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OF  
SOUTH AMERICAN INDIANS**

**JULIAN H. STEWARD, *Editor***

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**Volume 3**

**THE TROPICAL FOREST TRIBES**

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## THE MURA AND PIRAHA

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By CURT NIMUENDAJÚ

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### THE MURA

#### TRIBAL LOCATION AND HISTORY

From the beginning, these Indians have been known as *Mura* (pronounced *Murá* by their neighbors, the *Torá* and *Matanawí* of the Madeira River). Their name for themselves, however, according to Barboza Rodrigues (1892 b, p. 38), is *Buhuraen*, and according to Father Tastevin (1923 a), *Buxwaray* or *Buxwarahay*. In the author's vocabularies, the following forms are given as self-designations: *Bohūra* (Manicoré River); *Bhūrai-ada*, meaning "Mura language" (Manicoré River), and *Bohurai*; *Bohurai-arasé*, "Mura language"; *Nahi buxwara araha*, meaning "that one is *Mura*"; *Yane abahi araha buxwarái*, "we are all *Mura*."

The *Mura* were first mentioned in 1714 in a letter by P. Bartholomeu Rodrigues (*in* Serafim Leite, 1943), who located them on the right bank of the Madeira River, between the *Tora* and the *Unicoré*, between lat. 6° and 7° 40' S. They were hostile toward the Jesuit mission founded in 1723 or somewhat later above the mouth of the Jamarý River, and, because of this hostility, the mission was transferred farther down the river in 1742. Their unfriendly attitude was the result of a treacherous act committed by a Portuguese trader who had kidnapped some of the *Mura* and sold them as slaves.

For over 100 years, beginning in the early 18th century, the *Mura* were a terrible scourge. The first expedition up the Madeira River into Mato Grosso, under the leadership of Major João de Souza, had bloody encounters with the *Mura* and threw the Indians back with great losses. The *Mura* then avoided open battle and resorted to ambush for which they became famous.

In 1749, when João Gonçalves da Fonseca's expedition had several encounters with them, the *Mura* were established on a lake on the right bank of the Madeira River, opposite the "mouth of the Autaz" (Madeirinha, a little above Borba). By 1768 they had passed to the region north of the Solimões (Cudajaz) River, but before this date they had extended to the lower Purús (Moraes, 1860, p. 535). Upstream, however, they did not go beyond the mouth of the Jamarý River.

It seems, therefore, that the original habitat of the *Mura* was on the Madeira River, below the falls and near the mouth of the Jamaré River; and that, after they had become a warrior tribe and were aware of the effectiveness of their tactics, they spread out downstream on the Madeira River and as far as the Purús River, and from the latter as far as the Cudajaz River, which is almost opposite (lat. 3°-7° S., long. 50°-63° W.; map 1, No. 1; map 4). Evidently this expansion was not a move to draw away from the *Mundurucú* invasion, who at that time, 1768, were merely mentioned on the Maués River. The expansion of the *Mura* was facilitated by the fact that they found the country only sparsely inhabited; the numerous old sedentary tribes had succumbed to the "avenging troops" and to the mission system. Their weak remnants, lacking any initiative and pride against servitude, and concentrated in a few villages, did not have the power to resist the attacks of savages conscious of their superiority as warriors. It seems that the Autaz region from then on began to be the center of the *Mura*, and it remains so today. That the *Mura* had been preceded in the Autaz by other tribes of higher culture is proved by the archeological remains found there by Tastevin (1923 a) and the present author. These include a great number of hardwood fishweirs, anthropomorphic urns of the Miracanguéra type, jade objects, etc.

About 1774, the warlike expansion of the *Mura* had reached its climax, and the desperate Neo-Brazilians demanded their extermination as the only means for avoiding the complete downfall of Amazonas (Ribeiro de Sampaio, 1825). At this time, Ribeiro de Sampaio mentions the *Mura* in the following places: Silves, Madeira River (Borba), Autaz, Uaquirí (?), Manacapurú, Purús River, Cudajaz, Mamiá, Coary River, Catuá, Caiamé River, Teffé River, Capucá, Yauató, Fonte Boa, Japura River, Amaná, Manaus, Jahú River, Uinini River, and Carvoeiro. Other authors add Obidos, Moura, Barcellos, Nogueira, Alvarães, Maripí, Ayrão, Poiães, and Abacaxys. The *Mura* were attacked in these places every year by Government forces. These punitive expeditions, in spite of the resulting bloodshed, were not effective, and the *Mura* continued to show their animosity. In 1784, however, the *Mura* unexpectedly made peace with the Whites. In July, five *Mura* appeared peacefully in Santo Antonio de Maripí, on the lower Japurá River and were followed later by many more. Other *Mura* presented themselves in Teffe, Alvarães, and Borba. In the latter place, where in 1775 an Army outpost had been created for the protection of the residents and travelers against their hostilities, their number grew in 3 years to more than 1,000. 1786, the *Mura* of the Cudajaz came to terms, and by the end of the same year the whole tribe had made peace and started to settle down in permanent villages.

