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THE TUPI-CAWAHIB

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TRIBAL DIVISIONS AND HISTORY

The *Tupi-Cawahib* are not mentioned in the literature prior to 1913-14, when they were discovered by General Candido Mariano da Silva Rondón, who headed the Brazilian Military Commission. Little information about them is contained in the reports of the Commission (Missão Rondón, 1916; Rondón, 1916).

The *Tupi-Cawahib* declined rapidly in population within a few years. The 300 individuals who comprised the *Takwatip* clan in 1915 were reduced in 10 years to only 59 persons—25 men, 22 women, and 12 children. In 1938, there were only 5 men, a woman, and a small girl. Thirty years ago, the entire *Tupi* group probably included from 2,000 to 3,000 persons; now only 100 or 150 of them are alive. Epidemics of gripe, during 1918-20, are largely responsible for the decline in population. Several cases of paralysis of the legs, observed in 1938 (Lévi-Strauss, n.d. a), suggest that poliomyelitis may have reached this remote region.

According to the linguistic and historical evidence presented by Nimuendajú (1924, 1925), the *Tupi-Cawahib* and *Parintintin* are the remnants of an ancient *Tupi* tribe, the *Cabahiba*. Since the 18th century, it has often been stated that the *Cabahiba* had once lived in the upper Tapajóz Basin. The language of the *Tupi-Cawahib* closely resembles that of the *Parintintin*, and both are related to the language of the *Apiacá* of the Tapajóz River. After the destruction of the *Cabahiba* by the *Mundurucú*, the *Tupi-Cawahib* settled on the Rio Branco, a left tributary of the Roosevelt River (lat. 10°-12° S., long. 61°-62° W.) From the Rio Branco they were driven to their present territory on both sides of the Machado (or upper Gi-Paraná) River, from the Riosinho River in the southeast to the Muquí and the Leitão River in the north and the northwest. These three waterways are small tributaries of the Machado River. The native groups mentioned by both Rondón and Nimuendajú (1924, 1925) are clans with special geographical localization. According to Nimuendajú's informant, the *Wiraféd* and *Paranawát* (*Paranawad*) were settled on a tributary of the right bank of the

Riosinho River. The *Takwatib Eriwahun* (Nimuendajú), or *Takwatip* (Lévi-Strauss), who had once lived on the Tamuripa River, a right tributary of the Machado River, halfway between the Riosinho and the Muquí Rivers, were brought by General Rondón to the Rio Machado, where they lived until 1925, when the last six members of the group joined the Telegraphic Post of Pimenta Bueno. The *Ipotewát*, mentioned by Rondón, are no longer an autonomous unit. According to information recorded in 1938, they were then living on the upper Cacoal between the Riosinho and Tamuripa Rivers. Living downstream were the *Tucumanfét*. The *Paranawát*, mentioned by Rondón and Nimuendajú, lived on the Rio Muquí in 1938. They numbered about 100 individuals and had refused to have any contact with White people. When the remnants of the previously unknown *Mialat* were discovered in 1938 on the upper Leitão River, there were only 16 members of the group (Lévi-Strauss, n.d. a). The now extinct *Jabotifet* were formerly settled between the upper Cacoal and Riosinho Rivers.

#### CULTURE

##### SUBSISTENCE

**Farming.**—The *Tupí-Cawahib* cultivate gardens in large clearings near their villages and hunt game in the dense forest. They raise: both bitter and sweet manioc; five kinds of maize—a white one with large kernels, a dark red variety, a kind with white, black, and red kernels, one with orange and black kernels, and a red “chiné”; small, broadbeans; peanuts; hot peppers; bananas; papayas; cotton; and calabashes. Digging sticks and stone axes were formerly used for preparing and tilling the fields.

**Wild foods.**—The *Tupí-Cawahib* gather several wild foods. To facilitate the collection of Brazil nuts, which are abundant in the region, they clear the forest around each tree. They collect two kinds of cacao beans which are eaten raw and several kinds of berries. To harvest the small pyramidal seeds of an unidentified tall forest grass (awatsipororoke), the natives tie several of the stems together before the ears are ripe, so that the seeds will fall together in small heaps.

