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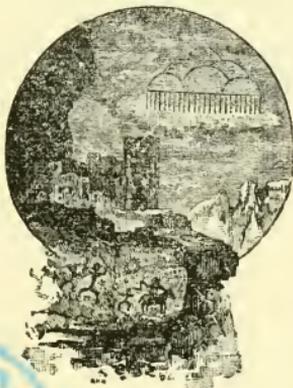
HANDBOOK
OF
SOUTH AMERICAN INDIANS

JULIAN H. STEWARD, *Editor*

Volume 1
THE MARGINAL TRIBES

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THE GUATÓ

By ALFRED MÉTRAUX

The *Guató* inhabit the marshy and flooded plains of the upper Paraguay River Basin (lat. 19° S., long. 58° W.) (map 1, No. 7).

ARCHEOLOGY

On the plains there are low mounds covered with groves of acuri palm (*Attalea* sp.), a plant of great economic importance to the *Guató*. Two mounds near the Caracara River, investigated by Max Schmidt (1914), proved to be artificial ellipsoidal platforms—one measuring 540 feet (140 m.) by 245 feet (76 m.); the other, 170 feet (52 m.) by 150 feet (45 m.)—that had been built about 2 feet (0.6 m.) above the original ground level to provide places where the acuri palm could grow safely above the reach of floods. Pits, from which earth for the construction had been taken, remain near each mound. The accumulated earth contained animal bones, snail shells, stone fragments, and potsherds. The exceedingly crude pottery is very similar to that of the modern *Guató*. It is ornamented only with scratched lines and a few incised grooves around a somewhat thickened rim. Not a single stone ax was found. A grave contained a skeleton in a reclining position with its head toward the west and two plain stone hammers similar to those which the modern *Guató* use to crack acuri (*Attalea* sp.) palm nuts. These parallels between the early builders of the mounds and the present *Guató* suggest a fundamental cultural identity.

HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHICAL POSITION

The few references to the *Guató* which appear in the literature have been quoted and commented on by Max Schmidt (1942). The *Guató* are mentioned twice in the *Comentarios* of Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca (Hernández, 1852, pp. 583, 589) as a tribe of the upper Paraguay River, and their name is associated with that of the *Guaxarapo* (*Guachi*), with whom they have been often confused by early authors. It is perhaps for this reason that they are said to have joined the *Guaxarapo* in a cannibalistic feast on the corpses of Spanish soldiers of the Francisco de Ribera expedition. Hernández (1852, p. 577) probably had the *Guató* in mind when he spoke of the Indians of the upper Paraguay River who, during the flood season, lived entirely in their canoes, where they kept a fire on a layer of soil.

Azara (1809, 2:81) was the first observer in more recent times to give concrete information about these Indians. He describes them as a tribe of only 30 families who wandered continually in dugout canoes in a lagoon, west of the Paraguay River, under lat. 19°12' S. (probably Laguna Caceres). In 1846, Castlenau (1850-59, 2:373-374; 3:13-14) found them on Lake Gaiba and along the Pando River, the canal which unites it with Lake Uberaba. An official document of 1848 puts the number of the *Guató* at 500 and gives as their habitat the course of the Paraguay River from the mouth of the Paraguay Mirim to Descalvado, and the course of São Lourenço River down to its junction with the Cuyabá River and the lakes of that region. During the second half of the 19th century the *Guató* were decimated by smallpox epidemics, and on several occasions during the Paraguayan war, they were molested both by the Paraguayans and by the Brazilians.

In the present century they have been visited three times by Max Schmidt, whose three monographs describe their material apparatus but contain scant data on their social and economic life. In 1901 Max Schmidt (1905, p. 175) counted 46 *Guató* living in isolated families on Lake Gaiba and Lake Uberaba and on the Pando River. A few *Guató* also lived at Figueira on the Paraguay River, on the lower São Lourenço River, and along its tributary, the Caracara River. In 1928 Schmidt met about the same number of *Guató* scattered from Descalvado to Lake Gaiba. Although their total population perhaps exceeds the number seen by Schmidt, there is no doubt that the *Guató* verge on extinction. Physically and morally, they seem to have been adversely affected by intimate contacts with Neo-Brazilians.

Physical appearance.—The contrast between the *Guató's* developed chest and muscular arms and his stunted and bowed legs and flat feet has always impressed travelers (pl. 82). These features are attributable to the amphibious existence of the *Guató*, who lived mostly in canoes and took only short, infrequent walks on shore.

