Native American Two Spirits
at National Historic Sites

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The following stories are drawn from research I’ve done over the course of three decades. They are fully documented in my published works, in particular Living the Spirit: A Gay American Indian Anthology, The Zuni Man-Woman, and Changing Ones: Third and Fourth Genders in Native North America.

—Will Roscoe

Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve, Florida
Fort Caroline National Memorial, Florida

In 1564, René Goulaine de Laudonnière and Jacques Le Moyne arrived in Florida, establishing Fort Caroline on the banks of the St. John River. These lands were occupied by the Timucua Indians, a populous society of village dwellers with a complex, stratified social organization.

Not long after Laudonnière’s arrival, while marching through the dense Florida woodlands on a hot afternoon, his party found itself exhausted and far from its destination. At that moment,

We met an Indian woman of tall stature, which also was an Hermaphrodite, who came before us with a great vessell full of cleere fountaine water, wherwith she greatly refreshed us. For we were exceeding faint by reason of the ardent heate which molestes us as we passed through those high woods. And I beleev[e] that without the succour of that Indian Hermaphrodite, or rather, if it had not bene for the great desire which we had to make us resolute of our selves, we had taken up our lodging all night in the wood. Being therefore refreshed by this meane, wee gathered our spirits together, and marching with a cheerefull courage, wee came to the place which wee had chosen to make our habitation in.

Later he encountered another “hermaphrodite” serving as an emissary from a Timucua king.

Jacques Le Moyne describes these “hermaphrodites” (a term frequently used by Europeans who assumed without evidence that berdaches were intersexed) and painted two pictures of them. Highly stylized engravings based on these paintings
were published (and widely circulated) by Theodore De Bry. One depicts two pairs carrying corpses on stretchers, while two others carry sick or injured persons on their backs. The engraving is captioned "Hermaphrodites as Laborers," and the accompanying text relates that because they are strong, "hermaphrodites" accompany warriors to battle to carry provisions and tend to the injured. A second engraving depicts "curly-haired hermaphrodites" bearing baskets of game, fish, and crocodiles to a storehouse.

The circumstances of Laudonnière’s encounters with Floridian berdaches are common for the symbiotic phase of native-European relations. He does not denounce the “hermaphrodite” who aids him; he is grateful for “her” assistance. The berdache, for her part, seems to have actually sought out contact with the French. Accounts of Osh-Tisch and Hastín Klah (see below) create similar impressions of berdaches as assertive, independent, and curious individuals who sought encounters with outsiders.

The image of the Floridian “hermaphrodite” in 1564 bringing Laudonnière and his men a refreshing vessel of water stands out. Over the course of centuries, many the third and fourth gender natives actively reached out to Europeans and Anglo-Americans—out of a desire to learn, a desire to teach, a desire to barter for goods, and sometimes out of pure desire itself. In so doing they followed a principle native people had been applying for centuries in their dealings with each other in a continent that has always been multicultural: affirm the other who affirms you.

Somewhere on the grounds of the Mount Vernon Arsenal, along with 250 of her tribespeople, the remarkable Apache warrior women known as Lozen is buried. She participated in the last significant armed resistance to the white conquest of North America, fighting alongside Geronimo until his final surrender in 1885 marking the end of the infamous Apache wars. Her remarkable story can finally be told thanks to accounts of Apache elders published many years after the events.

Born in the 1840s, Lozen was the sister of the famous Chief Victorio. Following a vision quest in her youth, she received the power to locate the enemy at great distances and to heal wounds on the battlefield. She began to join raiding and war parties. Her skills in riding, fighting, roping, and stealing horses were legendary (Ball 1980: 103). Victorio's daughter recalled, “She was magnificent on a horse. She could handle her rifle as well as any man, most of whom she could outrun on foot. She wielded her knife with utmost skill” (Boyer and Gayton 1992: 54).

Lozen fought with and counseled Victorio during the years in which her band of Warm Springs Apaches were in constant conflict with Americans. In 1880, after Victorio was killed at Tres Castillos, Mexico, she joined Geronimo’s Chiricahua band. Over the next six years, she participated in numerous actions as the group stubbornly resisted American efforts to settle them onto desolate reservations at Fort Apache and San Carlos. During this period, a woman named Dahteste became her constant companion. They fought together and served as mediators, making contact with both Americans and Mexicans.

