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HANDBOOK  
OF  
SOUTH AMERICAN INDIANS

JULIAN H. STEWARD, *Editor*

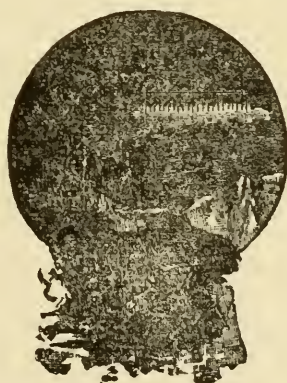
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Volume 4

THE CIRCUM-CARIBBEAN TRIBES

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# THE CARIBBEAN LOWLAND TRIBES

## THE TALAMANCA DIVISION

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By FREDERICK JOHNSON

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### INTRODUCTION

Some tribes of the *Talamanca* Division became extinct and the remainder were modified by post-Conquest events, but the contemporary remnants are lineal descendants of the tribes that occupied the area at the Conquest (maps 2 and 5). Their culture may be considered as a unit, and early records may be compared with accounts made in modern times.

The following description of the culture of the *Talamanca* Division originates largely in studies of two tribes, the *Guaymí* (Johnson, field notes; Pinart, 1885, 1887 a, 1887 b, 1900; Peralta, 1890) and the *Bribri* (Gabb, 1875; Skinner, 1920). The culture of the closely allied central and northern Costa Rican Groups, though very inadequately known, differs from that of the *Bribri* only on some details. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century data are assembled from miscellaneous observations of numerous tribes. Fragments of more recent information have been collected from remnants of several other tribes; the *Cabecar*, *Changuena*, *Dorasque*, *Terraba*, *Guatuso*, *Rama*, and others.

The *Guaymí* are divided into *Northern* tribes and *Southern* tribes. The former live in the Tropical Forest, and certain fundamental traits were superficially modified by it so as to contrast with the *Southern* tribes living in the Uplands of the Pacific coast. Other differences, though appearing in minor details, appear to be more deeply rooted.

### CULTURE

#### SUBSISTENCE ACTIVITIES

**Farming.**—Descriptions by Columbus and other early explorers indicate that agriculture in the Tropical Forest was once more extensive than at present. Aboriginal crops are still staple foods, except where rice, plantains, and pigeon peas are grown in large quantities. (Cf. list below.) In the Tropical Forest hunting supplies nearly as much food as farming. Wild plants, though more important in the Tropical Forest, are collected by all tribes. Among the modern tribes, particularly the *Southern Guaymí*, farming is extremely important (pl. 37, *top*).

LIST OF FOODS MOST COMMONLY GROWN BY THE GUAYMÍ<sup>1</sup>

## PLANTS OF AMERICAN ORIGIN:

Maize (*Zea mays*): Several varieties of both flint and dent.

Beans (*Phaseolus vulgaris*): Nine variants of this species were collected in 1932-33, seven of which were bush beans and two runner beans.

Lima beans (*Phaseolus lunatus*): Five variants were collected.

Yuca, or sweet manioc (*Manihot utilissima* var. *aiپی*).

Papaya (*Carica papaya*).

Alligator pear, or avocado (*Persea americana*).

Gourds: Vine and tree gourds of several varieties. Both edible gourds and those used for receptacles are grown.

Camote, or sweetpotato (*Ipomoea batatas*).

Cacao (*Theobroma cacao*).

Pejibaye (pejivalle) palm or peach palm (*Guilielma gasipaes*).

## PLANTS OF FOREIGN ORIGIN:

Plantain: Several varieties.

Banana: Several varieties.

Pigeon peas (*Cajanus cajan*): East Indian in origin, sometimes called "dahl." Introduced first into Africa and brought to America with the slave trade (pl. 37, bottom).

Gourds (*Lagenaria siceraria*): Large "water bottles" are made of this gourd. Probably of African origin but now grown generally in the American Tropics. Name (*Dioscorea alata* or *D. batatas*).

Rice: A variety of Upland rice.

Hotôes: A tuber, identity not known.

Sugarcane.

A type of slash-and-burn agriculture is universally employed. Among the *Guaymí*, crops requiring different lengths of time to mature are planted at the same time in one or more plots, and harvesting continues on each plot over a period of several years. Each family owns a number of plots and clears new ones every year, so that planting, harvesting, and fallow periods rotate.

Clearing the fields and burning the slash are done by the men with simple ceremonies. Male relatives and friends gather to drink chicha at the house of the owner of fields. They sing songs and the owner encourages them to work hard and to be happy. The *Bribri* are said to dance to drums before clearing the fields, but the *Guaymí* dance only after the field has been cleared.

The *Guaymí* women do the planting, but among other tribes the men do this work. All tribes use a digging stick several feet long, sharpened to a chisel-like edge (Gabb, 1875, p. 515). Skinner (1920) suggests that these implements may have once been used as clubs, perhaps being the quarterstaves mentioned in the early literature. He says that the *Bribri* called the stick "macana," which he recognizes as a possible equivalent to the *Nahuatl* "macuahuitl." The term is used generally in South America for a flat wooden club.

<sup>1</sup> This list, obtained from the *Guaymí* in 1932-33, includes most foods grown by all tribes in the *Talamanca* Division. Some crops are not grown by certain tribes because of local conditions.

Salt was an important commodity obtained in trade by the people of the Tropical Forest from the *Boruca* and other tribes which owned natural salt pans.

**Hunting.**—Game is killed by stalking or by ambushing animals along their trails; frequently it is driven by small black dogs. Bows and arrows are still the important weapons, but a few Indians own guns. The blow-gun is scarcely known to the *Southern Guaymí*, none of whom use it, but Tropical Forest tribes hunt with it, using a clay pellet rather than the dart (p. 243).

Traps are not adequately described. The *Guaymí* make baited box traps, sometimes strong enough to catch large cats. Snares, sharpened stakes in trails, and other types of traps are known. With the recent increase of economic difficulties, trails are sometimes guarded with bows and arrows and even guns to discourage theft and to prevent the uncontrolled movement of undesirable people in the region. It was impossible to discover whether this practice is aboriginal or not. The practice has been declared illegal by most of the tribal councils but had not been stopped in 1933.

Bees are not kept by these tribes, but wild honey is considered a special delicacy, and the larvae from the hives are eaten with a special relish. The *Guaymí* give most of the honey to the women and young babies but occasionally use it in making chicha.

**Fishing.**—Ferdinand Columbus says that nets and fishhooks were used to catch fish on the coast of Veraguas. People were also said to have lined up along the banks of a stream in order to frighten the fish and make them jump against mats set vertically in canoes.

During the dry season the *Southern Guaymí* catch small fish with their hands. The brooks may be temporarily dammed with stones and grass and the small fish driven into nets, which are fastened to hoops held in gaps in the dams. Small fish are also caught with spears made with sharpened pieces of wire 12 to 18 inches (30 to 45 cm.) long set into the end of a cane about 10 feet (3 m.) long. During the rainy season fish, lying in shallow water, are caught with similar but stouter spears.

People in the Tropical Forest shoot fish with the bow and single- or multiple-pointed arrow. The latter has at least three prongs. Single points with many barbs are reported from various tribes.

