

UC Merced

The Journal of California Anthropology

Title

Comment on the Indian in the "Watcher's Stage"

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2gn2408z>

Journal

The Journal of California Anthropology, 5(1)

Author

Roth, George

Publication Date

1978-07-01

Peer reviewed

Comment on the Indian in the “Watcher’s Stage”

GEORGE ROTH

Lawton and Wilke’s (1977) report on the Colorado River “watcher’s stage” illustrates a useful technique, one that might be utilized more extensively and for obtaining information about historical periods as well as traditional cultural techniques. For instance, one might, with the aid of a magnifying glass, in examining items of material culture in the background of photos, measure to some degree the extent of acculturation. Furthermore, it seems entirely possible that newly developed computer techniques for enhancement of photographs could bring out areas too fuzzy to interpret. This is especially a problem when a print is several photocopying generations from the original.

I would take exception to the comment (Lawton and Wilke 1977:311) that the man in the photo, though usually identified as Chemehuevi, could “just as likely” be Mohave. While facial features are never definitive, those of the man look, to my eye, far more likely to be Chemehuevi than to be a Mohave. The two tribes, I would note, are rather distinct physically, and there were no other groups on the river who were similar to the Chemehuevi.

Beyond this, the man’s hair is short. In the early 1900’s, photos of Mohaves rarely showed other than long hair, while those of Chemehuevis rarely showed other than short hair. Agent’s reports indicated short hair was

common among Chemehuevis as early as 1880 (see Roth 1977, especially Fig. 2 therein).

In addition, the style of dress (i.e., the adaptation of white clothing) was distinct between the two tribes in the early 1900’s. The clothes of the figure in the photo are typical of Chemehuevis of this period. The Mohave style of men’s clothing was generally more distinct from Anglo dress of the time than was that of the Chemehuevi. Features of this Mohave style which should be detectable in this photo, if present, include a kerchief around the neck and, less consistently, striped shirt and vest. Mohaves are not usually shown wearing shoes in this period, while Chemehuevis usually wore them.

While I did not ask any Chemehuevis whether or not the photo was a member of their tribe, I did show it to several in hopes of identifying the man. We were unsuccessful in the latter, but no one disputed the identification as Chemehuevi.

I note in passing that George Wharton James (1908:77) used the photo in his book *Learning from the Indians*, labeling it as Chemehuevi. However, he gives no identification of the source of the photo. James had considerable contact with the Chemehuevis in this period and is credited with a number of photographs of them. He may have taken this one. As published in his book it appears to have a negative number from the Pierce collection, which has many of his photographs. At the least, he had sufficient background for making his identification.

It is a worthwhile exercise, having simply looked at the photograph and having rather

automatically identified it as Chemehuevi, to try to specify what criteria I was using and what evidence supported it.

California State College, San Bernardino

REFERENCES

James, George Wharton

- 1908 Learning from the Indians. (1973 reprint edition by Running Press, Philadelphia. Originally titled What the White Man

May Learn From the Indians.)

Lawton, Harry W., and Philip J. Wilke

- 1977 The "Watcher's Stage" in Lower Colorado River Indian Agriculture. *Journal of California Anthropology* 4:310-315.

Roth, George E.

- 1977 The Calloway Affair of 1880: Chemehuevi Adaptation and Chemehuevi-Mohave Relations. *Journal of California Anthropology* 4:273-286.

