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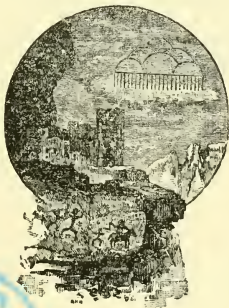
HANDBOOK
OF
SOUTH AMERICAN INDIANS

JULIAN H. STEWARD, *Editor*

Volume 1
THE MARGINAL TRIBES

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THE GUAYAKÍ

By ALFRED MÉTRAUX AND HERBERT BALDUS

HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHICAL SITUATION

The elusive *Guayakí* who roam the forest of eastern Paraguay represent one of the least-known tribes of South America (map 1, *No. 9*). The *Caingúá* and the *Guaraní*, who for centuries have waged a war of extermination against them, consider them as hardly human and have spread fabulous stories about them. Some of these tales are strangely reminiscent of Charlevoix's (1757, 2:286-288) description of the *Cayguá* (*Caingúá*). (See *The Caingang*, p. 445.)

The *Guayakí* are mentioned for the first time by Pedro Lozano (1873-74, 1: 415-421), who gives a short but accurate description of their culture. In the 18th century, the Jesuits of the Mission of Jesus sent out small parties of *Guaraní* Indians to capture *Guayakí* in order to bring them up as neophytes in their "reductions," and by the middle of the century there were 30 *Guayakí* in the Mission of Jesus, but the efforts made to settle whole bands remained unsuccessful. Father José Insaurrealde was the first to notice the close relationship between the *Guayakí* language and classic *Guaraní*, a relationship amply proved by modern vocabularies and texts. Several manuscripts on the *Guayakí* language, once part of the archives of the Mission of Jesus, seem to have been lost (Hervás, 1800-1805: 194-196).

Sad experience has made the *Guayakí* exceedingly shy of civilization. They come near Paraguayan settlements only to steal iron tools or, prompted by hunger in winter, to kill a cow or a horse. Such acts provoke bloody reprisals. As yet no one has observed the *Guayakí* in their original habitat, so that most of our knowledge of their culture rests on objects found in abandoned camp sites and on the memories of *Guayakí* children made prisoners during punitive expeditions. Many valuable data have come from a German settler, F. C. Mayntzhusen, who managed to keep a few *Guayakí* on his plantation. Vellard, who spent several months in vain attempts to get in touch with the *Guayakí* but who was obliged to abandon his project after a skirmish with one of their bands, wrote a book (1939) about them based on information he gathered from captives and from the literature. A recent publication by M. Bertoni (1941) contains new and interesting details obtained from a young *Guayakí* adopted by the author.

Northern and southern groups speak the same dialect but differ in minor aspects of material culture. Although the former keep equally aloof from civilization, their material culture has been slightly affected by indirect contact with the Whites. They have discarded stone axes for steel hatchets and use iron pots and tin cans instead of wax-smearred baskets.

The *Guayakí* live in the dense forests of eastern Paraguay where hills and mountains separate the tributaries of the Paraguay River from those of the Paraná River (lat. 26° S., long. 55° W.). Formerly, they were distributed from the Monday River in the north to the outskirts of the forest in the south and west, and to the Paraná River in the east. The constant encroachments of lumber camps and maté farms have forced them to retreat to the less accessible mountains and hills of the Caaguazú ranges. The largest *Guayakí* group roams the region of Tayao, between the Paraguayan villages of Ajos, Carayaó, San Joaquín, and Caaguazú. A smaller group lives near the Paraná River, between two of its tributaries, the Monday and Nacunday Rivers. The southernmost *Guayakí* inhabit the region of San Juan Nepomuceno, and wander in the forested plains between the Tembey and Teyucuaré Rivers (near Encarnación).

On the basis of hearsay or unreliable ethnological evidence, some authors maintain that there are two different kinds of *Guayakí* in the Paraguayan forest, but this has never been confirmed. Mayntzhusen (1924-26, p. 316) reckoned the total number of the *Guayakí* to be 800 or 1,000 in 1910. In 1920 only 500 were left after a severe influenza epidemic.

