

# Handbook of North American Indians

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*General Editor*

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# Southwest

ALFONSO ORTIZ

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CONTENTS:

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1. Indians of North America. 2. Eskimos.  
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# Quechan

ROBERT L. BEE

## Language and Territory

The Quechan (kwə'chän), also popularly known as Yuma, are linguistic members of the Yuman subfamily of the Hokan family.\*

The Quechans' reservation lies near the confluence of the Gila and Colorado rivers (fig. 1), their aboriginal territory now divided between the states of California and Arizona. Unlike the tribes of the Plains and the East in this country, these people have not been moved out of their home territory by the whims of federal Indian policy or the pressure of White settlers. Older Quechan can still, if they wish, glance to the north at the looming thumb of Picacho Peak as they recall legends about spiritual encounters around its summit. Yet it is not known when the ancestors of these people first settled near the river junction. No group of that name was mentioned by the first European into the area, Hernando de Alarcón, who passed through on his way to a meeting with Francisco Vásquez de Coronado's expedition in 1540. The earliest specific reference to the Quechan appeared in Spanish documents of the late seventeenth century. By then they were settled in the confluence area, as well as to the north and south along the Colorado and east along the Gila.

The Quechan themselves tell of a southward migration of their ancestors from a sacred mountain, *ʔavik'amé* (Newberry Mountain, located north of the modern community of Needles, California). They had been created there, along with the Cocopa, Maricopa, eastern Tipai, and Mohave, by Kwikumát (or Kukumat; *k'ak'amá:t*), who later died from sorcery worked by Frog Woman, his own daughter (Forde 1931:214). An-

\*The phonemes of Quechan are: (voiceless unaspirated stops and affricate) *p, t, tʰ, t̚* (retroflex), *c* ([c] ~ [č]), *kʰ, k, kʷ, q, qʷ, ʔ*; (voiced spirants) *v* ([β]), *ð*; (voiceless spirants) *s, š, x, xʷ*; (voiced laterals) *l, lʰ*; (voiceless laterals) *l̥, l̥ʰ*; (nasals) *m, n, nʰ, ŋ*; (trill) *r*; (semivowels) *w, y*; (short vowels) *a, e, i, o, u, ə*; (long vowels) *aː, eː, iː, oː, uː*; (accent) *˘* (high falling tone, except before another accent, where it is high tone; usually accompanied by stress). Initial glottal stop contrasts with initial vowels, which are pronounced with preceding aspiration.

Information on Quechan phonology was obtained from Halpern (1946-1947, 1:25-33, 2:150; Abraham M. Halpern, communication to editors 1981), based on studies of the language in the late 1930s. Innovations in the phonology of the language as spoken in the 1970s are described by Langdon (1977).

thropological evidence points—tentatively—to an accretion of small, probably patrilineal, bands into larger "tribal" groups between the thirteenth and eighteenth centuries, a trend fostered in part perhaps by group proximity during horticultural activities on the river bottomland, by linguistic affinity, and by the effects of warfare (see Forbes 1965:36 ff.; Steward 1955:159-161).

## Culture

This account of traditional Quechan culture is based on conditions existing between 1780 and 1860. During this period the Quechan were sporadically subjected to Spanish, Mexican, and Anglo influences of varying intensity; undoubtedly this modified some of the earlier, precontact patterns of behavior.

## Subsistence

The people were primarily growers and gatherers rather than hunters (Forde 1931:107, 118). The forbidding desert terrain immediately beyond the rivers' floodplains yielded little game for a relatively high labor output, so the productivity of growing or gathering plant foods was much greater. Forde (1931:115-116) was unable to estimate the ratio of gathered to cultivated plants in the Quechan diet but concluded on the basis of Spanish reports that horticulture was "no mere accessory" to gathering. Castetter and Bell (1951:238) estimated that the proportion of cultivated foods in the aboriginal diet of Colorado River Indians ranged between a low of about 30 percent for the Quechans' southern neighbors, the Cocopa, to a high of about 50 percent among the Mohave, their friends to the north. But no estimates were made for the Quechan themselves. There were occasional crop failures when the Colorado-Gila overflow was not so extensive as usual, and there was some danger of late flooding, which would destroy the sown fields (Forbes 1965:189; Castetter and Bell 1951:8). But all in all, in early postcontact times the flooding of the river and the richness of silt left after the waters receded made food growing a relatively low-risk enterprise with high potential yield.

The Quechan were able to seed some of their fields several times during the year. A little maize and some

melons were planted in February and were not dependent on the natural irrigation provided by the river (Forde 1931:109). Clearing the brush from the main fields began immediately prior to the spring flooding, and the year's major planting took place when cracks appeared in the surface of the postflood silt deposits, usually in July. The people first planted teparies, maize, and watermelons, then black-eyed beans, pumpkins, and muskmelons (Castetter and Bell 1951:149). In the fall the Quechan sowed winter wheat to be harvested just prior to the spring floods.†

In addition, the people planted the seeds of wild grasses on less fertile portions of land. The harvested seeds were ground into meal and baked or dried into cakes.

Care of the planted fields was not a particularly demanding or time-consuming chore. Wheat was not weeded. Teparies were weeded once during the growing season; maize, pumpkins, and black-eyed beans were weeded twice. Members of an extended family might cooperate for the weeding chores. Men were usually responsible for the heavier phases of the work, like clearing away the brush from the fields, digging the planting holes, weeding, and gathering the harvest. Women sowed the seeds and stored the harvested foodstuffs. This division of labor was by no means a strict one, however; and women could help in any of the agricultural chores they wished to (Bee 1969).

The chief sources of wild food were mesquite and screw-bean pods (Castetter and Bell 1951:179), with the former being the more popular and more resistant to drought. The people crushed mesquite pods in a mortar to remove the sweetish-tasting pulp, the only part of the pod that was eaten. The pulp could be dried, then ground into flour and mixed with water to form cakes that would last indefinitely. The crushed pods could also be steeped in water to make a nourishing drink that, with fermentation, could be mildly intoxicating (Castetter and Bell 1951:185–186). Mesquite and screw bean were always important portions of the diet and were probably the main source of nourishment when there were crop failures or during the lean times between harvests. The mesquite trees were not considered private property unless they grew close to a family's shelter; however, there was a tendency for families to return to the same grove each year to harvest the ripe pods. Castetter and Bell (1951:187–188) provide an extensive list of other wild plant foods utilized by the Quechan and their riverine neighbors.

