

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION  
BUREAU OF AMERICAN ETHNOLOGY  
BULLETIN 143

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**HANDBOOK  
OF  
SOUTH AMERICAN INDIANS**

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

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**Volume 3**

**THE TROPICAL FOREST TRIBES**

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Prepared in Cooperation With the United States Department of State as a Project  
of the Interdepartmental Committee on Scientific and Cultural Cooperation



UNITED STATES  
GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE  
WASHINGTON : 1948

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For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U. S. Government Printing Office,  
Washington 25, D. C.

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PART 2. THE TRIBES OF MATO GROSSO AND EASTERN BOLIVIA  
THE PARESSI

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By ALFRED MÉTRAUX

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TRIBAL DIVISIONS

The *Paressí* of Central Brazil together with the *Mojo* and *Chané* represent the southernmost branch of the *Arawakan* linguistic family.<sup>1</sup> They occupied in the Mato Grosso an area delimited in the east by the Arinos and the Upper Paraguay Rivers, in the west by the Upper Guaporé and Juruena Rivers, and in the south by lat. 40°30'.

They were divided into three main groups that were often hostile but that had a homogeneous culture and few dialectical differences: (1) The *Cashíniti* (*Kachíniti*), scattered along the Soumidoro River, a tributary of the Arinos River, and near the headwaters of the Sepotuba and Sucuriu-na Rivers (lat. 15° S., long. 58° W.); (2) the *Uaimaré* (*Waimaré*), who lived along the upper Rio Verde and Sacre River; (3) the *Cozárini* (*Kozárini*), who occupied the region of the watershed of the Juba, Cabaçái, Jaurú, Guaporé, Rio Verde, Papagaio, Burity, and Juruena Rivers (lat. 15° S., long. 59° W.).<sup>2</sup>

The *Cozárini* seem to be a mixed tribe formed by a nucleus of *Paressí* invaders who absorbed and assimilated Indians from other tribes, mainly *Nambicuara* (*Guayguakuré*). As recently as 1910 when Max Schmidt (1914) visited them, the *Cozárini* still fought the *Nambicuara* and kidnapped the men for slaves and the women for wives. The other *Paressí* looked down on the *Cozárini* as an inferior branch of their nation and called them *Cabishí*, a term also applied to the *Nambicuara* of the Serra do Norte and to numerous Indians of the Guaporé basin. Max Schmidt called them *Paressí-Cabishí*, a name which has been adopted in the anthropological literature.

After 1908, the *Paressí* were collected by the "Comissão de Linhas telegraphicas" in the following settlements: Utiáriti, Barão de Cam-

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<sup>1</sup> *Paressí* is closer to *Mehinakú* than to *Mojo*.

<sup>2</sup> The *Iranxe* (*Iranche*), who have been classified as a *Paressí* subtribe, belong according to Max Schmidt (1942) to a different linguistic group.

panema, Ponte de Pedra, and Aldeia Quemada. In 1928, most of the remaining *Cashiníti* and *Uaimaré* lived in Utiáriti and São José. The surviving *Cozárini* were settled near Villa de Mato Grosso and at Tapiruapán.

**Population.**—Pires de Campos (1862) stresses the large population of the *Paressí* and *Uaimaré* in 1718. By 1848, their number had been considerably reduced through slave raids. The *Cashiníti* were then estimated at 250, the *Uaimaré* at 400, and the *Cozárini* (*Cabishí*) at 500. In 1908, according to Rondón's census, there were 340 *Paressí* living in 12 villages of which the largest had 57 inhabitants and the smallest 16. In 1937, there remained about 150 *Paressí*.

#### HISTORY

The *Paressí*, under the name of *Pareti*, are mentioned in connection with the first Spanish expeditions to Chiquitos and Mojos. At the beginning of the 17th century, some conquistadors reached their territory and even saw the Serra dos Parecis and the Serra do Norte. (See Métraux, 1942, p. 160.)

