

THE GAMELLA INDIANS

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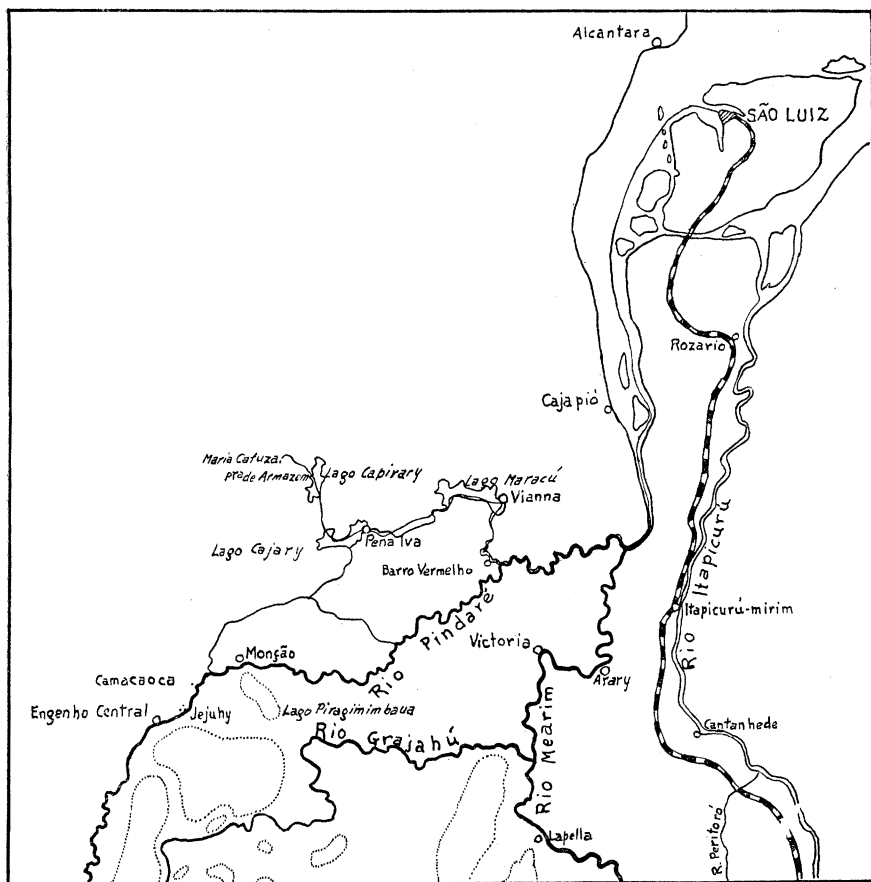
AS far back as our historical sources extend two Indian strains are recognizable in the population of the area now forming the state of Maranhão. The unquestionably older element, occupying the center and the south, embraces Gê tribes, including two linguistically and culturally distinct branches of the stock,—the Timbira in the north and the Akwé in the south. The more recent strain is made up of Tupí tribes, which had settled in the northwest and may likewise be divided into two groups. The dialects of the “he” group—so named from the pronoun of the first person singular—correspond to a somewhat earlier wave of immigrants, represented in this region by the Guajajara and the Amanayé. The speakers of the “če” dialects, on the other hand, in all probability did not immigrate into the area until after the discovery of Brazil, coming from the south; they are here represented only by the Tupinambá.

At present the Akwé and the Tupinambá are both extinct in Maranhão, while the Timbira and Guajajara persist.

Probably the entire coast of Maranhão and far beyond it in an easterly as well as westerly direction was once occupied by a primitive tribe of fishermen, the Taramembé, part of whose habitat was only subsequently seized by the Tupinambá. The remnants of the Taramembé became extinct in the first half of the last century before anything beyond a few personal names was recorded of their speech. From these and the sparse statements about their culture they seem to have been akin neither to the Tupí nor to the Timbira.

The entire northeast of the state and vast tracts east thereof are ethnographically almost entirely unknown. This is the part of Maranhão that first received a fairly dense population of

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settlers. Sources of the 17th and 18th century mention a dozen tribes: Guaná, Uruaty, Cahicahy, Guaxioná, Aranhi, Suassuhy, Arayó, Anapurú, Guanaré, Coroatá, Barbado and Gamella. The language of all these tribes has remained unknown, while the scant comments on their culture indicate that this was not uniform and that once more we are dealing neither with congeners of the Tupi nor of the Timbira, though possibly some of the groups belonged to some other branch of the Gê family. Of the tribes mentioned, the Guaná were peaceable farmers; others, e. g. the Cahicahy, warlike nomad hunters.