Although they had successfully eluded all attempts to capture them, by 1886 Geronimo’s people were exhausted and demoralized. In late summer, Lozen and Dahteste again made contact with the Americans. Negotiations resulted in Geronimo’s surrender.

Two women huddled behind Geronimo in a photograph taken of the prisoners shortly after their capture may be Lozen and Dahteste.
Geronimo and his people were held as prisoners of war for nearly three decades. First sent to Fort Marion, Florida (Castillo de San Marcos), poor conditions and disease claimed at least 24 lives. In 1887 they were relocated to Mt. Vernon Barracks in Alabama. Lozen and Dahtetse appear in a photograph from this time. Lozen died there of tuberculosis in June 1889.

A formal social role for women who engaged in male activities has not been documented for the Apache, although there are references to a two-spirit role for males. Nor is there direct evidence regarding Lozen’s sexuality; some Apache accounts claim that she foreswore marriage to a man order to fulfill her vision. But years later, Apache elders told anthropologist Morris Opler of two women who lived together during captivity and had sexual relations. Perhaps these were Lozen and Dahteste.
In 1833, Edwin T. Denig arrived at Fort Union, Montana where he would spend the next twenty-three years as a trader. Denig’s journals record observations and episodes that illustrate the complexity of Native American gender roles and identities. Noting the number of boté among the Crows, he wrote, “The disposition appears to be natural and cannot be controlled. When arrived at the age of twelve or fourteen, and his habits are formed, the parents clothe him in a girl’s dress and his whole life is devoted to the labors assigned to the females.” Denig also described the life of Woman Chief, a famous female hunter, warrior, and Crow leader who died in 1854. According to Denig, she led large war parties and “is fearless in everything, has often attacked and killed full-grown grizzly bears alone, and on one occasion rode after a war party of Blackfeet, killed and scalped one alone (within sight of our fort [i.e., Fort Union] on the Yellowstone), and returned unharmed amid a shower of bullets and arrows.” (See Changing Ones, Chapter 4)

James Beckwourth lived among the Crows in the 1820s. In his 1854 memoir he created a character named Pine Leaf, who appears to be based on Woman Chief:

> Whenever a war-party started, Pine Leaf was the first to volunteer to accompany them. . . . She seemed incapable of fear; and when she arrived at womanhood, could fire a gun without flinching, and use the Indian weapons with as great dexterity as the most accomplished warrior. (1854: 133)
Ohchish (Ohchikapdaapesh, also spelled Osh-Tisch)—or Finds-Them-and-Kills-Them—lived from 1854 to 1929. A traditional Crow boté, he was accomplished in leatherwork, beading, and other traditional women’s arts. He is remembered for crafting the largest tipi known in his tribe, the lodge of Chief Iron Bull. Although he appears dressed as a woman in the known photographs of him, he was also reported to have served as a scout for the Americans and likely dressed as a man when doing so. In 1876 he played a dramatic role in an historic battle.

The summer, Crow warriors joined the forces of General George Crook in a major military operation to defeat their traditional enemies, the Sioux and Cheyenne. Ten days before Custer’s defeat at Little Bighorn, Crook encountered hostile Indians on the Rosebud Creek—and barely escaped Custer’s fate. In this battle, Ohchish and a woman named The Other Magpie fought together, rescuing a wounded Crow warrior and counting coup—that is, killing an enemy and taking a scalp.

The Battle of the Rosebud is noteworthy for one other gender-bending moment. Among the Cheyenne who were fighting the Americans and Crows was a chief named Comes in Sight. When his horse was shot out from under him, his sister, Buffalo Calf Road Woman—depicted in the ledger drawing below—charged into a shower of bullets to rescue him. The Cheyenne named the battle after this incident, referring to it as “Where the Girl Saved her Brother.”
Buffalo Calf Road Woman is an example of a Native woman participating into warfare without necessarily adopting an alternative gender identity. (Stereotypical views of Native American women are belied by the frequency in which they entered conflicts, fighting alongside with men, and many times earned distinction.) This is evident in the ledger drawing above. Buffalo Calf Road Woman is depicted dressed in the finery of a typical Cheyenne female.