The first account of their culture was written in 1723 by the slaver Antonio Pires de Campos (1862), who in 1718 had discovered this tribe on the highlands beyond the watershed of the Paraguay River. The *Mahibarez*, undoubtedly identical with the modern *Uaimaré* (*Mahimbaré*), had, according to Pires de Campos, the same culture and the same language as the *Paressí*. Pires de Campos mentions also the wild and cannibalistic *Cavihí* (*Cabishí*), but it cannot be ascertained whether the latter were actually the modern *Paressí-Cabishí* (*Cozárini*).

During the entire 18th century, the *Paressí* region was crossed by slavers and by adventurers in search of gold or diamond mines. In the 19th century, the *Paressí* also were molested by rubber gatherers. Their territory was finally opened in 1908 by General Mariano Candido da Silva Rondón, who was then the chief of the Commission that built a telegraphic line across the Brazilian wilderness. Thanks to Rondón's endeavours, the Indians were well treated and were even given the means to adjust themselves to modern civilization. So rapid was their assimilation, that within a few years the Commission could use some *Paressí* as employees, even as telegraphers. Schools were created in several villages and many *Paressí* received White education. By 1928, the *Paressí* were fully acculturated. It is difficult to account for the sharp decline in population which took place after 1910; Max Schmidt (1943, p. 10), however, states that many *Cozárini* fell victims to an influenza epidemic.

#### SOURCES

Von den Steinen's chapter about the *Paressí* in his "Unter den Naturvölkern Central Brasiliens" (1894) is especially valuable for the creation

myths it contains, but his information is fragmentary, for the author never visited these Indians in their home country. Good data about various aspects of *Paressí* culture appear in Rondón's (1912) reports and in the book "Rondonia" written by the Brazilian anthropologist Roquette-Pinto (1917, 1938). Max Schmidt (1914, 1943) has written two important monographs about this tribe: the first one deals exclusively with the *Paressí-Cabishí* (*Cozárini*); the more recent one includes a detailed history of the *Paressí*, a summary of their culture, an extensive dictionary of their language with grammatical notes, and mythological texts in *Paressí*.

#### CULTURE

##### SUBSISTENCE

**Farming.**—The 18th-century *Paressí*, who probably lived somewhat north of their present territory, had large fields of maize, beans, sweet potatoes, and pineapples. The siliceous plateaus more recently occupied by the *Paressí* are less fertile. Only the thin gallery forests along the rivers are well suited for cultivation, hence the dispersion of the fields and the frequent shifting of villages. The *Paressí* cultivate bitter and sweet manioc, maize (a red and a yellow variety), beans, sweet potatoes, cara, tobacco, and cotton. They supplement their diet with wild food plants, such as cashews, jaboticaba, tarumá, tucum, wild pineapples, and many other species.

**Hunting.**—Game is scarce and elusive in the open savannas of the territory of the *Paressí*; these Indians, nonetheless, are good hunters. They stalk game with the bow and arrow using portable leaf screens to hide themselves. They also shoot from watchposts or organize communal drives in which they set fire to the bush. They decoy the game by imitating its call or catch it with traps. They have well-trained hunting dogs. According to Pires de Campos (1862), the ancient *Paressí* caught deer, rheas, and other animals in pitfalls which they dug within large enclosures built between two streams. Max Schmidt (1914) reports that hunters destroy the game indiscriminately, but Rondón (1912) states that they spare the female rheas during the breeding season.

**Fishing.**—Shooting with bow and arrows in flooded areas, drugging with timbó, or angling with European hooks are the main fishing methods of the *Paressí*. However, their deep and clear rivers constitute a handicap which makes fishing less important here than in the other tropical areas.

**Domestication.**—The *Paressí* are among the few Indians of America who practice a primitive form of apiculture. They put swarms of jati bees (*Trigona jati*) in a gourd with two openings, one for the bees and the other, sealed with wax, for removing the combs.