The reason for their peace overtures was, perhaps, the gradual weakening of the tribe by epidemics, by the adoption of foreign elements, and, particularly, by the relentless war that the *Mundurucú* waged against them. The latter, crossing from the Madeira River westward, butchered the *Mura* in Autaz without, however, dislodging them permanently from a single one of the many places that they had occupied. Even after the pacification, the *Mura*, according to Martius, spread farther out upstream on the Solimões to beyond the Tabatinga frontier. The latest establishments, about which there is some information, were on the Jandiatuba River, a little below São Paul de Olivença and in the region of the lower Amazon in Mura-tapera, now called Oriximiná, on the Trombetas River, some 35 km. (22 miles) above the mouth.

In the beginning of the 19th century, relations with the Whites seemed to have been generally good; at least Canon André Fernandes de Souza, who mentions them at that time, does not speak of recent hostilities. According to him, the *Mura* were the only natives respected by the civilized people. Later, however, the *Mura* resumed their hostilities on the Madeira River.

During the "Cabanagem," a revolt that evolved into a general uprising of the Indian, Negro, and Mestizo servants against their White masters, the rebels won the adherence of the *Mura* who, together with them, robbed, killed, and burned. Together with the rebels, they were defeated and massacred, 1834-36. Friction between the *Mura* of the Madeira and the civilized people continued for a long time after the revolt. The report by Governor Tenreiro Aranha in 1852 contains many complaints against members of this tribe, who committed horrible crimes against defenseless people. The governor sent reinforcements to the military outpost in Maturá, commissioned a well-armed river patrol, and appropriated the amount of 1,308 milreis for mission work. None of these missions (São Pedro, Crato, Manicoré) lasted long. The last acts of hostilities on record on the Madeira refer to the killing of a soldier and two slaves of the Crato missionary by the *Mura* of the Capanã in 1855. Later, the *Mura* gathered on Onças Island for the purpose of attacking travelers.

The author of "Ilustração" (Anonymous, ms. a) estimated the number of *Mura* at 60,000 at the time of the pacification. This number is no doubt too high, as is 30,000 to 40,000 given by Martius in 1820 (Spix and Martius, 1823-31, vol. 3). Estimates based on the report of Albuquerque Lacerda showed that the *Mura* did not exceed 3,000 in 1864. In 1926, the present author counted 1,390 inhabitants occupying 26 *Mura* huts on the Madeira, Autaz, and Urubú Rivers. The total number might have been 1,600.

The *Mura* never expanded very much on land. Even during the time of their greatest extension, they always sought the low floodlands of the shores of the Amazon-Solimões River and its tributaries, and similar lands on the Rio Negro and Japurá, Solimões, Madeira, Purús, and Amazon Rivers. They settled only where they could move about in canoes, choosing spots where they could build their villages, plant their crops, and hunt. Throughout their known history, they can be characterized as a canoeing and fishing people.

The *Mura* are today so much crossed with Neo-Brazilians that it is impossible to determine their original physical type. Truly Negroid types, however, are rare. In the area of Yuma Lake, the author found, in 1926, a relatively large percentage of individuals of Indian type, characterized by an arched nose and receding chin. When the *Mura* made peace in 1784, they had already absorbed many foreign ethnic elements from people who had sought refuge among them or who had been captured by them. Large groups of other tribes, such as the *Jumana* and *Iruri*, were with the *Mura* at that time. The *Jumana* belonged to the *Arawakan* family, and both the *Jumana* and *Iruri* had a more advanced culture than the *Mura*. We do not know the influence of these foreign elements on *Mura* culture.

#### LANGUAGE

After their pacification, the *Mura* began to adopt the *Lingua Geral*, but at the time of Martius' trip, this language was little used. In 1850 they could speak it, but used the *Mura* language among themselves. Later they substituted Portuguese for the *Lingua Geral*, and now the majority of the groups use Portuguese. Some groups still speak the *Lingua Geral* among themselves, but only occasional individuals know the *Mura* language. In many groups it has disappeared completely.

