colorado River. Dated October 31, 1877, the 44-page hand-written manuscript on lined paper is meticulously written out with few corrections and no revisions. Similarities between the handwriting and Tassin's own signature on the cover letter and at the end of the report suggest that it was entirely produced by him. There is no reason to suspect that Tassin did not compose this work, although there may have been other contributors. Section 3 on the Mohave Indians is by far the longest section of the report. Tassin may well have had the opportunity to read previous descriptions of the Mohave, especially those by Whipple et al. (1855) and in the annual reports of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs (beginning in 1865), although his composition is entirely original with its own literary devices. His writing ability and keen interest in Native American culture is clearly evident in many later published pieces based on his experience as an Indian scout attached to Camp Wright in Round Valley, Mendocino County, California and other assignments in the West. His two-part treatise on the religion and mythology of the Concow Maidu is quite detailed, although that is a much more literary piece, written in the first person as if told by a tribal member (Tassin 1884a, 1884b). His sympathies toward the plight of the Indians of Round Valley were made very clear in his reminiscences as an Indian scout in 1874 at Camp Wright, based in part on his official reports as scout (Tassin 1887a-e, 1888a). His experiences at Camp Mojave are also expressed in several semi-fictionalized works (Tassin 1888b, 1889a). Other works chronicle in similar literary fashion his postings in Arizona and Dakota territories (Tassin 1989b-e), as well as subjects unrelated to his career.

An appendix to his report includes eight hand-drawn scale maps of various sections of the lower Colorado River with accompanying descriptions of the geography. They include the mouth of the river, Yuma, Ehrenberg, Aubrey, Mohave Valley, Cottonwood Island, Stone's Ferry, and Colorado River Valley. A page of oblique sketches around Fort Mojave highlight the dramatic

landscapes, including the fort itself. Of particular importance are plans of Fort Yuma, Fort Mohave, and Ehrenberg. The ethnographic illustrations (reproduced here, with Tassin's captions) are clearly the product of an untrained hand, although the maps and oblique views are much more detailed and sophisticated. It is likely that Tassin himself was the sole artist, although another may have been involved. Similar style maps of Camp John A. Rucker, Arizona Territory, and general maps of Arizona and New Mexico territories (1878-1880) at Yale University are attributed to Tassin.

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### THE MAHHAOS<sup>1</sup> OR MOHAVES INDIANS

Although an historical notice of its inhabitants hardly comes within the scope of a report on the "forestry" of any particular section it may be safely assumed that any paper on the upper part of the Colorado Valley which would fail to include the Mohaves Indians within its limits would be, to use a somewhat hackneyed figure, very much like the play of Hamlet with Hamlet left out. It has been thought that after casting a retrospective glance at their early history a short description of their customs, mode of living, etc., might prove interesting, if not valuable, and in order to further elucidate the subject and throw some light upon the obscure points of an article of this nature, necessarily hurried, a few pen-sketches have been appended, which, at best, crude like the text, possess at least the merit of being true to nature.

In the year 1519 Fernando Cortez landed with his fleet at Tabasco and began his famous conquest of the Aztec empire and in August 1521 the stronghold of the Montezumas was overthrown and Mexico became a Spanish province.

Thence the Spaniards explored the entire coast from the Isthmus of Darien to Port Royal in South Carolina and became acquainted with the country west of the Mississippi (the ancient Meschacébé) as far north as New Mexico and Missouri and east of that river traversed the Gulf States as far as the mountain ranges of Tennessee and North Carolina.

We read in the old Spanish records of that period that fabulous stories of treasure supposed to be found in the "terra incognita" now comprised within the territory

of Arizona inflamed the cupidity of the Spaniards and thence exploring parties were equipped and started for the New Eldorado.<sup>2</sup>

The first of these parties struck the Colorado river at a point near the "El vado de los Padres"—the Priests' ford—and on their return described the wonders of the Grand Cañon but as a financial operation the results do not appear to have been satisfactory.

The second party reached the river at a point near the present site of Yuma City, opposite Fort Yuma.

The third took a middle course and striking the edge of the Colorado basin entered the valley by following the base of the mountain range at what is now known as Mohave Cañon, or the Needles, almost on the line of the 35th Parallel.

In his official report the Officer in Command of the party stated that oppressed with fatigue and goaded by hunger and thirst, after many days of toil, danger and suffering, they came upon a large and powerful tribe of Indians living upon the banks of a great river, the men and women of splendid "physique," being nearly eight (8) feet in height, calling themselves "Mojaves" and with whom, being treated with great hospitality and reverence, they remained long enough to recuperate and then descended the left bank of the river uniting with the other section of the expedition near the present boundary between the United States and Mexico.

The story of these parties can hardly be paralleled in the annals of suffering and peril but there is nothing to show that they returned to their starting point any richer in this world's goods than when they started from it.

We have thus far, by direct official evidence, traced the Mohaves for 356 years upon the same ground where they still live and have their being.

And yet how few traces of their passage have those who have gone before left behind them! Their footprints upon the sands of time have been as evanescent as those traced by their descendants at the present day upon the shifting sands of the Colorado deserts!

So far, of the many theories advanced in regard to the origin of the Indians, that of Asiatic descent is the most generally accepted and as it is not the design of the writer of this short description to presume to start a new one he proposes to follow the majority in its verdict until ethnologists, or other scientists, arrive at a settlement of the open question.

Be that as it may it is a notable fact that the ancient Assyrians' peculiar manner of curling the hair still obtains among the Mohaves and certain old stone carving in the dark recesses at the base of "Dead Mountain"<sup>3</sup>—the Hades of the Mohaves—has quite a family resemblance with the hieroglyphics of the Egyptian Isis and Osiris.

Whatever the ancient Mahhaos—in Spanish Mojaves and rendered Mohaves in our vernacular—may have been the present remnant of this once powerful tribe numbers, as nearly as it can be ascertained, a little more than 3,000, part of whom are now living on the Colorado Indian Reservation about 100 miles below Camp Mojave and the rest in the valley named after them in the immediate vicinity of the post to which they look for support against their fiercer neighbors.<sup>4</sup>

They are peacefully engaged in agricultural pursuits and entirely self-supporting, hence, as far as they are concerned, no necessity exists for the Indian Reservation at which they are supposed to be fed.

These Indians are looked upon as the finest, physically, on the American continent, surpassing even the Sioux in manly appearance. As already stated they are remarkably docile and peaceful, there being but one instance on record in which they became engaged in actual hostilities with the regular forces of the United States. This was in 1856 when some emigrants who had helped themselves to some corn and melons belonging to the Indians were attacked by them and one or two of the Whites killed.<sup>5</sup>

This led to a fight between a detachment of Soldiers under Captain Armistead, then of the Sixth Infantry, and a stronger body of Mohaves in which the Indians came out best and the troops would have fared badly had not reinforcements arrived in time on the field from Fort Mohave which had just been established upon the recommendation of Lieutenant A. W. Whipple who was the first regular officer to bring the Mohaves into notice by publishing some curious details on their customs and idiom.<sup>6</sup>

### CUSTOMS OF THE MAHHAOS

The Government of the Mahhaos is hereditary—a duality composed of the War and Peace Chiefs. In times of peace the last is supreme, a sort of reigning legislative power.

War once resolved upon and declared, however, the War Chief becomes the untrammelled and absolute executive power whose mandates must be obeyed unquestioningly.

In war as well as in peace the deliberations and conclusions of a permanent Senate—composed of the old and experienced men of the tribe—materially influence the decisions of either Chieftain.

