

BRAZIL'S TXUKAHAMEIS

Good-bye to the Stone Age

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
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"I AM a mighty warrior. Different from other men. To be respected. To be feared!"

That was the message once broadcast by the flat wooden disk worn in a slit lip, by the flaming red face paint, by the feathered dance headdress. Wearing such decorations like a badge, the Txukahamei warrior was a scourge to his Kreen-Akarore cousins. He also terrorized rubber tappers, road builders, and other *civilizados* encountered along the banks of northward-flowing Amazon tributaries or in the jungles and grasslands of Brazil's States of Mato Grosso and Pará. Today only a few of the older Txukahameis (Choo-kah-HAHM-eyes) wear the lip disk and revere old-time ways. But, in varying degrees, all join in the struggle to cope with invading modern influences.

Some two decades ago, Claudio and Orlando Villas Boas, long-time protectors of the nation's Stone Age Indian tribes, made civilization's first friendly contact with the Txukahameis, then living in a remote area west of the upper Xingu River. For the Indians' protection, the brothers persuaded a large group, perhaps as many as 400, to resettle near the river within the Xingu National Park and to establish Porori village (map, page 260).

Setting out for Porori ten years ago, Jesco von Puttkamer determined to capture on film a way of life then already threatened by the encroaching 20th century. For more than two months he lived with the Txukahameis, sharing the feasts as well as the famines of village existence, learning the language, joining the hunts, and suffering from bites of mosquitoes and bouts of malaria.

His rewards for that visit of a decade ago: lifetime friendships among the tribe and an invaluable collection of photographs of vanishing customs and ceremonials.

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SCALY HAZARD of the Amazon Basin, this stream-dwelling anaconda no longer poses a threat to Txukahamei children. Palm-frond headbands of these young hunters honor a visiting Suyá Indian, second from right. A taboo bars killing of the giant reptiles by fathers

of young children or husbands of expectant mothers, for fear their offspring may come to harm. Another river peril for the tribe: the piranha, a flesh-eating fish that sometimes attacks swimmers.

To the Txukahameis, however, the greatest danger is the human intruder.



Even Jesco, their friend of long-standing, had to re-establish his kindly intentions when he revisited the tribe last summer. To signal friendship, he employed a gesture he had used before, releasing big balloons behind his boat to bob on the river—dancing spheres of blue, red,

orange, green, purple. Thus assured that he came bearing gifts and goodwill, the hidden Txukahameis came out of the forest and stood on the riverbank, waving a welcome.



HOLDING OBLIVION AT BAY, tradition wears "claws" (left) and masquerades in creations that represent anteaters (below left). To teach courage and inspire respect for tribal customs, older boys at Porori slip on the costumes, perform a curiously silent dance, then chase smaller boys, using the arm openings to brandish clawlike sticks tipped with fish teeth. Adding to the excitement, the youngsters fight back with their version of bean shooters—bamboo tubes loaded with chewed-up leaves.

Though the costumes were artistic and worthy of preservation, Jesco could not save them. After three days of ceremonial use, they were thrown into the river at dawn as part of the ritual. If, as Jesco suspected, the masks had been made to honor the spirits of anteaters the Indians had killed for food, then their "burial" in the river seemed an appropriate act.

Destined for a tribal cooking fire after capture in the jungle, an 80-pound giant armadillo rides on the back of a lad (below), who uses a head sling to bear most of the weight.



Other trophies, such as a macaw (below), satisfy the desire to beautify. The hunter's shotgun, taken on a raid against rubber tappers, represents an important change from his traditional club and spear. The machete, too, is an introduced boon; metal was unknown to these Indians until a few decades ago.





THRONG OF EAGER GOURMETS prepares a turtle feast to celebrate the formal naming of village youngsters. During this ceremony the tribe confirmed the names borne from birth by two adolescent girls. The festival, held for both sexes and repeated as



needed, features a meal of turtle meat, baked on hot stones seen behind these juvenile helpers. The boys begin to untie the turtles, caught in the jungle; later the girls and women will cook them. The Indians blacken their bodies for ceremonies, hunts, and war parties.