CULTURE

SUBSISTENCE ACTIVITIES

Farming.—Modern *Guayakí* depend entirely on collecting, hunting, and fishing; according to our best authorities, they are ignorant of any form of agriculture. Their economy, however, may have been different in the past when they enjoyed greater security, for Lozano (1873-74, 1: 415) states that the *Guayakí* "sow maize, but their crops are small because they eat the green ears before they are ripe." The *Sirionó*, who in many respects resemble the *Guayakí*, also were regarded as nonagricultural people until in recent years it was discovered that they did some farming.

Collecting wild foods.—The fruit and heart of the pindo palm (*Cocos romanzoffiana*) along with honey and larvae constitute their basic diet. When the *Guayakí* find a pindo grove they camp by it until they have exploited all the trees. They eat the terminal shoots (palm cabbage) raw or roasted, and extract a coarse flour from the old trunks by smashing the fibrous wood with the back of a stone ax. The pounded mass is sifted through a crude square sieve, a mat made of bamboo splinters or *Carex* stalks. The flour, which has only slight nutritive value, is kneaded into balls; these are consumed raw or dried by the fire. The orange trees introduced by the Jesuits have multiplied into large groves which furnish abundant fruit.

The *Guayakí* seek honey so eagerly that it has been regarded as basic to their economy. Their trails are always marked by signs of this search, and several of their few implements are employed for gathering honey. To reach the honeycombs on tree tops, they use ropes 30 feet (10 m.) long made of vegetable fibers mixed with human and animal hair. They climb trees with great agility and have

invented many devices to approach the bee nests. For instance, they bend two young trees into an arch and suspend a seat from them at the level of the beehive. To remove the honey from the hollow trees, they use stone axes, which they carry hanging from their wrists when climbing. With these axes they can fell hardwood trees 2 feet (60 cm.) in diameter.

The *Guayakí* relish the long, fat grubs of passalid beetles, which grow in decayed pindo palms. To increase the supply, they fell and notch the trees with their axes, and the eggs, which the beetles lay in the holes, soon hatch in numbers sufficient for a substantial meal.

Their digging sticks are 2 to 3 feet (60 to 90 cm.) long with a flat oval end and are used mainly to open the pindo trees and to dig out tubers. Occasionally, they may serve as weapons or as gouges to extract larvae from the decayed trunks.

The hot months from September to February are the best for gathering food. During this season several edible fruits in addition to oranges ripen in the forest, the honey increases, the larvae reach their largest size, the birds lay eggs, and the fish go up the Paraná River to the small streams to spawn. The "lean months" from March to August are the principal ones for hunting.

If they are in a waterless region, the *Guayakí* dig wells from 15 to 20 feet (4.5 to 6 m.) deep. They also drink the water which collects in bamboo and other plants.

Hunting.—The chief hunting weapons are the bow and arrow. When shooting, some *Guayakí* rest the lower end of the bow on the ground, hold the staff with the left hand, and pull the string with the right hand. They are able to hit a mark at a distance of 300 feet (91 m.). A cord of human hair is wrapped around the left wrist as a guard. Small animals are clubbed to death. Tapirs are caught in pitfalls dug on their runs. The sides of the pit are lined with mud which, when dried hard, prevents the animal from climbing to the surface. The hunters, who observe several food taboos, hide near their traps to be on the spot as soon as the animal has fallen. Mayntzhusen regards the complicated jaguar traps "as their highest technical achievement."

Fishing.—The *Guayakí* shoot large fish with the bow and arrow and catch small ones by hand. They also catch them in conical baskets which they place along a dam. According to Lozano (1873-74, 1:417), they build stone dams across rivers, poison the water with a creeper crushed between two stones, and collect the drugged fish in sieves. To drug fish, they also use several kinds of leaves, among others those of one of the Lauraceae.

When they find a stream full of small fish, they make a barrier of takuapi (*Merostachys clausenii*) extending to the bottom of the river

and long enough to encircle the fish. The barrier is pushed toward the margin of the river or toward another barrier where the fish are cornered.