The tribe is divided into small bands, each under its own Captain, feudal Barons without MagnaCharta, owing blind obedience to the head Chief ruling at the time.<sup>7</sup>

These bands—large families whose strength depends upon the number of their relatives—generally abide together in small villages apart from one another—very much like the States in the Union minus the doctrine of State sovereignty.

These villages are composed of winter and summer huts, as shown in the sketch, in each of which a family abides.<sup>8</sup> Although the customs of the Mahhaos warrant polygamy it is but seldom practiced, many squaws having lived with the man of their choice for some thirty or forty years and raised large families of children who grow up around them.

As a rule these squaws are chaste,<sup>9</sup> prostitution existing only of late years among the young squaws who have become contaminated by contact with worthless whites who have found a home—often a refuge—among them, the result being the scourge of the human race—venereal diseases.

For here, as with the Northern California Indians—the subject of preceding reports—the record of the Whites in their intercourse with the Indians is one of which they have but little reason to be proud.

The law of divorce is very much simplified where necessity exists. If the offender belongs to the female sex she is driven away by her husband to find a home with another man—if so willing. If the man is guilty the squaw leaves him—if so willing also—without further ado.

Thus, like the majority of the Indian tribes on the American continent, the Mahhaos, starting from the comprehensive americanism of “Number One,” not only reach the family and then the tribal distinction as in the old patriarchal times, but retain other patriarchal customs also.

The villages of the Mahhaos dot the valley named after them all the way from the settlement of Hardyville

to the Cañon of the Needles—an area of some 45 miles in length with a width ranging from one to eight miles. They are surrounded by little plots of cultivated ground varying from one to three acres in which they raise corn, melons, pumpkins and a species of bean very succulent and nutritious and eaten when green. They are vegetarians in diet seldom using meat<sup>10</sup> although it has been stated that a dead Government mule is considered quite a rare bit among them when they come upon such a windfall. The well known tenacity of life of the average Government mule, however, leads the writer to the belief that the “bit” is “rare” in more ways than one. The teeth of these Indians are much worn showing that they are much used in masticating food. Tooth-ache among them is almost unknown, the writer knowing of but one instance in a three years tour of observation.

The supplies raised by these houses do not last long and their principal sustenance is the mesquite bean—both varieties of which are shown in the appended sketch.

Harvest is a season of rejoicing and is opened by what is called the “Feast of the Corn.”<sup>11</sup> Men, women and children meet at a central point and the festivities begin with a general dance lasting from one to three days and nights which is afterward repeated from house to house feasting upon the newly gathered corn all the time.

Timing themselves with remarkable punctuality the Hualpais, their neighbors, who live principally by hunting in the surrounding mountains, come down at this time and enjoy a sort of forced hospitality which generally leaves the poor Mahhaos with empty larders.

As if the hungry Hualpais were not enough wandering parties of Maricopas also chose this particular time for friendly visits and between the two but very little of the fruits of toil are left for the toilers whose only salvation is a gradual coming back to the old “stand-by” the mesquite-bean.<sup>12</sup>

These are gathered in long willow baskets by the squaws in the month of August—at maturity—and stored away for the winter in a kind of gabion shown in the sketch, a certain number of which are ranged side by side in a circle and then covered with sand.<sup>13</sup>

The largest gabion is used in constructing their winter dwellings, or huts, and is rendered necessary by the sandy nature of the soil upon which their villages stand.

A hole, some three feet deep and of suitable dimensions, is dug; the gabions are filled with the

displaced soil and used as walls, the whole being rafted over and then thickly covered with soil.

The Mahhaos are experts in the manufacture of a certain kind of pottery the principal article of which is the “Olla” or water pot much used by the Whites also in making the warm and turbid river-water cooler by evaporation.<sup>14</sup>

The long flat dish in the sketch is their principal table-ware; in it an “olla podrida” of mesquite-bean flour and water melon seeds with other ingredients which it is not material to mention, is poured after having being grinded in a rolling stone mortar and boiled.

Dinner being announced by a loud whoop from the house-squaw the family forms a squatting circle around the dish filled to the brim with eager eyes gazing upon it in gladsome anticipation—the right hand of the “Pater familias” is then extended rapidly toward it and a handful scooped out and carried to the mouth and taken inwardly by a peculiar compound motion half suction and half inhalation producing a familiar and peculiar noise acting like a bugle-call to “peas-upon-a-trencher” on the house dogs who gather around the “hospitable board” at the welcome sound.

This is repeated, turn about, by the whole family, until the last of the mess has disappeared when the guests turn over on their backs for a “siesta” of a couple of hours to accelerate digestion.

### [LANGUAGE]

The language of the Mahhoas, polysyllabic, melodious and rich, whatever it may have been in its original purity, is fast disappearing by adulteration, or rather by the admission of many words belonging in part or in “toto” to other languages and standing for things of which they had previously no knowledge; or alien names compounded with their own designation for certain things. This is self-evident, for instance, in the appellation “Carreta-avunyé” by which they designate a wagon-road—the first part of which is a perversion of the Spanish for wagon, tacked to the Indian name for road or trail—“avunyé.” Previous to the advent of the Spaniards the last part only of the name was used, but having once seen a wagon and ascertained its name and noticing the wide track made by it they designated it thenceforward with their own name for road coupled to

the one they had just learned for wagon. Never having seen a steamboat until the steamers of the Colorado Steam Navigation Company, or Ives Explorer, ascended the river, they inquired the name of the nondescript and the word “vapor” was incorporated in, and became part of, their language. And so on with a multitude of words standing for so many new things of which they had previously no knowledge, which they first perverted and then appropriated.

The following table of words, selected from the pure idiom, may be interesting.<sup>15</sup>

Hair	Nivetkora
Hand	Isa-lié
Teeth	I-éé-too
Nose	I-éé-hó
Eye	I-eé-ko
Face	I-to
My - Mine	Y-nzép
Father	Maccoopé
Mother	Eti-tié
Sister	Y-nia-ké
Brother	Ick-act-té
Bad	A-luaké
Good	A-otké
Tattooing	Ya-so-mé
Sky	Amaya
Large	Tatai
Very	Ta-hunu
Laugh	TchigoVarum
Baby	Homurito
Bird	Tick-na-o
Fish	Hath-ché
Water	A-hah
Melon	Hook-tah
Day	Anyak
Night	Tenampkéo
Light	Hotchoké
Coyote	Hooktaré
River	Hab-illé
Dead Mountain	Avi-ko-acté
Dead	Ik-ho-ich
Dancing	It-ri-mack
Singing	Is-var-ké
Corn	Tut-is-ké
Eating	A-mam

Drinking	It-hiné
Walking	It-huké
Moon	Alia
Sun	Aniá
Star	Hamosé
House	Temaupké
M.[Mesquite] Beans	A-he-sé
Woman	Tema-ayué
Man	He-pah
Mountain	Avé-kuckoba
Sand	Sel-ya-umaté
Trail	Avunyé
Cottonwood	Haha-avenoké
Grass	Het-vi-villé
“Olla” or Pot	opro-anaté
Cloud	Hick-wé
Foot	Himmie
M. Sheep	Amō
Bear	Hatcha
Piss ant	Tchama-dulé
Big ant	Hanu-pooka
Bone	Geni-a-é

### RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

The old Aztec empire after becoming a Spanish appendage was soon brought under the rule of the Roman Church and at the beginning of the eighteenth century its priests had penetrated as far as the coast counties of Southern California, spreading thence into the interior of the vast and dangerous section since divided into the States of California and Nevada and the Territories of New Mexico and Arizona.