At the beginning of the 19th century, except for the Gamella, these tribes survived, if at all, only in insignificant remnants, which completely disappeared by the middle of the century. The Gamella of Codó were exterminated in 1856, the only word preserved of their speech being " Bertrotopama," the name of their last chief. Of the Gamella near Penalva only a handful lived until the turn of the 20th century, and not a single word of their language is reported.

Again and again the designations "Timbira" and "Gamella" have been interpreted as synonymous terms for the same people. However, Ribeiro, familiar with both, sharply distinguishes them: "Timbira e Gamella unicos dialectos que presentemente se conhecem entre o gentilismo que habita estes limites." The Guajajara, it must be noted, remained unknown to him. He continues as follows: "A nação Gamella, que apenas em dois districtos espalha a sua prole, suppondo-se porisso poderoso, não forma comtudo mais do que tres ou quatro povoações; porem a nação Timbirá, superabundantemente numerosa, tem absorvido com innumeraveis aldeas quasi todo o ambito central desses terrenos, que ainda estão por nos deshabitados."¹ Thus, he not only points out the linguistic difference, but also contrasts the "nação Gamella" and the "nação Timbira." Pereira do Lago similarly draws a sharp line between the Gamella and the Timbira of the lower Pindaré region. In this context the Portuguese word "gamella," which denotes a wooden bowl or platter, refers to the lip-plug.

The earliest reference to the Gamella appears in the chronicle of Piahy by Pereira de Alencastre: "The Gamella, Ginapapo (?) and Guaraniz (= Guanaré), who lived on the banks of the Parnahyba in Piahy, migrated to Maranhão and the waste lands of Pará subsequently to the general uprising [of the Indians of North Piahy] in 1713."

From 1747 on, the Gamella are reported from the Rio Mearim. They probably occupied the region of the lakes and inundated steppes between Bacabal and the mouth of the Rio Grajahú. In the year mentioned the Capitão-mor of the Rio Mearim,

¹ Francisco de Paula Ribeiro, (a), § 3, 4.

accompanied by a missionary, traveled up-stream and apparently visited the Gamella. In 1751 the Jesuits were charged with the conversion of the tribe, which was then settled in eleven villages, but the attempt of P. Antonio Machado failed, presumably above all because he came with an armed escort ("bandeira"). The manuscript of his "Relação da Missão dos Gamellas" is deposited in the library of Évora; to my regret this presumably most important document on the Gamella is inaccessible for me.

By 1796 the only remaining settlement of the eleven Gamella villages on the Mearim was Lapella (on the left bank, 15 km above the mouth of the Grajahú), and this, too, had "dwindled down to nothing." Simultaneously there is mention for the first time of a Gamella settlement at Cajary, in the lake region on the north side of the lower Pindaré. Apparently, then, toward the end of the 18th century the Gamella had abandoned the lower Mearim, pushing somewhat further northwest to the Pindaré, where the historians of the Jesuit missions Maracú (= Vianna) and Carará (= Monção) had hitherto known only about Guajajara. As late as 1820 Pereira do Lago reports wild Gamella on the south side of the Rio Pindaré, two leguas south of Monção on Lake Piragimimbaua.

In 1819 there were doubtless in Maranhão two separated Gamella tribes, settled among hordes of Timbira,—the Gamella of Vianna and those of Codó. Given the sparse and inaccurate statements at our disposal, we must reckon with the possibility that these groups may have been not merely two locally differentiated divisions of one people, but two distinct peoples sharing merely lip-plugs and a hostile attitude toward neo-Brazilians.

The Gamella of Vianna² are perhaps identical with P. João Daniel's (ca. 1750 ?) exceptionally tall Indians with dish-like lip-plugs "on which they place food and drink, thence noisily sipping it into the mouth." Ribeiro also describes their use of the lip-disk as a plate, while according to Prazeres they hurled the food set on the lip-disk into their mouths by contraction of their lips, "which makes them look horrible and awful."

² Daniel, 183. Ribeiro (a), § 23-24; (b), 39-40. Lago, 395, 396, 410, 412, 414. Prazeres, 137. Marques, "Indios".