However, a two-spirit, “fourth” gender role for females did exist among the Cheyenne. Called *hetanemane’o*, these women joined war parties and participated in councils of men. When they fought in battle they did so dressed as men did—naked except for a breechcloth like the members of the Hohnuka or Contrary society. The following ledger drawings depicts a Cheyenne *hetaneman* (sing.).
Chief Plenty Coups (Alek-Chea-Ahoosh) Home, Pryor, National Historic Landmark, Montana

In the 1880s the Crow chief Plenty Coups played a prominent role in a key episode involving Ohchish and the local Indian agent.

Government policies during this period regarding allotment of tribal land to individuals, reduction of reservations, and compulsory education have been well documented, but the clash of cultures was equally dramatic in the area of sexuality and gender. Government officials and agents regularly complained about irregularities in Crow morality. “I know of no tribe of Indians where vice is as prevalent,” wrote agent Henry E. Williamson in 1887, and in 1889, A. B. Holder attributed acceptance of the boté “not to any respect in which he is held, but to the debased standard of the people among whom he lives.” Agents took direct action “to crush the formerly open viciousness” by “meting out severe punishment.” Even after the turn of the century, Crows who engaged in premarital and extramarital sex, common law marriage, native divorce, or polygamy were routinely jailed by agents. Legal marriage was enforced by sending couples under guard to the nearest Christian minister.

Osh-Tisch did not escape this morals campaign. As Lowie reported, “Former agents have repeatedly tried to make him don male clothes, but the other Indians themselves protested against this, saying that it was against his nature.” In 1982, tribal historian Joe Medicine Crow related these events to Walter Williams:

One agent in the late 1890s was named Briskow [Briscoe], or maybe it was Williamson [Williamson was agent 1885-1886; Briscoe succeeded him and served until 1889]. He did more crazy things here. He tried to interfere with Osh-Tisch, who was the most respected badé. The agent incarcerated the badés, cut off their hair, made them wear men’s clothing. He forced them to do manual labor, planting these trees that you see here on the BIA [Bureau of Indian Affairs] grounds. The people were so upset with this that Chief Pretty Eagle came into Crow Agency, and told Briskow to leave the reservation. It was a tragedy, trying to change them. Briskow was crazy. [See also, Lillian Bullshows Hogan, The Woman Who Loved Mankind (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012), pp 124ff.]

What is extraordinary about this account is the intervention of the chief. In other tribes, missionary and educational influences made native leaders reluctant to
defend berdaches. In 1879, the only Hidatsa berdache fled to the Crows when his agent stripped him, cut off his braids, and forced him to wear men's clothing. But the Crows continued to view boté as integral, even necessary members of their society. It was a chief's duty to protect them.

Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument, Montana

Cheyenne male two spirits, or he’emane’o, had special roles in relation to warfare. Above all, they led the Cheyenne victory ("scalp") dance. The following ledger drawing depicts the dance held after Custer's defeat at the Little Bighorn in 1876. The he’emane’o appear in the drawing carrying the scalps tied to the ends of long poles, their faces blackened and dress as old women.


Hawikuh, National Historic Landmark, New Mexico Zuni-Cibola Complex, New Mexico

New Mexico is rich in sites with stories of two-spirit people and traditions. Among the Pueblo Indians two spirits are documented not only by anthropological reports, but in written references dating back to the Spanish colonial period and in archeological finds.

At Hawikku, a ball of clay was found in a male burial, an object typically, along with pottery-making tools, in burials of women. Equally suggestive are baskets (another
female craft) included in male burials and one instance of a woman buried wearing both a dress and a man’s dance kilt (Smoth, Woodbury, Woodbury, *Excavation of Hawikuh*).

*The Zuni Man-Woman* is an extensive study of that tribe’s two-spirit, or *lhamana*, role. It includes a biographical account of the *lhamana* We’wha, a prominent member of the tribe in the late nineteenth century. We’wha befriended the anthropologist Mathilda Coxe Stevenson and travelled with her to Washington, D.C. in 1886, where she spent six months assisting Stevenson with her research, socializing with the city’s society women, and calling on President Grover Cleveland.