Upward of two scores of missions were established along the Pacific from that of San Bernardino<sup>16</sup> to that of San Francisco. In their efforts at propagation the holy fathers made it a point to change the old names of the tribes and christen them anew after some saint either picked out at random out of the Calendar or some especial favorite or patron of the different communities. Hence we have the “Akhatchamas,”<sup>17</sup> who coming under the sway of the mission of San Juan Capistrano became known thenceforward as the San Juanefios and it requires some degree of ingenuity and patience in researches to recognize the old “Guitchims” under the appellation of San Luiseños from the mission of San Luis Rey.

By the same process of Christianization the “Kameyas” and “Tackhtams” became appendages in name, as well as in everything else, of the mission of San Bernardino.

The resistance of the Indians, however, to the new state of affairs, increased in strength in the same ratio as the distance between their abode and the mission which claimed spiritual and temporal jurisdiction over them and the Mahhaos, Pah-Utes, Chemehuevis, Yumas and Cocopahs never came under priestly rule—or if they did its effect on them was so small as to be imperceptible.

True, some wandering disciples of Loyola, with the cross in one hand and the rules of the Spanish Inquisition in the other, penetrated in their proselytizing zeal as far as, and beyond the Colorado river, but their efforts generally ended in the cremation or crucifixion of the Padres. It has been shrewdly suggested that these reformers incurred the enmity of the Indians by practicing different morals than those they preached, but be that as it may their endeavors at imparting the teaching of their religion were fruitless and the Colorado Indians retained their old beliefs as well as old customs.

The difference, to an uninterested observer, would appear to have been after all somewhat insignificant. The ancient Mahhaos, as far back as they can be traced, had a tolerably good idea of the golden rule—of doing to others as they would be done by.

They believed in a Being, all powerful and good, who ruled the Indian destinies from his home above the clouds in the “Okumbova”—Heaven—and that good deeds were the “Hatchil-kuya avunyé” or trail to Heaven.<sup>18</sup>

That in this home, invisible like He amid the “Hamoséis” or Stars, a notch-stick was kept for each and every Indian and that the good were rewarded and the bad punished after death.

The cold and wind-swept summit of Ives’ “Dead Mountain” above Mount Newberry was the throne of the evil spirit whose duty, in obedience to a higher mandate, was to scourge with the ever-recurring memory of their misdeeds the shades of the bad Indians who wandered, shivering and disconsolate, amid the dark, rocky recesses at the base of the gloomy mountain.<sup>19</sup>

Farther down the river, where Aubrey now stands—the one saloon with billiards attached—and just beyond the southern bank of euphonious “Bill William’s Fork”

rises a singular looking, low capped mountain of pleasing aspect, sunlit and bright and where it is seldom cold and stormy and there, at eventide, the blessed dead gathered under the softened rays of the setting sun.<sup>20</sup>

The Northern California Indians in the vicinity of Camp Gaston in Trinity and of Camp Wright in Mendocino County have a tradition or myth that away back in far off times a great fire was sent upon the earth by Wah-no-nopem, the Great Spirit, in which all but two of their ancestors perished.<sup>21</sup> The earth being repopled again and its children, with time, becoming as bad and wicked as before the waters from heaven came down upon them and but few escaped. Among the Mahhaos the great fire is unknown but they believe that there came a great flood once which drove their forefathers into the neighboring mountains and that many—nearly all, were drowned. They also associate the idea of wickedness as the cause of the disaster. The Coyote, which among the upper Pacific Coast Indians plays an important part, being clothed somewhat confusedly with the mixed attributes of the Deity and devil, loses its importance among the Mahhaos and becomes what he is in reality—a despicable, sneaking thief.<sup>22</sup>

Very nearly, in other respects, the same superstitions exist among them which obtain among the upper country Indians and it is somewhat singular that the writer has found with the Mahhaos, with some slight modifications, certain superstitious fables which he came across in the “Landes” of lower Brittany in France; on the banks of the Rhine, and again in the “Swartzwold” or Black Forest.

No less singular is the fact that they have named many of the constellations after certain animals in common with the old eastern sages—as “Amó” or Mountain Sheep for Orion—“Hatcha” for Ursus Major or Dipper; “Hatchil-kuya-avunyé” or “trail of Heaven[?]” for the Milky way;<sup>23</sup> each and all in fact displaying a remarkable similarity with those retained by ourselves and probably acquired from the same source.

In the burial rites of the Mahhaos cremation is the invariable rule.<sup>24</sup> A deep grave is dug and filled with dry twigs and billets of wood, the body, dressed in the best wearing apparel of the deceased—not much to speak of at best—is laid thereon and the torch applied to the funeral pyre. In a few hours a few white, charred, half calcined bones resting among the ashes at the bottom of the grave is all that is left. The grave is then refilled and

the last remains of the dead disappear from the sight, if not from the memory, of the living.

All articles of clothing worn by the dead, and by his relatives also are then burned and the hair of the relations is cut short in sign of mourning. Somewhat on the principle of widow's weeds when the hair has regained its full length—the friends cease to mourn for the departed.

The deceased's favorite horse is also sacrificed to the waves[?]. This is to be charged to the transportation account for whether the dead goes to Heaven or Hell he must have a pony to carry him thither and enable him to make a decent appearance in his new abode.

There are several Medecine-men in the tribe and the practice of these bronzed Esculapiuses is not without its perils whatever it may be in professional diagnosis and success.<sup>25</sup>

A doctor in good practice must be invariably successful in his treatment—if he fails once he meets with frowning looks from the relatives of the deceased which are the precursory shadows of coming evil—twice—and the enmity becomes general and his practice and emoluments decrease accordingly. The third time the tribe takes the matter in hand by strangulating the poor devil whose late patient has scarcely time to grow cold before the Doctor is sent to keep him company. The worst of the dismal joke is that there is no backing out of the profession. The rule of once a Doctor, always a Doctor is unalterable. There is no jumping about as with us, from a cobbler to a Methodist Preacher.

Since the troops of which the writer is part have been stationed at Camp Mohave a case occurred in which nothing but the interposition of the Commanding Officer, Major Woodruff,<sup>26</sup> and of the other officers at the post, saved the unlucky Doctor's life who, in default of death, was expatriated.

Like all other Indians, the Mahhaos are very superstitious in regard to the dead. They ascribe dreams to invisible visits from their deceased relatives and friends who come to whisper to them tidings of joy or warnings of coming fate; and it may be taken for certain that dreams materially influence their actions.<sup>27</sup>

If one of their number dies upon a trail or road while proceeding on a journey or on his way from one house to another the road is carefully barred and closed by throwing brambles across it and another is made while



the old one is thenceforward carefully avoided; for they believe that the spirit of the dead hovers near it for an indefinite length of time—whether for good or evil is an open question which they have no wish to determine.<sup>28</sup>

Night finds them huddled together in their villages waiting with anxiety for daylight to drive the shadows away—in their season of festivities excepted for they hold to the axiom that strength is the product of Union and numbers.