About 1820 the territory of these Indians began back of the left bank of the Pindaré, between what is now called the Engenho Central and Vianna, and extended thence northwestwards to the Upper Tury. Their also living on the south side of the Pindaré has already been mentioned.

Ribeiro, too, emphasizes the fact that the Indians are tall, well-built and, as a result of their forest habitat, of light skin color. The lip-plug, according to him, was of wood. Lago, who visited the Gamella in their settlement near Monçao, says they stretched the lower lip and ears from 3 to 4 inches, i. e., about corresponding to the size of the ear-plugs now worn by the Canella and Krahó. Although he watched them at their meals, he does not refer to their laying food on the lip-disk. They went naked except that the women used a leaf covering and painted themselves with urucú. Their grass huts were almost round, 20 palmos (4.4 m) in diameter and 12 palmos (2.64 m) in height, i. e. considerably larger than the beehive huts of the Timbira. Weapons and quantities of sweet-potatoes were deposited with the corpse, which was buried in sitting posture in the hut; this, however, was abandoned on the occurrence of a second death. Their weapons were large arrows and bows, as well as a hilted sword-club four fingers in width and 4 palmos (88 cm) long. The Timbira equivalent is usually considerably longer. Lago was unable to detect any outward religious cult. A dying blind man was treated with indifference because he lacked kin. They were indolent, preferring theft to farming. On the numerous lakes of their region they devoted themselves to fishing.

A statement reproduced by Ribeiro indicates that their settlement in Penalva goes back to José Telles da Silva's efforts, but after the founder's departure most of the Indians left to live in the woods with hardly any outside intercourse. The date is uncertain, but in 1796 a Gamella aldea is located at Capivary near Penalva, though they were probably never settled in Penalva itself.

Martius calls the Gamella "Acobú." This is the name of the tribe or tribes among the Timbira, who designate as haka-po "a flat lower lip." Martius carried his inclination to use the final

syllables of tribal names as a classificatory criterion to the extent of uniting five groups—the Acobû, Bucobû, Busseti, Temembû, and Goanabû—into a branch of the Gê family in a wider sense. The last two names—properly Temembó and Uanapú—I am unable to explain; the remainder are to be translated as follows:

Acobû: see above

Bucobû: (Pohl's Bucobiyi), the Pukópye (sometimes pronounced Pukóboye) west of the upper Grajahú; a Timbira tribe.

Busseti: (Martius translates Bûs-été "the true Bûs," from été, Tupi for "genuine"). This is the Timbira name for the Šavante-Šerente: pu-če-ti, "big penis-sheath."

Thus, there is no warrant for a tribal group of Bû(s). Ribeiro, who heard the name, already declares his inability to verify its existence.

In 1810, after the Gamella of Vianna had attacked and menaced this place, Ribeiro undertook a punitive expedition against them, burning down their village and destroying their small plantations. The Gamella had fled before him, killing their aged and sick to forestall their capture. They had protected the approach to their villages and their retreat by bamboo caltrops.

Lago mentions two attacks by the Gamella (1818 and 1819) on a right affluent of the upper Tury and four in 1820 several leguas from Monção, near which locality there were then three villages of tame Gamella,—Guarapiranga, Capivary, and Cajary—with a total population of 280. Another Gamella village, Jejuhy, further up the Pindaré, was deserted. The site of Guarapiranga is no longer ascertainable; probably it was the village nearest to Monção. Cajary is the name of the lake on which Penalva is situated, but the location of the Gamella village cannot be determined today. Capivary is a lake northwest of Penalva, the Gamella village was on the west shore of the point of land called "Ponta do Armazem." In 1847 a hundred Gamella lived between Lago Cajary and the Estrada do Tapuio, somewhat below Monção, but seventeen years later there were only a few survivors.

The last gathering-place of the Gamella was the western shore of Lago Capivary, where their last chief, Julião, died in the middle of the 'eighties. In the first decade of the 20th century the last more or less pure individuals died there, in 1930 the last old woman of mixed blood still able to make some bungling use of the Gamella language.

Some of the old Sertão inhabitants of western Pará erroneously assume that the Tembé, a Tupí tribe extending over the territory of the Gurupy, Guamã and Acará, are descendants of the old Gamella. The opinion rests on the use of a Lagenaria lip-disk by the ancestors of the Tembé, as described by the present members of the tribe themselves. For tembé means "lower lip," and among the Amanayé this tribe was known as Tame-hu, Big Lower Lip.