Modern *Paressí*, besides keeping many wild animals as pets, raise dogs, chickens, pigs, and ducks. In 1910, the *Cozárini* had only dogs which were ill treated and ill fed.

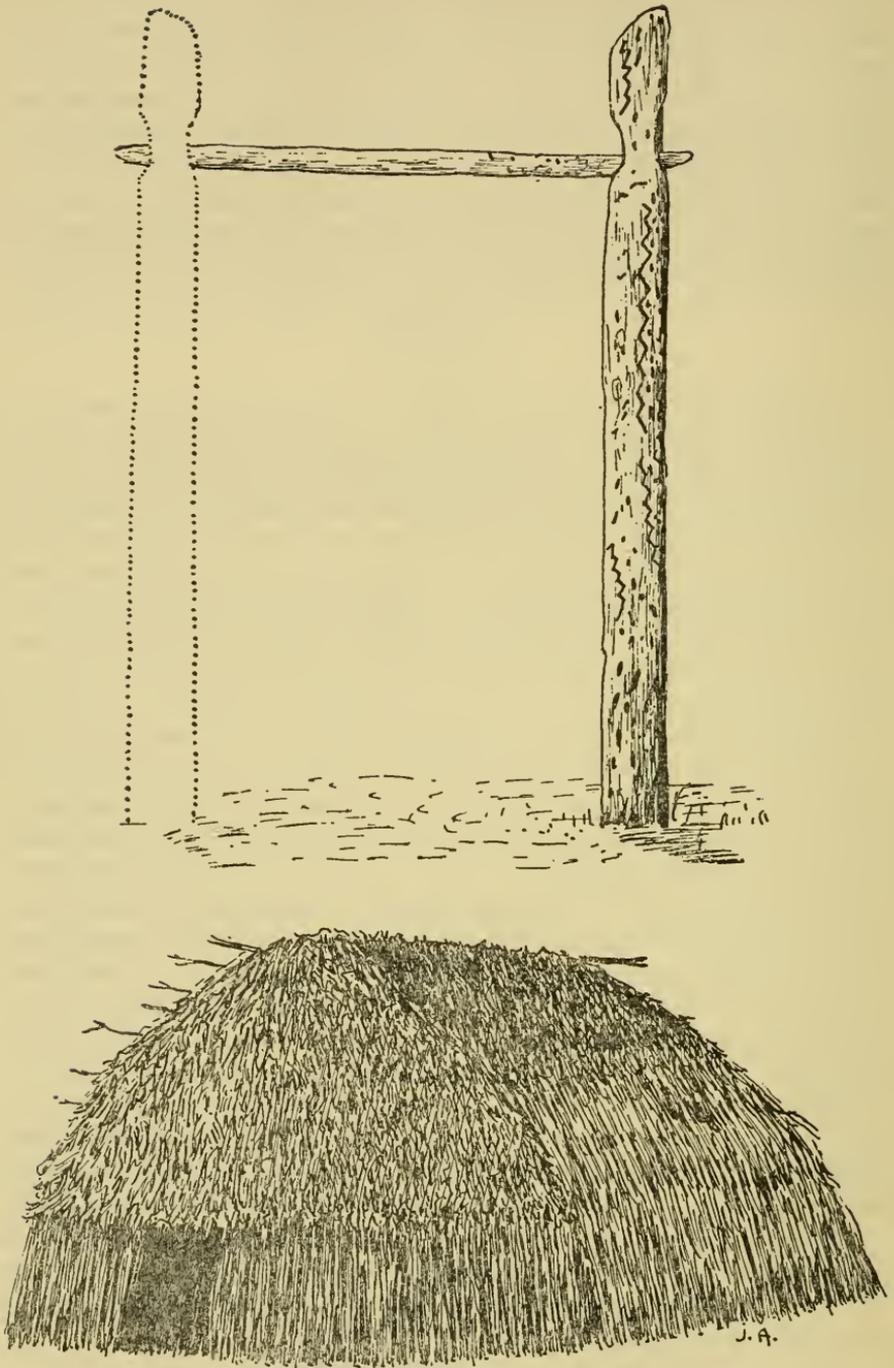


FIGURE 43.—*Paressí* Indians. *Top*: Decorated posts and bar for testing strength. *Bottom*: *Paressí* house. (Redrawn from M. Schmidt, 1914, figs. 27, 40.)