The tapir, peccary, forest deer, great antcater, and numerous kinds of monkeys (pl. 25, left) and birds are hunted. Wild bees are killed in the hive by closing the entrance with a pad of leaves of an unidentified poisonous tree, and the honey is collected in coarse containers of bark or leaves. Fish are shot with arrows or drugged with a saponine-rich vine that is used in dams constructed of branches and mud in shallow places in rivers. When the *Tupí-Cawahib* were first observed by the Whites, they kept chickens in conical sheds made of sticks set in the ground in a circle and tied together at the top. There was no dog in the *Mialat* village discovered in 1938.

**Food preparation.**—Game is singed and smoked in the skin, either intact or in pieces. Babracots are about 5 feet (1.5 m.) high and are constructed on four posts. Game is smoked for 24 hours; during the night, an attendant takes care of the fire. The babracot for drying beans is made of several branches placed on transverse sticks, which are supported on the prongs of a three-forked branch.

Maize chicha (ka-ui) (pl. 24, left) is made by drying the kernels and grinding them in a mortar with a few Brazil nuts or peanuts for seasoning. The coarse flour is mixed with water in large bowls, and small children spit saliva in the gruel. After the chicha ferments a few hours, it is put on the fire, and is kept just below the boiling point for 2 or 3 hours. Fresh gruel is constantly added to compensate for the evaporation. The beverage is drunk as soon as it is cold or during the next 2 or 3 days.

Manioc tubers are grated and roasted in large plates. Popcorn is made of maize and of the wild seed, awatsipororoke. Pama berry seeds are eaten roasted. In contrast to the neighboring *Nambicuara*, the *Tupí-Cawahib* are fond of highly seasoned foods. They cook hot peppers and broadbeans in a stew. A kind of salt is prepared by burning acuri palm leaves, sifting the ashes, and washing them with water. Both the water, which is dark brown and bitter, and the ashes, which form a gray astringent powder, are used as condiments.

##### HOUSES

When Rondón discovered the *Tupí-Cawahib*, their square huts had no walls; the gable roof of palms was supported on posts set in the ground. Hammocks were swung from the posts. In 1915 the *Takwatip* village comprised about 20 houses, each from 12 to 18 feet (3.5 to 5.5 m.) long, arranged in a circle about 60 feet (18 m.) in diameter. Two large houses in the center of the circle, each from 36 to 42 feet (11 to 12.5 m.) long, were occupied by the chief, Abaitara, and his wives, children, and court. Cages for harpy eagles and huts for fowls were in the open space of the circular plaza. There were no fortifications surrounding the village. Quite different was the *Mialat* village discovered in 1938. Of the four square houses, each about 30 feet (9 m.) long, situated in a row, two were used for living quarters and two for food storage. The roof frame was supported by posts, irregularly spaced and set back under the projecting roof, so that the house resembled a square mushroom. The storage quarters had no walls. Each of the other two houses was surrounded by a continuous palisade about 6 feet (2 m.) high, which gave the appearance of a wall but actually did not support the roof, as there was an opening a few inches wide between the lower edge of the roof frame and the top of the palisade. The palisade, which had loopholes (pl. 25, right) for shooting arrows, was made of longitudinal sections of palm trunks, fastened edge to edge, the convex surface turned outward. The exterior was

decorated with jaguars, dogs, harpy eagles, snakes, frogs, children, and the moon painted in urucú paste.

Platforms were built along the paths leading to the villages as lookouts from which the moves of hostile groups could be observed (Rondón, 1916).

Tree trunks were used to bridge small waterways.