Martius' contention that most of the words of the *Mura* language are of *Tupian* origin has remained unsubstantiated. Even the number of elements adopted from the *Lingua Geral* is strangely small. Most noticeable

are the regular use of the first and second singular, personal pronouns, and first person plural of *Lingua Geral*.

According to most linguists (Ehrenreich, Chamberlain, Rivet, Loukotka), the *Mura* language is isolated. The fact mentioned by the present author that the *Matanawí* language has a scant half-dozen words in common with the *Mura* does not mean that the two languages should be considered, as by Rivet (1924, p. 673) and Loukotka (1939, p. 154), as members of the same family. Only the following vocabularies have been published: Martius (1867, 2:20), Nimuendajú and Valle Bentes (1923), and Nimuendajú (1925, 1932 b).

## CULTURE

### SUBSISTENCE ACTIVITIES

**Farming.**—The *Mura* practiced farming before their pacification, but only on a small scale. According to Fonseca Coutinho (1873), they had large manioc and maize fields on the Autaz River. Moreover, A. F. de Souza (1870) mentions mandioca plantations of the *Mura* on the Matupiry, a tributary of the Madeira River, at the beginning of the 19th century. The author of "Observações adicionais" (Anonymous, ms. a, pt. 2) says that they did not plant anything, but looted the crops of others to make a fine manioc flour. This, however, presupposes that they already had pans, sieves, and tipití baskets. This, together with the Jará ceremony (see below), suggests that they were acquainted with manioc and its preparation. Very likely at war time they found it more convenient to steal tubers than to plant them.

**Hunting and fishing.**—The gathering of wild fruit was also important in their economy, but above all the *Mura* were fishermen. Their skill was admired not only by the civilized people but by their Indian neighbors, such as the *Catawishi*, who were also fishermen. The *Mura* caught turtles under water by hand, and after harpooning pirarucú (*Arapaima gigas*) and manatee, they pursued them between obstacles of aquatic plants and fallen trees. The importance of the harpoon here suggests that they had been acquainted with this weapon for a long time. In order to bring a dead manatee aboard their canoes, they swamped the craft so as to push it under the floating animal and then floated it again by emptying it.

They knew the use of the babracot, but preferred to roast their meat buried in the ashes or on a spit.

### HOUSES AND VILLAGES

The *Mura* build their houses in small groups of two to five, which sometimes are scattered far apart along the shore of a lake or river. They rarely live in isolated huts. According to Tastevin (1923 a), five or six families live in a hut, but the author noted that this occurs only in excep-

tional cases, each family usually having its own hut. These houses are not as poorly made as it has often been stated, and many of them do not differ from the huts of the poorer Neo-Brazilians of the region. The area surrounding the houses is not generally kept clean.

Judging from a drawing in Martius' Atlas, the original *Mura* hut seems to have been dome-shaped, with the rafters reaching to the ground and thatched with vertical palm leaves.

The anonymous author of "Observações adicionais" (Anon., ms. a, pt. 2) states that as a rule their real home is their canoe, and the present writer noticed in 1926 that the *Mura* of the Juma River slept on a platform in the canoe.

It seems probable that formerly the *Mura* slept on platforms such as those described by Father Tastevin (1923) and not in hammocks.

The early writers report that the *Mura* hammocks consisted only of three cords, a central one to support the weight of the body and lateral ones to maintain the equilibrium. This is obviously a satire of their indolence. Other information is more plausible. Ferreira states that in 1875 their sleeping hammocks were made of fibers of inner tree bark. Alfred R. Wallace (1853) says that they were made of three strips of embira, and Martius that they were made of a piece of bark (innerbark) shaped like a canoe. Bates (1863, p. 305) describes a *Mura* hammock as a "rudely woven web of ragged strips of the inner bark of the mongúba tree" (*Bombax* sp.). Later it seems that the *Mura* imitated the hammocks of neighboring tribes and of the Neo-Brazilians. Father W. Schmidt (1913) mentions a tucum hammock of the *Mura* in the Museum of Vienna, and the author saw two hammocks on the Juma River made of jauary (*Astrocaryum* sp.) fibers.

#### DRESS AND ORNAMENTS

Both sexes were completely naked, although one of Cavina's water colors (Ferreira, n. d., pl. 3<sup>1</sup>) shows an apron of twisted embira or burity fibers which is suspended from a belt and the upper part of which appears braided; the upper border is ornamented with a band of white zigzags over a red background. The ears and septum were pierced and pieces of cane passed through the holes. The upper lip was perforated above the corners of the mouth, while the lower lip was perforated in the center. In these holes the *Mura* inserted animal teeth or wooden pegs. According to Ferreira, the lip ornaments are of stone found in pirarucú brains; in the paintings, they are small, whitish, and somewhat three-lobed. They wore their hair trimmed along the forehead at the level of the eyebrows and long behind. It was usually disheveled.