†Watermelons, black-eyed beans, muskmelons, and wheat were postcontact introductions. Forde (1931:110) mentions that in Alarcón's 16th-century account of peoples of the lower Colorado, wheat and beans were not among the crops then being grown. Heintzelman's (1857) detailed report does not mention wheat as a cultigen. Thus, to the extent these reports are accurate, wheat was popular for no more than 200 years and may have been introduced by Father Eusebio Kino, in 1702 (Forbes 1965:124).

## Settlement Pattern

The Quechan recognized themselves as a single tribal group but were geographically separated into a series of settlements or rancherías (see Spicer 1961:12–14) scattered north and south of the confluence along the Colorado and east along the Gila. Forde (1931:map 2) places the northernmost Quechan ranchería on the Colorado some 20 miles north of the confluence, although Quechan living in 1966 noted that some of their tribesmen (called collectively "the Blythe group") moved into the confluence area during the last half of the nineteenth century from a ranchería in the Palo Verde valley some 60 miles to the north. The southernmost extent of settlement was probably the ranchería *xuksil'* during the ethnographic baseline period. Quechan rancherías were encountered by the Spaniards as far as about 26 miles east of the confluence, along the Gila. Settlement west of the riverine floodplain was limited by extensive sand dunes. The exact number of rancherías existing during the baseline period is not known. Forde (1931:map 2) lists the locations of four "village sites"; Bee's informants named six locations that they believed were in existence in the late nineteenth century (fig. 1).

Geographical arrangement of components of the rancherías shifted during the year, which adds to present difficulties in pinpointing past locations. Extended family groups in each ranchería dispersed to locations

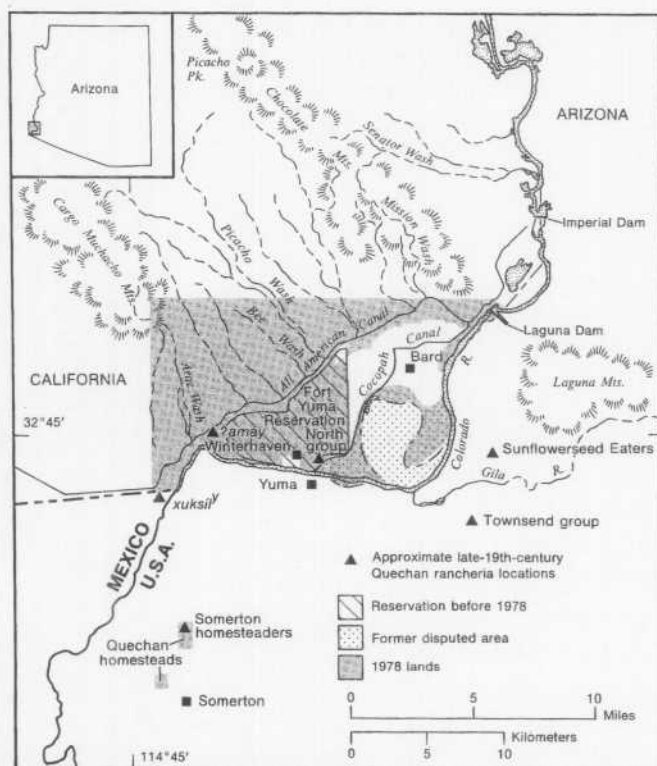


Fig. 1. Central area of Quechan settlement in the late 19th century and reservation in 1978.

close to their bottomlands during spring and summer farming seasons. The families drew together again on high ground, away from the river, during the winter and spring flood periods (Bee 1963:209). Also, the high ground locations of the rancherías themselves apparently shifted up and down both banks of the rivers at irregular intervals: Spanish journals reported an absence of Quechan on the Gila in 1774–1775 (Forbes 1965:127; Forde 1931:100). Patrick Miguel (1950:4), a gifted Quechan who was one of Forde's informants, wrote of groups moving north and south along the Colorado during the nineteenth century in response to food shortages and conflicts with Mexican and Anglo military units. One such movement was witnessed by Heintzelman (1857:36).

Several hundred people lived in each ranchería. The largest, *xuksil'*, had a population estimated at over 800 by Spanish observers in 1774 (Forde 1931:101). Those living in the same ranchería considered themselves to be related, and, while the "tribal" orientation was strong (Forde 1931:140), they probably felt that their own ranchería group was somehow superior to the others (Bee 1963:209). The rancherías were agamous—that is, a man was free to seek a mate from either his own or

a different ranchería—however, in practice there may have been a slightly higher frequency of marriages between persons belonging to the same ranchería (Bee 1963:209–210).

These major groupings were in turn composed of extended family households, whose membership was probably augmented by individual adults (usually related to the family) having no place else to live. Ideally, residence after marriage was with the man's family, but in fact the newly married couple often moved in with the woman's family; thus the residence pattern is best described as bilocal. The extended family household was the basic cooperative unit of subsistence. It was not



Calif. Hist. Soc., Los Angeles: Title Insurance Coll.: top, 3517, bottom, 3522.

Fig. 2. Quechan houses. top, Dome-shaped arrowweed house to right and ramada to left. bottom, Earth-covered house, usually occupied by the most important leader of a ranchería. Photographs possibly by Charles C. Pierce, about 1900.



uncommon for several extended families to pool their labor for the more demanding agricultural tasks of clearing land, weeding, or harvesting (Bee 1969; cf. Castetter and Bell 1951:140). The families lived under ramadas or in dome-shaped arrowweed shelters near their fields during the farming season, then moved into arrowweed shelters or camped under ramadas on high ground (Forde 1931:120). In each rancheria were one or two large shelters covered on three sides with earth; the front was walled with posts and horizontal slats, between which arrowweed was stuffed. These shelters were typically occupied by the rancheria leaders' families but could accommodate a small crowd in extremely cold weather (Forde 1931:122). The rancheria leaders dispensed hospitality from these earth-covered shelters, and climbed up on their rooftops to address the assembled community.