During the dry season the *Southern Guaymí* use a baited fish trap (pl. 38, *bottom*) operated by a man sitting behind a blind. When fish nibble the bait, causing dried leaves attached to a limber stick to rustle, he closes the gate. A conical trap, about 2 feet (60 cm.) in diameter at the open end and about 5 feet (1.5 m.) long (pl. 38, *top*), is used in seasons when the brooks rise and fall with some regularity. The trap is placed in

an opening at the downstream apex of a V-shaped dam. Some dams zigzag across a stream so as to accommodate several traps.

**Domesticated animals.**—There are early references to a few domesticated animals. Dogs, tamed tapirs, and wild peccaries (*zahinos*, *Tayassu tajacu*) are mentioned by Ceballos (1610). People in the Tropical Forest now have dogs, a few cattle, and poultry. They also keep tame parrots and small native mammals.

Many *Southern Guaymí* families have cattle and a few horses, the introduction of which, about 1900, caused and is still causing rather extensive changes in the economy. An added stimulus to cattle raising came during the first World War, when a scarcity of grazing land developed in the Republic of Panamá. Now a few corrals are maintained, and such things as lassoes, whips, and saddles are used when they can be obtained from the Panamanians. It has been necessary to fence cultivated land and to make other adjustments. Some folklore connected with ranching has been added to native traditions, and a set of laws and other social regulations governing range areas, inheritance, cattle stealing and such are being developed in the tribal councils.

**Food preparation.**—Most foods are boiled. Meat, when not eaten immediately, is salted and smoked. Maize is hulled in a mortar, boiled, and then ground on a metate. The resulting mush may be eaten fresh or allowed to ferment. It may be formed into cakes, wrapped in husks, and steamed.

#### VILLAGES AND HOUSES

In the early chronicles the habitations of the *Talamanca* Group are called "palenques," but no detail is available. A palenque was, apparently, a large dwelling, perhaps a group of dwellings, usually fortified by means of a stockade. The term has been applied also to unfortified hamlets of several houses. Villages were located on the islands at the mouth of the Laguna de Chiriquí and in river valleys some distance from the coast. Early descriptions of house furnishings are singularly absent.

Modern houses in the Tropical Forest are grouped in small communities. Sometimes the houses are close together, but frequently they are scattered, those of the *Southern Guaymí* being one-quarter mile to several miles apart. Most families have a single house, but large ones may occupy two houses, in which case the second usually serves as kitchen and as the home of the older people.

Among the *Southern Guaymí* one man or the family he represents may own several house sites, even though they use but one. Each site is recognized as a separate parcel of land and is inherited, usually through the male line. The distribution of house sites bears no spacial relation to the farmland owned by a family. Modern houses last about 5 years.

They are seldom repaired; instead, a new house is built upon an unused site and the family abandons the old house.

The *Guaymí* build three types of houses; rectangular, square, and round. None of these has a specialized use. The square and round houses are more common among the *Northern* tribes. The rectangular

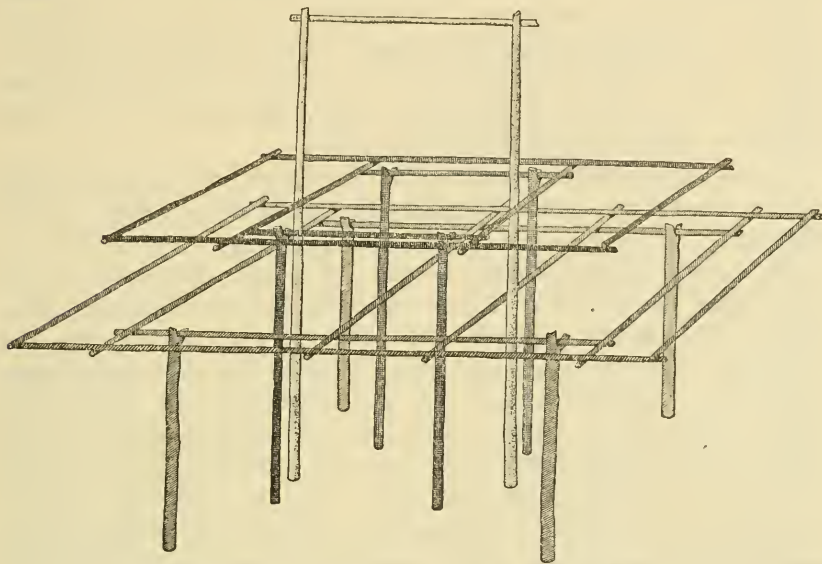


FIGURE 50.—Fundamental framework of *Southern Guaymí* hip-roofed house.

house, having a hip roof, is built almost exclusively by the *Southern Guaymí*. The framework is illustrated in plate 39, *bottom*, and figures 50 and 51. Grass is used as thatch by the *Southern Guaymí* and split palm fronds by the peoples in the Tropical Forest, the fronds being sewn to

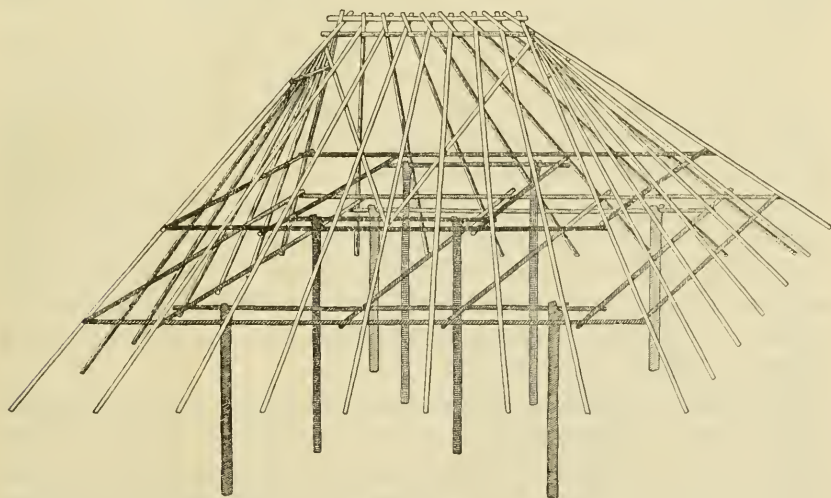


FIGURE 51.—Framework of *Southern Guaymí* hip-roofed house with rafters added.

rods attached to the rafters. In exposed places crotched sticks may help secure the thatch. Outside walls (pl. 39, *top*) are made of vertical poles lashed to the primary horizontal framework. Lofts are made inside the houses by lashing horizontal poles to the upper, secondary framework.

The square and round houses, characteristic of all the Tropical Forest tribes, are believed to be the older types. The construction of these is similar to that illustrated (pl. 39). The apices of the pyramidal and conical roofs are covered with large open-mouthed pots, e.g., broken iron pots. Most *Guaymí* houses have walls.

Various semipermanent shelters (pl. 40, *top*) provide additional living space or temporary shelter from the elements while traveling. Simple windbreaks may be the only shelter used for several weeks at a time.

The modern palenques built by the *Bribri* and, apparently, by the *Cabecar* and *Terraba* are circular or square in plan or, more rarely, have straight sides and rounded ends. The older ones are said to have been very large. The houses are conical or pyramidal, the roof coming down to the ground. The construction is of poles bound with vines (Gabb, 1875, p. 514; Skinner, 1920). These houses are distinctive in having pots to waterproof the apices of the roofs and a shedlike entry to prevent the rain from coming in the single door. Angulo (1862, pp. 153-154) notes that many families may live in the same house, each with its separate property and cooking fire. Other sources note that these houses were inhabited by groups of related families.