They painted themselves with urucú and with a black pigment. Sometime they smeared themselves with mud as a protection against insects.

<sup>1</sup> Ferreira, who was a member of the first expedition to encounter the *Mura*, described this plate as follows: "Um dos gentios Muras que pelo meiado do mez de Novembro do anno proximo passado de 1786 aportaram no logar de Ayrão."

## TRANSPORTATION

*Mura* canoes were formerly made of tree bark and were 6.6 m. (about 22 ft.) long, 1.1 m. (3.25 ft.) wide, and 44 cm. (17 in.) deep. The ends were tied up with creepers. These craft carried four or five people. The original type of paddle is unknown. When not in use, the canoes were kept submerged so as to be hidden from any enemy and so that they would not dry up and crack. The fire-hollowed dugout, at first stolen from the Neo-Brazilians and later made by themselves, finally replaced bark canoes.

## MANUFACTURES

**Mats and basketry.**—The *Mura* used large mats on their beds and in their canoes, and smaller ones to sit on. Carrying baskets were made of two interwoven palm leaves.

**Pottery and gourds.**—According to Martius, the *Mura* had pottery, but he does not say if they made it. The present writer has never seen any ware made by them. He did, however, see gourds which had been dyed black on the inside and crudely carved on the outside.

**Weapons.**—The only weapon was the bow and arrow. The bow measured 2.7 m. (9 feet) according to João Daniel (1841, p. 168) and 2 m. (6 feet) according to Southey (1862, 6:248–249). The back is strongly convex, the belly only moderately so. W. Schmidt (1913) describes the feathering as radial and cemented. Fishing arrows lacked feathering. War arrows were formerly tipped with lanceolate bamboo heads 33 cm. (13 in.) long and 10 cm. (4 in.) wide, with two large barbs on each side. Now they have iron heads. The author found arrows made of a single piece of paxiuba on Lake Sampaio. An arrow figured by Therese von Bayern (1897, pl. 2, fig. 4) has arched feathering and is tipped with a rod notched along the side. The *Mura* in Covina's picture is armed with two arrows, each with a broad wooden point that has four or five pairs of barbs, and, protruding beyond this point, another lanceolate point of bamboo.

## SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

When the *Mura* made peace in 1786, they were divided into many groups, each numbering 45 to 150 persons and having its own chief. The 26 groups visited and counted by the author in 1926 averaged 53 persons and ranged from 15 to 120. Chieftainship was formerly hereditary, but carried little authority. According to the author of "Ilustração," (Anonymous, ms. a) the *Mura* rendered to the chief "respect and obedience as to a father." A tuft of yellow and black feathers tied to the forehead might have been a distinctive chief's ornament (Martius, 1867). After the pacification, the principal chief of the *Mura* lived at Amatary, on the

left bank of the Amazon, somewhat above the mouth of the Madeira River.

Each family head had his private fishing ground which he would defend against any poacher. In quarrels over fishing groups, disputants fought each other with the clubs, which a *Mura* always carried in his canoe to stun the fish after they are caught.

#### LIFE CYCLE

**Pregnancy and childbirth.**—During a woman's pregnancy there are no restrictions on her husband. Formerly, during childbirth, the woman would sit on a "log of a certain wood burned all over its surface as charcoal." Such logs were carried in the canoe, so that a trip might not be interrupted by childbirth ("Observações adicionais," Anonymous, ms. a, pt. 2). After childbirth, the father stays at home. He fasts for 5 days and the mother for a longer period. The size of the fish which the father may eat increases as the baby grows. Until the child can walk, the father may not hunt and eat his kill lest during his absence the boto (*Sotalia brasiliensis*) and the jaguar come invisibly and take revenge by killing the child. The author learned that if the father were to hunt a caiman, boto, otter, or anhima (*Anhima cornuta*) before the child could walk, these animals would steal the child's shadow. Herndon and Gibbons (1853-54, vol. 1.) mention cases of infanticide, but the present writer was impressed by the kind treatment of children.

**Puberty.**—From the beginning of the first menstruation until the end of the second menstruation, the girl is confined in a corner of the hut where she lies in her hammock.

The passage from childhood to adulthood was marked by a ceremony in which boys were permitted for the first time to take parica snuff. (See p. 263.) The boy was also flagellated (p. 264).