The geographical dispersion of the households within rancheria groups was thus closely correlated with the condition of the rivers and the technology of riverine agriculture. The threat of enemy attack may also have been a factor, particularly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. If the Quechan patterns of warfare in all aspects closely paralleled those reported for their close allies, the Mohave, then Fathauer's (1954:98) observation that the Mohave assembled for large war parties "after the harvest" may be most relevant (see also K.M. Stewart 1947). It was at this time that the rancheria families were less dispersed and thus perhaps less vulnerable to surprise counterattack by the enemy. Forde's (1931:162) informants mentioned attacks on villages rather than isolated extended families in major war expeditions.

The bilocal extended family household seemed an optimal unit of agricultural exploitation; it provided a cooperating work force large enough to lessen the amount of heavy individual labor, yet small enough to reduce conflict over personal versus group economic interests. The bilocal pattern indicated that the family was as flexible as possible in incorporating new members for the labor force.

### *Property*

Given the apparent functional importance of the extended family, it is difficult to account for the report that the farm plots themselves were individually owned by males. Individual ownership is even less understandable in view of the fact that these lands were not inherited by kinsmen upon the death of the owner but were instead abandoned, perhaps in later seasons to be used by nonkinsmen (Forde 1931:114-115). The family of the deceased usually sought replacement plots from among the bottomlands not then being utilized by others. Castetter and Bell's Mohave and Quechan informants recalled that extended family holdings were demarcated

by reference to terrain features in the reservation period, and that "usually there were no individual boundaries within this larger area" (1951:144). This was probably typical in the prereservation period as well. In view of these conditions, it seems safest to assume, with Castetter and Bell (1951:144), that "land ownership was little formalized." This conclusion, coupled with the pattern of abandoning plots at the death of a family member, implies that during the prereservation period land was not a particularly scarce resource among the Quechan, even though occasional interfamily brawls erupted over the precise locations of family plots (Forde 1931:114-115).

In fact, the inheritance of any sort of material property was probably never a source of conflict in prereservation times. This is because all possessions of the deceased (including the family home) were destroyed or given away by kinsmen in an attempt to erase the painful reminders of the person's existence. Often this left the surviving kinsmen in destitution, and they were provided for by friends and rancheria leaders until they could recoup their losses.

Perhaps in part because of the noninheritance pattern, the people did not show much interest in the accumulation of material goods beyond the immediate needs of the family group or the surplus maintained by local leaders to provide for impoverished families within their rancheria. Family groups often donated a portion of their harvest to the leaders for eventual redistribution. There were no marked gradations in wealth, a condition fostered by the mourning practices as well as the social pressure in favor of sharing of one's abundance with others who were less fortunate (Bee 1966; see also Forde 1931:137).

### *Technology*

Forde (1931) and Trippel (1889) describe the material culture in some detail. In general the Quechan were not preoccupied with technological or decorative elaboration beyond the demands of minimal utility, although Trippel (1889:575-576) was favorably impressed with the painted geometric designs on late nineteenth-century pottery (fig. 3). Their arrows, propelled from simple, unbacked bows, had relatively weak penetrating power, made weaker when used (as they frequently were) without points. Sharpened staffs served as digging sticks, or, when cut in longer lengths, as weapons.

### *Clothing and Adornment*

Neither males nor females wore much clothing: two-piece aprons (front and rear) made of the inner bark of willow were the standard female dress; males frequently wore nothing. In cooler weather members of



Smithsonian, Dept. of Anthr.: left, 5509; right, 76.179.

Fig. 3. Painted pottery. left, Water jar with red horizontal stripes on buff ground. right, Red bowl with black geometric designs on exterior and interior rim and cord wrapped around neck. Used for squash or mush. Diameter of right 27.5 cm, both collected by Edward Palmer, left in 1867, right in 1885.

both sexes carried firebrands for warmth (Forbes 1965:49) or wrapped themselves in rabbitskin robes or blankets obtained in trade with the Hopi.

Males were particularly proud of their long hair and alternately rolled it in long rolls (fig. 5) treated with mesquite sap or plastered it with reddish mud. Both sexes liked to paint their faces with yellow, red, white, black, or green pigment (Trippel 1889:565). Males daubed light pigment over their entire body (fig. 6) for warfare. Men often had their nasal septum perforated, as well

as their ear tissue, for the attachment of bits of decorative shell or beads. The warm climate and lack of precipitation made substantial housing unnecessary for most of the year. The relatively few earth-covered lodges were apparently adequate for winter quarters. Clearly in this milieu of fairly low food-production anxiety, the emphasis was on other than the material aspects of the Quechans' way of life.