Domesticated animals and pets.—The *Guayakí* keep all kinds of pets, which they fondly carry when traveling. At night these animals are tied to trees or confined in small cages. Few South American Indians eat their pets, but the *Guayakí* seem to consider the coati, of which they always have a greater number, as food reserves for the lean winter months. This was noted by Lozano (1873-74, 1:415): "They have the foresight to domesticate a few wild pigs and to raise some animals called coati which they kill for food." Hunting coati is one of their favorite sports. Men and women join in drives to tree a coati, which they shoot with arrows or seize when it tries to escape. They wrap their arms with cord as a protection against bites.

CAMPS AND HOUSES

The *Guayakí* never camp near streams because of the mosquitoes and because they fear that the murmur of the water would prevent their hearing the approach of an enemy. Instead, they seek a heavily forested area where they can make a fence by cutting and breaking the branches and bushes. Within this enclosure each family establishes itself by its own fire. If there is danger of jaguars or of White people, the approach to the camp is cleared of vegetation to avoid surprise attacks. When rain threatens, they crawl under rude shelters constructed of palm leaves thrown over a rectangular or triangular wooden frame attached with creepers to small trees or to forked sticks stuck into the ground. The waterproof thatch forms a roof and a wall on three sides. According to Lozano (1873-74, 1:417), the *Guayakí* sheltered themselves behind mats used as windbreaks. Sometimes they built crude huts with walls of bamboo. The men usually lie on straw mats about 4½ feet (137 cm.) long and slightly narrower. The women lean against their husbands or their basketry knapsacks. Children sleep around the fire, sometimes on small mats. When the weather is cold, they often lie in a shallow pit dug in the ground.

Unless it rains, the *Guayakí* seldom stay more than one night at a camp, and they never go back to an old camping ground which they consider "ine," that is, "stinking." In order to perform the necessities of nature, they retire out of sight and hearing of the others.

DRESS AND ORNAMENTS

Both sexes go about nude, though old women may protect themselves from the cold by covering their backs with a square piece of cloth, and men sometimes suspend a bird skin from their shoulders.

Men wear a tonsure cut with a bamboo blade; the crown of hair narrows over the forehead and the ears and widens at the back. Women let their hair hang loose on their backs or fasten it around their heads with a bark strip. Lozano (1873-74, 1:416) tells us that women shaved their heads after marriage. He also says that many *Guayakí* women cut their hair when it reached a certain length and used it, together with monkey hair and palm fiber, to make ropes. On festive occasions and during their fights, men wear high conical helmets of the skin of newborn tapirs and jaguars, surmounted by tufts of hair or coati tails (pl. 96). They also glue bird down to their faces and bodies.

As ornaments, men (according to Mayntzhusen, only women) wear a frontlet or a necklace of animal teeth, mainly monkey and tapir, and monkey leg and arm bones and armadillo tails. According to Lozano (1873-74, 1:417), women's necklaces were composed of fruit shells (aguai fruit).

From the time of puberty, the men wear a bone or wooden labret in their perforated lower lip. The stone labret mentioned by Lozano has never been reported in our time. The perpendicular lines scratched across the chest and stomach of girls who have come of age remain as indelible tattoo marks though no pigment is rubbed into the wounds. Girls' legs also show some scars which are made during early childhood. Both sexes paint horizontal stripes across the face, the upper arms, and the chest with a mixture of rosin and charcoal—some sources say of wax. Warriors are entirely blackened.

TRANSPORTATION

When the *Guayakí* travel through the bush, the men go in front carrying only their bows and arrows and sometimes a child on their shoulders if the terrain is difficult. Children capable of walking follow while the women form the rear guard, carrying the family possessions in huge basketry knapsacks held by a broad tumpline passing over the forehead. On top of the knapsack they place the babies and the pets. Infants are transported in a special sling, woven of fibers, or in a large pliable knapsack.

MANUFACTURES

Basketry.—*Guayakí* industry is rudimentary. These Indians make ovoid baskets which are waterproofed with a thick coating of wax mixed with charcoal (pl. 95, *l, m*). They also plait crude palm leaf (pindo palm) knapsacks in which to carry food and their few possessions (pl. 95, *f-h*), flexible basket pouches in which to store feathers and other small objects, sleeping mats, fire fans (pl. 95, *e*), and sieves.