**Food preparation.**—Meat is roasted on a four-legged babracot; manioc is grated on wooden graters, strained through sieves, and roasted in clay pans. Maize or manioc is pounded in large, cylindrical wooden mortars with wooden pestles. Gourds of all kinds and sizes serve as bottles, bowls, and cups. Small mats are used as dishes and fire fans.

#### HOUSES AND VILLAGES

According to Pires de Campos (1862), the ancient *Paressi* villages comprised from 10 to 30 round and oven-shaped huts, from 30 to 40 feet (10 to 13 m.) in diameter.

At the beginning of this century, *Paressi* villages consisted only of one or two communal houses accommodating an average of six families. These huts were dome-shaped with an oval ground plan and a thatched roof which reached the ground. The frame was made of bent rafters attached to a central ridge pole. The lower part of the wall was lined up with large pieces of bark. These huts averaged 25 feet (7.6 m.) in length, 18 feet (5.4 m.) in width, and 12 feet (3.6 m.) in height. Each family occupied a space bounded by the rafters.

Each village had a ceremonial hut, which may be described as a gable roof resting on the ground and closed on all sides but for a single door shut with a leaf screen.

Hammocks, which were made of cotton, but sometimes of tucumã fibers, were suspended from the rafters and from extra posts, which were often decorated with painted motifs (*Cozárini*). Such posts were held to be animated by spirits that protected the families from thieves.

#### DRESS AND ADORNMENT

Men and women dress today like the Mestizos. Formerly, men went naked, but tucked their penis under a few cotton strings threaded with beads and tied around the waist. Women wore short, cylindrical, cotton skirts, which scarcely covered their lower abdomen (pl. 35, *bottom, left*). Pires de Campos (1862) mentions penis covers (?) and women's skirts covered with feathers. Both sexes wore wide garters and anklets, the men of cotton, the women's often of rubber. Men use also woven bracelets, reinforced with wooden sticks and feather quills. Both sexes took pride in owning a great many beads, which they displayed in the form of bracelets or of heavy necklaces suspended crosswise over the chest.

The only headdresses consisted either of a simple feather circlet mounted on a low frame of bamboo strips or of tufts of feathers attached to the nape. Feathers were passed through the perforated septum of the nose and sticks through the earlobes. In former days, both sexes were tattooed, an operation performed by women. The *Paressi* paint themselves with *genipa* and *urucú*.

According to tradition, *Paressí* men wore a tonsure in ancient days; today they cut their hair around the head. Combs consisted of splinters inserted between parallel pieces of bamboo.

#### TRANSPORTATION

Many *Paressí* groups lack canoes. They cross rivers buoyed by a bundle of burity stems or on tree-trunk bridges.

The ancient *Paressí* seem to have built broad paths or even roads to connect their villages.

#### MANUFACTURES

**Basketry.**—Some circular sieves and concave trays are made with a plain checker weave of bamboo strands. More complicated diagonal patterns are obtained by using a twilled weave. The finished basket is smeared with black pigment which, adhering to the rough sides of the strands, causes the design to stand out sharply. The large cylindrical carrying baskets represent a third technique: the warp and weft meet at right angles and are held in position by extra diagonal strands (pl. 35, top, left).

**Spinning and weaving.**—Cotton is spun with drop spindles fitted with a clay whorl or a fruit. Ropes of tucum fibers are twisted on the thigh.