### Social and Political Organization

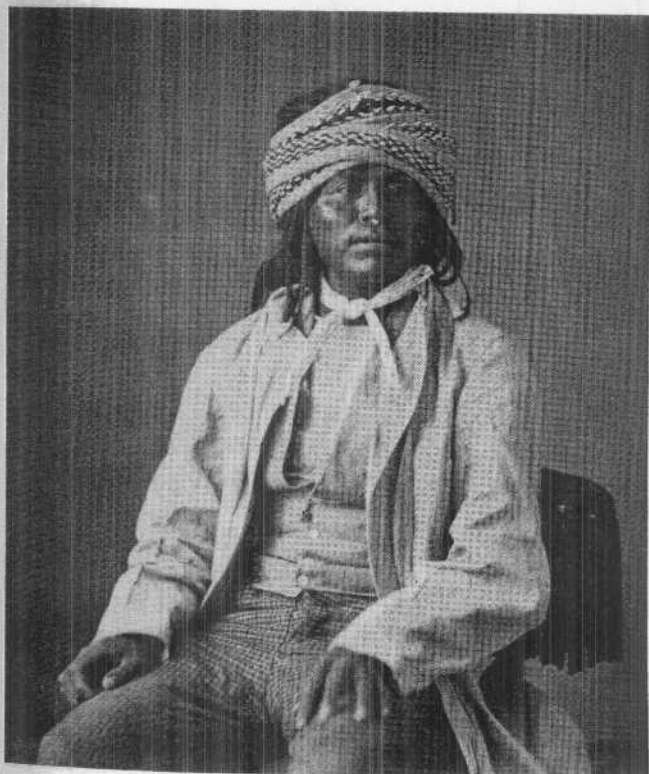
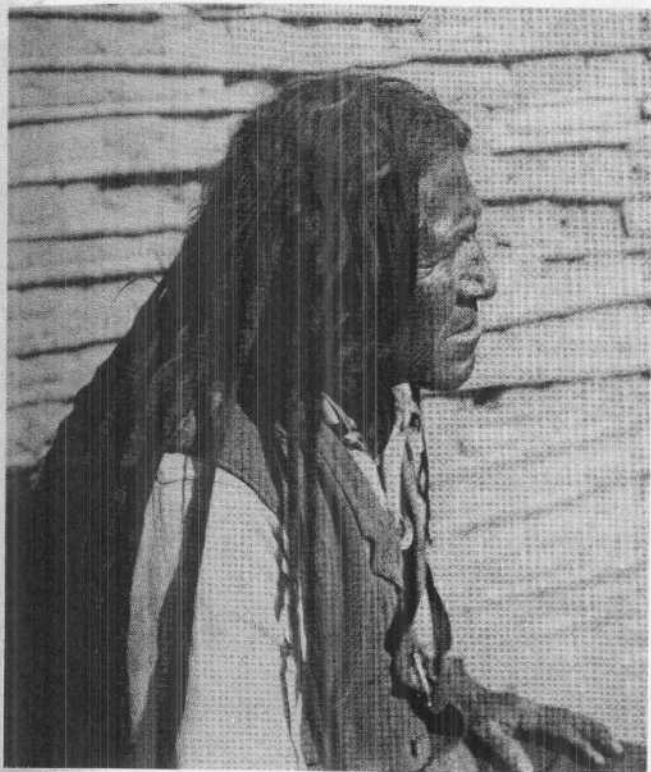
• KIN GROUPS The Quechan recognized a series of patrilineal clan groupings whose past importance and functions are not entirely clear. The clan name was borne only by females; and each had linked with it one or more "namesakes" (as Forde's informants described them) or totemic associations (for example, corn, frog, red mud, red ant, moon, coyote, rattlesnake). The clans were once exogamous units and may have been informally ranked in importance: both Forde (1931:142) and Bee (1961) were told that *xavcá'c k'acá'n* was the leading clan. There is a suggestion that some of the clans functioned as units in the mourning ceremonies (Bee 1963:217; cf. Forde 1931:145). Clan membership did not necessarily correspond to rancheria affiliation,



Smithsonian, Dept. of Anthr.: a, 152.697; b, 325.194; c, 325.193; d, 325.182; e, U. of Ariz., Ariz. State Mus., Tucson: 23055 x 6.

Fig. 4. Clay figurines, which may once have had a ceremonial function but in the 19th century were already being sold to tourists (Trippel 1889:576). They are usually dressed in traditional style although some recent examples show modern clothing. Wigs of either human or horse hair are glued into a depression at the top of the head (see drawing) and held in place by string wound around the head. Seed beads are added around the neck and through pierced ears. Painted designs represent body painting and tattooing. a, Male in red flannel breechclout secured with blue thread has extensive body patterns painted in red on white. Blue and white beads are threaded through ear holes and blue beads serve as the typical necklace. Legs are always straight and stiff but b and c show some of the variations in arm position. (Both probably have lost bead necklaces because of neck breakage). The female has fiber back skirt and red and blue yarn front with red cloth overskirt. The male wears red cloth breechclout and light blue and gold earrings ending with red yarn tassels. Both have black tattooing lines on chin, minimal red body paint, typical incised mouth and large eyes outlined in black. d, Baby in cradleboard complete with fiber blankets and black and white plaited band binding it to cradle. Female figures are made in more positions than males, including holding pots or children (Kaemlein 1954-1955). e, Child carried in distinctive manner on the skirt bustle. a, collected by Edward Palmer in 1890-1891; b-d collected by Frances Densmore in 1922; e, collected by Herbert Brown 1895-1913. Length of a 23 cm, rest to same scale.





top, Calif. Hist. Soc., Los Angeles; Title Insurance Coll., 3471; bottom, Smithsonian, NAA: 2793-a.  
 Fig. 5. Quechan hair styles. top, Billy Escallante with traditional rolled hairstyle. Photograph possibly by Charles C. Pierce, 1890s. bottom, José Pocati wearing a nose ring and turban. Photograph by Alexander Gardner, in Washington, Oct. 1872.

although some coincidence was reported in the Sunflowerseed Eaters rancheria near the Gila in the late nineteenth century (Bee 1967:218). This is to be expected given the fact that the rancherias were agamous, residence was ideally patrilocal, and clan affiliation was patrilineal.

Some clan names are either alien or make reference to alien groups, and others may have originated in groups like the Mohave, Maricopa, or Tipai-Ipai (Forde 1931:142-143). Forde (1931:146) reported that there was nothing to indicate the clans developed out of a series of localized lineages. Yet evidence cited at the beginning of this chapter could be used to support the assertion that the Quechan clans were once small, relatively autonomous local groups that became merged into the tribal group at the expense of their formal



Smithsonian, NAA: 56.961.

Fig. 6. Young boy with elaborate body paint, multi-strand bead necklaces, and a breechclout over a yarn or bark twine girdle, covered with a trade kerchief. Photograph by E.A. Bonine, 1870s.

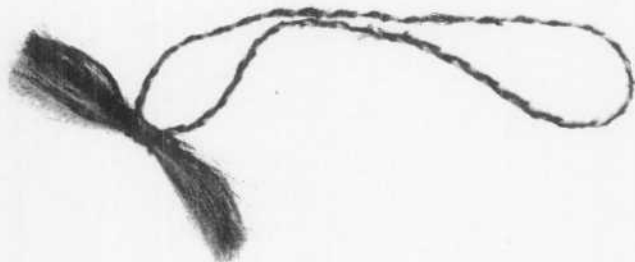


Mus. of N. Mex., Santa Fe: School of Amer. Research Coll.