#### DRESS AND ORNAMENTS

According to Rondón (1916), men wore a garment of woven cotton resembling drawers. In 1938, *Tupi-Cawahib* men were naked, except for a small conical penis sheath made of the two halves of a leaf plaited and sewed. Women wore a short, cylindrical skirt of woven cotton string, which reached half-way to the knees (pl. 26). Modern *Tupi-Cawahib* women tattoo their faces with a sharpened deer bone and genipa, applying a geometrical design on the chin and two large symmetrical curved stripes on the cheeks, running from the chin to the ears. Men used to paint themselves with genipa or urucú dye when monkey hunting (Rondón, 1916). Both sexes wear bracelets, earrings, necklaces, and rings made of mollusk shells, nutshells, wild seeds, game teeth, and deer bones cut in rectangular plates (pl. 26). For ceremonies, men wear a cap without a top made of a large band of woven cotton, over which feathers are stuck. The chief wears a heavy tuft of feathers hanging down his back. Both sexes pluck their pubic hair and eyebrows, using the thumb nail and a half shell. "Eyebrows wearer" is the derogatory equivalent of "civilized." Woven cotton bands are worn around the ankles, the arm, and the wrists.

#### TRANSPORTATION

The *Tupi-Cawahib* made canoes of the bark of large trees (Rondón, 1916). A baby straddles its mother's hip, supported by a cotton sling (pl. 26, right).

#### MANUFACTURES

**Spinning.**—Spinning is done by women. A *Tupi-Cawahib* spindle consists of a small stick, with a round wild seed for the whorl. It is very light and is used more for winding thread in balls than for spinning.

**Textile arts.**—Cotton armbands and anklets are woven by women on primitive vertical looms. Women's skirts are woven and small hammocks are netted with cotton string, and carrying sacks are woven with tucum string.

**Basketry.**—The *Tupi-Cawahib* weave flat sieves and baskets of bamboo strips and palm leaves, and fire fans of palm leaves, often decorating the fans with feathers. An ingenious rucksack for carrying large objects or animals is made by knotting two palm leaves together.

**Pottery.**—The earthenware seen in 1938 consisted of hemispherical bowls, large ones for preparing chicha and small ones for individual meals, and large, circular plates for roasting flour. None were decorated. Informants, however, speak of a purple dye obtained from a wild leaf which was used in former times for painting geometric designs.

**Weapons.**—*Tupi-Cawahib* bows are about 5 feet 8 inches (1.7 m.) long and are made of a black palm wood. The section is circular and the ends are carved to form a knob and shoulders for fastening the string. The grip is wrapped with cotton. Arrows are of three types: those tipped with a large bamboo splinter, for hunting mammals; those with a blunt point, for bird hunting; and arrows which have short feathers and four to seven bamboo points arranged as a crown around a small ball of string, for fishing. Feathering is flush and tied (Arara type), flush and sewed (Xingú type), or arched (eastern Brazil type). Arrow poison is unknown. When shot, the arrow is grasped between the first and middle fingers, which also draw the string, or else it is held between the thumb and finger, and the string drawn with the other three fingers.

To defend the paths leading to their villages, the *Tupi-Cawahib* set pointed rods or stakes obliquely into the ground, either singly or fence-like. The stakes are from 1 foot (30 cm.) (Lévi-Strauss, n.d. a) to 4 feet (1.2 m.) (Rondón, 1916) in height, so as to impale the foot or the body, and are hidden under foliage taken from the surrounding forest.

**Other implements.**—Boxes for holding feathers are made of hollowed sections of acuri palm trunks; a longitudinal segment serves as a cover. A manioc grater consists of a wooden board with embedded palm thorns. Spoons and containers are made of calabashes. Ordinary combs and small-tooth combs are of the composite type. Drills and knives are made of iron pieces fastened onto sticks with wax and wrapper cotton.

#### SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

The *Tupi-Cawahib* are divided into several patrilineal sibs, each localized in one or more villages occupying a defined territory. There is a strong tendency toward village exogamy, which is regarded less as a binding rule than as a means of insuring good relations between neighboring sibs. Endogamic marriages are possible, although infrequent. Residence seems to be patrilocal, although contrary practices have been recorded. Consequently, the majority of individuals in any village belong to one eponymic sib, but are nevertheless associated with a few people belonging to different allied sibs. Besides the four group names mentioned by Rondón (1916) and Nimuendajú (1924), no less than 15 new sib names were recorded in 1938 (Lévi-Strauss, n.d. a). As this list is certainly incomplete, the ancient sib organization must have been complex. In addition to sib divisions, each village was divided into two age classes, "the youths" and

"the elders." The function of these age classes seems to have been mostly ceremonial.