Today there are very few if any of these palenques in use. Modern *Bribri* houses are rectangular or oval in plan, with a hip roof and no vertical walls. *Cabecar* houses are now simply a shed roof, sloping in one direction and open at the front and sides. *Terraba* houses are "el" roofs raised on short poles and open all around below the eaves.

*Guetar* villages consisted of a few communal houses. The *Suerre* house was "shaped like an egg, in length about 45 paces, and 9 in breadth. It was encircled with reed, covered with palm branches remarkably well interlaced; there were also a few other houses but of a common sort" (Lothrop, 1926 b, p. 23, quoting Benzoni). *Guatuso* houses were scattered over a considerable area. "The houses are low, consisting of a roof pitching both ways from a ridge pole, and resting on very short but very thick posts. This is thatched with palm leaf and is entirely open at the ends and sides, under the eaves" (Gabb, 1875, p. 485). Tree houses were built by the aboriginal occupants of the region, according to Padre Zapada (Bancroft, 1883-90, vol. 8, p. 755).

**Household furniture.**—The *Guaymí* build platform beds along the walls. Other tribes pile plantain leaves on the floor in addition to using platform beds. Benches consisting of two horizontal poles or of a split log run around the walls. Stools are made of a single block of wood and

are rectangular, with a V-shaped hollow as the seat (fig. 52, *a*) (*Guaymí*) or are carved with two or four legs. Skinner (1920, pp. 52, 55) says that frequently the *Bribri* carved these stools to represent tortoises. Hammocks, used for lounging but rarely for sleeping, are hung about the houses.

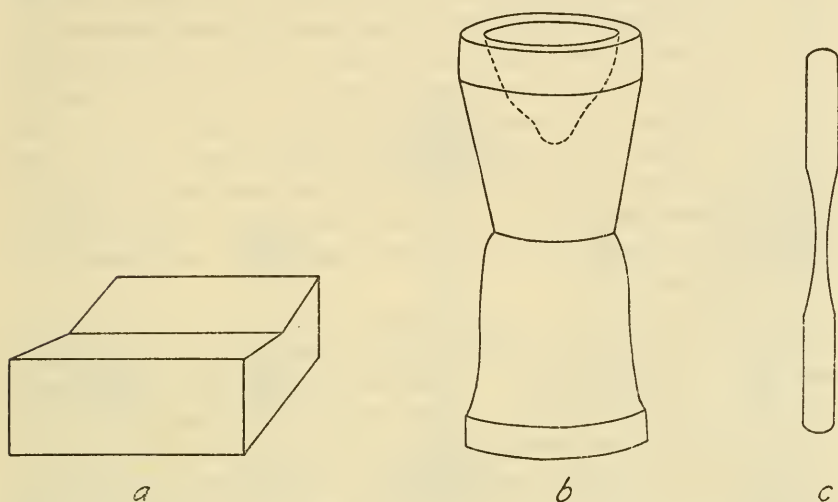


FIGURE 52.—*Guaymí* household furnishings. *a*, Wooden bench with concave V-shaped seat; *b*, *c*, wooden mortar and pestle.

The center of the floor of a *Guaymí* house is usually occupied by a large log trough in which chicha is made. Troughs are hewn into several forms: Some are canoe-shaped with pointed ends; some have square ends; others have a lip or flange on the ends. The sides are simply the surface from which the bark has been peeled.

Grain is stored in house lofts in cylindrical bins of bark, in baskets and such. The *Bribri* are said occasionally to build outdoor granaries. Miscellaneous property is hung about the houses in string bags and gourds and sometimes in baskets. Bows, blowguns, and arrows are hung in crude racks or stuck in the thatch. Sometimes, particularly in the Tropical Forest, poultry and even swine are confined in pens inside the house.

The fireplace is inside the house, usually opposite the door, if the house is walled, and its vicinity is cluttered with culinary articles, such as metates and large chicha jars, the latter propped up with sticks and stones. Metates, however, may be in a separate shelter. *Bribri* houses may have floors about 4 feet (1.2 m.) from the ground (Skinner, 1920, p. 48); these cover only part of the area of the house. Floors and lofts are reached by a short notched-log ladder.



## CLOTHING AND ORNAMENTS

The aboriginal man's costume was a breechclout, a narrow strip of bark cloth, some 6 feet (2 m.) long, passed between the legs and wound around the body. It was usually supported by a belt. The women wore the breechclout and a knee-length, wrap-around skirt. Both sexes frequently wore nothing above the waist, but in most tribes they might use a short jacket "so scant that it shows the entire breast." Near Herradura the people were said to wear bark-cloth mantles having a hole in the center for the head. Men and women occasionally wore, either with or without a skirt, a "blanket which covered the head and fell to the feet" (*Terraba, Boruca*). Girdles (*Changuena* and the Tropical Forest of Costa Rica) and feather-decorated aprons (*Guaymí*) are mentioned but not described. Some bark-cloth garments were decorated with painted designs. Feathers attached to the head in an undescribed manner are mentioned by the earliest explorers.

At the present time the more conservative people wear the breechclout about their houses and cover their shoulders with strips of cloth or rarely with short, shirtlike jackets. Sometimes the bark-cloth breechclout is covered by a second one of cotton cloth (Pittier de Fábrega, 1938 b, p. 11). A poncholike shirt, consisting of a wide strip of bark cloth with a hole for the head, is worn by both men and women. This is tied under each arm with a piece of string or a belt. In all tribes boys go practically naked until puberty, but girls are clothed when they are very young.

At the present time the less conservative *Guaymí* men wear shirts made with a neckband about 1 inch (2.5 cm.) high and cut to open at the back. The bosoms of the shirts are frequently outlined with strips of appliqué and are often decorated with geometrical designs in appliqué (pl. 45, *top, right*). Rawhide sandals are sometimes worn. These are attached to the foot by means of a lace running between the first and second toe and over the instep to a second lace attached to the heel and tied around the ankle.

Straw hats, a recent innovation, are made exclusively by the men. Straw is braided into plaits, and the plait is sewn in a spiral beginning at the center of the crown. The hat is shaped as it is sewn.

The modern *Guaymí* women wear a cotton or bark-cloth breechclout supported by a belt and a dress with sleeves and an extremely full skirt. The dress reaches from the neck to the ground (pl. 46, *top, right, and bottom, left*) and is slit in front nearly to the waist or has a round neck-opening. Appliqué decorations are frequently added about the neck and, more rarely, around the lower part of the skirt. The women's costume is completed with quantities of bead necklaces and strings of teeth and shells.

*Guaymí* ceremonial costumes are simply elaborations of ordinary clothes. The men's shirts have elaborate appliqué designs on the bosoms; the outside of the trouser legs is also decorated (fig. 53). Various types of headdresses are worn: a conical cap of fiber or bark cloth (pls. 45 and

46); straw hats, commonly decorated with a circlet of feathers attached to the crown, which corresponds to the circlets of brilliant feathers formerly worn; and sometimes a square piece of cloth folded diagonally and wrapped about the head. Men also wear an elaborate bead collar (pl. 45, *bottom, right*). Women's ceremonial clothing differs from their ordinary attire in the great amount of appliqué decoration and in the use of quantities of necklaces. It often includes straw hats.