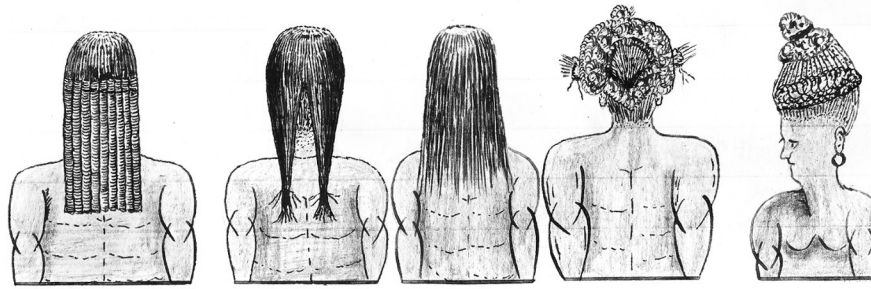
In common with the peasantry and ignorant masses of many parts of old Europe the howling of dogs baying at the moon at night is an omen of death and the offending cur is driven away with kicks and low-muttered curses.

The Cañon of the Needles, that forbidding, gloomy pathway cut through the solid rock by the Colorado, thousands of years since, in its rush to the sea, is peopled by them with gnomes and terrible shapes beckoning after dark the benighted and trembling Indian to an untimely grave in the deep, watery subterranean caverns extending far under the frowning mountains—and so on “ad infinitum.”

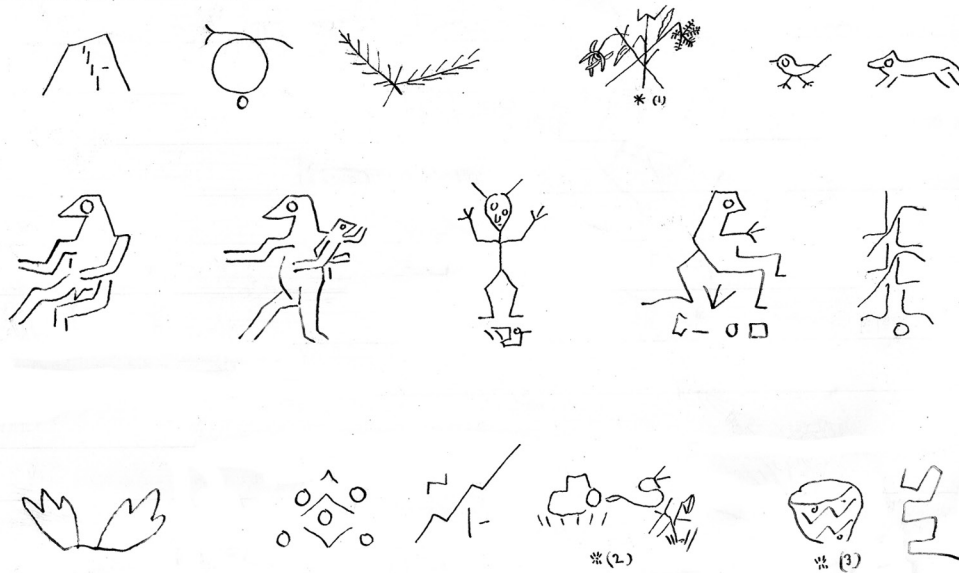
And yet if the countenance of every nation defines the characteristics of its people—if every human face indicates a moral training as well as the temperament and ruling traits of its owner just as every human form indicates the quality and amount of physical exercise, the Mahhaos, judging from their physiognomy, must be in a certain way, remarkably intelligent; far surpassing the Sioux, as already stated, in physical development they rank next to them in facial intellectual signs.

Without the least desire to presume, even for a moment, to question the policy pursued by the Government in regard to them or of suggesting a better one to replace it, the question may well be asked not only of humanity but also of vaunted Christianity whether, when their aptitude and natural gifts are contrasted with the advances they have made in civilization under the hospices of the Whites since their contact with them as represented in the Sketch, something better and nobler cannot be done for them with the immense resources of this Great Nation?

Respectfully submitted,  
A. G. Tassin  
2 Lieut. 12 Infantry.



DIFFERENT MANNER OF DRESSING THE HAIR AMONG THE MOJAVES, THE MUD COIFFURE OR VERMIN PANACEA.

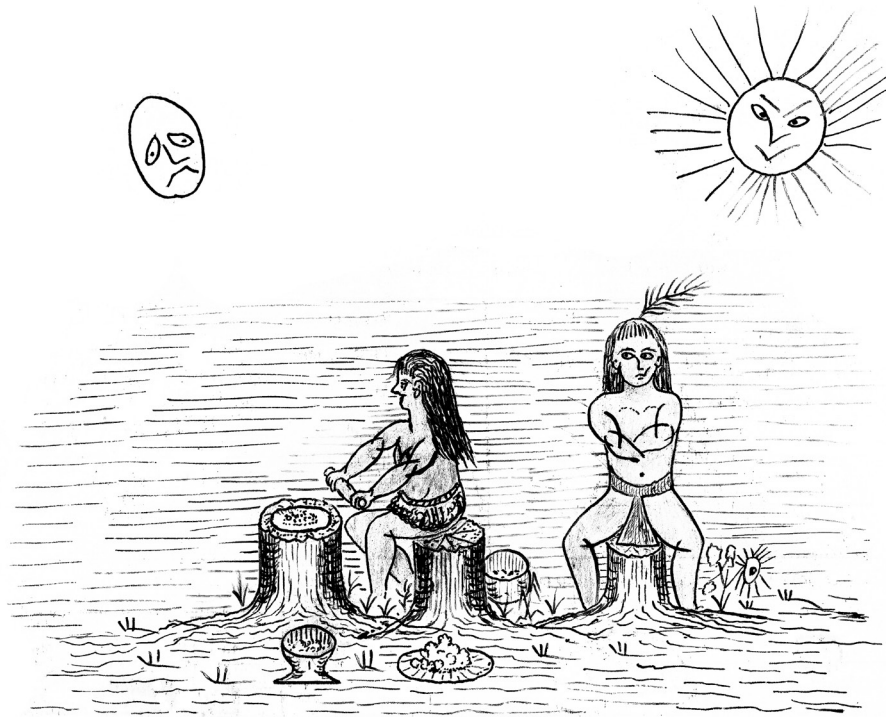


SPECIMEN OF ANCIENT ROCK CARVING AT THE BASE AND IN THE RECESSES OF DEAD MOUNTAIN\*  
THE ABODE OF DEAD BAD INDIANS ACCORDING TO THE MAHAOS MYTHOLOGY.

NOTE

\* (1) Evidently the two different species of the Mesquite Bean - (2) Would seem to refer to the bite of the Crotalus and to the use of a certain herb for its cure - (3) Presumably the "Oyo" or water cooler of the Mahaos. (0) Certainly a fair representation of the hooped serpent - the Egyptian symbol for eternity

[Upper row] Different manners of dressing the hair among the Mojaves. The mud coiffure or vermin panacea. [Lower row] Specimen of ancient rock carving at the base and in the recesses of Dead Mountain, the abode of dead bad Indians according to the Mahaos mythology. Note: (1) Evidently the two different species of the Mesquite Bean. (2) Would seem to refer to the bite of the Crotalus and to the use of a certain herb for its cure. (3) Presumably the "Oyo" or water cooler of the Mahaos. (0) Certainly a fair representation of the hooped serpent — the Egyptian symbol for eternity.