The loom is of the vertical, or "*Arawak*," type. Loincloths, baby slings, and bags are made of the entire cylindrical piece of the finished cloth as it is removed from the loom. For other objects, such as arm bands and belts, the warp is cut before the fabric is completed, so that the ends are always fringed.

**Featherwork.**—Ancient *Paressí* excelled in making feather fabric, probably in the same techniques as *Mojo* feather mosaics.

**Pottery.**—Unlike most *Arawakan* tribes, the *Paressí* have a very crude pottery, though they might have had a better ceramic in the past. Clay is tempered with the ashes of the katipe bark and a ferruginous powder, common in the region.

**Rubber.**—Rubber balls are made by coating a concave piece of wood with the latex of the mangabeira (*Hancornia speciosa*). The edges of the membrane are glued together by pressing them with the fingers. Air is blown into the ball through a small hole which is patched with a thin membrane. Several additional coatings of latex give strength to the ball. The rubber bands which women wore around their legs were made on a cylindrical piece of wood.

**Weapons.**—In 1718, Pires de Campos saw among the *Paressí* bows and arrows, flat swords of hardwood, and short spears. Bows and arrows fell into disuse soon after guns were introduced. The bows of the *Cozárini* have a semicircular cross section and shoulders are cut at both ends for



PLATE 35.—Paressí life. (Courtesy American Museum of Natural History.)



the three-ply cotton string. There are three kinds of arrows: those tipped with a long sharp rod, bird arrows made of a simple bamboo stem with the root forming the knobbed head, and whistling arrows. The feathering is of the cemented type. It is lacking on fishing arrows.

*Paressi* are acquainted with curare, which they extract from shavings of the bark of a creeper (*Strychnos toxifera*). Other ingredients added to the poison have magical rather than practical usefulness. Curare is used on ordinary hunting arrows.

#### SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

The political unit of the *Paressi* is the independent village, which is under the direction of a chief and of a shaman. Often one man fills both roles. Among the *Cozárini*, chieftainship is transmitted to the eldest son, who enjoys special privileges even when he is only the heir apparent. It is remembered that in the past some *Paressi* chiefs ruled over minor chiefs in other villages. The functions of the chiefs are not fully described in our sources, but we know that they lead all the ceremonies and that they receive visitors.

Among the *Cozárini*, heads of families control a class of dependents that includes many adopted captive boys. These servants open clearings, carry wood to the village, build houses, and give their masters all their earnings (M. Schmidt, 1914, p. 188).

The inhabitants of different villages visit one another frequently and maintain active commercial relations. The whole territory of these Indians is crisscrossed by paths leading from one settlement to another.

#### LIFE CYCLE

**Birth.**—It is customary for a woman during childbirth to kneel on the ground and to lean against another woman, generally her mother. Until the infant's navel cord drops off, both parents remain at home. Moreover, during his seclusion, the father may eat only manioc wafers.<sup>3</sup> When the child is about 3 years old, it receives the name of one of its grandparents (Steinen, 1894, p. 436).

**Marriage.**—Monogamy prevails now, but formerly sororal polygyny appears to have been common. When native traditions were still unimpaired, small children were often betrothed to each other by their parents. Sometimes an adult man reared a girl from childhood and married her when she reached puberty.

Marriage was considered sealed after the bridegroom had made a small present to his bride's parents and after the latter had brought the girl to his hammock (Steinen, 1894, p. 434). Residence was customarily matri-

<sup>3</sup> A father who did not observe the rules of the *couvade* faced the danger of being killed by bush spirits.

local, except for chiefs who were privileged to take their wives to their own houses.

**Death.**—Toward the end of the 19th century, the dead were buried in their huts with food and all their possessions, their heads turned toward the east. Relatives of the deceased remained indoors for 6 days, observing a rigorous fast. On the seventh day, they rubbed their bodies with a plant juice mixed with urucú. The house of the dead was abandoned temporarily or permanently.