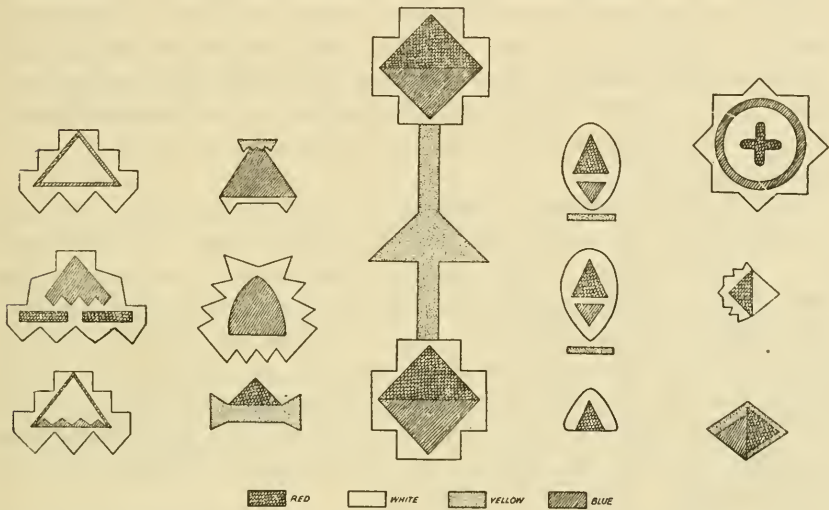


FIGURE 53.—*Guaymí* appliqué clothing designs. From trouser legs of men's ceremonial costumes.

For the *balseria* and the secret ceremonies *Guaymí* men carry on their backs stuffed animals decorated with beaded collars, ribbons, and bells. The front paws rest on the shoulders and the head sticks straight up (pl. 45).

Some people still wear headdresses of feathers set vertically into a tape which extends from temple to temple (Gabb, 1875, p. 19; Skinner, 1920, p. 80, and illustrations). Some headdresses are made of bands of decorated cloth. Beaded collars and necklaces are also worn.

Chiefs and other officials formerly wore special ornaments, apparently identifying insignia. Most frequently mentioned at the time of the Conquest were gold ornaments, which now are extremely rare. Chiefs also carried a decorated staff (Gabb, 1875, p. 520; Skinner, 1920, p. 89).

In the 16th and 17th centuries all the people of the region were said to have gold ornaments hung about the neck or fastened to the clothing or to the arms and legs. These were described as zoomorphic figures, such as eagles, lizards, toads, and spiders, and mirrors, golden medals, plates, and plaques. Necklaces of various types were also very common.

In the vicinity of Cartago the men tied a few threads of cotton about the prepuce.

The people of mixed ancestry living in the eastern section of the Pacific slopes, west of the Panama Canal, make a bark-cloth mask in which a deer skull with horns is frequently incorporated. These are used in ceremonies connected with Catholic holy days, which are observed in former mission towns. This custom is rapidly dying out.

Men cut their hair off just above the nape of the neck or sometimes clip the back and sides up to a line near the top of the ears. They wear bangs. Occasionally the hair is allowed to grow long, either hanging loosely or being plaited, bound with bark cloth, and coiled at the back of the head. Women's hair hangs freely and is tied with a ribbon about the top of the head, or it is divided into two plaits or rolled up at the back of the neck.

According to Ferdinand Columbus, "The people [probably *Guaymí*] were all painted on the face and body in divers colors, white, black and red." Urcullu (1763, p. 488) describes scarification or tattooing. The same source mentions bone nose and lip plugs and an earplug decorated with feathers. Pinart (1887 b, p. 119) says that the *Dorasque* scarified the body with sharp pieces of stone and also painted the body. The *Guetar* and the *Guatuso* also decorated themselves with paint. Gabb (1875, p. 519) says that the *Bribri* painted their faces with parallelograms or squares and that the *Terraba* formerly tattooed small patterns on the faces and arms. Painting has died out.

*Guaymí* men paint their faces at all times, but women rarely do so except during ceremonies. A man has his own set of geometrical motifs and applies them in any combination that suits his caprices. The *Southern Guaymí* do not now paint their bodies.

Some of the *Guaymí*, usually younger men, mutilate their teeth, a custom that probably was recently adopted. The corners of the upper and lower incisors are chipped off, usually to produce a sharp wedge-shaped point or what could be described as "needle" teeth. This custom is most common among the mixed Panamanian-Indian groups and among the *Guaymí* who have been in closest contact with the Panamanians. It is not characteristic of the conservative *Guaymí* and has not been reported among the *Talamanca* Group. The custom may be of African origin (Stewart, 1942).

#### TRANSPORTATION

Loads are carried in net bags or bundles equipped with a tumpline. Horses and, more rarely, bulls and steers are used as pack animals.

Dugout canoes are used where possible on the ocean and along the quieter, lower reaches of the rivers. They are paddled in the aboriginal manner, but some have a small sail and a fixed rudder. Small dugouts

are used on the rivers. During high water the mountain people, who rarely have canoes<sup>1</sup>, use logs or makeshift rafts to cross the rivers.

#### MANUFACTURES

**Basketry.**—For baskets, rough splints are woven in an octagonal open-work twill. Baskets vary from cup size to 3 feet (0.9 m.) high and some 2 feet (0.6 m.) in diameter.

**Cordage.**—All string is made either from majagua, a bast fiber, or from pita, a fiber obtained from cactus leaves. Both fibers are twisted by rolling them on the thigh.

**Netting.**—Hammocks and numerous bags (pl. 41) are made with a technique called "coiled netting." (Cf. Lothrop, 1937, fig. 82, p. 111.) Innumerable variations of this technique are possible and are employed at the discretion of each individual. The bags are decorated by employing dyed string. The finest and most highly decorated bags are made of pita fiber by *Guaymí* women, who work several colored threads into complicated geometrical designs by means of the simplest stitch.

**Weaving.**—Native woven cloth is being supplanted by modern European cloth. The *Guetar* were formerly famous for their cloth. Gabb (1875) describes a two-bar loom used by the *Bribri* men who wove locally grown cotton. Skinner (1920) visited the same people and found that weaving had disappeared, though he collected some old pieces of native cloth. Among the *Southern Guaymí*, in 1933, there was but one woman in several hundred families who knew how to weave. She used a two-bar loom (pl. 40, *bottom*) and wove with thread spun from wild tree cotton on a drop-spindle which had a disk-shaped wooden whorl.

**Ceramics.**—Pottery is made by all tribes, but details are available only for the *Guaymí*. Large, pointed or round-bottomed jars with restricted necks are general, but other types have been reported only for the *Guaymí*. The most conservative and inaccessible *Guaymí* groups are said to use slips and other methods of decorations, but most of their pottery is unadorned. Pottery is made by only a few women in each local group.

Pottery clay is kneaded with the hands and is fine grained; clean sand is added. A small lump of prepared clay is molded to a cup or dish shape and rolls of clay about 15 inches (38 cm.) long and less than 1 inch (2.5 cm.) in diameter are added to its edge as concentric rings to form the body of the vessel. The rolls are pinched together with the fingers and smoothed with the hands and with pieces of gourd. Necks of jars, rims, lug-handles, and such are added in much the same way (pl. 42, *top*).