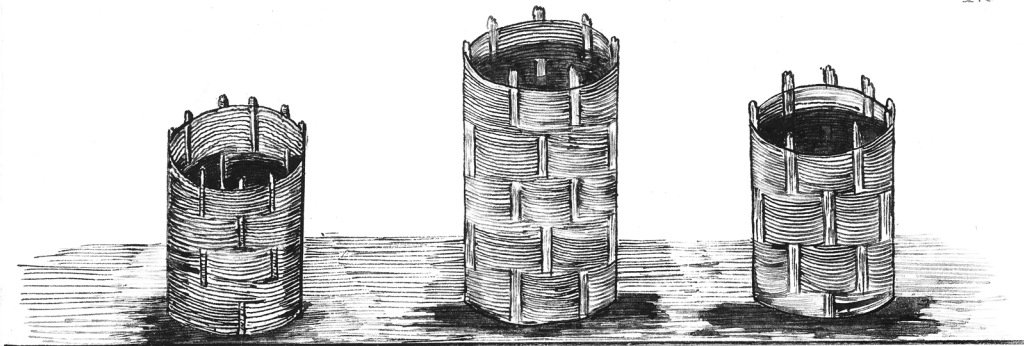


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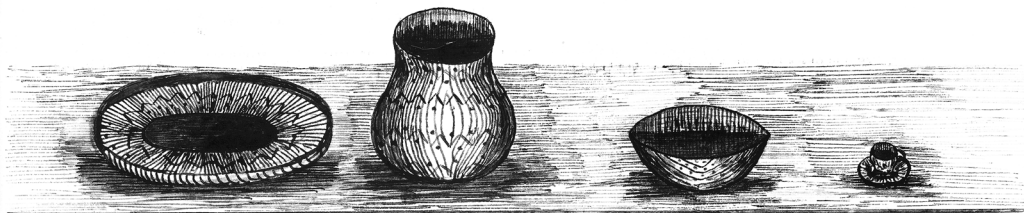
A MAHHAOS GRIST MILL ~ TWO HORSE POWER

“SOL IN APOGEE - LUNA IN PERIGEE”

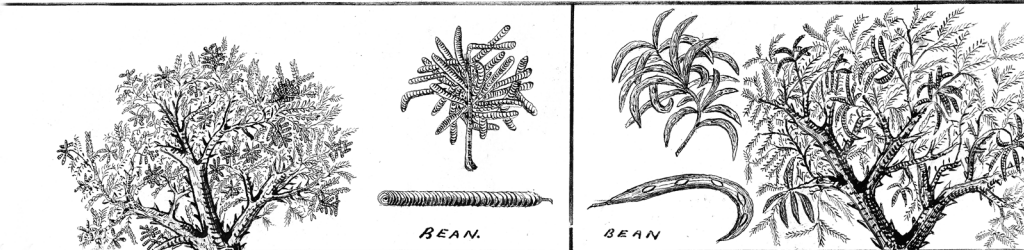
**A Mahhaos grist mill—two horse power. “Sol in apogee, Luna in perigee.”<sup>29</sup>**



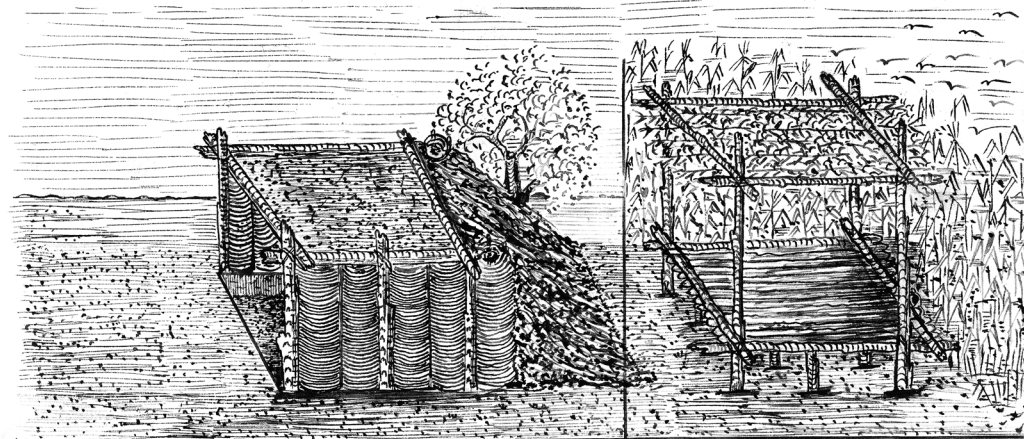
GABIONS OF INTERLACED WILLOW OR ARROW-WEED USED IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF HUTS AND KEEP BEANS IN WINTER.



SPECIMENS OF POTTERY, MANUFACTURED AND IN USE AMONG THE MAHHAOS.



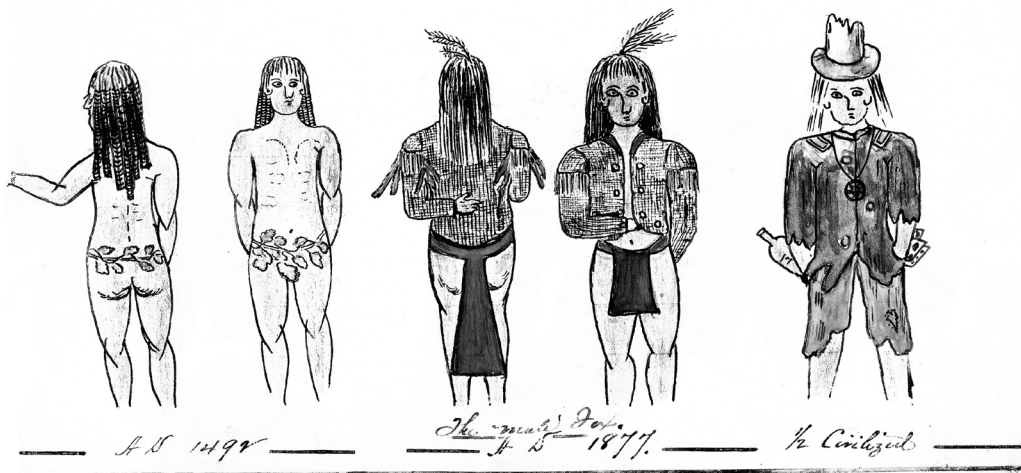
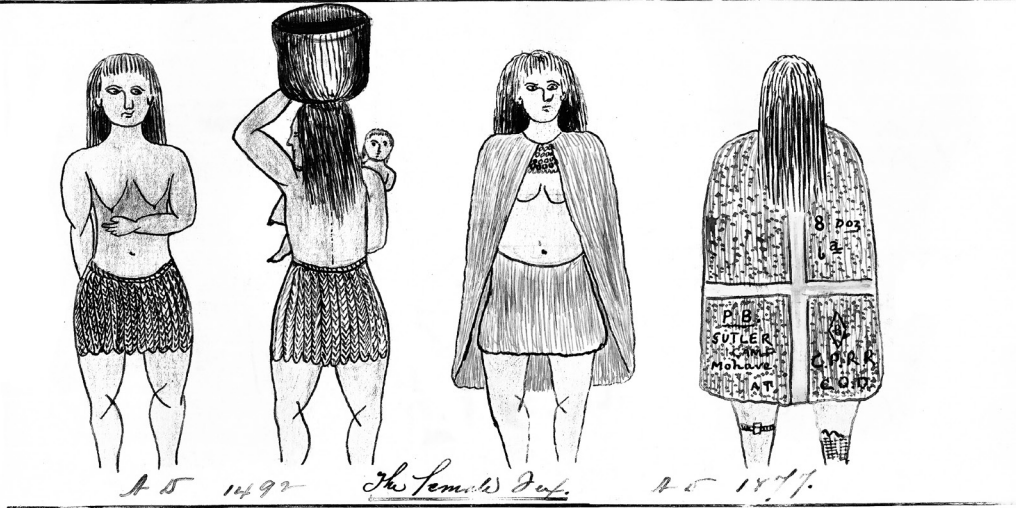
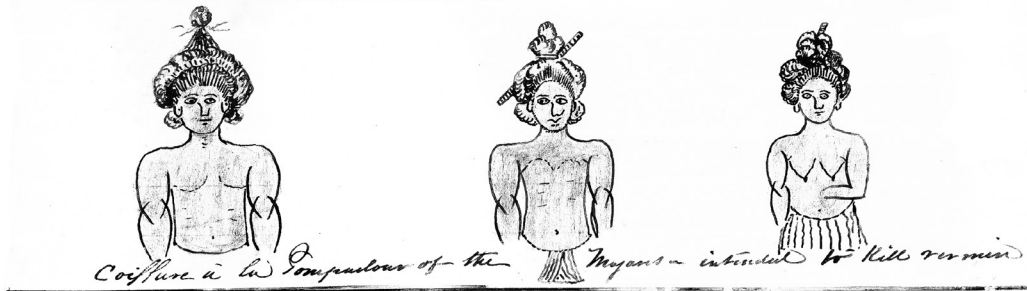
THE "ALGAROBIA GLANDULOSA" AND "STROMBOCARPA PUBESCENS" PRINCIPAL FOOD OF THE MAHHAOS.



