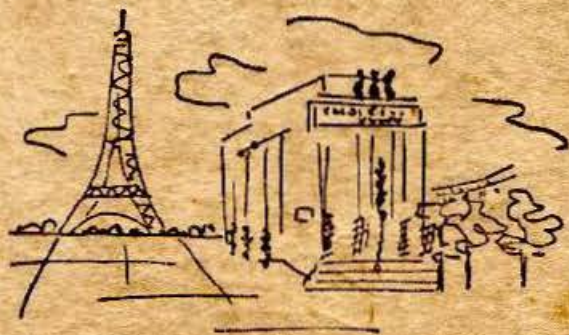


Miscellanea

PAUL RIVET
OCTOGENARIO DICATA

II



XXXI CONGRESO INTERNACIONAL DE AMERICANISTAS
UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL AUTÓNOMA DE MÉXICO

1958

THE ETERNAL PINDÓ PALM AND OTHER PLANTS IN MBYÁ-GUARANÍ MYTH AND LEGEND

LEON CADOGAN

ALTHOUGH some of the information contained in this article is included in "Ayvú Rapytá —Textos Míticos de los Mbyáguaraní del Guairá", the first three chapters of which were published in *Antropologia* (Sao Paulo), most of the data is unedited, having been obtained, incidentally, while collecting information for a paper on Guaraní botanical names among the Mbyá-guaraní of Caaguazú and Paso Yováí, and later (this work I was unable to finish, but it was published, in a fragmentary form, under the title of *Breve contribución al estudio de la nomenclatura guaraní en botánica*, Asunción, 1955). As no history of the Mbyá-guaraní of the Guairá has up to date been attempted, a few words regarding this group are necessary.

The Mbyá-guaraní of the Guairá (Villarrica department and, after this department has ben subdivided, the departments of Caaguazú and Caazapá) are a group who have clung with remarkable tenacity to their language and traditions and, until they were practically exterminated by smallpox about the beginning of the century, had successfully resisted all attempts to subdue them. Their hatred, first of the *yvy pó amboaré í* (inhabitant of foreign lands, i.e., Spaniards) and later his Mestizo descendant the *Juruá* (hairy-mouth —Paraguayan) commenced after an attempt to convert or subdue them had ended in disaster. Some 400 or 500 souls living in the Tarumá (San Joaquín) having been "converted" by the Jesuit missionaries with the help of tame Guaraní from the southern missions, they were transferred to Santa María, some hundreds of miles to the south, arriving there during the period when these southern missions (Santa María, San Ignacio, Santa Rosa and Santiago) were in a state of turmoil owing to clashes between the Jesuits and the Paraguayan government, the situation being greatly aggravated by hunger and disease. After a few years in Santa Rosa, the Mbyá escaped and returned to their forest fastnesses of the Tarumá,

where a few were found years later and utilized, with Guaraní from the south, to found, or re-found, the Tarumá Missions (San Joaquín and San Estanislao). These Monteses, Itatines, Tobatines or Cayguá, as the Mbyá-guaraní are variously called by different writers were, according to information contained in the Jesuit chronicles, a nation of peaceful agriculturists; their leaders, however, were evidently decidedly averse to being "converted". And upon their escape from Santa María the whole group, with the exception of the few whom it was possible to incorporate into the Tarumá Missions, became irreconcilable enemies of the Spaniard and later the Paraguayan, attacking them and robbing whenever there was a chance to do so; and this hatred, as stated, did not end until the tribe was virtually wiped out by the smallpox. This accounts for the remarkable purity in which they have managed to preserve their language and traditions, it still being possible to obtain, among the scattered surviving remnants, texts in which no apparent trace of Christian influence is apparent, in spite of the fact that for half a century at least they have lived in more or less close contact with the Mestizo population.*

The most prominent tree in Mbyá-guaraní mythology is the *Pindó* palm: *Arecastrum Romanzoffianum*. In the Creation Myth five *Pindó* palms uphold the Universe, there being a *Pindovy* (eternal palm) under *Yvy Mbyté* (the centre of the earth); another under *Karái Ambá* (the abode of Karái, the god of fire, the East); another under *Tupã Ambá* (the Abode of Tupã, the god of rain and owner of the waters,

* (For historical information, compare the account of the Tarumá Missions in Azara's classical *Viajes*. . . with:

PERAMÁS, P. José Manuel: *Vida y obra de seis humanistas*, con prólogo del P. Guillermo Furlong, S. J., pp. 203-07. Buenos Aires, 1946.