<sup>1</sup>Large wooden troughs found in many *Guaymí* houses have been called canoes (e.g., Pinart, Peralta). The natives distinguish between canoes and these troughs, which are not seaworthy. On the coast, where canoes are used, the *Guaymí* also have troughs. It is possible that a canoe might be used as a trough when an exceptionally large quantity of chicha is to be made.

After the jars have dried for a few hours the surface is rubbed smooth with a wet tool. Several days later vessels are set on the ground and a fire is built about them. There are six fundamental forms of vessels (pls. 42, *bottom*; 43, *top*; fig. 54), some of them similar to the products of the modern Panamanian industry and others possibly resembling the basic forms of the more highly decorated prehistoric pottery.

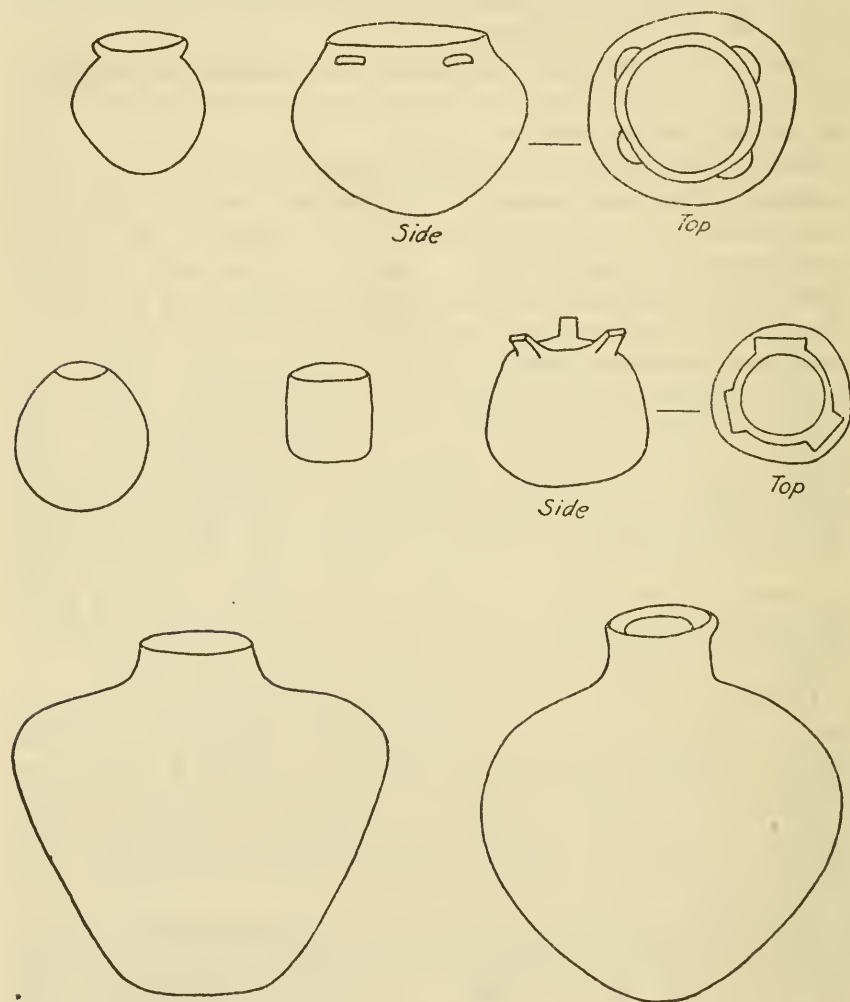


FIGURE 54.—*Guaymí* pottery.

Pottery ocarinas resemble gourd ocarinas, being round or egg-shaped with a protruding mouthpiece. Some have two stops arranged on each side of the center line; others have two or rarely three stops on the center line. A variant, usually smaller than the first two, is pear-shaped with two tubular stops rising above the surface of the ocarina about half an inch (1.3 cm.), one on each side of the center line.

**Weapons.**—Bows are 4 to 5 feet (1.3 to 1.7 m.) long, less than 1 inch (2.5 cm.) wide, and about half an inch (1.2 cm.) thick. The best bowstrings are made of pita fiber. Arrows are made of cane and are 4 to 5 feet (1.3 to 1.7 m.) long. Stunning arrows, used for small game, have blunt, knobbed heads made of deer antler, hardwood, or cow horn (Skinner, 1920) set into the larger end of the cane, bound with cord, and sometimes covered with pitch. Killing arrows are tipped with a piece of hardwood which has a rudimentary tang and is set in a deep notch of a wooden foreshaft. Only one reference to poisoned arrows has come to light. These were said to have been used in battle by the *Boruca*.

Gabb (1875, p. 516) describes a blowgun, or pellet gun, bored from one piece of wood, fitted with a double sight, and covered with pitch. "The missiles are clay balls. These . . . are carried in a little net, with them are two bone implements. One, simply a straight, heavy piece of bone used to drive a ball out of the tube by its weight, in case of sticking. The other is similar in appearance, but the end is worked into a round pit with sharp edges, for trimming the balls to the proper size and shape."

**Woodworking.**—Woodworking is confined to hewing with machetes and small adzes and finishing with smaller tools and with certain kinds of leaves which are used as sandpaper. *Guaymí* wooden articles are illustrated in figure 52. *Bribri* articles are illustrated by Skinner (1920).

**Stone industry.**—No cutting tools are made of stone at the present time. The grinding surfaces of manos and metates are flattened and prepared by pecking with another stone. Whetstones are cut from deposits of soft sandstone or volcanic rock.

The *Guaymí* possess some stone tobacco pipes, which they highly prize. These are said to be made by the people living in a locality where a special kind of rock is obtainable. These pipes vary from the simple elbow variety, undecorated except for a small conical point at the bottom of the bowl, to those carved with conventionalized faces. Other varieties are decorated with small round lugs near the rim of the bowl, or rarely, with incised geometrical designs (fig. 55).

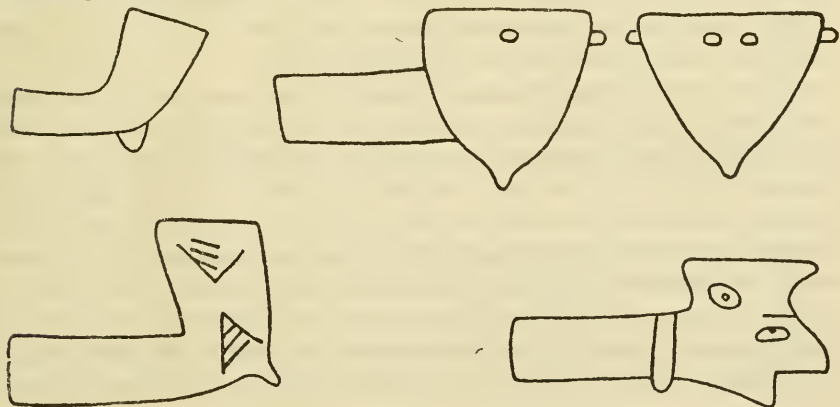


FIGURE 55.—*Guaymí* stone tobacco pipes.

**Fire making.**—Fire was formerly made with the hand-twirled drill, the tinder being cotton or shredded bark. Ceremonial fires, particularly of the *Talamanca* Group, are still lighted in this way. Fire is also made by striking a machete against a stone and catching the sparks on tinder, but no special strike-a-lights are used. Fire is seldom allowed to go out, being kept smoldering in punky wood or punky fiber hung in a protected place. Firebrands are carried when traveling.