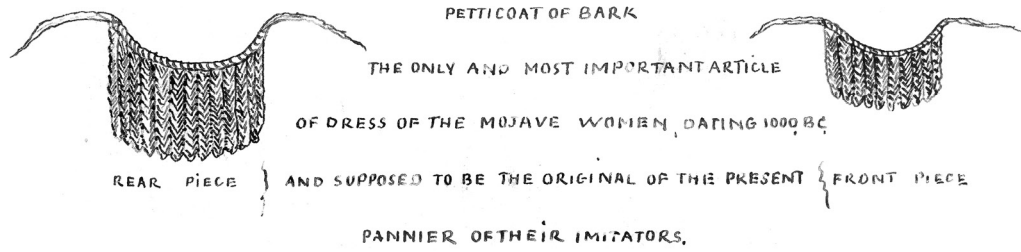
WINTER AND SUMMER HUTS OF THE MOJAVES—THE LAST PRINCIPALLY USED TO BE PROTECTED FROM THE SUN WHILE KEEPING THE BLACKBIRDS FROM CORN FIELDS.

[First row] Gabions of interlaced willow or arrow-weed used in the construction of huts and keep beans in winter. [Second row] Specimens of pottery manufactured and in use among the Mahaos.<sup>30</sup> [Third row] The "Algarobia glandulosa" and "Strombocarpa pubescens" principal food of the Mahaos. [Fourth row] Winter and summer huts of the Mojaves—the last principally used to be protected from the sun while keeping blackbirds from the cornfields.

THE MARCH OF CIVILIZATION AMONG THE MOJAVES.



The march of civilization among the Mojaves.<sup>31</sup> [Upper row] Coiffure à la Pompadour of the Mojaves—intended to kill vermin. [Middle row] The female sex—A.D. 1492—A.D. 1877. [Lower row] The male sex—A.D. 1492—A.D. 1877—1/2 Civilized.



SICK-A-HOTE, HEAD CHIEF OF THE MOJAVES,  
 VISITING HIS FRIENDS AT THE POST—ARRAYED LIKE THE LILLIES OF THE FIELD—  
 HIS HAIR DONE UP À LA MUDDY BY SPECIAL REQUEST.  
 "WITH AN OBJECT IN VIEW"

[Upper row] Petticoat of bark—the only and most important article of dress of the Mojave women, dating 1,000 B.C. and supposed to be the original of the present pannier of their imitators. [Left] rear piece [Right] front piece. [Lower row] Sick-a-hote, head chief of the Mojaves, visiting his friends at the post—arrayed like the lillies of the field—his hair done up à la muddy by special request “with an object in view.”<sup>32</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Tassin's designation of "Mahhaos" for the Mohave is not among the usual forms (cf. Stewart 1983:69), but it follows the use of "Mah-hah-os" by military surveyor Amiel Weeks Whipple in 1849 (Whipple 1961:65).

<sup>2</sup>What follows seems to be Tassin's somewhat confused account of the 1540–1542 expeditions under the general leadership of Francisco Vásquez de Coronado (e.g., Hammond and Rey 1940). The "first party" may refer to a probe by García López de Cárdenas that discovered the south rim of the Grand Canyon. This party did not reach the Vado de los Padres, which lies farther east and was found in 1776 by the Franciscan missionary-explorers Francisco Atanasio Domínguez and Silvestre Vélez de Escalante. The "second party" may refer to the maritime expedition under Hernando de Alarcón, which sailed up the Colorado River at least as far as Yuma, attempting unsuccessfully to make contact with Coronado's overland expedition. The "third party" may possibly refer to the overland expedition from Sonora under Melchior Díaz, which reached and crossed the lower Colorado River shortly after the departure of Alarcón. Díaz died during his return, and his expedition was incompletely described at second hand in later accounts. It is unlikely that he travelled as far north as Mohave territory.

<sup>3</sup>"Dead Mountain" corresponds to a peak also known as "Avikwamé," or "Spirit Mountain," which is usually identified with the Newberry Mountains in the southern corner of Nevada. The petroglyphs shown in the figure were also reproduced from Tassin's manuscript in a publication by Garrick Mallory (1893:95), and the site at which they occur has been recorded as CI-9 (Heizer and Baumhoff 1962:32, 128, 131; Steward 1929:150–151).

<sup>4</sup>Estimates of 3,000 people for many of the Colorado River and Delta Yuman tribes were typically given by early Spanish and later chroniclers. Whipple et al. (1855:17) estimated 4,000 Mojave in 1853–1854, based on information provided by Joaquin Antoine Leroux, a mountain man and rancher who accompanied the Mormon Battalion, Sitgreaves, and Whipple expeditions. Mohave population in 1872 was estimated at about 4,000, including 828 on the Colorado River Reservation and 700 at Fort Mojave (United States Office of Indian Affairs 1872).

<sup>5</sup>This event actually occurred on August 30, 1858 and ultimately led to the founding of Fort Mohave to protect westward immigrants at the newly established Beale's Crossing on the Colorado River. Erroneous written versions rapidly gained circulation, but the most authoritative is the account by eyewitness L.R. Rose, written several weeks later and eventually published in the *Missouri Republican* (reprinted by Cleland 1941:306–315) and in the reports of the War Department. Apparently the reasons for the Mohave attack were that the immigrants cut down valued cottonwood trees to make rafts and that, while camped on the river in anticipation of crossing, their cattle trampled Mohave farmland. The Mohave also were becoming suspicious of the immigrants' intentions to

actually pass through rather than settle on the river (Sherer 1994:79–86). The Mohave had reason to feel threatened, as they had just the previous year suffered a profound military defeat with their Quechan allies during a raid on the Maricopa Indians (Kroeber and Fontana 1986). In April 1859, Lt. Col. William Hoffman and Captain Lewis Armistead proceeded from Fort Yuma to the Mohave Valley with six infantry companies, including Armistead's 6th Infantry Regiment, two companies of dragoons, and artillery. Their overwhelming force and threats of annihilation impressed the Mohave leaders and led to promises of peace and acceptance of a military fort, Camp Colorado, on the east side of the river overlooking Beale's Crossing. Captain Armistead was left with two infantry companies and artillery at the renamed Fort Mohave. Still defiant, that June the Mohave staged a last battle when some 200 of their warriors were cut down under a U.S. Army rifle barrage (Stewart 1969). This ended the Mohave's power to resist military occupation and began a prolonged period of cultural change.