CULTURE

SUBSISTENCE ACTIVITIES

Collecting and farming.—The *Guató* could easily subsist on the many food resources provided by their environment. Only a few of the plants which they used have been listed in our sources. The acuri (*Attalea* sp.), the fruits of the yatubá (Max Schmidt: sibota) tree, and the seeds of an aquatic plant (forno d'agua) were important in their diet. In the flood season, they harvested in their canoes great quantities of wild rice (*Oryza sativa* or *perennis*), which temporarily became a staple. They also collected the wild bananas which grew near ancient habitation sites.

Modern *Guató* practice some agriculture, but, according to Max Schmidt (1942, p. 68), it is almost limited to the cultivation of bananas and acuri palms on "aterrados," or artificial mounds. An official report of 1848 (see Schmidt, 1942, p. 72) states that "sometimes the *Guató* raise maize, manioc and fruits, more as delicacies than to secure their subsistence." Koslowsky (1895 a, p. 250) also alludes to maize

fields, and says that during his stay among these Indians he lived on maize and bananas. They probably also grow some cotton since this was used in their industries.

Max Schmidt (1942, p. 67) noticed that the *Guató* planted a few crops along the riverbanks on tracts periodically covered by floods. The same type of agriculture is reported for the ancient *Guachí*.

Hunting and fishing.—The favorite game animals of the *Guató* were caimans (whose tails were relished), turtles, lizards, boas (sucuri, *Eunectes murinus*), deer, monkeys, and birds. The only hunting practices which are known are those used against jaguars. It was not uncommon for a *Guató* to attack a jaguar single-handed. By beating the ground with his spear and making roaring noises, he induced it to leap and then impaled it on his weapon. Another and safer method consisted in luring the animal into the water by imitating its call with a cow horn and killing it with a spear from a canoe.

Fish were caught with hooks or shot with ordinary barbed arrows or with harpoon arrows. The thrashing fish were clubbed to death before the arrow broke.

Food preparation.—Men did most of the cooking. Meat and fish were usually boiled—meat often together with mashed green bananas. Caiman tails as well as fresh maize and bananas were roasted in hot ashes. Salt and pepper (a wild *Capsicum*) were the main condiments.

Acuri nuts were broken with a stone hammer on a flat rock; as a result, both instruments were pitted with characteristic small cavities after long use. The utensils required for food preparation were pots, wooden mortars, wooden bowls for washing fish, gourds, flat sticks with carved edges for stirring the soup, and shell or wooden dippers.

Men and women ate apart.

Domesticated animals.—The *Guató* had hens and also had dogs trained for hunting. They kept wild birds as pets.

HOUSES

Each family spent several months in a permanent dwelling on the bank of some river. Modern houses are in the Mestizo style with a gable roof on trunk walls. The primitive hut—which the *Guató* still built 40 years ago as a temporary shelter when camping—was a flimsy, primitive, thatched, gable roof resting on the ground (fig. 47). Camp sites were the common property of all the family groups.

Goods were stored out of reach of sudden floods on a platform indoors or in trees outside. Beds consisted of a mat plaited of acuri

leaves, or of a rough cloth of intertwined tucum fibers, or of a jaguar or deer skin. Seats varied from crude lumps of wood to carved four-footed stools.

To avoid mosquitoes, an unbearable menace after sunset, the *Guató* slept in large, tent-shaped mosquito nets, made of intertwined tucum (*Astrocaryum* sp.) fibers, which they stretched between two trees or two paddles stuck in the ground. During the day they drove off the mosquitoes with a sort of swatter or flap consisting of a piece of tucum fiber or cotton cloth attached to a short stick (pl. 81, *top*). In the rainy season they never moved without their mosquito flap.

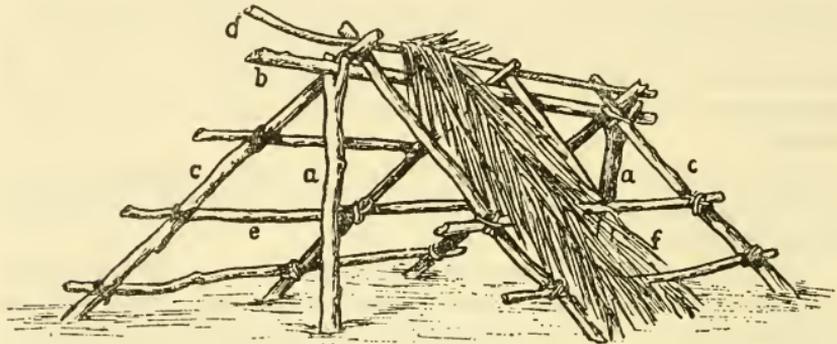


FIGURE 47.—*Guató* house construction. Caracara River, Matto Grosso. (After Max Schmidt, 1914, fig. 32.)