PASTELLS, P. Pablo, S. J.: *Historia de la Compañía de Jesús de la Provincia del Paraguay, continuación del P. F. Mateos, S. J.*, tomo VII, p. 604; Madrid, MCMLIX.

CHARLEVOIX, P. Pedro F. Javier de: *Historia del Paraguay*, con anotaciones y correcciones latinas por Muriel; trad. de Hernández, p. 9; Madrid, 1916.

SCHADEN, Egon: Introducción a "Ayvú Rapytá", "*Antropología*", São Paulo, vol. I, No. I.

"Las reducciones del tarumá y la destrucción de la organización social de los mbyá-guaraníes del Guairá", *Estudios Antropológicos publicados en Homenaje al Doctor Manuel Gamio*, México, 1956.

For bibliography, see Herbert Baldus: *Bibliografía crítica de etnología brasileira*, São Paulo, 1954; to which should be added Egon Schaden's masterly *Aspectos fundamentais da cultura guaraní*, São Paulo, 1954.

the West); one at *Yvytú Ymá Rapytá* (the origin of the primitive wind, the South); and another at *Yvytú Porã Rapytá* (the origin of the good wind, the North). *Yvy Mbyté* (centre of the earth) is the name applied to that part of the Guairá Department situated between the districts of San Joaquín, Caaguazú and Yhu where the father of the race, *Pa'í Reté Kuaray* (the priest of the body like the sun) was begotten, and is considered by the Mbya to be the cradle of the race, comparable to our Garden of Eden.

The next myth in which the *Pindó* is mentioned is *Yvy Ru'u*, the Deluge. Taparí, the hero, and his aunt with whom he has sinned, pray and dance in the waters of the Flood until they attain *aguyjé* (perfection, saintliness, ripeness), which enables Taparí to create a *Pindó* palm with two leaves, one for himself and one for his companion. It towers above the waters and enables them to enter *Yvy Marã Ey*, the Elysian Fields of Guaraní mythology.

In the myth of *Pa'í Reté Kuaray* (the priest with the sun-like body) the *Pindó* is again mentioned (this is the Mbyá-guaraní version of the Myth of the Twins: as the Mbyá eliminate twins at birth, a Myth of the Twins would be inadmissible; in this version therefore the elder brother, *Pa'í Reté Kuaray*, creates his younger brother Jachy, the Moon). In this myth *Nande Ru* (our Father) in the form of an owl is caught in a trap set by *Nande Jaryi-rã* (our future grandmother) for partridges; and *Pa'í Reté Kuaray* is begotten as a result of the union of Our Grandmother with the god. The text states that "the place where our Grandmother lived is called the place of the gushing fountain. It is the centre of the earth, the true centre of the earth. A *Pindovy* (eternal palm) towers upright in that place. The blossoms of the eternal palm were first lightly sucked by the *Piri'y riki* bird".

The prominent place occupied by the *Pindó* palm in Mbyá-guaraní mythology is but natural: *Pindó* leaves are used for thatching the Mbyá's dwelling; the tender tops provide him with an excellent vegetable; the fruit, pounded and mixed with water, provide him a nutritious beverage; the kernel is edible; the roots are used in medicine as a stypic; the pith of the trunk provides him with flour: *hu'í*, in times of dearth; the trunk, felled at the appropriate season, serves as a breeding ground for edible larvae, an indispensable source of fat or oil. Life for the Mbyá would be inconceivable without the *Pindó* palm; it is therefore but natural that the Universe, as he pictures it, should rest upon the eternal *Pindovy*; that a *Pindó* should have permitted Taparí

to save himself when the waters of the Deluge destroyed the earth; and that an eternal *Pindó* should tower above the fountain at *Yvy Mbyté* where the father of the race was miraculously begotten (The *Pindó*, in everyday conversation, is generally referred to as *Guapytany*—the red-fruit tree—a name also given in Montoya's classical *Tesoro de la lengua guaraní*. The names *Pindó* and *Pirí*—reed, which see below—are derived from the same root: *pi*, *api* = bare, smooth, polished; and the name *Pirí'y riki* applied to the bird which first sucked the blossoms of the *Pindó* palm growing in the Guaraní Garden of Eden shows that the *Arecastrum Romanzoffianum* was also called *Pirí'y*, the literal translation of which is: reed trunk, reed tree).