Fig. 7. Pau-vi, Polly, with chin and cheek decoration, probably painted, and painted stripes on her hair. Photograph by Ben Wittick, about 1880s.

functional importance. In the 1960s, clans were still regarded as exogamous units; but, particularly among the younger Quechans, one's own clan affiliation was not always known, and past clan functions were largely forgotten.

• **THE TRIBE** The Quechan tribal structure became apparent in large-scale war expeditions against the neighboring tribes, when the relevant structural principles were sex, skill in the use of a particular type of weapon, and "Quechan" (rather than rancheria or clan) affiliation (see Gearing 1962 for the "structural pose" concept). There were also annual tribal harvest celebrations in which members of all rancherias would gather for feasting and visiting, each family contributing food or labor. And almost every year there were large tribal mourning ceremonies in which the ceremonial roles were assigned on the basis of sex and kin-group affiliation (Forde 1931:221 ff.; Bee 1963:217). What structural units comprised "the tribe" at any given time was thus in part a question of what sort of activities "the tribe" was engaged in.



Smithsonian, Dept. of Anthr.: 325,202.

Fig. 8. Ornament of red, white, and black braided horsehair hung as a charm on a child's neck to stop excessive drooling and insure strength and rapid growth. Length 27 cm, collected by Frances Densmore in 1922.

• **LEADERSHIP** Spanish and Anglo sources consistently reported the existence of two tribal leadership statuses, one (*k<sup>w</sup>axó!*) for civil affairs, the other (*k<sup>w</sup>anamí*) for war. Forde's account (1931:133 ff.) accepts this dichotomy, but how accurately it reflects the traditional Quechan situation—as distinct from one imposed by foreigners accustomed to executive hierarchies—is not clear. Abraham M. Halpern (personal communication 1981) feels that the *k<sup>w</sup>axó!* was most likely the kind, generous embodiment of spiritual power described by Forde (1931:135), but that his role in handling civil affairs was not particularly influential. Likewise, the *k<sup>w</sup>anamí* is consistently described by Quechans themselves as an extremely brave and skillful warrior, but it is not clear that he was preeminent in tactical or strategic decision-making.

Each rancheria had one or more headmen (sg. *pa<sup>?</sup>i pá<sup>?</sup>ta<sup>?</sup>axán* 'real person' or 'genuine man'), who probably not only handled the bulk of the leadership responsibilities in each rancheria but also met in council to resolve issues of tribal concern (Forde 1931:139). Leadership statuses tended to remain in "eminent" families, but only so long as other, more important criteria were met by candidates (Forde 1931:136). The authority of the local headmen was extremely circumscribed by public support, and they held their statuses only so long as they were able to demonstrate their competence to do so. Important matters at either the rancheria or tribal level were always decided by consensus, sometimes after long debates dominated by the better and more forceful speakers.

The primary criterion of leadership was competence, and competence in turn stemmed from personal power bestowed by special types of dreams. The candidate for a leadership status quite literally dreamed his way into office. A group of elderly men listened to a candidate's accounts of his dreams, then decided on his qualification for office. The power of a leader's dreams had to be continually manifested in his success in handling practical matters, however; the "right" dreams alone were not enough to secure his status (Forde 1931:137).

The proper sorts of dreams were also prerequisites to other achieved statuses in Quechan society: for singers, speakers, and curers. Other individuals reckoned the success or failure of proposed undertakings on the basis of dreams.

### Warfare

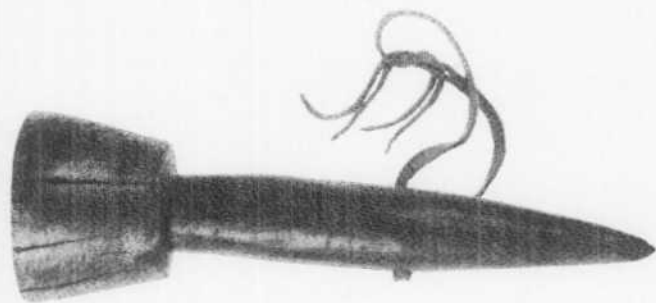
Much of the Quechans' attention and energy centered upon warfare. Accounts of battles and reenactment of battle tactics permeated their myths and rituals, and war was considered an essential source of the tribe's life stuff, spiritual power. In some aspects it seemed atypical of the almost nonchalant organization and execution of other community activities (Forde 1931:161–162). For example, in some of the larger war expeditions, the lines of battle were arranged roughly according to the various warrior functions: the first group behind the leader were the spearmen and clubmen; behind them, the archers; horsemen armed with spears comprised a third group (when horses were available); and there was a rear element of hefty Quechan women bearing stout staffs to finish off the enemy wounded (Bee 1961, 1967:16; Forde 1931:167).

The Quechan distinguished between two sorts of warfare: the war party ("going to the enemy") and the small raiding party ("waking the enemy"). The raid was conceived as a surprise attack, not necessarily to kill but to stir up mischief and maybe to steal some horses or captives. Usually these raids were launched from individual rancherias by a group of younger men who grew restless for action. The larger parties were tribal affairs, launched ostensibly for revenge against losses suffered at the hands of the enemy. At times these encounters were rather like brutal team sport: prearranged appointments for combat, agreement of types of weapons to be used, one side delaying the attack until the other side drew up in battle formation, exchange of a series of insults with opponents before closing with them, and other acts (Forde 1931:162 ff.).

Warfare was probably incessant but usually not very costly in lives among the combatants. Often one side would break off the conflict if it looked as though too many of its men were being lost; however, there were occasions when the battle continued until one side had been all but obliterated. The last such clash is said to have occurred in 1857, and the Quechan were the losers (Forde 1931:163–164).

The Cocopa and Maricopa (who sometimes were allied with the Pima) were the major enemies. Quechan allied themselves frequently with the Mohave in striking out against the tribes to the east of the Colorado, and they were good friends with some of the Sand Papago groups (Castetter and Bell 1951:58–59).

It is possible that warfare among the riverine peoples increased in both scale and intensity during the eight-



Smithsonian, Dept. of Anthr.: 325,203.