DRESS AND ORNAMENTS

Both sexes wore a piece of cloth around the waist but later abandoned it in favor of European garments. Formerly, some *Guató* had long hair with a single wrapped braid behind; today hair is cut short. The *Guató* are among the few South American Indians with full beards and mustaches.

Ornaments were few: a wooden labret in the lower lip, a small tuft of feathers in the ear lobes, and necklaces of seeds (*Lagrmas da Nossa Senhora*) and animal teeth (especially caiman teeth and claws).

TRANSPORTATION

Most of life was spent in dugout canoes; these had a tapering bow and a somewhat widened and massive stern, often with a low, raised edge, where the woman sat to steer. Paddles were well made, lanceolate, 7½ feet (2.2 m.) long, and characteristically lacked any crutch or grip. In shallow marshes, canoes were punted with poles, often with a wooden fork attached to the distal end to give a better hold on the aquatic plants.

MANUFACTURES

Basketry.—The technique was affected by the predominant use of the acuri palm. Unlike the fan palm, which permits a greater range of combinations, the fronds of the acuri, having pinnate leaves, can be woven only to produce patterns of oblique and perpendicular stripes. *Guató* baskets, mats, and fire fans (pl. 81, *bottom*) were made of whole fronds, with the midrib included in the finished specimens. The weave was a simple checker or twill, and the edges were braided.

Spinning and weaving.—Ropes, strings, and threads were made of tucum-palm fibers or cotton. Women carded cotton with a small bow, almost certainly of European origin; it was used in South America only by the *Churapa*, *Chacobo*, *Guarayú*, *Itenes*, *Guaná*, and *Guató*. Cotton threads were spun clockwise with a drop spindle—a stick nicked at the proximal end and fitted with a whorl of wood or turtle shell. Tucum fibers were spun counter-clockwise by rolling them with the hand on the thigh. Three-ply string was twisted by rolling the strands on the thigh.

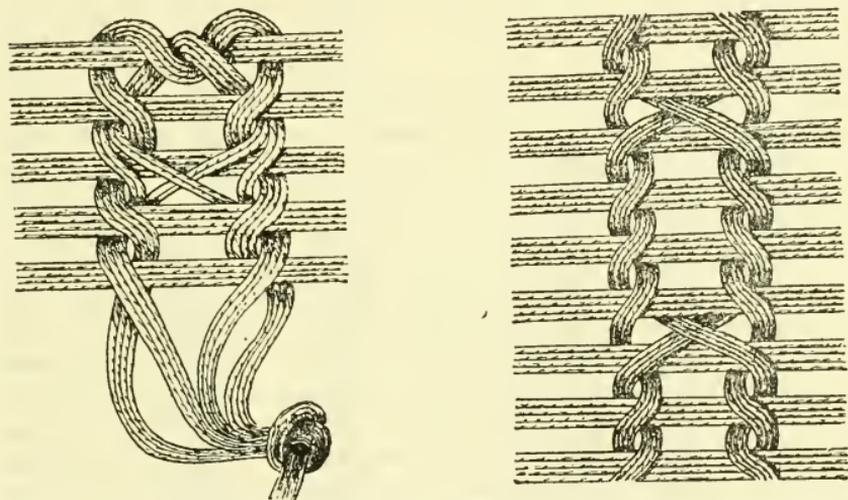


FIGURE 48.—*Guató* twining techniques. Detail of mosquito fan. (After Max Schmidt, 1905, figs. 128, 129.)

Textiles were transitional between basketry and true weaving, all being variations of the twined weave (fig. 48). For mosquito nets, certain mats, and some swatters, the warps were crudely twisted bundles of tucum fiber which were twined together at wide intervals. Other mosquito flaps and wrist guards for shooting bows had a quadruple weft twined over a warp—often double—so tightly as to appear

woven. Looms consisted of two posts between which the warp was wound. Only a simple wooden dagger was used in weaving. Threads were dyed orange, brown, violet, black, yellow, and numerous other shades in decoctions of the bark or wood of several trees. On tightly woven cloth, only the weft showed and carried the design. Different colors were used to produce wide alternating vertical or horizontal bands. These occurred especially on mosquito swatters and on arm bands.