*We’wha demonstrating weaving in the Mall near the Smithsonian Institute, 1886, National Anthropological Archives*

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**Fort Wingate Historic District, New Mexico**

In 1892, six years after her visit to Washington, We’wha was arrested for striking an American soldier attempting to arrest the Zuni governor. A contingent of heavily armed troops from Fort Wingate was dispatched to the pueblo and a raucous confrontation ensued. In the aftermath, key Zuni leaders, and We’wha, were arrested and imprisoned at Fort Wingate for a month. We’wha returned to Zuni by foot on a forty-mile trek across the Continental Divide in the dead of winter.

Even greater numbers of soldiers from Fort Wingate were dispatched to Zuni in 1897, as the result of events triggered by We’wha’s death. They occupied the village for five months, intervening in its governance and disrupting its social and cultural life. These events are remembered vividly by Zunis to the present day.
Acoma Pueblo, National Historic Landmark, New Mexico

In the late nineteenth century, two spirits were among the most accomplished potters at both Acoma and Laguna pueblos. A photograph taken in 1900 by Sumner Matteson depicts the Acoma kokwimu Wa-Ki with two female relatives and samples of their work on display. Matteson describes them as the most expert potters in Acoma.

In the same period, a two-spirit potter at Laguna known as Arow-awk (also spelled Arroh-ah-och) made extraordinarily large pots and was credited with introducing Zuni influences in his designs. He made have learned the craft at Zuni and, if so, likely knew We’wha, who was also an accomplished pottery maker.
Among the western Pueblos (Acoma-Laguna, Zuni, and Hopi) two-spirits were represented in both myths and sacred dances. At Zuni, a two-spirit *kokko*, or god, called Ko’lhamana was depicted in a major ceremonial. At Acoma-Laguna, myths tell of a battle with a entire tribe of two-spirit people known as the Storoka. The Storoka were portrayed in kachina dances at both Acoma-Laguna and Hopi. The Storoka are portrayed wearing a woman’s manta over men’s leggings.

At Zuni, Ko’lhamana was portrayed with the hair on one side worn up in the style of a woman and on the other side in the style of a man. This same hairstyle appears on a figure depicted in a kiva mural at Pottery Mound, an archaeological site in the vicinity of Acoma, dating to the early 1400s.

*From left to right: Kiva mural at Pottery Mound; mask of Ko’lhamana (Zuni); Storoka kachina (Acoma), Koroasta kachina (Hopi)*

**Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian, National Register of Historic Places, New Mexico**

Hastín Klah (1867-1936) deserves recognition as one of the most influential two spirits in American history. Born soon after his family returned from captivity at Fort Summer—the infamous Long Walk—his two spirit, or *nádleehi*, identity was
confirmed when he was a youth. His family pooled their resources to enable him to undertake extensive training in complex Navajo ceremonials, a traditionally male role. His female relatives taught him all the skills associated with the traditionally female art of weaving. He became one of the most accomplished weavers and medicine man of his generation.

Living in the vicinity of Newcomb, New Mexico, he formed lasting friendships with Anglo-Americans including Franc Newcomb, wife of the local trader, and Mary Cabot Wheelwright, a Boston heiress, who made New Mexico her second home. With their encouragement, Klah made a radical innovation. Combining his knowledge of the sandpainting designs he made during healing ceremonies with his skills in weaving, he began producing large tapestries depicting scenes from Navajo mythology. Prior to this, Navajo weaving utilized strictly geometric, abstract designs, and were sold as tourist items or for use as rugs. Klah’s large-scale weavings immediately attracted the attention of collectors and were displayed on museum walls. Although many of his contemporaries objected to the depiction of religious images, the scale and quality of Klah’s work helped transform what had been a “craft” into a fine art, one that provides a livelihood for numerous Navajo women (and two-spirit men) today.

Klah formed a deep and collaborative relationship with Mary Wheelwright. Out of this came one of the country’s most unique cultural and architectural resources. Originally called the Museum of Navaho Ceremonial Art, it is known today as the Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian in Santa Fe. The following account of the Museum’s founding is from Changing Ones.