Weaving.—The *Guayakí* weave very crude fabrics with the fibers of a wild nettle (*Urera baccifera*). The cloth is intermediate between basketry and a textile, as the weft and warp may be simply crossed by hand, or they may be knotted together, or coiled spirally. The loom consists of two parallel lines of small sticks stuck in the ground.

Some fabrics have simple ornamental bands produced by alternating dark and light stripes. Baby slings and cloaks worn by old women are made by this simple technique.

Rope making.—Rope is made of human or monkey (*Cebus*) hair, sometimes mixed with plant fibers (pindo, nettle, bamboo, etc.) (pl. 95, *j*).

Pottery.—The exceedingly primitive pottery of the *Guayakí* is limited to a single type of vessel, characterized by a broad belly, a wide opening, and slightly conical base (pl. 95, *n*). Most of the pots are small; the largest specimens are not more than 7 or 8 inches (15 or 20 cm.) high. The clay is tempered with charcoal. During the firing, nobody must look at the pot lest it crack.

Small pots are used either for drinking or as containers for pigments; the larger ones are used for cooking.

Weapons.—The southern *Guayakí* make their bow staves from the wood of the *Cocos romanzoffiana*; the northern bands, in addition, use the hard mbocayá palm wood (*Acrocomia totai*). The bows are comparatively long, 6 to 7 feet (1.8 to 2.1 m.), have an oval cross section, taper at both ends, and lack terminal notches for the strings. The bow string is generally made of samuhu (*Ceiba pubiflora*) fibers or of caraguatá or guembé fibers.

War or large-game arrows are tipped with bamboo blades; today some iron points are used. Other hunting arrows have long sharpened wooden heads, which vary widely—some are barbed on one side, some on both, some have a triangular cross section without barbs, and others have several ornamental carvings (pl. 95, *p*). Bird arrows end in a wooden knob. Arrow shafts are made of bamboo (pl. 95, *o*). The feathering is of the arched or bridged type ("tangential"), identical to that of the *Cainguá*. Strips of guembé bark are wrapped around the shaft where the head is inserted.

A combat weapon, described as a spear, is a pole from 6 to 8 feet (2 to 2.5 m.) long with both ends pointed or with one end slightly enlarged. Mayntzhusen described it as a club used especially for intertribal duels. The men swing the club downward, holding it with both hands. Perhaps it serves both as a lance and as a club.

Implements.—Axes (pl. 95, *i*) have an almond-shaped stone blade (diabasic pebble) inserted into the bulging end of a wooden shaft.

The cutting edge of the blade is shaped by grinding. One of the main *Guayakí* tools is a chisel made by hafting a rodent incisor (aguti or capivara) in a bone handle. Like all South American Indians, the *Guayakí* cut by drawing the blade toward the body. Chisels are carried strung on a cord, like bunches of keys. Certain kinds of woodwork, for example the socket for an ax, are done with a chisel of tapir bone. Planes are made of broken or perforated snail shells (*Bulimus*). Sharp bamboo (*Chusquea ramossissima*) blades serve as knives.

Fire making.—An arrow shaft tipped with a short stick and twirled between the hands constitutes the fire drill. The hearth stick has a pit and lateral groove. Vellard (1939) was told that the *Guayakí* produce fire by striking pieces of fine-grained quartzite together so that the spark falls into tinder made of the samuhu (*Ceiba pubiflora*) down. This method, known only in Tierra del Fuego, is so unexpected in Paraguay that the statement must be accepted with reservation. The *Guayakí* use pieces of takuapi wood as torches.

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

The *Guayakí* roam through the forest in small hordes comprising, as a rule, about 20 individuals. Bands are independent units which rarely come together, although they may range near one another and even gather in orange groves or other places where food is plentiful.

Lozano (1873-74, 1:417) says that the only chiefs were men with several daughters whose husbands lived in the band of their father-in-law. Recent investigations confirm Lozano's statement, but other factors, such as hunting ability or physical strength, also are said to determine chieftainship. The band leader serves as guide and adviser. According to Mayntzhusen, leaders challenge one another to duels fought with cudgels. The band of a defeated chief disperses or follows the victor. Certain chiefs are reported to be inveterate cannibals, who prey on the members of their own (!), as well as of neighboring bands. Most sources agree that the *Guayakí* are cannibals, but the evidence is not always convincing. The endocannibalism described by Mayntzhusen is open to strong doubt and requires careful checking. Lozano and modern authors report that woman stealing is a common practice and causes numerous feuds between bands.