**Marriage.**—The aboriginal *Mura* had only one wife "whom they loved with tenderness and guarded with savage jealousy" ("Observações adicionais," Anonymous, ms. a, pt. 2; see also Spix and Martius, 1823-31, vol. 3). It seems that the *Mura* later became polygynous. Spix and Martius (1823-31, vol. 3) and Wallace (1889) stated that every man had two or three wives, who were kept in abject servitude. They were acquired as prizes in boxing matches between the girl's suitors, which were fought as soon as she had reached puberty. In earlier times, murder of wife stealers was sanctioned; later, such offenders were less severely punished.

Present-day *Mura* still feel honored if a person whom they esteem courts an unmarried daughter, and they allow the girls of the tribe a great deal of liberty. Today a request for marriage is made by the young man to the girl's parents, who sometimes demand of him some service. The marriage is concluded without any formality and, according to Tastevin, is easily dissolved. Marital fidelity is not strictly observed.

**Funeral rites.**—Formerly, a person was buried with all his possessions wherever he happened to die. At the beginning of the present century, the *Mura* of Murutinga (Autaz) still erected a small hut over the tomb, even in Christian cemeteries, and placed food, drink, and the weapons of the deceased on the grave. The mangoes which grew in the cemetery were reserved for the dead.

#### WARFARE

For half a century the *Mura* waged unceasing war against the civilized Indians and the Neo-Brazilians. According to Martius, they declared war against occasional enemies by planting arrows, head upward, in the ground in the territory of the rival tribe. Attacks were made silently. They ambushed canoes near rapids where travelers were forced to draw near the shore, watching the approach of their victims from the tops of sunaúma trees (*Ceiba pentandra*). They also ambushed enemies on the paths leading to the plantations. In the onslaught, they did not pay any attention to age or sex. They mutilated the bodies, but did not bring home any trophies, and they have never been seriously accused of cannibalism. According to Ribeiro de Sampaio (1825), they took prisoners to enslave them, but it is more likely that they incorporated them in the tribe. At the time of the pacification, the most important *Mura* chief was a civilized Indian, who had been captured as a child and reared by Whites. His mother, also a captive, acted as an interpreter during the peace negotiations.

By the end of the 18th century, the *Mura's* most feared enemies were the *Mundurucú*, who had come from the region of the Tapajóz River, sailed down the Canumã and Abacaxys Rivers, and established themselves on the Madeira River at Tobocal near the mouth of the Aripuanã River. It is probable that the *Mura's* defeat by the *Mundurucú* contributed greatly to their pacification. According to Martius, the *Mura* feared the *Mundurucú* so much that they did not even resist when the latter came for their women.

#### ESTHETIC AND RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

**Musical instruments.**—The *Mura* used a kind of clarinet, commonly called toré, made of a thick bamboo, and a five-hole bamboo flute. The latter was used for transmitting messages about a great variety of matters (Marcoy, 1866, and Anonymous, ms. a).

**Dances and songs.**—The dance witnessed by Martius was an imitation of the Neo-Brazilian dance, and the songs which accompanied it were in the *Lingua Geral*. The dances in vogue in Tastevin's time (1923 a) are identical to those of the *Mura's* civilized neighbors. Southey (1862, 6:348), however, speaks of an original dance in which the Indians were

arranged in two lines. Those of one line were armed with bows and arrows; the Indians of the other line were painted, and blew on long bamboo flutes. A man led the dance with grotesque gestures. In 1926, the *Mura* of the Juma River performed a nocturnal circle dance accompanied by the toré clarinet, and by songs about the sloth (*Bradypus* sp.) After the dance, the men gathered on one side of the ring and women on the other to bleed each other with sharp pirarucú and tambaqui fish-bones.

**Narcotics.**—Parica, made from the roasted seeds of the parica tree (*Mimosa acacioides*), is the most powerful narcotic used by the *Mura*. It was taken either as a snuff or as an enema. As a snuff, it was blown into the nostrils by means of a tube 1 foot (31 cm.) long made of tapir bone or a bird's leg bone. The powder was kept in a large bamboo tube and the doses measured out with an caiman tooth. It caused a general state of excitement and exaltation with auditory hallucinations, and a condition of feverish activity which ended with prostration or unconsciousness. According to Martius, individuals who were over-excited by the narcotic and suffocated died on the spot. "Observações adicionais" states that on the morning following a narcotic spree, the bodies of persons were often found shot with arrows or stabbed with knives. These murders were not considered as crimes and were blamed on the parica.

Parica taken as an enema by means of a rubber syringe had a similar but weaker effect. The participants in groups of ten sat in circles while old women held a vase containing the liquid and passed the syringe from hand to hand. To increase the effect, the enema was accompanied by singing, "Hé! Hé!" (Marcoy, 1866). The drunken men danced and threatened each other with weapons, which the women always tried to remove from the parica house. Present-day *Mura* still snuff parica but take less of it than before. A bamboo tube is used for the purpose (Nunes Pereira, personal communication).