The souls of the dead were believed to travel to the sky, but on the way they had to face many ordeals. They passed by a large fire which flared up to burn the "sinners" and by a doglike monster which tore them to pieces. If they succeeded in overcoming these dangers, the souls were received in the sky by Waikomóné and his three brothers, who painted them with urucú (Steinen, 1894, pp. 434–35).

#### ESTHETIC AND RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

**Art.**—Gourds (fig. 44), dancing sticks, and house posts of the *Cozárini* are decorated with painted, incised or fire-engraved geometrical and real-

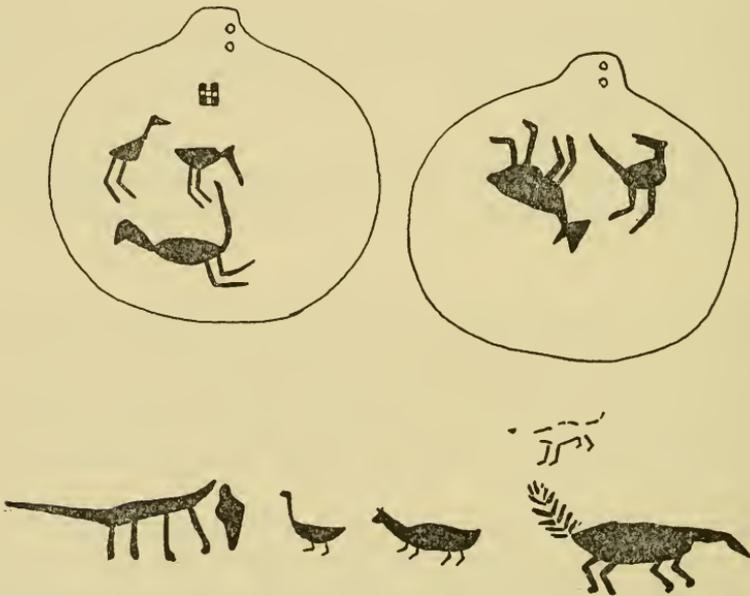


FIGURE 44.—*Paressí* decorated gourds. (Redrawn from M. Schmidt, 1914, figs. 127, 128, and 126.)

istic designs. The geometrical patterns consist of straight or undulating lines, series of dots, triangles, hooks, rows of lozenges, T-shaped motifs, and others. Simple zigzag lines are called "Male serpent spirits"; a group of lozenges represents the "Female serpent spirit." As a rule, however, these design elements are combined according to the fancy of the artist and

seem to lack any symbolic or other significance. The realistic decorations are black silhouettes of men and animals. Apparently, there is seldom any attempt to depict a scene. The posts supporting the transverse piece of wood, which young *Cozárini* boys break with their back, are covered with paintings, some realistic, others geometric. These designs are more or less conventionalized representations of the moon, spirits, caimans, and so on. The motifs are haphazardly combined, and cannot be regarded as true pictographs. They show, however, striking resemblances to the petroglyphs of Ponte da Pedra, in *Paressí* territory. (See M. Schmidt, 1940).

**Musical instruments.**—Many of the musical instruments are highly sacred, and symbolize spirits. In this category are the big flutes with four stops, of which there are several kinds with different tones. Among the *Cozárini*, the Male serpent-spirit, Makunaima, is represented by a clarinet or trumpet formed of two parts, a bamboo tube, and a gourd (resonator bell). The distal end is notched and vibrates when air is blown into the tube.

Men imitate spirit voices by speaking into a bamboo tube, the thin walls of which are slashed. This is not so much a musical instrument as a "tone coloring instrument, somewhat like our mirlitones" (Izikowitz, 1935, p. 235).

Resonator whistles, or flutes made of two halves of gourds and blown with the nose, are also sacred.