Pottery.—Women made a few cooking vessels, water jars, and bowls. The ware was coiled, smoothed with a shell, and baked for about 10 minutes in an open fire. Vessels were usually rounded and had pointed bottoms. Water jars had short necks. The finish was crude and the decoration was limited to rudimentary fingernail impressions and small lugs.

Weapons.—The most important weapon was a spear (fig. 49, *bottom, left*), the shaft of which was inserted into the hollow end of a sharpened bone point, usually a femur. Bows were from 6 to 7 feet (1.8 to 2.1 m.) long and had two characteristic features: a more or less circular cross section and a lack of terminal notches for the bowstring. The bowstring was affixed at each end of the bow to a ring plaited over a wrapping of cipo (creeper) strips, covering the whole stave (fig. 49, *bottom, right*). Formerly, the bowstring was of monkey sinew; recently, always of tucum fiber. Arrows were made of cambayuva reed or uba reed, with a wooden foreshaft. Uba reed, being brittle, had an artificial notch made by inserting three small wooden splinters in the butt (fig. 49, *top*). Arrows had six types of heads: (1) A cylindrical stick tipped with sharp bone, for ordinary purposes; (2) lanceolate bamboo for large game; (3) a knobbed head for shooting birds and knocking yatuba fruits from trees; (4) barbed points, or (5) removable (harpoon) heads for shooting fish; (6) plain sharpened wood for target practice. The wooden harpoon head had barbs carved along one edge and was tipped with a bone point (fig. 50, *a*). It was fitted loosely into a funnel made by wrapping a cipo strip around the end of the foreshaft and was connected to the shaft with a string (fig. 50, *c*). Schmidt (1908, p. 188) describes a bird arrow made of a cambayuva stem, with the bulge near the root serving as the head. All *Guató* arrows, including those for fish, had two feathers with their barbs trimmed on one side and attached tangentially at each end. When shooting, the arrow butt was seized between the index and the middle finger and the string was pulled by these and the ring finger.

Pellet bows, projecting clay missiles, were popular as children's toys (fig. 50, *d*). The stave was flat, except for the rounded grip, and was notched at each end for the string.