Klah had spent a lifetime mastering the cultural traditions of his people. His career had been carefully nurtured by his family, who early on recognized his talent. He was certainly one of the most knowledgeable medicine men on the reservation. He was the last qualified to perform several important ceremonies. Consequently, he had begun to train a successor before 1917—his nephew, Beaal Begay. But in the summer of 1931, quite unexpectedly, Begay died. It was a bitter disappointment. Klah was in his sixties, and there was no time to train another student.

Wheelwright had also been thinking about her legacy and had decided to use her inheritance to found a museum devoted to Navajo religion. That autumn, when she asked Klah if he would be willing to place his ceremonial equipment and documentation in a place where they would be preserved and could be studied, Klah agreed. He was already beginning to have dreams of his own death.

Wheelwright had two goals in mind for her museum: “Although I believed strongly that the museum should be a depository for the lore
of the Navaho for their benefit in the future, I felt it should also be an open door for the American people into the wonderful world of their fellow-citizens, the Navaho.” To finance the project in the middle of the Depression, Wheelwright sold two of her family homes. Klah participated in all aspects of the museum’s planning, working closely with architect William Henderson. The result was a unique design that recreated the experience of emerging from the underworld—as the Navajo origin myth describes—and attending a Navajo ceremonial. In its original configuration, visitors entered the museum by ringing a bell at the doorway. A curator led them down a set of stairs, then back up again into the exhibition hall, where, Wheelwright hoped, they would experience a “sense of surprise and wonder” as they viewed displays of sandpaintings and artifacts and found themselves “face to face with the strange world of Navajo religion.”

![Hastín Klah with one of his sandpainting tapestries at the Newcomb’s trading post, Nava, New Mexico, ca. 1927; Wheelwright Museum gallery, 1938](image)

**Yuman Crossing Heritage Area, Arizona**

In the maps and books made by Europeans following their discovery of the Americas, the so-called New World was frequently illustrated by the figure of an Amazon queen. She reclines in a pose typical of European depictions of the nude—except for the inclusion of a bow and arrows, war club, or sometimes a bloody, severed head. To translate the erotic appeal of such an image for Renaissance male viewers into contemporary terms we need only imagine her feathered headdress and club replaced with a whip and a pair of stiletto heels. The New World was from the beginning an erotic horizon for male Europeans, a land where pleasures and evils banished by Christianity had migrated and flourished.
Such was the case when the Spaniards ventured northwards, beyond the region of the Aztec empire, into present-day Arizona and southern California. One of the first to entered these unknown lands was Hernán Cortés, who reported stories of an island north of Mexico rich in pearls and gold and inhabited by Amazons. It was given the name California, after the Amazon queen Califia in a popular novel of the time (Las sergas de Esplandian (translated as The Labors of the Very Brave Knight Esplandian), written around 1500 by Garci Rodriguez de Montalvo). In 1529, Nuño de Guzmán led an expedition to the region hoping to find the Amazons of California—and their gold.

The basis for these reports may have been in native mythology. A century later, Don Juan de Oñate asked natives along the lower Colorado River about Amazon women and was told stories of an island in the sea called Ziñogaba:

> The mistress or chieftainess of it was a giantess, and she was called Ciñacacohola, which means chieftainess or mistress. They pictured her as the height of a man-and-half of those of the coast, and like them very corpulent, very broad, and with big feet; and that she was old, and that she had a sister, also a giantess, and that there was no man of her kind.” (Zárate-Salmerón 1916: 276)

In fact, gender diversity was an integral part of Yuman-speaking societies, reflected in institutionalized roles and identities, mythology and folklore, and evidence from Yuman prehistory. Male two spirits were called elha among the Cocopa, éályaxai among Maricopa, alyha: among Mohave, and elxa´ among the Quechan. The Yuman tribes are especially notable for having a well-documented “fourth” gender role—
that is, a distinct status for females who expressed male traits and skills. They were called *hwame*: in Mohave, *kwerhame* in Quechan, *kwiraxameh* in Maricopa, and *warhameh* in Cocopa. Such women engaged in men’s work, including hunting, farming, and warfare, typically dressing as men and marrying women. Both male and female two-spirits were credited with mythological origins and spiritual powers that distinguished them from non-two-spirit men and women.