The fort was abandoned and burned on May 28, 1861, as the troops were needed for the Civil War. It was re-garrisoned on May 19, 1863 by Companies B and I of the 4th California Infantry of Los Angeles to protect overland travelers, river traffic, and gold prospectors. Many of the volunteer infantrymen also established mining claims during their off-time (Maisch 2006). The U.S. government in 1860 convinced Mohave Chief Iritaba and some of his followers to move to the Parker area, 100 km. to the south. Most adjusted to the move, and in 1865 joined many Chemehuevi to become part of the new Colorado River Indian Reservation. A larger number of Mohave stayed in the north with Chief Homose Hohote. They elected to reside near the fort to avoid being mistaken as hostiles. The U.S. government accommodated their insistence to remain in their homeland by establishing the Ft. Mohave Reservation on August 4, 1870. Lack of an irrigation system, schools, or a hospital for the reservation, as well as negative influences from Euro-American intruders, lead to disease, hunger, alcoholism, suicide, and degradation of traditional Mohave culture (Devereux 1961; Furst 2001), as Tassin bore witness.

Notwithstanding conflicts with the Chemehuevi, Yavapai, and Walapai during the 1860s and early 1870s (Kroeber and Kroeber 1973), the Mohave maintained peaceful relations with the Americans throughout the remaining history of the fort until it finally closed on September 29, 1890. The land was transferred to the Office of Indian Affairs, and in 1935 it became part of the Fort Mojave Indian Reservation. Today nothing of the fort remains above the ground surface (Casebier 1975).

<sup>6</sup>See Whipple 1856, 1961; Whipple et al. 1855. Tassin may have had an opportunity to read the Whipple expedition reports, as well as that of Ives (1861) and other government reports, either while in Washington, D.C. or on post.

<sup>7</sup>Subsequent ethnographers denied the existence of localized kinship groups or nucleated villages among the Mohave (e.g., Drucker 1941:132; Kroeber 1902:277; Stewart 1983:57).

<sup>8</sup>Tassin's drawing of a winter house appears to be a simplified schematic of a partially earth-covered lodge. His house lacks one or two center posts and multiple exterior posts. Möllhausen's

1854 watercolor (Huseman 1995:130) and derived engraving (Whipple et al. 1855:24) depict a much larger structure with extensive earthen banks on the sides and back, a substantial covered portico, and what appear to be horizontally stacked logs, perhaps an artistic convention, rather than woven wattle walls on the front. Later photographs all show wattle-and-daub walls. Whipple et al. (1855:23) suggested that houses were built into a natural sand bank. These may be the more substantial houses of tribal chiefs, and by Tassin's time houses may have ceased to be made on that scale. Bourke's (1889) later simple diagram and description indicate wattle walls but also two center posts. Kroeber (1925:733–735) provided the most detailed description of a Mohave lodge, with daub-covered wattle walls and two center posts. He included measurements and interior layout.

<sup>9</sup>Kroeber (1902:279, 1925:747) reported that the Mohave were not restrictive regarding sexual activity among themselves but were averse to relations with outsiders.

<sup>10</sup>Tassin overlooked the significant role of Colorado River fish in the Mohave diet (Kroeber 1902:276, 1925:737; Stewart 1957; Wallace 1955), although numerous early accounts describe the fish as tasteless or very bony and not especially good to eat, at least to the Euro-American palette.

<sup>11</sup>An early account of the Mohave mentioned an autumn harvest feast in 1854 (Stratton 1859:202–203). Subsequent ethnographic accounts do not make mention of a “Feast of the Corn” or harvest festival among the Mohave.

<sup>12</sup>According to anthropologists and historians, the natives of the lower Colorado River and adjacent areas were divided into two antagonistic military alliances (Forbes 1965:80–81; Kroeber 1925:596; White 1974). The Mohave belonged to one of these alliances, while the Walapai and Maricopa belonged to the opposite one. However, amity and enmity may have been less rigid or consistent than has sometimes been supposed. For instance, Stewart (1983:56) reported, “Relations between the Mohave and the Walapai were mixed; at times they were friendly enough to permit trade, while fighting between them occurred at other periods.”

<sup>13</sup>The construction of Mohave granaries and dwellings was described in additional detail by earlier observers and artists (Huseman 1995:130; Möllhausen 1858, 1861; Whipple 1856:115; Whipple et al. 1855:21) and later writers (Bourke 1889:177; Drucker 1941:101–102, 104; Kroeber 1902:277, 1925:731–735; Stewart 1983:57, 60).

<sup>14</sup>Mohave pottery-making was described in detail by later observers (Drucker 1941:107–109; Kroeber 1925:737–738; Kroeber and Harner 1955; Rogers 1936:36–37).

<sup>15</sup>Transcribing Tassin's Mohave word list posed problems. Reference to word lists compiled by Wares (1968) and others helped to eliminate ambiguities when there were questions about Tassin's handwriting. The majority of words in Tassin's

list have cognate forms recorded by Wares (1968), although only a few are near-perfect matches.

<sup>16</sup>Tassin consistently mislabeled San Diego as San Bernardino.

<sup>17</sup>The Franciscan missionary Gerónimo Boscana (1846) applied the name “Acagchemem” to the natives of San Juan Capistrano. Kroeber (1907:145) recorded “Ghecham” as the name for the natives of San Luis Rey. The first of Tassin's two terms for the natives of the San Diego area is easily recognized as corresponding to the modern Kumeyaay; the second term is not recognizable in subsequent usages.

<sup>18</sup>Lowe (1874–1875:4) wrote this on the Mohave concept of heaven and hell: “They, Mohaves, believe in a hell (a cold place on a high mountain in the Color. [Colorado] range where it rains much in winter) and call it avikvomé (bad mountain) and in a heaven, a hot sandy valley just west of the Needles on the Colorado river, and call it okiámbova.”

<sup>19</sup>Dead Mountain (Avikwamé) figures prominently in the creation story and many other Mohave myths and songs (e.g., Kroeber 1948). Mohave in general and shamans in particular dream of Avikwamé and the events of creation that occurred there, including the giving of culture by Mastamho who also built his house there. He was hardly considered an evil spirit.

<sup>20</sup>Tassin depicted this hill, part of the Buckskin Mountains, on a map of Aubrey and the mouth of the Bill Williams River in his manuscript. Bourke (1889:174) also identified this as the location of the spirit land where shamans consulted the dead in their dreams. The Bill Williams River is 50 km. south of The Needles, where other ethnographic sources locate the land of spirits. According to Stewart (1983:66–67),

The ghost...went to *salʷaʷáytə*, the land of the dead, which was believed to be located in the sand hills downriver from the Mohave valley, near the peaks known as The Needles. Deceased relatives greeted the soul there, in a pleasant place where souls were believed to live on much as before death, but with no sickness, pain, or troubles, and always with plenty of watermelons and other good things to eat. Regardless of a person's behavior while alive, the soul went to *salʷaʷáytə*, with only a few exceptions, such as the victims of witchcraft, and those who died without having been tattooed, who were believed to pass down a rat hole at death.