Fig. 9. War club for close combat, of solid hardwood with head painted black. The leather thong, threaded through 2 holes in the handle, was looped around the wrist and the sharply pointed tip was jabbed in the opponent's stomach. When the victim doubled over the club was brought up and the broad end was smashed into his face (Forde 1931:170). Length 37.5 cm, collected by Frances Densmore in 1922.

eenth and early nineteenth centuries (Forbes 1965:134). The factors seem to have been economic: to gain captives for trade to Spaniards or other tribes for horses or other goods. If so, then Forde's statement (1931:161) that there was no economic motivation in Quechan warfare must be qualified. During this period the Mohave and Quechan pushed the Halchidhoma out of the broad river valley near Blythe, California, and availed themselves of the fertile bottomlands in the area (Forde 1931:103). The Quechan later abandoned this area and moved southward to lands closer to the confluence. Elsewhere, along the Gila to the east and the Colorado to the south, the Quechan showed no particular desire to seize and occupy the land of their enemies. Again, the inference is that population pressure on available farming land was not particularly severe.

### Mourning

Commemoration of the dead was another concern of the Quechan, ranking along with patterned dreaming and warfare in the emphasis it received in their traditional lifeways. The tribal mourning ceremony, *kar'úk*, was performed usually after an important leader had died, or when there had been an accumulation of deaths of other persons whose families wished to dedicate a ceremony to their memory.

Like the rituals of many societies, the *kar'úk* was a microcosm of the Quechan way of life in its totality. An important element of the ritual was a sham battle, including all the tactical steps of a real foray against the enemy. It was at the same time a reenactment of the original *kar'úk* staged after the death of the creator, Kwikumat. Corn, one of the staples of the Quechan diet, was sprinkled liberally at intervals to serve as a purifying element. Tasks were assigned according to the ideal sexual division of labor and perhaps on the basis



of clan affiliation. Older men, some of whom had dreamed of their ritual role (Forde 1931:204), assumed important leadership functions.

It was also in effect a second funeral for the deceased, complete with copious wailing, destruction of property and ritual paraphernalia at the climax of the rite, and the cremation of elaborately dressed images as representatives of the dead (the making of images may have diffused in about 1890 from the Tipai-Ipai—Forde 1931:221). The *kar'úk*, like the war party, required organization and coordination relatively more elaborate than that of the usual extempore pattern described by Forde, although it was certainly more flexible than ceremonial arrangements among groups like the Pueblos.

## History

The Quechans' territory at the confluence of two major rivers was of major strategic importance to the Spaniards, Mexicans, and Anglos in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It afforded the most logical crossing for soldiers and settlers moving between California and points to the south and east. Most of the Spanish efforts among the Quechan were thus aimed at ensuring their friendliness, and to this end a leader (Salvador Palma) and three other Quechans were wined and dined in Mexico City in 1776–1777 (Forbes 1965:177). Spanish Franciscan priests were perhaps the most familiar contact agents at that time and were fairly well accepted by the Indians even though the priests persistently condemned the aboriginal patterns of polygyny and shamanism (Font 1951:201–208).

Near the close of the eighteenth century, the Spanish decided that the most effective way to consolidate their interests in the crossing was to establish two settlements near it, occupied by farm families, four priests, and a small detachment of soldiers. What had theretofore been a generally amicable, if intermittent, relationship between two cultures became increasingly hostile as the settlers turned to Quechan fields for food and forage for their cattle and Spanish discipline by the lash made the Quechan recalcitrant hosts (Forbes 1965:175–220). The Indians finally destroyed both settlements in 1781, killed the priests and some others, and abruptly ended Spanish control of the crossing. Spanish and, later, Mexican military and civilian expeditions passed through the area, but it was not until the mid-nineteenth century that alien influence was permanently reestablished among the Quechan. After one unsuccessful try, the United States Army in 1852 built a small garrison, Fort Yuma, on a bluff near the confluence. The fort served to ward off Indian attacks against Anglos streaming into California.

The commanders of the garrison were generally content to let the Quechan live their lives, so long as they

remained peaceful. The first commandant, Maj. Samuel P. Heintzelman, deposed one Quechan leader for attacking the Cocopa (Heintzelman 1857:46) and later appointed a man, Pasqual (fig. 10), who enjoyed the status of "tribal chief" for the next three decades.

The fort's presence assured the growth of steamship and railroad travel through the area, and with it the emergence of a small town on the opposite side of the Colorado from the garrison. Quechan men found work as laborers on the steamships or in town, and Quechan women worked as domestic help in the increasing number of Anglo homes. By 1884, when the government established a reservation for the Quechan on the west side of the Colorado, the Anglo town of Yuma had become a flourishing transportation center, and Anglo settlers were becoming increasingly envious of the Quechans' farm plots on the fertile bottomlands. In 1893 the Quechan were persuaded to sign an agreement that would limit their holdings to five acres for each person living at that time (a local application of the Dawes



Smithsonian, NAA: 53.564.

Fig. 10. Pasqual, a principal leader (perhaps the last *k'axot*) from 1854 until his death in 1887, with nasal pendant and wearing a military coat over his breechclout; his walking cane leans in front. At his sides are possibly L.J.F. Jaeger and his wife, who were proprietors of a store and ferry boat at Yuma, Ariz. The 2 men in the background are not identified. Photographed in 1870s.



Natl. Geographic Soc., Washington.

Fig. 11. The "Yuma Indian Band," with Quechan and non-Indian members in pan-Indian uniforms. Its successor, the Quechan Indian Band, in 1981 included Quechan, Mohave, and other Indians. Photograph supplied by the Yuma, Ariz., Chamber of Commerce in Nov. 1927.

Severalty Act of 1887). The remainder of the land was to be sold at public auction. The Quechan have vigorously challenged the legality of this document for years, charging that it was made under duress and that the government never fulfilled its terms. The agreement nevertheless served as partial justification for financial charges levied against the tribe for irrigation systems, water usage, and other goods and services (Bee 1969). After prolonged negotiations between the tribe and Department of the Interior solicitors, 25,000 acres of the original 1884 reservation were restored to the tribe in December 1978 on the grounds that the agreement's conditions in fact had not been fully met by the government.