The ancient *Mura* prepared manioc chicha. Today they have acquired two dangerous vices which have contributed to their moral and physical degradation: rum, from the White; and liam̃ba (hashish), from the Negroes (Tastevin, 1923 a, p. 517). A large part of the payment which they receive for their services is rum and liam̃ba, in exchange for which they are willing to surrender to the Neo-Brazilians their last bit of food. Then they spend day after day in a state of torpor, unable to work.

#### RELIGION

Little is known about *Mura* religion with the exception of a few ceremonies and magico-religious practices. Today the tribe is Christian, but its adherence to the Church lies only in the knowledge of a few saints, the ceremony of baptism, and the celebration of some feasts.

**The Parica feast.**—Martius denies that parica was taken at puberty initiations and links it instead to the ripening of the parica seeds. Marcoy (1866) says that anyone who had parica would invite others to the parica house, an open shelter built for the purpose and forbidden to women. The great parica feast was preceded by a hunt which lasted one week. The feast began with flagellation, after which came libations of a non-alcoholic beverage made with the fruit of the acahy palm. Then parica was taken, first in the form of snuff and afterward as an enema. The feast ended with a dance which lasted 24 hours. Marcoy's description of the feast contains obvious inaccuracies.

Martius gives second-hand information about this ceremony. The feast was celebrated every year and lasted for 8 days. It began with the drinking of cauim and other intoxicants. Then pairs of men flagellated each other with a long leather thong of tapir and manatee hide. This continued for several days. Afterward the partners kneeled in front of each other and blew parica powder into each other's nostrils by means of a tapir bone tube. (See Martius, 1867, fig. 63.)

**Punishment rites.**—The flagellation rite was also practiced during the full moon, its purpose being to increase one's strength. One man would hold the victim with his arms outstretched while the old man who performed the flagellations in the puberty ceremonies would whip him with a few lashings on the arms and legs.

After burning the brush for planting, the *Mura* performed a flagellation ceremony in order to increase the output of manioc. They brought in a pile of whips made of jará palm (*Leopoldina pulchra*), and the men surrounded the houses, seizing all the grown children, whose parents could not interfere. Each was held by two men, and forced to lean forward. A very old man sang, danced, and finally whipped the children's backs with the jará whips.

In order to make young boys successful in fishing, the *Mura* take them to a *tucandeira* ant's nest and force them to expose a hand to the sting of the ants.

**Shamanism.**—In Wallace's time, 1850, *Mura* shamans were highly regarded as men of great ability. They were feared and their services were always well paid. The shamans observed by Tastevin and the present author are faithful counterparts of the Neo-Brazilian shamans of that region, and have no aboriginal features.

Ornaments and preparations with magic power have been reported among the Juma River *Mura*. A caraipérana (Rosaceae) seed necklace offers protection against grippe and headaches. A necklace made of "tears of Our Lady" wards off eye disease. Painting the face with urucú protects against chickenpox. Juparana leaves were used against malaria. According to Spix and Martius (1823-31, vol. 3), the *Mura* used a monkey penis as a charm against fever.

## MYTHOLOGY

Some fragments of *Mura* cosmogony have been collected by Father Tastevin (1923 a) and the author. Heaven is a world, somewhat like the earth, where souls live and die and where the fearsome thunder resides. There is also a nether world, which is an aquatic region. The moon is female during 14 days, when women have greater vigor, and male during a like period, when men are especially strong.

The waters of the earth are connected to those of heaven; when there is a flood on the earth, the waters ebb in heaven, and vice versa.

The coal sack near the Southern Cross is a manatee carrying on its back a fisherman (Alpha and Beta Crucis of the Southern Cross), whose canoe was upset by the fish, while his companion (Alpha and Beta of Centaurus) is getting ready to throw the harpoon. The lightest part of the Milky Way is foam worked up by the manatee in the water.

The origin of the rainbow is explained as follows: A woman carried in her womb two snakes that would climb trees, bring her fruits, and return into her. Her husband killed them, and they went up to the sky, where they became the upper and lower rainbows. The rainbow is also conceived as the mouth of a large snake through which souls enter heaven. So as to obtain free passage, a coin is placed in the mouth of the deceased. If the latter is very poor, a fig is used instead. The master of the rainbow snake is called *kaíi tuhúí*.