Sparse as are the reports on the Gamella of Vianna, the literature on those of Codó is still scantier.³ In 1819 they inhabited the bush forests of the river area of the Rio Codoinho, which near Codó empties into the Itapicurú from the left. In the west their neighbors were the Timbira tribes of the lower Mearim; in the south there was another Timbira group, the hostile Čákamekra (= Matteiros); in the southeast, east, and north they roamed as far as the Itapicurú and down this stream as far as Cantanhede (3° 40' s. lat.), i. e. over the entire former territory of the Barbado. They were far more warlike than their Vianna congeners, and all bandeiras sent against them from Caxias failed in their efforts. In 1794 one of these armed expeditions, led by Felix do Rego and Domingos Lopes, succeeded in surrounding the more northern of their two villages, but the Gamella managed to drag out the negotiations so that the other village was able to send reinforcements, thus necessitating the flight of the bandeira. According to Ribeiro, they had repeatedly taken captives and also furnished an asylum to fugitive Negro slaves, who did their bit to circumvent peace. Saint-Adolphe also declares that the woods round Codó had always been a place of refuge for fugitive Negro slaves. There were reports, later proved false, of a large lake, the Lagoa da

³ Ribeiro (a), § 31-34; (b), 40. Marques Lagoa da Matta.

Matta, near the headwaters of the Codozinho. Starting from the Mearim in 1820, the following year from the Itapicurú, Pereira do Lago made two vain attempts to penetrate to this locality, which, he relates, was infested within a radius of 12 leguas by Gamella and "Guajajara",—the latter term presumably designating the Timbira of the lower Mearim.

In 1856 the Gamella of Codó were overtaken by fate: President Antonio Cruz Machado ordered the construction of a high-road from Barra do Corda to Caxias, the task devolving on one Frederico Augusto Souza, who was simultaneously "Director" of the Čákamekra (= Matteiros), a Timbira tribe. He had at his disposal 100 Indians, probably Guajajara, and a small military detachment. Official sources yielded no further data, but the Ramkókamekra relate that Souza asked them for an auxiliary troop, whereupon a number of warriors, led by their then chief Cadete, joined him. Souza ordered his allies to surround the Gamella village without killing anyone; all were to be captured alive. To the leaders of the Ramkókamekra, it appeared absurd to return from a raid without killing an enemy. Hence, when the Gamella chief became visible, Cadete shot at him, wounding him in the arm. Seizing a pestle, the wounded man vigorously belabored his assailant, who was hard put to it until a fellow-tribesman killed the Gamella chief. Two or three others were also slain, but the majority succeeded in fleeing into the woods. The troops, however, occupied the water-holes, caught the first Gamella driven there by thirst, and sent them back to the other fugitives with promises of safety, which led to their surrender. They were transported to São Luiz do Maranhão, whence none of them returned.

A divergent account, evidently based on Gonçalves Dias', appears in the first volume of Rocha Pombo's *Historia do Brazil*. He, too, dates the extinction of the Gamella back to Cruz Machado's administration. A Negro slave, sent by his master as a pretended fugitive, is said to have betrayed the Indians, who were captured and sent to Maranhão, where they were distributed among the citizenry. However, they escaped from the houses and were re-arrested on the streets. Their chief Bertrotopama, looking out of a window, saw his tribesmen captured by the

police and protested against this treatment. When no attention was paid to him, he committed suicide by leaping out of the window. The Gamella were henceforth made to work in the Arsenal and became extinct.

Possibly both narratives are correct, referring to distinct settlements of the Gamella of Codó.

The traditions of the Ramkókamekra describe these Gamella as sturdy folk, though no taller than themselves. They cut off the hair on the front part of the head—and wore a wooden lip-plug not over an inch in thickness. Probably it had once been larger since a plug of the size mentioned would hardly warrant the Timbira designation of the tribe as Haka-po, "Flat and Wide Lower Lip." They had extraordinarily powerful bows, tilled the soil, lived in gable-roofed huts, and slept on mats. The Ramkókamekra and Čákamekra did not consider themselves as in any way related to the Gamella, declaring that their language was radically distinct, so that it certainly cannot be classed as Timbira.