The reservation was finally allotted in 1912, with each person receiving 10 acres instead of the five originally dictated by the 1893 agreement. In the interval, a dam had been built on the Colorado upstream from the reservation, reducing the annual floods and yearly deposits of silt. The Quechan children were being educated in a government school created from the old Fort Yuma buildings (the facilities were transferred to Department of the Interior in 1884). By the time of the allotment, most of the people had abandoned their outlying rancherias and had moved into the area of the reservation. Only one small group of Quechan "homesteaders" remained to the south (fig. 1), outside the reservation boundaries (Bee 1981:48-84).

By the 1920s and 1930s, farming was no longer a lucrative vocation for most Quechans. They had by then become wage earners in nearby Yuma, serving as laborers or domestic help; or, they lived on the money received from leasing their allotments to farmers. A government agricultural development program of the late 1920s did not appreciably alter this economic pattern, and during the depression of the 1930s the Que-

chan suffered along with communities of unskilled wage-laborers elsewhere. Between 1884 and 1965 the Quechans' land holdings shrank from the 45,000 acres of the original reservation to slightly over 8,000 acres, much of it unproductive (Bee 1981:48-84).

The proper sort of dreams were an irrelevant criterion for the government's selection of community leaders very early in the twentieth century (although some Quechan may still have considered it important for leaders they themselves recognized as legitimate). It may also have lingered as a requirement for certain singers, speakers, and curers. Government "papers" of certification became a crucial prerequisite for "official" tribal leaders, and the government was at best inconsistent in granting such validation. It was perhaps inevitable that political factions would form around would-be Quechan leaders and their kinsmen-followers in the resulting power vacuum. Factional squabbling scuttled the attempts to form tribal representative bodies, even when both the Quechan and the government wanted such organizations. Between the early 1890s and 1936, there was no Quechan who enjoyed unequivocal leadership status (Bee 1981:48-84).

Under the provisions of the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, the Quechan narrowly ratified a tribal constitution and elected a seven-man tribal council in 1936. The act also provided for the ratification of a tribal business charter, but the Quechan have never voted to become a chartered business corporation. The tribe's police force and court were abolished in 1953, when Public Law 83-280 transferred local law enforcement responsibility to the state of California (Bee 1981:88-119).

In the 1940s and 1950s, the tribal council's primary concerns were the economic development of the tribe



Natl. Arch., Washington: 75-N-Colr.-4.

Fig. 12. A man using a disk harrow in a field on the Ft. Yuma Reservation, Calif. His hair is in the traditional rolled style. Photographed in 1940.



and a favorable solution to various reservation boundary disputes. In 1940 the council drew up an agricultural development plan to bolster family farming on allotted land, but the federal government did not respond. The reservation remained in the economic doldrums. In the boundary disputes, the council's attention focused on a large portion of rich bottomland lying on the west bank of the Colorado near the confluence with the Gila. This tract was exposed in 1920 by a sudden eastward shift of the river channel. The reservation's eastern boundary was described in relation to the river channel, without further description of the location of the channel itself. The Quechan reasoned that if the river moved, so did the eastern boundary, and the bottomland should belong to the tribe. The government waffled on the issue, and in the meantime non-Indian families moved in and established substantial farming operations. This made an amicable solution of the issue all the more difficult (Bee 1981:88-119).

In 1960, frustrated by the delay of government officials in resolving the dispute, the tribal council unilaterally reconstituted its tribal court and police force and blockaded access roads into the disputed territory. Tribal members manned the blockades and demanded toll payments from non-Indian drivers wishing to enter the area. Tempers flared, the Quechan voluntarily disarmed themselves to prevent violence, and after five days the blockade was lifted. The land was not restored to the tribe by this action, but by 1970 the tribe had taken a long-term government lease on the tract and the non-Indian farmers were moving out. In 1973 the Quechan again blockaded a portion of land (this time to the west of the reservation) whose ownership was being contested between the tribe and Imperial County, California. That issue was resolved by the 25,000-acre restoration in 1978.

By 1966 the Quechan found themselves in the midst of a series of federal anti-poverty and community development programs. Some of their plywood prefabricated homes, obtained from the government after World War II, were being replaced with new cinderblock houses built by the Quechan themselves. The reservation received a new water system, a community action program including public health and preschool education facilities, a credit union, and several different vocational rehabilitation projects. The vocational projects were especially popular with the people, who were feeling an acute need for employment (the average yearly family income in 1965 was estimated at less than \$2,000 for 150 of the reservation's 180 families) (Bee 1970:156). There were problems in the administration of some of the development programs (Bee 1969a, 1970), but in 1969 the programs' material impact on the reservation itself was most evident. The effect on the life-styles of the people was less apparent.

By 1974 the tribe had launched two on-reservation

farming operations that offered the potential for significant and permanent income for many of its members. One was a hydroponic tomato and cucumber farm; the other, a farm that included 600 acres of the leased bottomlands plus several hundred additional acres leased by the tribe from individual Quechan allottees. Under tribal management, both enterprises flourished at first. Then an unfortunate combination of crop disease, a hurricane, competition from lower-priced produce imported from Mexico, and management problems forced the tribe to relinquish its management role and lease both operations to non-Indians in 1980.

In 1980, the reservation's 1,000 or more inhabitants lived along its major hard-surfaced roads, where communication with others and access to the stores in the nearby towns of Yuma, Arizona, or Winterhaven, California, was made easier. Their homes were scattered at 10-acre intervals in a pattern not markedly different from that of Anglo families living near the reservation. Many of the Quechan family households were still extended, a condition forced in part by the need to pool family income from a variety of sources.

Quechan children attend the nearby San Pasqual Consolidated School, where they are not in the ethnic majority. A considerable number of Indian high-school graduates have taken advantage of the government program for vocational training as medical assistants or automobile mechanics. According to one Bureau of Indian Affairs official, the Quechan do relatively well in vocational programs requiring them to move into urban areas such as Los Angeles or Oakland. They are still close enough to the reservation to return for brief visits, and experiences such as shopping in nearby Yuma serve them well in a more intensely urban environment (Bee 1967:79).