No other palms are mentioned in my collection of mythical texts; but well informed *mburuvichá* (leaders) state that the *Jeju*, *Jejú*, or *Jeju'y*, a very tall species growing in the Paraná forests is, like the *Pindó*, *yvyrá porã* (sacred tree, holy tree) growing in Paradise. Growing on the trunk of the *Jeju'y* is sometimes to be found an orchid called *Mbaraká moã* (guitar remedy), used for making glue with which guitars are made and mended; and the *Jeju'y* growing in *Yvy Marã Ey* are described as harbouring a number of these orchids. That this *Jeju'y* palm was formerly—for some reason which has been forgotten—considered highly important, is proved not only by the fact that it is included in the number of sacred plants growing in the realms of the gods, but also by the fact that it is the only other plant name beside *Takúa* (bamboo) and *Pirí* (reed) still used by the Mbyá as a sacred human name. It is also mentioned by Peramás as the name of one of the chiefs with whose people the mission of San Joaquín was founded; and as a Guaraní surname appears in the parochial registers of several towns including Nuestra Señora del Rosario de los Ajos (now called Coronel Oviedo) and Villarrica, between the years 1806 and 1850. The importance attached to the *Jeju'y* might possibly be related to the fact that it is used by the Guajakí for making their bows.

According to some *mburuvichá* (leaders), the *Mbokajá* palm (*Acrocomia totai*) also grows in Paradise, in the realms of *Karái Ru Eté* the God of Fire, who is also the owner of the large wild pig. The *Mbokajá* produce a crop of nuts every morning to feed the herds of *Karái Ru Eté*.

The common or everyday name of the Paraguayan cedar or *Cedrela fissilis*: *ygary* (boat tree) is suggestive; and further evidence of the importance attached by the Mbyá at some remote period of their history

to the Cedrela, owing undoubtedly to its being used for the making of canoes, is the religious name *Yvyrá Ñamandú* (Creator tree). Nowadays the wood is sometimes used in building a hut or making a drum or guitar; and the only information to be elicited from the *mburuvichá* (leaders) regarding the privileged position of the tree is that it was the first tree to be created by Ñamandú (the Creator); it is therefore *yvirá porã* (sacred tree) and grows in Paradise. Boats and navigation are practically unknown to the present-day Mbyá, and to judge by the language, have evidently been so for centuries. Even in their religious traditions I have only once heard a boat: *ygá* mentioned. A legend which is evidently of modern origin describes the genesis of the Cedrela. According to this story, there was a beautiful maiden, courted by innumerable suitors. She rejected them all, remaining chaste and devoting herself to the religious exercises which would enable her to enter Paradise without suffering the ordeal of death. Upon the eve of attaining *aguyjé* (perfection) however, she succumbed to temptation and was changed into the Cedar. In this way the Mbyá explains the fact that the tree is sought after (it provides a valuable timber, and the forests are literally combed in search of suitable sized trees).

The *Kurupika'y* (*Sapium longifolium*) is also *yuyra porã*, a sacred tree growing in heaven. It is mentioned in the myth of Pa'i Reté Kuaray, being the tree from the leaf of which he created his younger brother. The latex was also used by the Twins for painting their faces and the wood, together with that of the Cedar, for making drums, for which purposes both the wood and the latex are still sometimes utilized. The tree is also of interest because of the fact that the name proves it to be the tree of the Kurupí, a species of satyr in the mythology of some groups, a devil among certain Brazilian tribes and the "owner" of chasms and precipices in Mbyá-guaraní mythology: *Kurupika'a'y* = the trunk or stem of the Kurupí's plant. There is also a creeper (*Shodanthus splendens*) called in contemporary Guaraní *Ysy-pó Kurupí* (Kurupí creeper), and *Kurupí rembó* (Kurupí's penis) in Chiripá-guaraní, both of which are reminiscent of the enormous penis attributed to this satyr in classical Guaraní lore. This creeper is not included by the Mbyá in their list of sacred plants.