In March 1936 I took an opportunity to determine what might survive of the Gamella of Lake Capivary. An eleven-hour trip by motor-boat brought me from São Luiz do Maranhão to the little town Vianna, the old Jesuit mission Maracú for the Guajajára on a lake of the same name. On the same morning I crossed Lake Maracú in a skiff manned by two men and went up the flooded valley of the Rio Cajary, which unites that lake with the Lago Cajary. The high water, which still reached *terra firma* everywhere, put great obstacles in the way of a survey. With a low stage of the water the lakes contract markedly and except for several watercourses all the lowlands are transformed into a grassy plain. After four hours I arrived in Penalva, where the Rio Cajary flows out of the lake of that name. On the other side of its exit Raymundo Lopes found (1919) the remains of old Indian pile-dwellings with traces of a culture reminiscent of the Amazon Valley.

The following morning I took another skiff with two men on to Lago Capivary. The trip was in part rendered arduous by the flooded woods and the water plants acting as snags in the streams. After four hours and a half we landed at Ponta do

Armazem, the one-time seat of Julião, the last Gamella chief. The surviving mixed-breeds, who regard themselves as descendants of the ancient Gamella, live a legua further west-northwest in forest territory, by the sources of the Gemedor brook, which flows into the Lago Capivary from the west. The following morning I arrived there and was hospitably received in old Maria Cafuza's spacious palm-thatch house. Her grandmother had still been a pure Gamella, and Maria is generally reckoned the best custodian of old Gamella tradition today. I remained here for six days, hoping to discover something about the culture and, above all, the speech of the old Gamella, but the results proved lamentably meager.

Some thirty to forty persons scattered over the vicinity in single-family huts preserve the tradition of descent in the fourth generation—from this or that Gamella woman. Since that time crossing has occurred almost exclusively with the Afro-Brazilians inhabiting the shores of Lago Capivary; accordingly the Indian traits of these hybrids have been so thoroughly masked by Negro characteristics that hardly any one would infer Indian descent from their appearance. At most three individuals must be excepted as still revealing traces of Indian ancestry.

These people spoke the customary Portuguese of the rural neo-Brazilian population of the region. Their material culture revealed not a single feature distinguishing them from neighbors unconnected with the Gamella. Their character and views likewise preserved nothing of their Indian heritage. Their views about Indians were as fantastically incorrect as those in vogue among the other neo-Brazilians of the locality. In demeanor they were amiable, accommodating and modest, causing me not the least trouble during my residence there.

Old Maria took the greatest pains to tell me whatever she had heard her grandmother tell about the old Gamella. Above all she painstakingly recalled all the Gamella words she could recollect during my visit. Notwithstanding her trouble, this yielded only 19 vocables, viz.:

<i>tatá</i>	fire	<i>yopopó</i>	jaguar
<i>purú</i> ♂	membrum	<i>kokói</i>	monkey
<i>sebé</i> ♀	"	<i>pohoné</i>	horse
<i>katú-brohó</i>	Negro	<i>azutí</i>	cattle
<i>katú-koyaká</i>	White? Indian?	<i>kuréká</i>	domestic fowl
<i>múisi</i>	brother-in-law	<i>kyoipé</i>	tree
<i>kokeáto</i>	pot	<i>anéno</i>	tobacco
<i>kutubé</i>	gourd bowl	<i>birizu</i>	pepper
<i>tamarána</i>	club	<i>tomabéto</i>	thick
<i>kasapó</i>	knife		

The following comments may be offered. The word *kokói*, "monkey," is Timbira, the words for "fire" and "club" are Tupí. Apart from these three loan-words the list indicates no kinship with any known Brazilian language. This is the more remarkable because of the several terms for cultural loans—knife, horse, cattle, fowl—which usually spread with great facility among originally unrelated languages. As to the word *katú-koyaká* for "White" or "Indian", Martius mentions as dwelling in the Pindaré region "the Coyaca, a tribe of white bush folk," of alleged Dutch descent. In Timbira, *aká* means "white."

So far as this handful of words permits any conclusion, Gamella as spoken at Vianna must be treated as isolated.

Old Maria's inserting one Timbira and two Tupí words is explained by the fact that during her grandfather's chieftaincy among the Gamella a number of "western Indians," including Guajajara, Amanayé and Timbira, settled with him. Hence, what I learnt about ancient Gamella culture may also in part refer to these alien tribes, whom Maria designated as "western" in contrast to the "eastern" Gamella, whom she regarded as having come from the east. As appears from my initial discussion, this corresponds with the historical facts.