In the 1930s, the anthropologist George Devereux collected stories about a *hwame*: who lived in the late 1800s and was a powerful shaman. From his reports and from supplemental sources, a complex and nuanced story emerges of a female two spirit who lived in a time of great stress, and who, in fulfilling her tribe’s traditional fourth gender role became a controversial figure, remembered to this day.

Masahai was born sometime in the 1850s (or 1860s). With five brothers and two half-sisters, hers was a large and prominent family considered among the *pipa tahan* or “best of people.” Her aunt had been married to the famous chief Irataba. Masahai’s full name was Masahai Matkwisa Manye:, which means “Alluring Young Girl Who is Pleasing.” It was actually a man’s name, the kind a Mohave man might choose as a way of gaining luck in attracting the kind of women it describes. In fact, Masahai was quite lucky when it came to finding female lovers.

Of her early years, Devereux reports nothing. Upon arriving at adulthood, she is said to have never menstruated, although she looked feminine and had well-developed breasts. She did not cross-dress, or at least not routinely. Devereux was told that she wore short skirts “like a man,” which could either mean that she wore a variation of the men’s breechcloth or, conversely, a variation of the traditional knee-length woman’s bark skirt (although most Mohave women wore the full-length “Mother Hubbard” dress in this period). The Mohave referred to her as “he” (in English) and considered her a *hwame*.

It is not clear if Masahai underwent a formal initiation as most *alyha*: did. Her dreams gave her the power to cure sexual diseases. This power also made her lucky in love. Through her income from doctoring, her hard work as a farmer and hunter, and, later, through prostitution, she had enough money to be considered prosperous in Mohave terms—she could afford shoes.

Masahai’s first wife was considered very pretty—so pretty that men kept teasing her and trying to seduce her. They would say, “Why do you want a transvestite [Devereux’s term] for your husband who has no penis and pokes you with the finger?” Unimpressed, Masahai’s wife replied, “That is all right for me, if I wish to remain with her.” Yet another suitor tried to persuade her by saying, “She has no penis, she is just like you are. If you remain with her, no ‘other’ man will want you afterwards.” Although Masahai’s wife asserted that her partner was an excellent
provider, she decided to leave Masahai for this man. But finding this husband less satisfying, she eventually to Masahai.

In the meantime, Masahai had begun attending dances. She sat with the men and brazenly described her wife’s genitals, while flirting with girls—all typical male behavior. This earned her an obscene nickname, Hithpan Kudhape, which refers to one of the sexual positions used by hwame:. It was “such a bad insult that no one dared called her that to her face.” Eventually, the relentless teasing of Masahai’s wife led to their breakup.

Masahai’s next wife was also teased, and a rivalry developed between her and her predecessor. Masahai was unperturbed. “Never mind what she tells you. She wants to come back to me, that is all.” Eventually the two women met at a dance and a fight erupted between them (urged on by men). Masahai and her former wife’s husband watched serenely, as befit their masculine pride, until a bystander pushed the combatants onto Masahai and all three rolled around in the dirt. Some time later, this wife also left Masahai.

Disappointed and resentful, Masahai painted her face like a warrior and took out her bow and arrows. However, instead of going to the house of her second wife’s suitor to seek revenge, she went to a nearby camp and began courting yet another woman.

The married woman she wished to visit leered at her and insultingly spoke to her the way one woman speaks to another woman: “She thinks maybe that the bow and arrows suit her. She thinks she is a man.” These remarks did not appear to ruffle Sahaykwisa: [Masahai]. She calmly replied: “Yes, I can shoot game for you,” and then left. We think she must have felt encouraged, because we say that if a girl or woman insults her suitor, he can be pretty certain of winning her in the end. A few days later Sahaykwisa: visited this woman once more and asked her to grind corn for her, which is precisely what a bride is supposed to do the moment she reaches her new husband’s camp. Surprisingly enough, the woman complied and ground corn for the hwame:. The news of this spread like wildfire all over the reservation, and people said: “I bet she will get herself another wife. What can be the matter with these women to fall for a hwame:?”