Most fruit trees are mentioned in the myth of Pa'i Reté Kuaray and Jachy (Myth of the Twins); they were discovered and named by the brothers, and therefore grow in Paradise where they produce a fresh crop of fruit every morning. Most leaders, however, do not in-

clude among this number the *Guavirá* (*Campomanesia xanthocarpa*) nor the *Jacarati'á* or *Jaracachi'á* (*Jaracatia dodecaphylla*), the reason given being that they were not known to be brothers, but were discovered later by man: *tekó achy rembikuaá* (known to mortals).

Another tree named in the same myth is the *Eugenia myrcianthes*, called *yvahái* in contemporary Guaraní; the everyday name in Mbyá-guaraní is *Tejú-rembĩ'ú* (iguana's food), and the religious name *Agua-ra yvá'y, tembía ja* (the tiger's fruit tree, bait for the prey). It was created as a bait by the "Twins" to entice the *Mba'é Ypy*, the primitive beings who had devoured their mother, across a river, in which they were destroyed, excepting one who was changed into a tiger. The *Yvahái* does not grow in heaven.

Another tree mentioned in this myth, and which is also a sacred tree growing in *Yvy Marã Ey*, is the *Aspidosderma quirandii*, the name of which is of interest to ethnologists. Upon *Jachy* (Moon) being ordered to ascend to Paradise, which he did by shooting his arrows into the air and forming a column reaching to Heaven, his bow remained on earth and was changed into the *Aspidosderma*, a tree which would provide mankind with wood for their bows. The religious name of this tree is *Jachy rapá* (Moon's bow) and the everyday name *Guayrapajú*, which may be translated either yellow bow or eternal bow. As stated, it is used (as is also the *Guajayví-Patagonula*) for making bows. The name of this tree in contemporary Guaraní is *Kirandy*, and there is another tree which I have as yet been unable to have classified, called *Kira'y*; the latter meaning Kira tree, the former Kira grove (The meaning of *Kira* I have as yet been unable to ascertain). The *Kirandy* is obviously the tree which gave its name to the Querendí Indians. Paul Groussac, in *Mendoza and Garay*, quoted by Máximo Pereira in *Boletín de Filología*, Montevideo, t. VI p. 127, 1950, suggests that the word is a modified form of *Caranda'y*, the *Copernicia australis*; and in the Smithsonian's *Bulletin* No. 143 it is suggested that the word means "containing fat". Neither of these suggestions, when studied in the light of the Mbyá-guaraní myth, appear to be satisfactory; it being much more probable that the sacred Moon's Bow or *Aspidosperma quirandii*, the *Kira'y* or *Kirandy* of contemporary Guaraní, is the "totemic" tree of the Querandí.

Details given regarding several trees and plants which are said to be sacred or grow in Paradise because "they are remedies which were known to our Father: *poa Ñande Ru rembi-kuaá*" are of interest as

they undoubtedly give an insight, however slight it may be, into the ailments which afflicted the Guaraní in prehistoric times, also providing information regarding the *modus operandi* of the tribal doctor. The *Tatare* (*Pythelocobium tortuum*), for instance, is a sacred tree because it was decreed by our Father that it should cure coughs; an infusion of the bark of *Yvyra Ñechi* (*Rutaceae*) was prescribed by him to cure inflammation of the white of the eye: *techá yvy pytã* (Piper, Jaborandi) is a panacea for aches and pains; *Uruvú retymá* (*Fragaria*) was used by him for headaches and as a prophylactic to keep all sorts of disease away. A decoction of the bark of *Yvyrapyté pytã* (*Cangralea cangerana*) was administered by Ñande Ru to victims of enemy sorcerers who had had grubs or worms introduced into their viscera; this decoction reinforced the effects of the praying and chanting and fumigation with tobacco smoke which was simultaneously resorted to, and expelled the worms or grubs. When the victim of rival sorcery had been attacked by another sort of parasite, *teté rachó* (the body grub), an infusion of *poã pochy* (the angry herb, as yet unclassified) was used in the same manner. I was able to ascertain that *Poã pochy*, as in all probability also the *Cangralea*, are still used in this interesting combination of magical and rational therapeutics.