The ceremonial musical instruments are kept in the club houses safe from the eyes of women, to whom they are taboo.

*Paressí* panpipes consist of 5 tubes held together by a simple ligature. Like the gourd rattles which are used as toys, they are profane instruments. Dancers wear anklets of fruit shells. (On musical instruments and on *Paressí* music, see Roquette-Pinto, 1938, pp. 137-140.)

**Games.**—The *Paressí*, like the *Mojo*, have a rubber-ball game which is played exclusively with the head. The hollow rubber ball is 8 inches (20 cm.) in diameter. The players are divided into two teams, and the ball is placed on the ground on top of a heap of sand. One player runs forward, throws himself flat on the ground, and butts the ball toward the opposite side. The first butt never lifts the ball very high and it rolls and bounces toward the opponents, one of whom throws himself flat on his face and butts it back. After this, the ball flies sufficiently high for the players to strike it with their heads. A score is made by one team when the opponents miss the ball and allow it to fall to the ground. The main rule is that the ball must not be touched with the hands or feet or with any part of the body except the top of the head (Roosevelt, 1914, pp. 198-199).

In a contest of strength, young *Cozárini* men use their backs to break a transverse wooden bar passed through two perpendicular posts (fig. 43, *top*).

Children's games include walking on stilts and throwing shuttlecocks.

**Dances.**—Ceremonial dancing is restricted to men; women may not even see the performance. Women may, however, join profane dances. Men carrying pipes and trumpets circle slowly round and round stamping their feet, to make their rattles clatter. Dances are led by the chiefs.

**Beverages.**—*Paressí* prepare manioc chicha in large wooden troughs. They boil the mass in large pots, and add to it chewed manioc cakes (beijú) and an infusion of palm fruits. The main feasts, involving drinking and dancing, take place in October and April and attract many visitors from far away villages.

#### RELIGION

Diffuse animism appears to be one of the main features of *Paressí* religion. The Indians people rivers and woods with spirits and demons. The most important deity of the *Cozárini* seems to have been the Serpent spirit, Nukaima, and his wife. The men's club is his temple where he is represented by a trumpet and his wife by a flute (flageolet). According to Pires de Campos (1862, p. 443), the ancient *Paressí* had special huts in which they kept terrifying "idols" and trumpets which belonged to these deities. Women were not permitted to enter the sacred huts where the men assembled in their best outfits to dance and drink.

An unshaped piece of wood is, according to Roquette-Pinto, one of the *Paressí's* main sacred objects. When it becomes old and moth-eaten, a shaman and his assistant go to the forest and get another log, which they carry home while chanting a monotonous duet which women are forbidden to hear.

Drinking bouts are celebrated by the *Cozárini* in honor of the Serpent spirit. At dusk on the day before the feast, beer is sent into the club, where it is received with a curious yell produced in the throat. Men begin the feast by beating the roofs of the huts with a sort of whip to notify the women inside that the Serpent spirits are thirsty and that their anger can be appeased only by offerings of beer. Two dancers, holding the musical instruments symbolizing the spirits, stamp on the ground in front of the houses while other participants sing in deep voices to their rhythm. The chief gives the dancers large quantities of a manioc or chicha beer prepared by the terrified women. The latter remain shut inside the dwelling houses during the entire performance.

The Serpent spirits also demand meat. Large portions of game are set aside and roasted as offerings for them, but actually are eaten by the men in the club house, where they receive the food with deep roars.

Occasionally, lay dances are performed to the accompaniment of musical instruments. Groups of three men dance together while blowing their panpipes. There are also choruses under the direction of some precentor.

## SHAMANISM

Shamans are surrounded by apprentices on whom they impose solitary retreats into the forests and severe fasts. Shamans are credited with considerable knowledge and are said to be capable of flying to the sky (Steinen, 1894, p. 435). They treat their patients by blowing tobacco smoke on their bodies, but they use also a great many medicinal plants, judging from the extensive list of them published by Rondón (1912, pp. 15–17). Sorcerers throw poison at their victims or mix it in their drinks.