Maria had heard her grandmother tell that formerly manioc was grated on the spiny root of the paxiuba palm (not in Timbira fashion on the bark of the *aroeira*). The fire-drill was made of urucú, cotton, or *envireira* wood, while the Timbira and Guajajara used only urucú wood for the purpose. Maria

herself had seen fish covered with a mass of sweet manioc and wrapped in leaves so they could be baked under hot stones and covered with earth. She also remembered how bacaba fruits were made soft in the subsoil water heated with hot rocks in a pit by the edge of a brook. Both processes, unknown to the Guajajára, are still in vogue among the Timbira and suggest that the Gamella were originally ignorant of pottery.

Bows, arrows, and club did not vanish until the extinction of the last pure Indians, hence Maria and several others clearly remembered their appearance. The bow was round on the outside, flat on the string side, like the Guajajára and Timbira equivalents. The arrows had either bridge ("Stegfederung") or sewed feathering ("Nahtfederung"); the occurrence of the latter was described to me in such detail that no doubt is possible. The Guajajára and Timbira are acquainted with sewed feathering, but at least today no longer employ this procedure. The Timbira say they borrowed it from the Gamella of Codó. Among the Amanayé and Urubú it is in general use.⁴

Strangely enough, the "tamarána," the club known by Maria and others as a weapon of their ancestors, completely differed in type from the two-edged sword-club described under this appellation by Ribeiro. My informants unanimously assured me that it consisted of a cylindrical shaft about 50 cm in length and 3-4 cm in thickness, with a perforation at the grip and a loop for the wrist. The spherical butt-end, about 10 cm in diameter, was sharply set off from the shaft; this weapon was used for striking, not as a throwing club. Perhaps it corresponds to the "cajado" (stick) Ribeiro mentions as a weapon of the Vianna Gamella. Similar clubs with sharply separated head, nowhere demonstrably spherical, are known to me from the Apinayé, Ramkókamekra, southern Kayapó and many Chaco tribes; usually they serve both for striking and throwing.

⁴ Snr. Nimuendajú's data on the use of sewed feathering are significant in enlarging the very restricted distribution of sewed feathering. See Nordenskiöld, *Comparative Ethnographical Studies*, 3: 45, 47, map 4, Göteborg, 1924. Von den Steinen (*Unter den Naturvölkern Zentral-Brasiliens*, 2nd ed., 220, Berlin, 1897) describes the sewing of the spirally placed feathers: cotton string is wrapped round the ends and itself protected by a wrapping of *Philodendron* bark.

Maria Cafuza described the jacamim (trumpeter-bird, *Psophia* sp.) as the lightning-bird: the convulsive opening and closing of his wings produces lightning. Apart from this statement, she also narrated the following tale:

“The Indians went hunting, scattering in small groups. One group of three men got to a big brook; a tapir was standing in the water there. One of the men shot an arrow at him, but at once there was a flash of lightning and a simultaneous peal of thunder, and the marksman fell dead. Then the second shot an arrow, but he was likewise killed by the lightning that came out of the tapir. Then the third one did not dare shoot. He went back to the village and reported what had happened. Then all the people gathered and accompanied him to the site of the occurrence, where the tapir was still standing in the water. When they saw the corpses of the two men, the people lacked courage to shoot again, for they recognized that it was no ordinary tapir, but Lightning himself.”

In 1913 I recorded a very similar story among the Krëyé, a Timbira tribe living between the lower Grajahú and the Mearim, i. e., in the immediate vicinity of the Gamella.

Maria's grandmother and other Indian women also used to tell long tales about sun and moon, but Maria was unable to recall them. Sun and moon figure as human beings in a long series of episodes in Timbira mythology, but not among the Guajajára.

Altogether the Gamella of Vianna seem to have had a culture similar to that of the Timbira.*

*The italicized *u* in *Pukópye*, *Pukóboye*, *pu-če-ti* (p. 63), and the italicized *a* in *Čákamekra* (pp. 64, 65, 66) and *Haka-po* (p. 66) have a right-turned hook beneath them in Snr. Nimuendajú's manuscript,—denoting nasalization (?).—Ed.

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