In the Hipahipa migration legend and other Mohave myths, Kroeber (1948:70; 1951:142) transcribed the site's name as *Selye'aya-'ita* (“big sand”), not far south of The Needles on the Arizona side of the Chemehuevi Valley. Kroeber recorded several other place names in the immediate vicinity that also relate to the abode of the dead. Bourke (1889:172), perhaps contradicting his remarks about the Bill Williams River, also identified The Needles as the “Mojave Elysium.” Devereux (1937:419), citing Bourke, suggested that The Needles was the



entrance to the land of spirits, while the location near the Bill Williams River was the actual dwelling place. Stewart's (1977) consultants identified only *Salya:yt* as the land of the dead, and Tassin and Bourke may have put this location too far south.

<sup>21</sup>Elsewhere, Tassin (1884a) elaborated this myth, which he attributed to the Konkow. The mythic motifs of a world fire and/or a great flood destroying most or all life were widespread in native North America (Thompson 1929:286–287). However, the attribution of these events to human wickedness may be a European introduction.

<sup>22</sup>Coyote is an important figure in the Mohave creation myth as recorded by subsequent ethnographers (e.g., Curtis 1908:57; Kroeber 1906:314–315).

<sup>23</sup>Lowe (1874–1875) recorded identical or very similar names for these constellations during the Wheeler Expedition. Corbusier (1885:133) also transcribed the same names for Orion's belt and the Milky Way, although he identified *ha-tcá* as the Mohave word for the Pleiades.

<sup>24</sup>Later ethnographers provided additional information on Mohave funeral customs (Drucker 1941:146). Tassin neglected to mention the important mourning ceremony held for prominent individuals subsequent to the period of cremation (Drucker 1941:148–150; Kroeber 1902:281, 1925:750–751; Stewart 1983:67).

<sup>25</sup>Tassin's account of the perils faced by doctors or shamans was confirmed by later ethnographic evidence (Kroeber 1925:778; Stewart 1983:66).

<sup>26</sup>Edward C. Woodruff (b. 1839) and Tassin appear in many of the same Commissioned Officers Returns Records from Fort Mohave between 1875 and 1882. Woodruff enlisted in the U.S. Army at the age of 22 during the Civil War. After the war, both he and Tassin were in the 12th U.S. Infantry, with Woodruff as Commander of Company A as well as of Fort Mohave during most of his assignment there. His other assignments included Whipple Barracks and Fort Lowell in Arizona Territory. Both Woodruff and Tassin transferred out of Fort Mohave on August 8, 1882.

<sup>27</sup>The importance of dreaming within Mohave culture was brought out more fully by later ethnographers (Drucker 1941:158; Kroeber 1902:280, 1925:754–755; Stewart 1983:65).

<sup>28</sup>Tassin's is one of the earliest and among the few references to spiritual connotations associated with trail use, a subject of increasing interest for archaeologists and Native Americans. The belief in the necessity to avoid ghostly spirits is well documented among the Mohave and other Yuman groups (Devereux 1961; Stewart 1977). This reference to placing barriers over trails supports inferences for the function of recorded "trail breaks" throughout the Colorado Desert. These usually take the form of rock alignments placed across the trail. Malcolm Rogers used pot drops along trail segments

of different relative dates to develop a "horizontal trail stratigraphy" for Patayan ceramics of the Colorado Desert (Rogers 1945:181; Waters 1982:276). Most of the trails he examined were cut by washes and replaced by new routes, but Tassin's remarks indicate that there might also be cultural reasons to abandon one trail and begin a new one.

<sup>29</sup>In "Sol in Apogee, Luna in Perigee," Tassin appears to be making a satirical comment on the unequal division of labor among Mohave men ("sun") and women ("moon").

<sup>30</sup>Tassin's sketch of Mohave pottery forms generally replicate known shapes and decorative treatments from the late prehistoric and ethnohistoric periods (Kroeber and Harner 1955). These types are described as Parker Buff and Parker Red-on-Buff, including a historic Fort Mohave Variant (Kroeber and Harner 1955; Rogers 1936; Schroeder 1958; Waters 1982). The cup and saucer at the far right are especially interesting as they show that Mohave potters were already creating Euro-American forms by 1877 (see Furst 2001:172–3 for a later example). This was among the new forms that were made in response to a commercial market created by the residents of Fort Mohave and Ehrenberg, local gold prospectors, and overland travelers, among others. The image demonstrates that the adaptation by Mohave potters occurred at least six years before the coming of the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad and the founding of Needles, California. Trade in figurines and Euro-American vessel forms, as well as traditional shapes, appears to have accelerated after this time, as had occurred with the earlier coming of the railroad to Yuma (Bourke 1889; Trippel 1889). Among the Mohave, this adaptation likely occurred in the 1860s, when those Mohave who did not move south to the Colorado River Indian Reservation instead stayed near the rebuilt Fort Mohave, or around the time of the founding of the Fort Mohave Indian Reservation in 1870.

<sup>31</sup>Mohave hairdressing and clothing were illustrated and discussed by later observers (Bourke 1889:177–178; Drucker 1941:114–116; Kroeber 1925:728–729; Stewart 1983:57–59, 63). For the 1877 women's attire, Tassin depicts a red-and-green cloak made from a recycled cloth shipping wrapper. Although possibly expressing some artistic license, he went so far as to indicate the addressee, "P.B. Sutler, Camp Mohave, AR.," the quantity, eight dozen; and the carrier, the Central Pacific Railroad, C.O.D. Tassin's depiction of a pre-Columbian era Mohave Man includes a vine around the waist, which was a Victorian convention for indicating nudity. The striking central figure from 1877 wears a red-collared coat with red trim and feathers and a red breach-cloth. The unflattering depiction of a "1/2 civilized" man with a tattered gray hat, blue pants, and gray military coat, a liquor bottle in one back pocket, and a deck of playing cards in the other, may be more a criticism of negative Euro-American influences on the Mohave than of the Mohave themselves and of what their future might bring, as Tassin's concluding remarks on the Mohave and his description of American towns on the Colorado River indicate.

<sup>32</sup>Chief Sica-hot–Humosehquahote or Humma-sick-a-hoit, as he was called by Ives (1861:72) in 1858—was chief of the northern Mohave or Matha Iyathum. He was the paramount chief and one of several major Mohave leaders in the 1850s, including Iretaba, Cairook, and “Chief José.” Although not named, he was likely the same individual who ceremoniously met Whipple on February 27, 1854 when the latter reached the northern Mojave Valley and his Camp 134 (Whipple 1856:116–117). The chief expressed wishes for good relations and future trade. In this somewhat amateurish portrait, Tassin shows him with a U.S. Army non-commissioned officer's dress coat. It includes collar insignia of the 12th U.S. Infantry and blue (peacetime service) corporal's chevrons, complete with shoulder straps and brass buttons. One inconsistency is the diamond in the angle of the chevrons, which was reserved for the three stripes of a first sergeant (McChristian 1995). Such coats and other accoutrement were routinely presented to tribal leaders as a gesture of respect and in recognition of their authority to represent their people. Indian scouts or irregulars attached to the army were also provided with uniforms. An unidentified Mohave man is shown in an 1868 photograph with almost full uniform (Stewart 1983:58), and a well-known 1870s photograph of Chief Pascal of the Quechan shows him in a less ornate and modified military coat over a breach-cloth (Bee 1983:94).

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