The tribe still gathers on the national holiday of Memorial Day to pay homage to its dead, and occasionally truncated versions of the *kar'úk* are sponsored by bereaved families when they accumulate the considerable amount of money required. On both occasions, and at



U. of Ariz., Ariz. State Mus., Tucson: 41867.

Fig. 13. The Quechan Community Center, looking north-northeast. Ft. Yuma Indian Reservation, Calif. Photograph by Helga Teiwes, July 1975.

funerals, there are still the songs and speeches in Quechan, still the wailing, still the destruction of clothing and other personal items, still the military themes. In fact, this mourning pattern has remained the most massively resistant to alien intervention, even though the destruction of property has bothered federal administrators for nearly a century. Land is too scarce to abandon now after a death, and no family would think of destroying a serviceable house. But in the commemoration of the dead the public expressions of Quechan-ness are never more visible.

### Population

Forbes (1965:343) concludes that there were perhaps 4,000 Quechans at the time of their first contact with Spaniards. The population diminished to about 3,000 due to European diseases and increased warfare, "and it remained fairly stable at that figure until it declined to 2,700–2,800 in 1852. Thereafter, the decline was even more rapid, reaching 2,000 in 1872, 1,100–1,200 in the 1880's, and a low in 1910 (at least as far as the reservation was concerned)," of 834 (Forbes 1965:343).

There are some puzzling ambiguities about the reported totals, even allowing for inaccurate estimates by brief visitors to the area. Father Francisco Garcés in 1774 estimated 3,500 Quechans, yet one year later, Juan Bautista de Anza reported only 2,400, with no mention of major catastrophe in the intervening period. This difficulty continues into the 1960s. The tribal roll of April 1, 1963, listed a total membership of 1,544, while government figures cited by Forbes (1965:343) gave a total of 2,125 in 1950. It is possible that the government figures refer to all Indians under the jurisdiction of the Fort Yuma Subagency, which includes some Cocopa.

### Synonymy‡

The name Quechan is from the Quechan name for themselves, *k<sup>w</sup>acá:n*, literally meaning 'those who descended'. This is interpreted as a reference to the account of the creation of the Quechan and their neighbors on the sacred mountain *'aví: k<sup>w</sup>amé*. In one version, the name is a shortening of *xám k<sup>w</sup>acá:n* 'those who descended by a different way' (Corbusier 1925–1926; Forde 1931:88; Kroeber 1943:39); in another version the full phrase is *xám k<sup>w</sup>acá:n* 'those who descended by way of the water' (Abraham M. Halpern, communication to editors 1981).

Related or borrowed names for the Quechan in other Yuman languages are: Mohave *k<sup>w</sup>ičá:n* (Pamela Munro, communication to editors 1981); Walapai *kachan* (Cor-

busier 1923–1925); Maricopa *k<sup>w</sup>čá:n* (Lynn Gordon, communication to editors 1981); Kahwan *kwasá:nt* and Cocopa *kwasan<sup>v</sup>* (Kroeber 1943:38).

The Spanish name for the Quechan was Yuma, perhaps first recorded by Eusebio Kino in 1699 (Coues 1900, 2:544); this name shows virtually no variation, spellings like Huma (Kino in Bolton 1916:445) being merely misprints or the like. Spanish Yuma appears to be a borrowing of Pima-Papago *yu'mí* 'Quechan' (Saxton and Saxton 1969:51); Cahuilla *yú'mu*, glossed 'Yuman', shows the same word in another Uto-Aztecan language (Seiler and Hioki 1979:255).

The earliest English accounts sometimes use the Spanish Yuma (Ives 1861:42) and sometimes adaptations of *k<sup>w</sup>acá:n*: Cutchanas (Möllhausen 1858, 2:245), Cuchaus (misprint for Cuchans), Cuchian, Cuichan, Cushans (Hodge 1907–1910, 2:1010). Heintzelman (1857:35–36, 51) refers to the "Cu-cha-no, or as they are usually called, the Yuma Indians," or simply Cuchano, and distinguishes them from the "Yum, or New River Indians," apparently members of the Kamia group of Tipai.

Spellings of Yumas in English include Umahs, and Umeas; another form is Yahmáyo, Yumayas, Yurmarjars (Hodge 1907–1910, 2:1011). Yuma has been the name commonly used by anthropologists and linguists, but Quechan has been officially adopted by the Quechan tribal council and has since become prevalent in scholarly studies. The spelling Kwtsaan, based on the practical orthography representation of the pronunciation of *k<sup>w</sup>acá:n* used in the 1970s, appears in some linguistic studies as the English name of the language (Norwood 1976; Langdon 1977).

Some sources give the Spanish name Garroteros, "or Club Indians," or versions of this (Hodge 1907–1910, 2:1010; Möllhausen 1858, 2:246).

For spellings of the name of the Kahwan in historical sources that were erroneously taken by Hodge (1907–1910, 2:1010) to refer to the Quechan, see the synonymy for Kahwan in "Maricopa" (this vol.).

### Sources

Early Spanish explorers and missionaries left brief and scattered accounts of the Quechan lifeways, perhaps the most extensive of which is Pedro Font's (1951). Much of this early material has been collected and arranged into a readable volume by Forbes (1965).

Heintzelman (1857) included a brief ethnographic account in his report to the secretary of war regarding the problems of establishing Fort Yuma; but Trippel's (1889) articles about the Quechan comprise the earliest comprehensive ethnographic treatment, portraying the culture as it existed at the end of the nineteenth century. Forde (1931) produced the best single source on traditional Quechan life; since it was aimed at ethno-

‡This synonymy was written by Ives Goddard, incorporating references supplied by Robert L. Bee.

graphic reconstruction, his work contains practically no information on the twentieth-century reservation community. Bee (1963, 1967, 1969a, 1970, 1981) focused on kinship structure and sociocultural change, particularly the changing tribal political process and the impact of federal "development" programs during the twentieth century.

In a more specialized vein, Halpern (1942, 1946, 1947) visited the Quechan in the early 1940s to collect linguistic data and kinship terminology. He returned in the 1970s to collect folklore and oral history material. Castetter and Bell (1951) included a detailed discussion of Quechan horticultural techniques and products in their extensive survey of Yuman agriculture.