Indeed, when Masahai called upon the woman a third time, she left her husband and eloped with the hwame:. The husband, a 35-year-old man named Haq’au, did nothing at that time. “He could not very well fight with a transvestite,” Devereux was
told. Masahai lived with her third wife on the southern outskirts of Needles. (One of these wives is identified in a 1911 census as “Owch kwitahiyooova, female wife of Masahai Kwisa.”)

Masahai’s ability to obtain wives was believed to be related to her shamanism. Hwame: were especially sought after for their ability to treat venereal disease, which was considered one of the most powerful skills of all—and a source of income. According to Devereux’s informants, “She was a good provider, worked hard and took great pleasure in bedecking her wives with beads and pretty clothes.”

Even so, Masahai’s third wife returned to her husband. She again painted herself like a warrior and stood on the outskirts of her former wife’s camp on the northern edge of Needles. This behavior was considered synonymous with that of a witch. Haq’au, her former wife’s husband, ambushed her in the bushes and raped her, proclaiming that he would “show her what a real penis can do.” After this, Masahai did not take a wife again. The Mohave believed she had intercourse with the ghosts of her former wives, whom she had bewitched, in her dreams.

Eventually Masahai fell in love with Tcuhum, a man of her own clan twenty years her senior. But Tcuhum refused to have sex with her, saying, “You are a man.” Masahai used her powers as a shaman to bewitch him. He died without ever naming her as his bewitcher, which Mohave interpret as meaning that he secretly did love her. Masahai then became lovers with his son, Suhura:ye and his friend, Ilykutcemidho:.

Masahai had now crossed the line between doctoring and witchcraft. According to Devereux, “Like most Mohave bewitchers she began to look for a chance of being killed, for only a murdered shaman will join the ghosts of his victims in the other world.” Accusations of witchcraft were widespread within the Yuman tribes in this period. Kelly has documented fourteen cases of individuals killed for witchcraft among the Cocopa between 1880 and 1945. Contemporary Mohave recall several infamous cases of witchcraft from the turn of the century and believe that the witches of that period were particularly powerful. Hivsu: Tupom³, Devereux’s primary informant for Masahai’s life, was a confessed witch who had also committed incest.

Masahai and her two male lovers traveled together some 30 miles north of Needles, where they planned to work for a living. On the trip, Masahai got drunk and openly boasted of killing Tcuhum with her witchcraft. Angered, her two lovers picked her up and threw her into the Colorado River, where she drowned. Her body was found two weeks later near Needles, and Hivsu: Tupom³ helped give her a traditional cremation. Masahai was approximately 45 years old.
It is important to note what is missing from Devereux’s case history—details of Masahai’s ordinary life, her upbringing, her shamanic practice, her relations with her family. Another reading might recognize her as an individual with an identity crisis in an historical period in which her tribe was under extreme duress.

Quite a different picture of Masahai Matkiwsa: emerges from the memories of contemporary Mohave, including descendants of her relatives. She is recalled primarily as a powerful shaman, who specialized in love magic, and less for her status as a *hwame*: Her demise is considered the result of a shamanic practice that was, if anything, too successful.

In the end, Masahai’s behavior conformed in every way to Mohave expectations for a *hwame*; a shaman, and, finally, a witch. Although these were, indeed, ambivalent roles in Mohave culture, they were not marginal. If anything, individuals like Masahai were viewed ambivalently because they enjoyed a *surplus*, not a deficit, of the power all Mohave aspired to obtain—the skills and luck bestowed by dreams.

To the south of the Mohave, reports from the 1890s mention a Quechan female two spirit, or *kwerhame*, who was married to a woman. She may be the woman in the photograph below from the same period—the only known photograph of a Native American female two spirit. It shows a Quechan woman wearing a man’s breechcloth and with bow guards on her wrists. Her posture is typical of a man. The massive amounts of jewelry she is wearing indicates wealth and high status.

*Quechan kwe’rham, ca. 1890s. Southwest Museum, Los Angeles, neg. no. N5506.*