Chieftaincy is hereditary, passing from the father to son. In former times, the chief was attended by a hierarchy of officials. He possessed judicial power and imposed the death sentence, the convicted person being bound and thrown into the river from a canoe. When the Rondón Commission first met the *Takwatip* chief, Abaitara, he was apparently extending his domination over a large number of sibs and trying, by means of successful wars, to establish his hegemony over others.

#### WARFARE

Rondón mentions the decapitation of enemies killed in warfare, but does not state that head trophies were prepared.

#### LIFE CYCLE

**Childbirth.**—A *couvade* is observed, during which both parents eat only gruel and small animals. Nuts of all kinds are forbidden them.

**Marriage.**—The *Tupi-Cawahib* practice marriage between cross-cousins and between a maternal uncle and his niece. In the latter case, an adult man may betroth a baby girl, who remains under his care and to whom he gives presents until they marry. Although marriage is generally monogamous, a chief may have several wives, usually sisters, or a woman and her daughter. To compensate for the shortage of women thus created, the chief lends his wives to bachelors and to visitors, and fraternal polyandry, associated with the levirate, is practiced within the group. In a polygynous family, one wife has authority over the others, regardless of the differences of age or of previous family relationship.

The existence of homosexuality is not openly acknowledged, but a word meaning "passive pederast" is commonly used as an insult.

**Death.**—The deceased at the time of Rondón's visit was buried inside his hut under his hammock, which, with his weapons, ornaments, and utensils, was left undisturbed. Mourners, i. e., relatives, cut their hair (Rondón, 1916).

#### ESTHETIC AND RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

**Art.**—Painting on house walls has already been mentioned.

**Narcotics.**—Strangely enough, the *Tupi-Cawahib* do not cultivate or use tobacco. (For *chicha*, see p. 301.)

**Games.**—Children play with crude toys made of plaited or twisted straw. In a disk game, "the youths" are matched against "the elders"; each age group alternately shoots its arrows at a rolling wooden disk thrown across the plaza by a pitcher. In another archery contest, they

shoot arrows at a dummy representing a man or an animal. There is a belief that to shoot at a wooden dummy may bring death; to avoid the risk, the dummy is made of straw.

**Dance and music.**—Festivals were given by the chief, who assumed the title, "Owner of the Feast." Festivals were preceded by hunting expeditions to obtain small animals, such as rats and marmosets, which were smoked and strung together to be worn as necklaces. During the feast, men playfully carried a flute player on their shoulders.

In 1938, the *Mialat* chief entertained his people several times with a musical show in which songs alternated with dialogue. He himself played the numerous roles of the comedy, humorously enacting the adventures of several animals and inanimate objects which were mystified by the *japim* bird. Each character was easily recognized by a musical leitmotif and a special register of the voice.

**Musical instruments.**—The main musical instruments were pottery trumpets (Rondón, 1916), panpipes with 13 pipes, short flageolets with 4 holes, whistles, and gourd rattles. A clarinet without stops was made of a piece of bamboo about 4 feet (1.2 m.) long; a small piece of bamboo in which a vibrating strip was cut formed the reed.

#### MAGIC AND RELIGION

We have no indication of the magical and religious beliefs of the *Tupi-Cawahib*. The chief is certainly endowed with shamanistic powers: he treats patients and improvises songs and dances in order to tell and enact his dreams, which are considered to have a premonitory significance. At the end of his musical show, he may become delirious and try to kill anyone in sight.

Although nearly all the sibs have animal or vegetable names, totemism does not seem to exist, for the eponymic plants or animals are freely eaten.

Even today, the *Tupi-Cawahib* capture great harpy eagles, rear them carefully in large square cages, and feed them game, such as birds and monkeys. It is likely that this custom has a magical or religious background, though nothing positive is known in this respect.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

Lévi-Strauss, n. d. a; Missão Rondón, 1916; Ninnundajú, 1924, 1925; Rondón, 1916.