MAKING MEN of Txukahamei boys involves many tests, considerable endurance, and sometimes years. Invited to live at the Porori boys' house, Jesco had a ringside seat during their initiation rites.

One manhood test, heroically endured by 12-year-old Tio (**left**), required that he hit a wasp nest with his fist and suffer the angry stings and fever. Warriors repeat the ordeal throughout their lives.

Another test saw bloody scarring of the boys' legs with razor-sharp fish teeth. More long-range "schooling" sent them off with warriors to hunt, fish, and raid the camps of rubber tappers, source of the kettle used as a water jug (**below**).

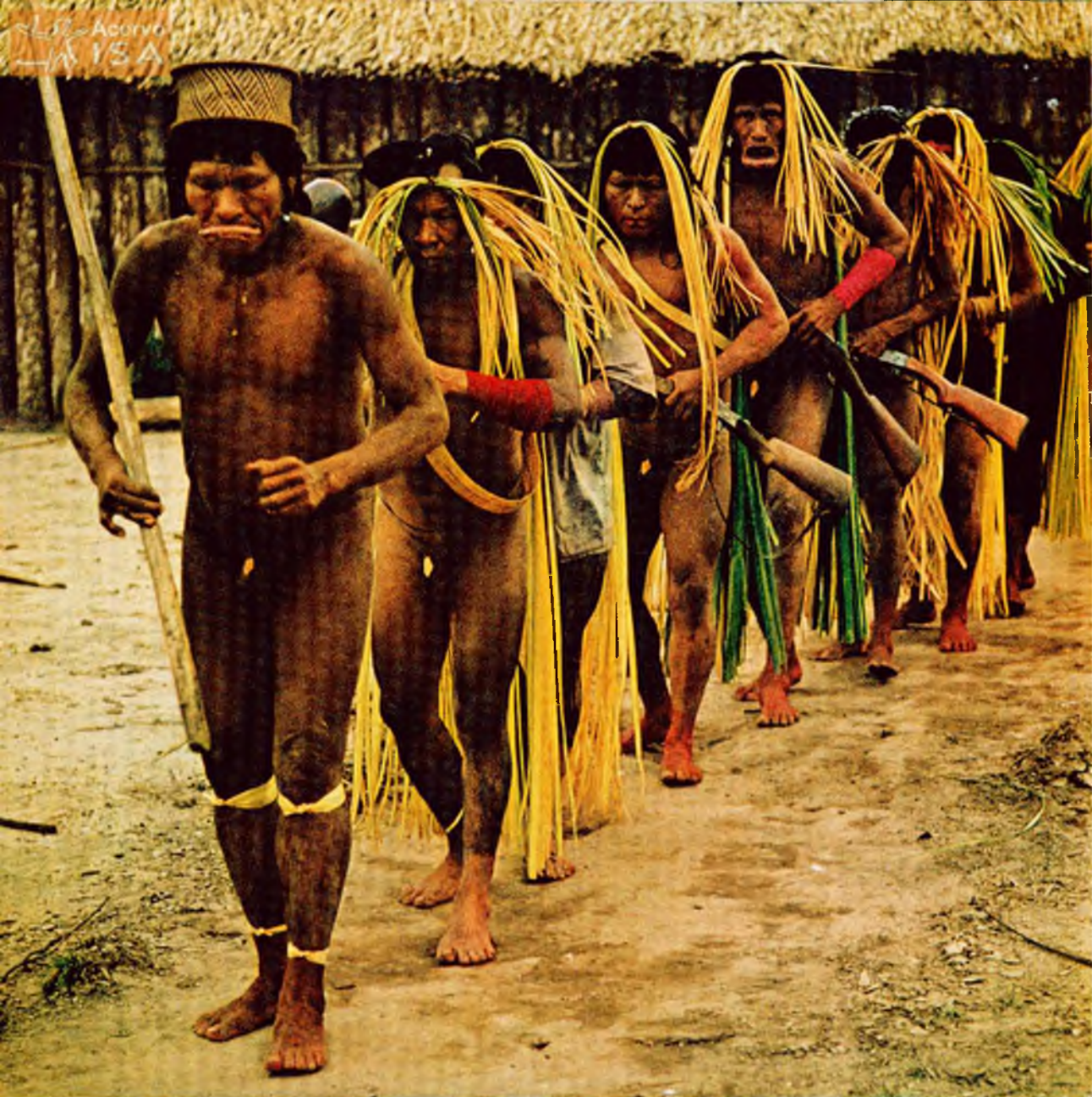
Finally "graduation" is at hand. Those who are ready partially shave their heads, stain bodies black with the juice of unripe genipap fruit, paint faces and feet red with dye from the urucú plant, and apply beeswax hats (**right**). Then begin days and nights of singing and dancing.