Property.—When the members of a band cut down a palm tree, it is regarded as their exclusive property; such trees are referred to as "those cut down by the head of such and such band." Band members do not eat the larvae in palm trees belonging to another group or touch the tapir fallen in their neighbor's pitfall.

LIFE CYCLE

Childbirth.—To give birth, a woman, accompanied by a male and a female assistant, withdraws from her husband's fire. The man supports her and later severs the navel cord and massages the woman's genitals. Afterward, he pours cold water over the newborn child to establish a lifelong relationship that, in the case of a female child, precludes his marrying her. The female assistant (*upiaré*) then massages the child and begins to deform its head by pressing it between her hands to make it round. This operation is repeated by the mother during the next 3 days. The afterbirth is buried. The father, meanwhile, keeps to the woods. Both mother and father are forbidden to eat meat and honey, lest the child vomit and perhaps die. After 3 days both parents ceremonially bathe to ward off the jaguar demon; they are then considered safe and may resume normal life. The child is given the name of any food animal—not only vertebrates, but even the larvae of wasps, bees, and beetles—except those forbidden to women, such as ducks. The mother chooses the name of an animal eaten during late pregnancy, from which presumably the child's body was formed. The root of the words for name and for body is the same.

Puberty.—During their first menses, girls refrain from eating various kinds of animal meat. Afterward they are washed ceremonially, and perpendicular incisions are cut across their breasts and abdomen.

Boys have the lower lip perforated when they reach puberty. The operation is performed with a sharp tapir bone. Charcoal is rubbed into the wound, and a leaf is applied to prevent suppuration. At first, the young initiate wears a short piece of bamboo to keep the hole open; later he substitutes a real labret.

Marriage.—There is little information on marriage customs. According to Mayntzhusen alone, young girls marry elderly men and young boys mature women. Residence is strictly matrilineal. Polygamy is rare, and is the privilege only of chiefs and good providers. Yet matrimonial ties are brittle, and many women either desert their husbands or have secret adventures. The wronged husband contents himself with thrashing his unfaithful consort. M. Bertoni (1941, p. 39) was told by his informant that a husband who did not bring food to his wife was finally killed by other men of the group.

Death observances.—Old people and the sick who cannot follow the band are killed. The *Guayaki* bury their dead in a sitting position. The arms are tied against the chest, the feet are fastened together with a rope, and the back rests against stakes. A fire is kept burning on the grave for several days after a son or a younger brother

has trampled it. A miniature hut is also built over the grave. Those who have died a violent death are cremated.

ESTHETIC AND RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Art.—The northern *Guayakí* carve their arrowheads and decorate their calabashes with fire-engraved dots and dashes. The southern *Guayakí* paint horizontal stripes on their arrows, clubs, and chisels with a mixture of rosin and pulverized charcoal.

Games.—Children play with wax tops. Small children run around a little tree grasping it with their hands or swing hanging from a liana. Both adults and children are fond of making string figures (cat's cradles).

Musical instruments.—The northern *Guayakí* have bamboo flutes with three stops and calabash whistles with two stops. The calabash whistles of the southern groups have an opening across which they blow. The *Guayakí* also have cylindrical whistles made of wax or of a piece of bamboo (*takuapi*, *Merostachys clausenii*) smeared with wax and decorated with an animal claw. They use these instruments to signal their companions in the forest or to ask for help when they have killed large game.

Like the *Cainguá*, the *Guayakí* beat the rhythm of their dances with stamping tubes made of sections of bamboo.

Boys and girls use their nails to pluck fibers tied to a pole to make them vibrate. Boys burn holes in the shafts of their arrows to make them whistle when in flight.

Women sing songs on festive occasions, for instance, when a large animal has been killed or when some member of the group has been buried. Men utter a peculiar chant before going to sleep. They also chant when they have killed a coati.