**Beadwork.**—Necklaces of bone beads and perforated teeth are very rare at present. Beads of European origin are strung into necklaces and woven into collars. The *Guaymí* make collars with designs of various colors, the beads being strung on pita fiber thread (fig. 56).

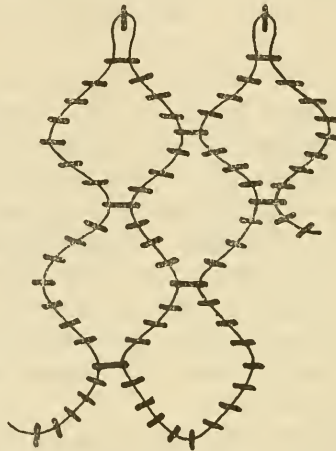


FIGURE 56.—*Guaymí* technique in making beadwork collars.

#### ECONOMIC ORGANIZATION

The majority of the *Guaymí* produce a surplus of food, but some people have insufficient land or other resources, such as labor, to supply themselves with enough to eat. In addition, there are orphans, disinherited families, and certain unfortunate individuals who are paupers. Such people are largely absorbed as agricultural labor.

*Guaymí* economy depends upon agriculture, but remnants of what may have been an aboriginal system of trade between the Tropical Forest and the Savanna may be observed in operation. In addition, commodities of European origin, such as cattle, clothing, machetes, fishhooks, sugar, and to some extent salt, have to be obtained from the Panamanians. This necessity has forced the people to adopt money and methods of exchange which are apparently completely foreign to their tradition. In spite of nearly 400 years of dealing with Europeans, the *Guaymí* do not yet understand the use of money. The less conservative groups, who have vague and usually erroneous ideas of European practices of exchange, obtain

articles of European origin and trade them in the *Guaymí* country, following more or less the aboriginal barter system. This procedure results in the utmost confusion. A deal, even if initially of the simplest sort, usually becomes hopelessly complicated and ends up, sometimes after several years, in the council, where the governor makes an arbitrary and not always popular solution.

The influx of cattle, particularly since 1914, has interrupted the economic life to some extent. The principle effect has been to take the men off the land for a portion of the year, leaving more work for the women to do. In some cases this results in hardship for it reduces the normal supply of food. Cattle are so precious that they are rarely slaughtered and thus do not replace the agricultural losses.

Wealth is usually measured in terms of the productivity of one's land and the number of one's cattle. It is expressed not only directly but in terms of what the crops, particularly the surplus, can buy. Thus, a wealthy man may be the head of a family having a well-equipped house or he may be the owner of a large supply of some commodity such as cloth or salt.

#### SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

The whole social structure of the *Guaymí* is now being modified. Present rules are often contradictory and result in much disagreement among the people. The fundamental *Guaymí* unit is the family, which consists of a man, one or more wives, and their children. Occasionally this unit includes the first wife's mother and father and sometimes the parents of other wives. A man usually formally marries his first wife. He may marry or purchase subsequent wives. Divorces are illegal but frequent. A woman may leave her husband for another man, but the latter must pay the husband. The *Guaymí* have a clanlike organization which appears to be exogamous, but the details are unknown. All tribes are polygynous.

Descent among the *Guaymí* is reckoned through the female line, but property may be inherited through both the male and female lines. As a rule, land, cattle, and other property are held in the names of the men and boys. Women own a little land, many cattle, and all the household goods. Claims arising from this complicated system, which at present does not work well, are adjusted by the tribal council upon the order of the governor.

Pittier de Fábrega (1895) notes that the *Bribri* had exogamous matrilineal moieties, which were divided into clans. A *Bribri* man purchased his wives. Information from other tribes is extremely scarce, but it suggests that analogous systems were in vogue. Inheritance was apparently similar to the *Guaymí* system (Gabb, 1875, p. 496). At the time of the Conquest the *Guetar* were divided into three classes: nobles, commoners,



and slaves, the last being women and boys captured in war. Captive men were sacrificed.

#### POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

Evidence from the early documents and from some more recent sources indicates that these tribes existed under a number of feudal governments. There were probably at least three feudal states—the *Guaymí*, the *Talamanca* Group, and the *Guetar*. During the wars with the Spaniards each government was rapidly welded into a strong unit. When these were broken up by the Conquest, realignments were attempted. At the present time these systems have broken down, and most of the surviving tribes are governed by heads of local groups.

The titular head of the *Guaymí* lives in the Miranda Valley and rules only by reputation. The local governors still have considerable authority. Each usually inherits his position, being, theoretically, the oldest surviving son of the first marriage. A governor rules over clanlike divisions. His authority depends upon the prestige of his office, his ability, and, to some extent, upon the support of a loosely organized council made up of influential members of the group.

The social and political organization of the *Guaymí* is in a state of transition. The people on the fringes of Indian territory are becoming closely associated with the neighboring Panamanian towns and districts and heed some of the orders of the Panamanian officials, especially those that are to their advantage. The infusion of Panamanian ideas is breaking down former ideas of family relationships and the inheritance of property. The resulting complication often becomes intolerable, and a *Guaymí* family group may break up and join the Panamanians or it may move farther back into the mountains and in turn upset the local social, political, and economic situation there. The position of some governors is not an enviable one.

Among the *Bribri* and related tribes the situation seems to differ only in detail. The *Bribri* conquered the *Terraba* after a war at the beginning of the 19th century (Gabb, 1875, pp. 488–489), and the *Bribri* chiefs now control the *Terraba* chieftaincy. In addition, the *Bribri* are the political superiors of the *Cabecar*, and the *Bribri* dialect has survived at the expense of the other dialects. The full powers of *Bribri* chieftainship rest in a single family, which does not observe unilinear succession but selects its most eligible member to succeed a deceased chief. The chieftaincy carries some social prestige, but the authority depends upon support of the Costa Rican Government, which has now gained control of it.

## WARFARE

All the tribes were more or less warlike. The early sources emphasize the idea that the wars were for the purpose of obtaining captives for sacrifice (particularly in central and northern Costa Rica). It is probable that economic, political, and territorial difficulties also were involved. The Spaniards had considerable difficulty in conquering some of these tribes not only because of the environment but also because the tribes quickly formed alliances against the common enemy. They were, however, sometimes able to play one tribe against another. Nothing is known of the way in which the *Guaymí* organized for war. The *Bribri*, *Cabecar*, and *Terraba*, among others, had war chiefs who were usually elected and who exercised absolute power over the tribe. The warriors belonged to a special class and were frequently given special burials.

## LIFE CYCLE

**Childbirth.**—During pregnancy the women of most of these tribes practice simple sympathetic magic in order to impart desired attributes to the expected child. A woman gives birth in a little house built for the purpose at some distance from the dwelling. She is assisted by her mother or by some elderly midwife. The umbilical cord is cut with a special bamboo knife. As soon as the child is born it is washed, the placenta is buried, and both mother and infant are ceremonially washed in a river. The woman returns to the house but may not enter it until she has been purified by a shaman, who blows smoke all over her. The details of this purification ceremony differ among various tribes. (Cf. Pinart, 1885, p. 444; Gabb, 1875, p. 494; Pittier de Fábrega, 1938 b, p. 23; Angulo, 1862, pp. 153-154; etc.)