The importance of tobacco: *pety*, need not be stressed; it may be added, however, that the meaning of the word is evidently: to heat and protect oneself (with the smoke). And the religious Mbyá-guaraní name of tobacco smoke: *tatachiná reko achy*, fully confirms the importance attached by the Guaraní to tobacco. *Tatachiná* is the life-giving mist or haze attributed to Jakairá, the god of spring and patron of sorcerers, and is considered by the Mbyá as the source of vitality. The creation of tobacco and the pipe are referred to in the myth of *Yvy Pyaú* (New Earth) which was created after the destruction of the first earth by the Flood. Jakairá, upon undertaking to create a new world, states: "I shall cause *tatachiná* to flow throughout all the valleys; I shall create the tobacco and the pipe in order that my sons shall protect themselves with *tatachiná reko achy* (human or mortal *tatachiná*)".

Other trees and plants included among the *yvyrá porã* (sacred plants) growing in Paradise are:

Mbaraká moã (called *tamanakuná* in contemporary Guaraní) an orchid used for making glue, already referred to.

Káá (*Ilex paraguariensis*) and *Káá miri* (*Ilex dumosa*, called

Ká'a chirí or *Apere'a ka'a* in contemporary Guaraní). The first is the national beverage; the second medicinal.

Yvyrapepe (*Holocalyx Balansae*), the heartwood of which is used for making the wand or rod carried by leaders, the symbol of power in Guaraní mythology (The sacred name in Mbyá-guaraní of the masculine human skeleton is *yvyra'i-kãgã*, the approximate translation of which would be: bones of him who bore the rod or wand). *Yvyrapepe heartwood* is also used in magical medicinal rites.

Ju'a pará (*Solanaceae*) —the prickly pear with mottled fruit, the large mottled fruit of which were created for infant's playthings.

Also included in the number are the *Pirí* (reed), the *Mbavy* (*Banara macrophylla*) and the *Karandá* (*Prosopis Kuntzeii*). No plausible reason is given for including the reed, but the myth of Piri-tau-ju (*Anthropos*, Band 50, pp. 49-54, 1955), proves it to have been an ancient Mbyá-guaraní feminine name; and it appears in the Mission parochial registers as a Guaraní surname in *Pirí* (reed), *Pirivevé* (flying reed) and *Piripoty* (reed flower). The meaning of *Karandá*, the name of the *Prosopis Kuntzeii*, is lordlike, shamanlike; but no reason could be obtained for its inclusion among the sacred trees. It is, however, mentioned in a chant describing a ritual dance of Tupã Chy Ete, the goddess of rain and thunder. As regards the *Mbavy* or *Banara* it is said to be sacred because it harboured the little birds created by Ñande Ru after the earth had appeared.

A tree which one would expect to find among the sacred trees but which is not included in the number is the *Aju'y Joá* (*Ocotea*). It is mentioned in the myth in which Ñande Ru, with the cooperation of *Kururú* (the toad), steals live coals from the Future Vultures for the use of mankind, the *Aju'y Joá* being the tree in the wood of which one of the coals was deposited, it being a soft wood used for producing fire by friction. It is also mentioned in one version of the Creation myth as supporting the earth which was being created. Another plant the name of which would induce one to consider worthy of inclusion among the sacred plants is the Passiflora, *Mbarakujá* (*Mburukujá* in other branches of Guaraní). The Mbyá name means the owner or producer of well being; the "classical" name, meaning the producer of religious fervour; but none of my informants included it among the sacred plants nor knew of its use in medicine.

Three varieties of soft maize, a variety of mandioca called *manji'ó*

jeruchí, sweet potatoes and *kuarapepe* (pumpkin) are said to provide a daily crop of fresh food for the inhabitants of the Yvy Marã Ey. The *andai*, a sweet pumpkin much used in Paraguay, is not included among the number of sacred plants, "as it was not known to our Father". The *peguaó* (*peguahó* and *mbery* in contemporary Guaraní), a large leafed plant of the Cannaceae family, grows among the edible plants in Paradise, its leaves being used as wrappers for *mbytá* (corn cakes) which are baked under the ashes. The large Indian variety of spotted peanuts is also included in the number: and in a myth in which a Mbyá reached the realms of Karaí Ru Eté, he was fed on holy peanut meal: *manduvi ku'i ju*.