RELIGION

Guayakí religion is almost entirely unknown. It is said that they try to prevent the wind from blowing or the rain from falling by shouting, as if these phenomena were living beings. They also swear at the rainbow, which they picture as a large and dangerous serpent. The *Guayakí* fear a bird, which they believe can strike them like lightning. They also dread a nocturnal bird (owl?), which they frighten away by shaking bunches of snail shells.

It is reported that they believe in forest spirits or goblins (M. Bertoni, 1941, pp. 22-23). A murderer, fearing the ghost of his victim, who may return in the shape of a bat, sleeps amongst a group of friends with his club beside him. This statement contradicts Mayntzhusen's impression that the *Guayakí* have little fear of ghosts.

MYTHOLOGY

The *Guayakí* explain lunar eclipses as the attack of jaguars against the moon. Sometimes the moon dies or is badly mangled. In order to succor the moon and frighten the celestial monsters, the *Guayakí* set fire to dry bamboos, which explode with a big noise, or strike trees with their axes. Falling stars are pieces of the moon. The Pleiades also are hostile to the moon, which is in danger every time it passes near that star cluster.

Long ago, when there was a big flood, men climbed on pindo palms and lived on the fruits, but they threw the stones of the fruit into the water, thus causing it to rise until most of them were drowned.

Once the moon fell into a pit but was rescued by a man (Bertoni, 1941, pp. 23-24, 36).

MEDICINE

A favorite cure consists in the application of heated leaves to the patient's body. Hot water poured on a layer of leaves also is used. Poultices are made of pulverized leaves or of pieces of bark. When a child feels pain in his stomach, two men take hold of him and stretch his limbs. Various medicinal plants known to the *Guayakí* have been listed by M. Bertoni (1941, pp. 51-54). Many of these are also used by the *Guaraní*.

There is no mention of shamans or of specialized curers.

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See also *The Caingang*, p. 475.

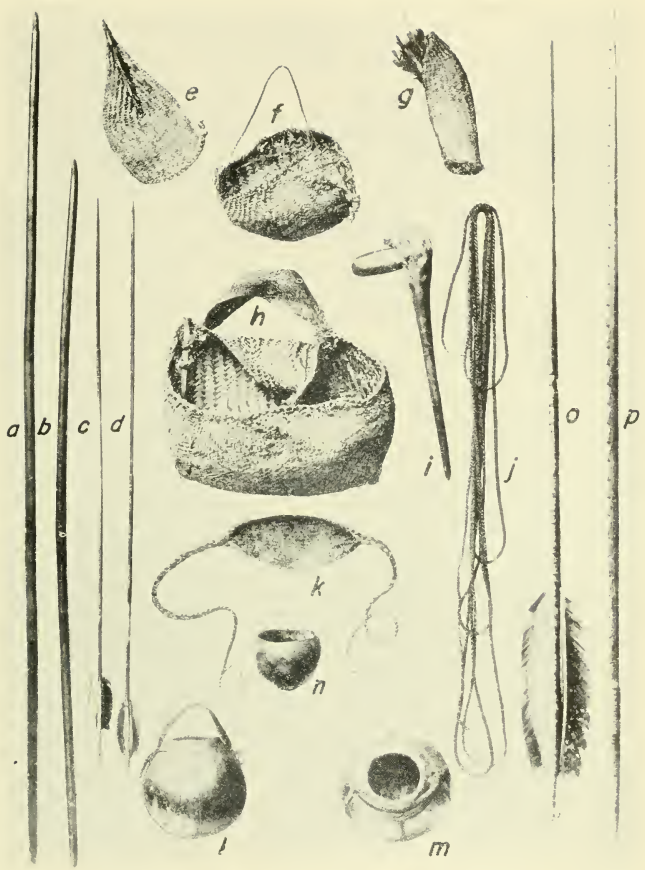


PLATE 95.—Guayaki arms and utensils. *a, b*, Bow staffs, *c, d*, arrows; *e*, fire fan; *f-h*, twilled baskets; *i*, stone ax; *j*, hair rope; *k*, tumpline; *l, m*, baskets smeared with wax; *n*, pottery vessel; *o*, arrow shaft; *p*, arrow point. (After La Hütte and Ten Kate, 1897.)



PLATE 96.—Guayaki warrior. (After La Hitte and Ten Kate, 1897, pl. 1.)