The only naming ceremony reported is that of the *Guaymí*, who usually combine it with some other affair, such as clearing the land, which is attended by a number of people. The child's father swings it through the smoke of a fire and names it. Other men also swing it through the smoke. Names so given are used until the puberty ceremony, when new names are given.

**Boys' puberty.**—A secret puberty ceremony, called in Spanish the "clarido," is celebrated by the *Guaymí*. Certain male members of a local group instruct the boys, while designated women act as aids or servants. The leaders paint their bodies and appear in masks. The boys are taught to paint their faces, and, in some sections, their teeth are chipped. They receive an official but secret name, and, following the ceremony, they may take their first wives.

**Death customs.**—There are conflicting and confusing accounts of customs connected with death and the disposal of the dead. It is probable that each tribe buried in various ways, the method depending upon the

deceased's social position. The *Southern Guaymí* bury after the corpse has hung in the house during a few days of mourning and ceremonial observances (pl. 44; fig. 57). The dead are not exhumed. Pinart

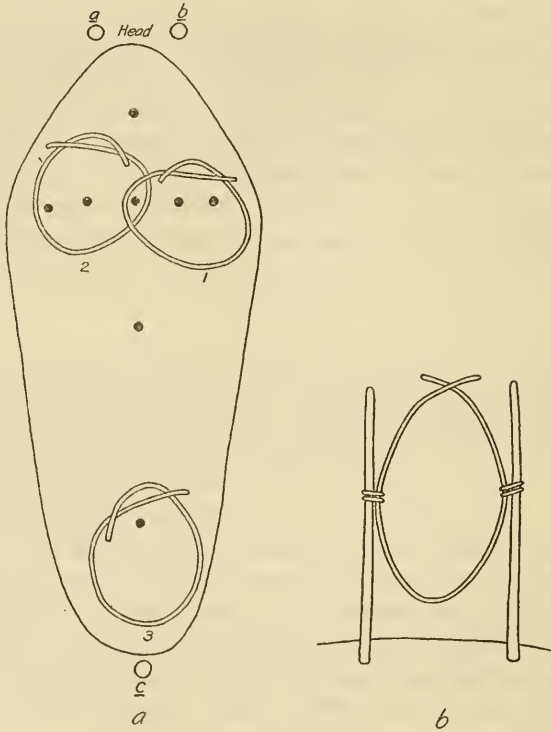


FIGURE 57.—*Guaymí* burial. *a*, Diagram of mound constructed over burial which was oriented with the head of the corpse to the west. Numbers 1, 2, and 3 are bejuco hoops which were laid over crosses located by black dots. *a*, *b*, and *c* indicate the location of small holes in which chicha in two small iron pots and articles such as mirrors, combs, a bit of face paint, etc. were buried. *b*, Sketch of gate or exit made of two upright balsa poles to which a loop of bejuco was lashed. The gate was located on the eastern edge of the cemetery. This was constructed while the grave was being filled. Everyone at the burial services passed through this exit at the end of the ceremony.

(1885, pp. 445–446) says that the *Guaymí* (probably the *Northern* tribes) wrap the corpse and leave it in a special place until the flesh has rotted off, when the bones are collected and buried with great ceremony. Inhumation and varieties of secondary burial are reported for several other tribes. The remains are put in the ground or hung in the houses. Among the *Guetar* embalmed bodies are put in mortuary buildings. All funeral ceremonies are long and complicated.

## ESTHETIC AND RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

**Musical instruments.**—The *Guaymí* make conch-shell trumpets by grinding off part of the whorl and molding a mouthpiece of pitch. Cow-horn trumpets made of the horns of longhorn cattle or of several sections of short horns stuck together with pitch and equipped with a wooden mouthpiece are now replacing these.

Whistles or endflutes with three and four stops are made of bone, wood, and reeds. Each whistle is made to play a certain tune composed by its maker. Double-reed whistles with no stops are also made.

Pottery ocarinas have been described (p. 242). Ocarinas are also made of gourds or are molded of pitch. Rarely, turtle shells are suspended from the shoulders by a string and played by rubbing the hand over the edge of the shell.

A few drums are made by the present-day *Northern Guaymí*. Some have double heads tightened over a hollow log by means of hoops and lashings; others have no hoops. These drums are beaten with the hand or with two sticks. *Bribri* drums are made of a tapered hollow log and have a single head (Gabb, 1875, p. 517; Skinner, 1920).

The *Bribri* make an instrument of armadillo skin, which is rubbed with a beanlike seed. Gourd rattles and a xylophonelike instrument made by hollowing a chunk of wood are also mentioned.

**Alcoholic beverages.**—Many beverages or chichas are made, most of them fermented and some intoxicating. Most commonly, maize is used. It is partially ground on a metate or simply crushed in a mortar, and it may or may not be cooked before it is poured into a trough to ferment. A type of chicha, highly desired because of its alcoholic content, is made of maize, much of which is partially chewed by the women and spat into a trough. Other beverages may be made of yuca or of combinations of various kinds of fruits. Such beverages were first described by the conquistadors, and one account mentions a drink made from a tree of the "copal" species. It was said to resemble turpentine and to have been used also to embalm the dead!

**Narcotics.**—In discussing Ferdinand Columbus's descriptions of the natives (*Guaymí*?) encountered on the north coast of Veraguas, Lothrop (1937, p. 17) notes that in the land of the Cacique Urira the people were accustomed to chew a dried herb mixed with some sort of powder and suggests that this refers either to tobacco chewing or to coca chewing.

## RELIGION

Early accounts of religious activities are confined to passing mention of priests who were usually also secular officials. By means of ceremonies these men cured the sick, prophesied the future, and such.

Modern references describe the remnants of religious concepts which must have had considerable influence upon everyday life. The *Guaymí* now speak of a God with attributes similar to the Christian God. They also have shamans and sorcerers who prophesy the future and placate various evil spirits. Ritual is now restricted to very private ceremonies held at night. Other ceremonies also have a certain religious background.

Accounts of the *Bribri* describe a formal priesthood usually made up of *Bribri* but ruled by a single priest chosen from the *Cabecar* tribe. In addition, a certain group of laymen is officially recognized as sorcerers and shamans. The *Guetar* had an organized priesthood, and they sacrificed human beings at every moon and at burial feasts.

The people have a well-developed theology which includes a Supreme Being and a multitude of lesser deities, both benevolent and malevolent. The bad spirits must be constantly placated in order to ward off sickness, death, and all kinds of misfortune. They are exorcised by the religious officials in various ways.

These tribes have concepts of various degrees of spiritual cleanliness of both human beings and inanimate objects. An object which has not been used for some time may become unclean and must be spiritually cleansed before it is serviceable. Some degrees of uncleanness are conceived to be of a serious nature. (For further details, cf. Gabb, 1875, p. 188, pp. 503-504; Pittier de Fábrega, 1938 b, pp. 16-19; Skinner, 1920, pp. 46-47.)

#### CEREMONIES

Only the more important of the many ceremonies reported during the past centuries are now celebrated. All these have a religious background, and all characteristically involve varying degrees of drunkenness and brawling. Some are primarily of a social nature, such as the *Guaymí* "chichería," during which the men and women dance in a circle to a single song that everyone sings interminably. The dancing may last for several days. Upon occasion this ceremony is considered to be a memorial to the deceased rather than a social gathering.