The following are some *Mura* myths:

**The flood.**—Men escaped the rising flood in canoes and found a high rock, where they gathered, subsisting on the animals which also had taken refuge there. After the deluge had passed, they could not find their way home until a shaman took them there.

**The great fire.**—There was once a world conflagration, from which only one family escaped. The man had dug a deep cave, provided it with 30 pitchers of water, and erected a house of wood and straw inside it. He closed the entrance with stone. The fire passed above the cave, and it was intensely hot in the pit. Two weeks later, the stone was still hot, and the family did not emerge until the stone was cool enough to move. The earth was deserted and had no water or plants. The man built a hut, but he worried because only 10 pitchers of water remained. Then the Holy Ghost came with drums and flags, and the Indian obtained water from him. He got fish from Saint Anthony, palm trees from Saint John, and manioc from Saint Peter. The last ordered him to lie down on his back and when he turned around he saw that the manioc had already grown a foot. On the left bank of the Amazon near Manaos the dry and stunned vegetation bears witness to the great fire.

**The prisoners of the pigs.**—A newly married man went pig hunting. When he killed a sow, the aroused animals forced him to climb a tree. They dug up the roots of the tree, and when it fell they carried him away.

The pig's mother, a small red animal, kept him with her. When they went past uixu, buryty, and biribá trees they asked him whether he ate these fruits, and he answered that he did. The pigs then assumed a human shape. He had to sleep among them. When he arose, they did the same and grunted and sniffed. After 2 months, he managed to escape by climbing a tree and jumping from branch to branch. He carried away the pig's flute. After he had returned home, he invited his wife, his brother, and brother-in-law to hunt pigs. While they remained in the canoe, he blew twice on his flute. Soon a large herd of pigs came running toward him, and he killed as many as he wanted. His other brother returned from a trip and inquired how he obtained so many pigs. Then the brother took the flute and, saying that the other was a fool for having allowed the pigs to take him prisoner, he went ashore, blowing the flute. The pigs killed him and took the flute back.

### THE PIRAHÁ

#### TRIBAL LOCATION, HISTORY, AND LANGUAGE

The *Pirahá* (*Pirianaus*, *Piaarhaus*, *Piraheus*, *Piriahã*, *Piriahá*, *Piriahã*, *Pinyaha*, *Iviridyarohú*, "lords of fiber rope," i.e., armbands, *Ivirapa-pokú*, "long bow," and *Tapü*, "strangers") is a subtribe of the *Mura*, which speaks a distinct dialect. It has evidently always occupied its present habitat between lat. 6°25' and 7°10' S., along the lower Maicy River and at Estirão Grande do Marmellos, below this river's mouth.

The *Pirahá* have remained the least acculturated *Mura* tribe, but they are known only through a short word list and unpublished notes obtained by the author during several brief contacts in 1922, when efforts were being made to pacify the *Parintintin*.

The dialects of the *Pirahá* and *Mura* of Manicoré are mutually intelligible, and differences in these dialects appearing in the author's vocabulary may be partly attributable to informant difficulties. In a few instances, the *Mura* "r" becomes "g" in the *Pirahá* dialect.

The *Pirahá* are mentioned by Ferreira Penna (1853) in 1853, by Orton (1875, p. 470) in 1873, and by Barboza Rodrigues (1892 b) in 1885, the last describing them as the fiercest of all the *Mura*.

In 1923, they numbered around 90. In 1921, the "Serviço de Proteção aos Índios" established a center to give them aid but, apparently content with their present state, these Indians have shown little inclination to acquire European culture. Except for a few implements, they show almost no sign of any permanent contact with civilized people. They showed no interest in the utensils and clothing given them by the Serviço de Proteção aos Índios. Neither did they steal. In fact, no two tribes offer a more striking contrast than the *Pirahá* and their neighbors, the

*Parintintin*. The latter were active, clever, greedy for new things, ambitious, and thieving.

In general, the author found the *Pirahá* dull and unresponsive. Their sullenness made field research among them difficult. Their indifference and aloofness is probably more apparent than real, and seems to stem from their deep resentment at seeing their old enemies, the *Parintintin*, being favored by the governmental authorities, whereas they, who had never been hostile to the Neo-Brazilians, were treated with much less regard.

The vocabulary collected among them never exceeded 71 words. The *Pirahá* appeared to be completely indifferent as linguistic informants. In spite of several decades of contact with Neo-Brazilians, their knowledge of Portuguese and of the *Lingua Geral* never exceeded a dozen words.