Grass is twice mentioned in the mythical texts. In the myth of *Yvy Tenondé* (the creation of the first earth) the earth was originally covered by forests. "In order to work producing meadows, our Father sent the chirping grasshopper; tussocks of grass appeared wherever he placed his hindquarters, and in this way meadows were created. The first to express his joy at the appearance of the meadows was the big red partridge". *Kapi'i ju* (eternal grass) is referred to in a chant reproducing a conversation between the father and the mother of the gods. The father of the gods complains that his sons have forgotten the heavenly abode, and the mother of the gods answers: "I still see humility among those to whom I have given seats (women and children); and look, I have gathered small spotted baskets with which they shall play when they return to my abode; and among the grass tussocks of the eternal meadows I have gathered *Eichú* (*Nectarina mellifica*) in order that they may rinse their mouths with honey when I recall them (It may be added that *Eichú*, *Nectarina mellifica*, a small bee, is the name of the Pleiades or Seven Sisters in several Guaraní dialects).

Reference has already been made to the *Pirí* (rush) and *Jeju'y* (a palm), both of which names are used as sacred human patronymics by the Mbyá. Another plant name also used as a human name is *Takuá*, the generic names of canes and bamboos, of which there are several "sacred" varieties growing in Paradise. *Takuá* as a sacred human name, is also used by the Apapokuva-guaraní, according to Nimuendaju's classical work on the mythology of this group and also, as I was able to ascertain, by the Chiripá-guaraní. It is a feminine name, the *takua-pú* or bamboo rod being used by women in the ritual dance. Such is the importance attached to the *takuá* in the mythical texts that the sacred name of the feminine skeleton (in which it is hoped that the soul will

re-incarnate), is *takua-yva'i-kāgā* = bones of she who wielded the *takua* (in the ritual dance).

Although only the three plant names mentioned are referred to in my collection of texts as sacred human names, the number of trees which might be classified as "totemic" is possibly greater, because a number of plant names are quoted by Nicolás del Techo and other Jesuit chroniclers as names of groups or tribes; and in the parochial registers of several towns of the Guairá department I recollect having seen the surnames: Arasa, Arasái (*Psidium guayava*); Ybamiri (little fruit, unclassified); Yvaviyú (*Eugenia pungens*); Mandiyú (cotton plant); Piri and Pindó, already mentioned. Curupay (*Piptadenia macrocarpa*) also appears, but the "convert" to whom the name was applied was probably a former sorcerer, because the word also means witch-doctor.

A number of trees are said by the Mbyá to possess evil souls, and may wound people in the same way as sorcerers or mischievous spirits, causing pebbles to penetrate the flesh (the wound remaining invisible!) which only the experienced shaman can extract. One of these is the *Tajy* (*Tecoma ipe*). The gods sometimes punish the *Tajy* by striking it with a thunderbolt; fragments of the wood of a tree killed in this manner are used as amulets to ward off danger. Other trees with evil souls are the *Yvyrá kachi*, a *Bergeronia* called *Yvyra tái* in contemporary Guaraní; the *Guajayví*, a *Patagonula*, already referred to; the *Yvyrá pajé* (*Microcarpus frondosus*), and the *Kurupa'y* (*Piptadenia macrocarpa*). The fact of a tree having an evil soul does not mean that it cannot be utilized: the bark of the *Yvyra kachi* is considered an excellent remedy for worms; while the heartwood of the *Guajayví*, as stated above, is used for making bows. As regards the *Kurupa'y*, the belief of its possessing evil properties is not limited to the Mbyá because Montoya in his classical *Tesoro de la Lengua Guaraní* states that it is synonymous with sorcerer, and that to "wound with kurupa'y = a kurupa'y boñá" is synonymous to "smite with witchcraft". Among the Mbyá, *Kurupa'y* splinters are still used in sorcery, according to my informants; and the word *kurundú*, derived from the same stem, is still sometimes used in the Guairá in referring to a person considered to possess supernatural powers.