One of the important *Guaymí* ceremonies is called in Spanish the "balsería." It is connected with agriculture, particularly the planting of crops, but no clear statement of the details has yet been obtained. Outwardly, the ceremony is a large social gathering in which there is some formalized competition between regional and relationship groups. These groups are perhaps extended families, possibly even clans, each of which occupies a certain region and owns a number of the ceremonial grounds. The balserías are held at a different location each year. A group of the *Northern Guaymí* occupies a special place on the program of the ceremony. In the principal activity, which lasts one day, two groups throw balsa-wood sticks at each other (pls. 46 and 47). These contestants

belong in different classes, which are determined by either a family relationship or by region. In some instances men may wager property and even their wives upon the outcome of the "stick play."

For descriptions of ceremonies among the *Bribri*, see Gabb (1875).

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Angulo, 1862; Bancroft, 1883-90; Ceballos, 1610; Gabb, 1875; Lothrop, 1926 b, 1937; Peralta, 1890; Pinart, 1885, 1887 a, 1887 b, 1900; Pittier de Fábrega, 1895, 1938 b; Skinner, 1920; Stewart, 1942; Urcullu, 1763.





PLATE 37.—Guaymí farming and foodstuffs. *Top*: Fenced farmland on which yuca and pigeon peas are raised. *Bottom*: Pigeon peas being dried in the sun. (Courtesy Frederick Johnson.)



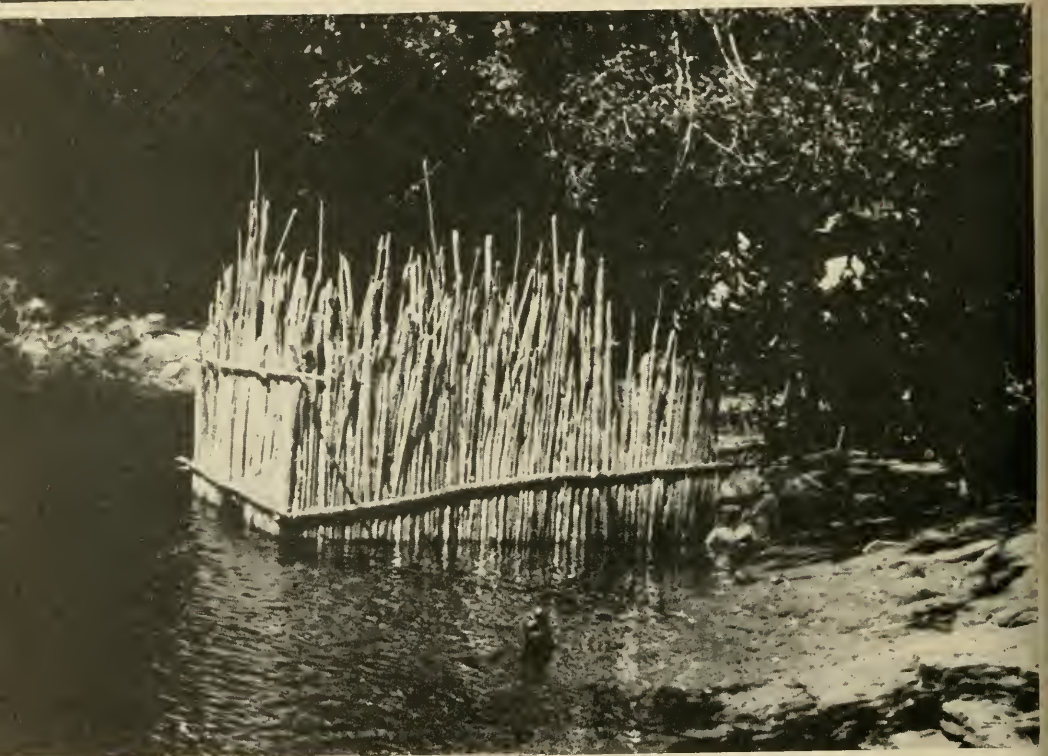


PLATE 38.—Guaymí fish traps. *Top:* Abandoned trap and stone dam. *Bottom:* Trap in working order. (Courtesy Frederick Johnson.)



PLATE 39.—Hip-roofed house of the Guaymí. *Top:* Completed. *Bottom:* Framework. (Courtesy Frederick Johnson.)



PLATE 40.—Guaymí shelter and loom weaving. *Top:* Flat-roofed shelter. *Bottom:* Beating down wool with sword batten in weaving. (Courtesy Frederick Johnson.)



PLATE 41.—Valienti (Guaymí ?) bags, Panamá. (Courtesy American Museum of Natural History.)



PLATE 42.—Guaymí pottery making. *Top:* Adding clay ring to form rim.  
*Bottom:* Small jar before firing. (Courtesy Frederick Johnson.)



PLATE 43.—Guaymí utensils. *Top:* Large pottery jar. *Bottom:* Uncommon shape of mortar. (Courtesy Frederick Johnson.)



PLATE 44.—**Southern Guaymí burial.** The corpse is hung from the tree. Group at right digs grave, one phase of which is being superintended by a woman relative of the dead. Mourning women sit at left while the pregnant widow sits outside the cemetery limits.  
(Courtesy Frederick Johnson.)



PLATE 45.—Guaymí men in ceremonial costumes. (Courtesy Frederick Johnson.)





PLATE 46.—Guaymí ceremonies and ceremonial dress. *Top: (left)* Balsería ceremony. Man pointing pole at his opponent. *Top (right) and bottom (left):* Women in ceremonial dress. *Bottom (right):* Man in ceremonial dress. (Courtesy Frederick Johnson.)

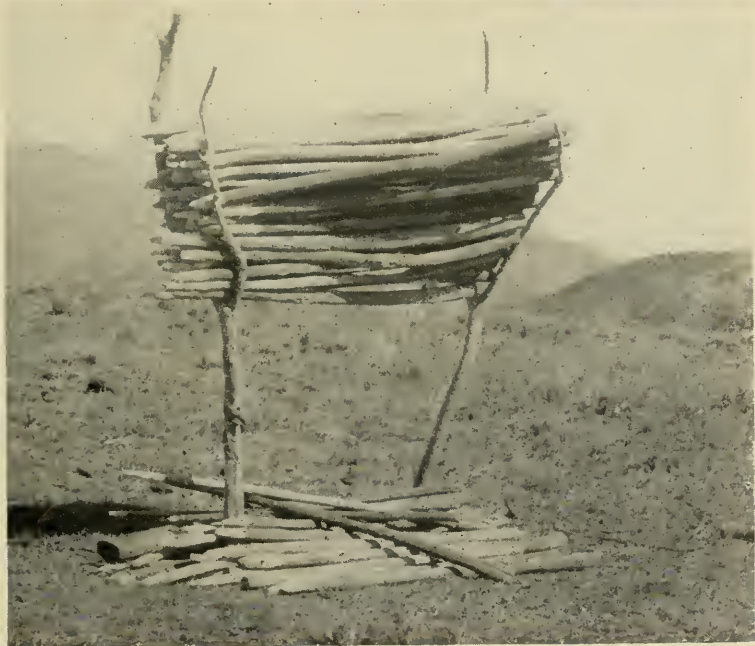


PLATE 47.—Guaymí balsería ceremony. *Top:* Man throwing pole at his opponent. *Bottom:* Rack of balsa poles prepared for balsería ceremony. (Courtesy Frederick Johnson.)



PLATE 48.—Guaymi man. Wearing “working” or everyday clothes. (Courtesy Frederick Johnson.)