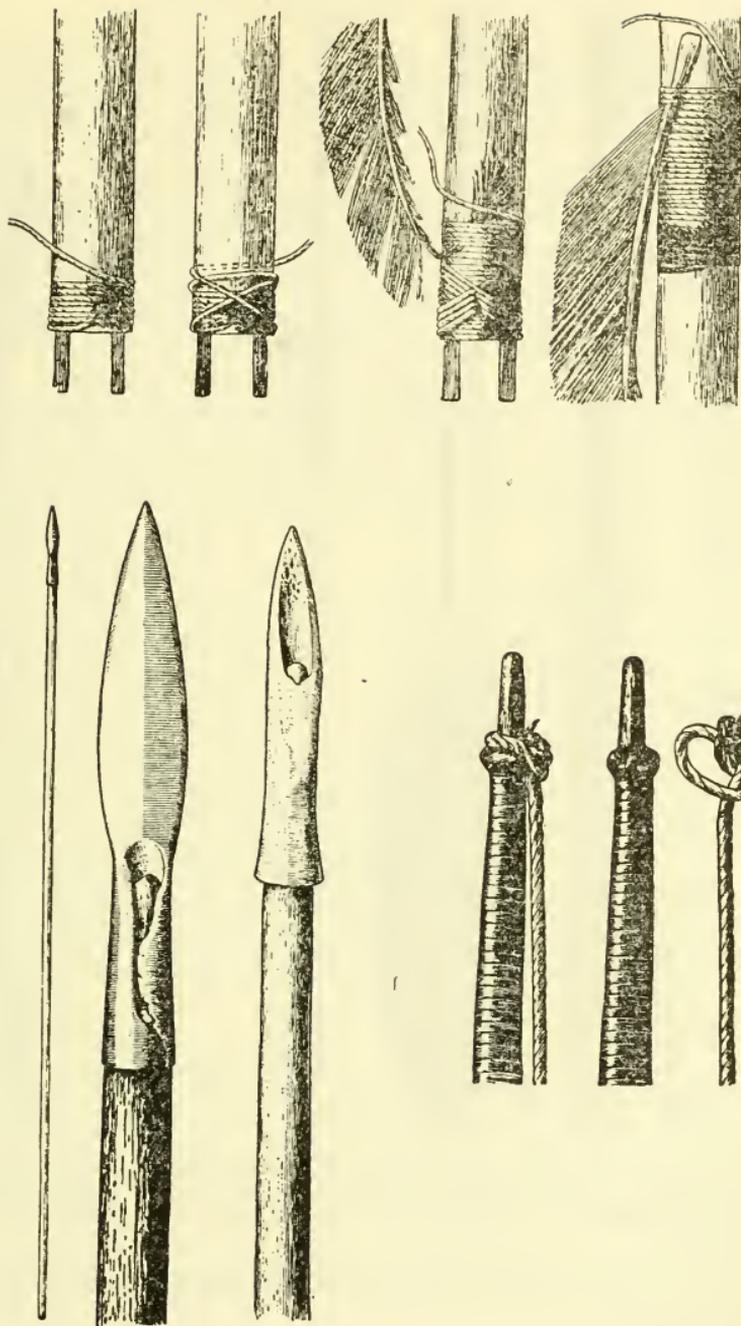


FIGURE 49.—Guató arrows, bows, and spears. *Top*: Details of arrow-shaft butt wrapped with cotton string and attachment of feathers. Small sticks are inserted to form notch ($\frac{1}{2}$ natural size). *Bottom (left)*: Complete lance ($\frac{1}{20}$ natural size); lance with iron point, and lance with jaguar-bone point ($\frac{3}{8}$ natural size). *Bottom (right)*: Detail of bow string attachment ($\frac{1}{2}$ natural size). (After Max Schmidt, 1905, figs. 52 to 55; 41, 42; and 44, 45.)