With the coming-of-age rites, young people are free to have sexual relations. Selected older women, all highly respected, instruct the young men.

There is no marriage ceremony; couples simply set up housekeeping. Until then, single men live in the boys' house, practicing hunter and warrior skills.







LIKE PARADING CORNSTALKS, be-tasseled dancers exhort young corn to yield a bountiful harvest. They wear "fig leaves" of yellow palm fronds and brandish guns seized in raids on rubber-tappers' camps. The Txukahameis depend increasingly on firearms for hunting and protection; in former times they used guns to gain victories over the Kreen-Akarores, their traditional foes, who had only clubs and bows.

The volatile character of the Txukahameis made their situation at Porori precarious when park boundaries were

redrawn after highway BR-080 cut through the territory (map, page 260). Half the tribe, led by Chief Rauni, re-settled at Kretire. Others returned to a former village and fell upon bad times. Increased contacts with *civilizados* brought on a measles epidemic. Then came disillusionment with Indian values and a resort to alcohol provided by the road builders.

Now the Txukahameis outside the park and those at Kretire have become rivals in a situation so explosive that an eruption of fighting is feared.



HE SPEAKS to the spirits of animals and people. Cobroti, painted for a dance at Porori, is credited with the power to summon snakes from the jungle and to commune with the dead. He also gives counsel to the tribe.

Hostile Kreen-Akarores ripped out Cobroti's lip disk in battle many years ago. The wound gives him added status among his people.

For the big corn festival, chiefs (**below**) put on their finest feathers of egret, oropendola, and parrot.





NO LONGER self-sufficient children of the jungle, many Txukahameis are becoming dependent on the white man's tools and ways, Jesco discovered during a recent revisit with his Indian friends. Metal hooks and nylon lines, here distributed by "Father Claudio" Villas Boas (left), gradually replace the bow and arrow used to shoot fish, or the poison from timbo vines used to paralyze them.

Other Villas Boas gifts: fruit trees, here being tended by youngsters (below left), and clothes for those who want them. More and more, the boys and men wear shorts while girls and women put on dresses for everyday, reserving painted nudity for festivals (right).

What will happen to the Txukahameis, caught between the past and present? "Time," urges Claudio Villas Boas. "We need time." The Xingu National Park gives the Indian time to understand and accept what is right for him among civilization's gifts. But the park cannot shield him forever.

Yearly his needs grow—medicine, ammunition to hunt food for the tribe, hammocks and mosquito netting to avoid painful bites and disease. Today education is becoming a compelling drive for these intelligent and adaptable people.

Meanwhile, the Villas Boas brothers believe that Txukahamei values—self-sufficiency won from a harmony with nature, a sense of freedom and independence that makes a chief an adviser only—are traits that more civilized peoples would do well to emulate. □