## MYTHOLOGY

The first ancestor was the stone woman Maisö. At the time, there was darkness, and there were neither rivers, earth, nor wood. By introducing a piece of wood into her vagina, Maisö produced first the dirty Cuiabá River and then the clear Paressí River. She put soil in the water and created the ground. Many people issued from her, the first man, Dukavaitéré, entirely of stone. With his wife, Urahiulu, he engendered the sun, the moon, the rheas, the jaguar, the seriema bird, and the deer, all of which he placed in the sky as stars and constellations. Then they procreated several kinds of parrots together with serpents of the same color. For instance, the blue arara, which had a human face, appeared at the same time as the "blue arara serpents." Maisö, concerned by the successive birth of parrots and serpents, made magic on her daughter-in-law, who finally conceived the first *Paressí*. This first man, Uazale, was hairy and had a tail and a membrane between his arms and legs.<sup>4</sup> The other children of the mythic couple became the ancestors of the several *Paressí* subtribes and even of the Portuguese.

Later, the woman, Urahiulu, produced iron tools, axes, and finally, horses, cattle, and pigs. Everything came from her.

Uazale, the first *Paressí*, was a true culture hero. He discovered manioc in the forest and created cotton by planting his hair. Tobacco grew from the body of a child that he buried. Uazale wanted to kill his children, whom he suspected of incest. The children ran away into the forest, which they accidentally set on fire. Several valuable plants grew from the various parts of their charred bodies. Uazale also taught pottery making to women.

Tshenikauré, Uazale's brother, was the "big jaguar" that devoured Kamazú, the ancestor of the *Cozárini*, and his wife. Waikomóné, Kamazú's son, killed the jaguar. The jaguar's arrows were changed into *Bacãiri* Indians. All the Indians who were hostile to the *Paressí* were believed to be members of the family of the mythical jaguar.

In *Paressí* mythology, Waikomóné is second in importance only to Uazale. Waikomóné and his three brothers receive the souls of the

<sup>4</sup> According to the myths recorded by Max Schmidt (1943, pp. 234–235), Uazale and his brothers came from a cave, near Ponta de Pedra. A bird discovered the land outside.

dead when they reach heaven. Waikomonné had a son, whom he created magically of leaves, and who was the husband of all the pretty women who came to heaven. (See Steinen, 1894, p. 435-440.)

In another version of the creation myth (Roquette-Pinto, 1938, p. 133), the Supreme Being, Enore, carved the first men and women out of a piece of wood. This couple had four children, two boys, Zaluiê and Kamaikôrê, and two girls, Hoholaialo and Uhaiuariru. When Enore divided all the good things of the world among his children, Zaluiê refused to accept guns because they were too heavy and horses and cattle because they would soil the plaza of his village. He departed with bows and arrows. Kamaikôrê accepted the objects his brother refused, and the Whites, his descendants, have become prosperous and powerful.

Maize sprouted from the grave of a big chief, Ainotare. Manioc originated from the body of a girl who, despised by her father, asked her mother to bury her alive in the forest.

#### LORE AND LEARNING

According to the *Paressí*, the sun is a ball of red arara feathers and the moon a ball of yellow mutum feathers. Each belongs to a different master, who stores it away when it must not be seen. Phases of the moon are caused by a spider who gnaws the moon's edge and by four armadillos who hide its disk. Constellations are described as various kinds of animals: A jaguar devouring a deer, a sariema bird, and others. The Coal Sack near the Southern Cross is identified as a rhea. The Milky Way is a path covered with kutá fruits.

Rondón (1912, pp. 40-42) gives the text of four *Paressí* songs. They are short pieces: one describes the meeting with the "Father of the bush"; another tells of the killing of a man; another of the pleasures of dancing and drinking; and the last commemorates a battle.

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