#### THE YAHAHI

Barboza Rodrigues (1892 b) divides the *Mura* into *Pirahens* (*Pirahá*), *Burahens*, and the *Jahaahens* (*Yahahi*), giving for the location of the last the Solimões River. The *Torá* and *Maranawí*, who inhabit the lower Marmellos, call the *Yahahi* a subtribe of the *Mura*, which they say used to live on the Branco River, a tributary of the right bank of the upper Marmellos. The last survivors of the *Yahahi* joined the *Pirahá*.

#### CULTURE

##### SUBSISTENCE ACTIVITIES

The *Pirahá* grew maize, sweet manioc (macaxera), a kind of yellow squash (jurumúm), watermelon, and cotton. They were also excellent hunters and fishermen. The only aboriginal fishing technique observed among them was shooting fish with an arrow; however, they used fish-hooks obtained from civilized people. They ate Brazil nuts and wild fruit, and they liked honey mixed with water. They did not drink rum.

##### DWELLINGS

The dwellings of the *Pirahá* were rudimentary and badly constructed. Some were merely a poorly thatched roof covering a rude platform which served as a floor. As the huts were built on the beach slopes, the downhill ends of the flooring poles rested on a horizontal pole supported on two forked posts, while the uphill ends were stuck in the sand of the slope. On this platform were strewn one or more straw mats. The palm leaves of the roof were thrown at random over a still lighter framework, resting on four small forks about 5 to 6½ feet (1½ to 2 m.) above the first. The rain beat in everywhere as there were no walls. Similar, but larger, huts were sometimes placed side by side in twos or threes. In the summer,

one saw huts in little groups on the beaches of the Maicy River; in the winter, the Indians lived on land not subject to floods. On one small inland farm, a better constructed, open, gable-roof hut was noted.

#### DRESS AND ORNAMENTS

The men wore a belt of raw fibers with fringe down the front, covering and holding the penis up against the abdomen. The women, at least in the camps, were nude. The women's ears and the lower lips of some of the men were pierced. The young women, from puberty until marriage, wore two fiber strings, sometimes braided, across the shoulders. Over the biceps the men wore fiber bands with long fringe. The women had necklaces of seeds and animal teeth. Though they had rustic wooden combs, their hair was always more or less unkempt. They did not remove the body hairs. In spite of their river habitat, the *Pirahá*, especially the children, were very dirty and untidy. Use of urucú and genipa body paint was rare.

#### MANUFACTURES

**Miscellaneous.**—The *Pirahá* made pouches with handles, baskets of babassú straw, gourds for holding water, gourds with painted black interiors, and spoons made of monkey skulls. They made two types of straw fans, one rectangular and the other in the shape of a fish. There was no pottery. The Indians usually slept on a platform, but sometimes, to escape the mosquitoes, they lay in their canoes, tying them to a branch on the bank. Very rarely, one saw a netlike fiber hammock, in which they rested during the day.

**Weapons.**—The only *Pirahá* weapon was the bow and arrow; it was powerful but less carefully made than those of the *Parintintin*. The arrows had radial feathering, tied at intervals. A jawbone with tusks was used to smooth the bow and the wooden arrow shaft. On the edge of the bamboo arrow point a cutia's tooth was set in a handle.

#### WARFARE

The *Parintintin* and the *Pirahá* were constantly at odds. In both tribes there were a number of Indians who bore scars of wounds from this fighting. Their hostile encounters usually took place in the summer when the *Pirahá* went up the Maicy River, sometimes as far as the Maicy Fork, looking for tracajá (turtle, *Podocnemis*) eggs in *Parintintin* country. Likewise, the *Parintintin* attacked the *Pirahá* in their camps on the lower Maicy River almost every year. Unlike their enemies, the *Pirahá* were not cannibals and did not take trophies from the bodies of the slain enemies. They did, sometimes, take prisoners. Thus in 1916 or 1917 they captured a *Parintintin* woman and child and sold them to the civilized people of the lower Marmellos River. Long ago the *Pirahá* seem

also to have had some bloody battles with the *Matanawí*, but to all appearances they managed to get along peaceably with the *Torá*.

#### ESTHETIC AND RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

No musical instruments were seen among the *Pirahá*. A group of *Pirahá* who were camped near the Brazilian Government Center held a dance from the rising to the setting of the full moon. Holding hands and singing in unison, men and women formed a circle and danced in an open space. Starting slowly, they accelerated until they were running. This was repeated all night long. One of the men wore around his head a cord with short feathers of many colors; others had yellow grains of mumbaca palm trees (*Astrocaryum mumbaca*) hanging over their ears as ornaments. At a certain time, all were served a warm gruel of the jurumúm (squash) in a large gourd, made by roasting the plant in ashes and crushing it with the hands in water.

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