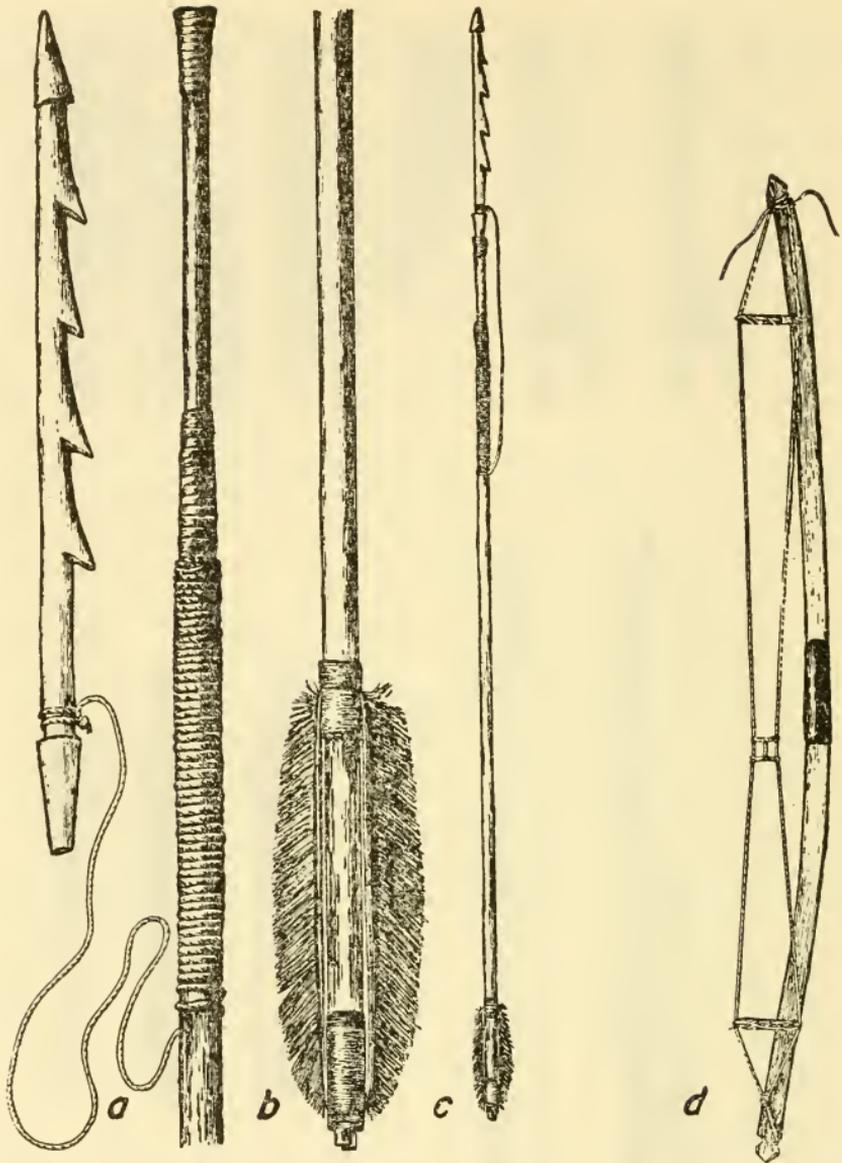


FIGURE 50.—*Guat6* harpoon and pellet bow. *a*, Harpoon shaft with barbed bone point ($\frac{1}{8}$ natural size); *b*, detail of harpoon feathering ($\frac{1}{8}$ natural size); *c*, complete assembled harpoon ($\frac{1}{42}$ natural size); *d*, pellet bow ($\frac{1}{6}$ natural size). After Max Schmidt, 1905, figs. 71, 72.)

Wrist guards were cotton strips, 2 feet (0.6 m.) long, wrapped around the wrist.

Fire-making.—Fire was made with a drill, often inserted into an arrow shaft to increase its length. The hearth had notches beside the holes.

Adhesives.—Wax and yatoba resin were used as adhesives.

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

All *Guató* were split into small, biological families which generally lived alone and camped apart even when near other families. A boy left his father's camp immediately after puberty to establish his own family.

The three *Guató* local groups or subtribes, each with a headman, inhabited: (1) The upper Paraguay River Basin; (2) the region of Lake Gaiba and Lake Uberaba and the hills of Caracara; (3) the lower São Lourenço River. On certain occasions, the headmen would summon all the men of the subtribes to a general council. Castelnau (1850-51, 3:13) states that all *Guató* would foregather twice a year at some conspicuous geographical spot, such as Dourado Mountain or the entrance of Lake Uberaba. Chieftainship was inherited patrilineally. A chief whom Koslowsky (1895 a, p. 242) visited was surrounded by his grown sons and their wives (extended family).

Tribal members who had been absent for a long time were welcomed with wails and tears.

Although today, the *Guató* are as a rule monogamous, formerly, when the tribe was more numerous, they were polygynous. According to Castelnau (1850-51, 3:113), a man might have from 4 to 12 wives, despite their mutual jealousy.¹ If a woman were barren or died, her husband might marry her sister. Koslowsky (1895, p. 233) describes a *Guató* who successively married all his first wife's sisters and finally obtained the number of children he desired.

Kinship terms distinguish the father's from the mother's siblings. Terms for uncles are shortened forms of the mother and father terms: F, bápa; FBr, pa; M, meme; MBr, me.

Each family is an economic, self-supporting unit. Though they like to visit one another, they seldom trade goods on such occasions. Etiquette requires that visitors announce their arrival by blowing a cow horn.

Men do most of the work, providing and cooking food, making baskets, and paddling canoes.

A man's prestige depended, among other things, on the number of jaguars he had killed. It is even said that a young man could marry only after he had slain a jaguar. Piles of jaguar skulls were exhibited near the huts.

The dead were buried with funeral laments. A woman clipped her hair short when she had lost her husband but only cut half its length to mourn a dead child (Koslowsky, 1895 a, p. 248).

¹ The official document quoted by Max Schmidt (1942, p. 72) says, "as they are polygamous it is not rare to see a *Guató* traveling with 5 or 6 canoes filled with his wives and children. However, they have generally only two wives and some of them are content with one."

WARFARE

Except for many years' warfare against the *Caingang*, the *Guató* were peaceful and did not trespass on the territory of their neighbors.

ESTHETIC AND RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Musical instruments.—The *Guató* formerly used bamboo or bone flutes with three stops. In modern times, they played only guitars copied from European models, accompanying them with the musical rasp or notched stick.

Dances.—The two favorite dances were the kururu and the siriri, both introduced by Brazilian Mestizos. The kururu was simply a walk to the rhythm of a song improvised on any occasion, and generally in honor of the host. In the siriri, the participants, jumping and bouncing, broke a line formed by other dancers.

Beverages.—Each family owned a grove of acuri palms from which they obtained wine in the dry season. They climbed the trees on a notched ladder, bent down the fronds and pierced the bases with a shell to collect the sap—a procedure which usually killed the tree. After standing overnight, the slightly fermented sap was sipped through a reed.

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