

1. Description

1.1 Name of society, language, and language family:

Pemon→ Also known as: Arecuna; Kamarakoto; Taurepan

Language: Pemon

Language Family: Carib

1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com): 639-3: **aoc** (2)

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude): Venezuela primarily but some in Brazil and Guyana (2)

Pemon territory includes the Gran Sabana (4°34' to 6°45'N, 60°34' to 62°50' W) and the valleys of the Caroní, Carun, and lower Paragua rivers (4° to 7° N, 62°30' to 64°20' W), all in southeast Estado Bolívar, Venezuela. There are also Pemon in the valleys of the Cuyuni, the upper Kamarang, and Venamo rivers and some in Roraima Territory in Brazil (4)

1.4 Brief history:

The Pemon-Caribs of Venezuela used to be called Arecuna, Kamarakoto, and Taurepan. There are no historical records of their lives from the time before 1750. At the end of the nineteenth century, English Protestant missionaries started to Christianize the Pemon. Gold and diamond rushes began in the area in 1936, and during the 1960s, the area was connected with other parts of Venezuela by airplane and road. (1)

1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors:

At the end of the nineteenth century, English Protestant missionaries started to Christianize the Pemon. In 1931, the first Capuchin (a Catholic religious order) mission post in the Pemon area was established. In the mission villages, more and more young people use Spanish among themselves. Most Pemon people now have Christian (Spanish) names.

1.6 Ecology:

1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density

Population size: 5,000 in Venezuela, 680 in Brazil, 480 in Guyana (2)

2. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s): Yucca, manioc root, and cassava (1).

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources: Fish- but with the arrival of firearms in the 1940s. Birds and mammals, such as deer and vampire bats, then became an important part of the diet (1).

During the rainy season, the Pemon capture flying ants. Throughout the year, they gather the insect larvae found in the moriche palm (1).

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?: Arrows, knives, axes, fishing rods, and some firearms (1).

2.4 Food storage: Gourds are raised in the fields alongside food crops and are used for water and manioc-beer containers (4).

2.5 Sexual division of production:

Men hunt, fish, weave baskets, cut fields, build houses, gather wild foods, work for pay in mines and missions, and go on trading expeditions. Women cook, tend and harvest fields, make manioc beer, fish, gather wild foods, weave cotton articles, assume primary responsibility for children, and also go on trading expeditions (4).

2.6 Land tenure: The Pemon's means of subsistence (getting enough food to live on) are based on slash-and-burn farming, fishing, hunting, and collecting wild fruits and insects (1).

2.7 Ceramics: Some women are famous for the quality of their clay bowls (1).

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:

2.9 Food taboos: For one year after the boys' passage into adolescence ceremony, certain foods could not be eaten (1).

2.10 Canoes/watercraft?: The Pemon make wooden dugout and bark canoes and paddles (1).

3. Anthropometry

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f):

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):

4. Life History, mating, marriage

4.1 Age at menarche (f):

4.2 Age at first birth (m and f):

4.3 Completed family size (m and f):

4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce: Divorce rates are low; about 10 percent of all ever-married individuals have been divorced (4).

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously: Polygyny is practiced, with about 8 percent of all marriages involving a male and two or more co-wives; co-wives are often sisters (4).

4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?: Upon marriage, the groom takes up residence with his parents-in-law to perform at least one or two years of bride-service (4). The Pemon are UXORILOCAL.

4.9 Inheritance patterns: In the past, an individual's personal belongings were destroyed at death, but nowadays valued items such as shotguns or manioc graters may be passed on to near relatives, usually a child or sibling of the deceased. Houses were formerly burned or abandoned upon the death of the head of household (4).

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):

4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these "other fathers" recognized?

4.14 What is the belief of the mother's role in procreation exactly? (e.g., "receptacle in which fetus grows"): According to traditional beliefs, the solid parts of babies—the bones—come from the father, and the blood comes from the mother (1).

4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)?

4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape

4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin): Pemon have a rule enjoining marriage with a category of relative that includes the opposite-sex cross cousin, although the rule is only partially followed in practice. Marriage with a category of relative that includes the sister's daughter is also found (4).

4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?

4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring

4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?

4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females

4.22 Evidence for couvades

4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older)

4.24 Kin avoidance and respect?

4.24 Joking relationships?

4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations: Descent in Pemon society is bilateral (4).

4.26 Incest avoidance rules

4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?:

The relationship between the father-in-law and the son-in-law is most important. For the father-in-law, his son-in-law is the substitute for his own son. Therefore, after the marriage, the son-in-law detaches himself from his own father and takes care of his father-in-law. **In the Pemon society, there is no wedding ceremony.** The new husband simply moves his hammock to his father-in-law's house and starts working with him (1).

The relationship becomes public when the groom slings his hammock in the house of his father-in-law (4).

4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name?

4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?)

4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)?

4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:

Warfare/homicide

Open conflict, anger, and fighting are strongly discouraged. The basic response to conflict is to withdraw. Often this means a person will leave home and make an extended visit to relatives somewhere else, waiting for things to calm down. Since the Pemon do not approve of anger or displays of hostility, physical punishment of children is very rare. If an adult hits a child at all, it is done so mildly that it is just a reminder (1).

4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:

4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death:

4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing:

4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations):

4.18 Cannibalism?

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size: Pemon settlements range from a single family to a maximum of six or seven families (i.e., from four to seventy people) (4).

A neighborhood is made up of groups of siblings linked by marriage bonds, with some inmarrying outsiders from more distant settlements (4).

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):

5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes): Pemon society is based on trade and considered egalitarian and decentralized (3).

Regional leaders, called capitanes, may wield influence throughout a river valley area. They are men who exhort, speak well, and inspire followers, not men who give orders. For the most part, their role lies in defusing conflict before it escalates and also includes being a community representative to non-Pemon (4).

5.4 Post marital residence: Nuclear families predominate, although two- and three-generation extended families build up as sons-in-law marry in or sons bring their wives back home after bride-service. A settlement may have two or three households within five minutes' walk, the members of which span several generations of one or two families (4).

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex): hierarchical relationships outside the domestic unit are based solely on age and personal prestige or special skills (4).

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:

5.8 Village and house organization: 5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses):

Mission sites and Adventist villages have produced larger, nontraditional settlements. Pemon dwellings may be round, oblong, or rectangular and usually house a nuclear or extended family. Houses are of mud or slatted walls with thatch roofs and are open and undivided inside; less frequently, they are mission-type houses with interior rooms patterned on criollo styles (4).

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?: The Pemons traditional housing consists of huts whose walls are made of clay or bark, with roofs made of palm leaves. Hammocks are hung from the beams of the roof, and a fire is kept at one or two corners of the house (1).

5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc:

5.12 Trade: An extensive long-distance trade network links the Pemon with neighboring tribes and involves direct exchange of shotguns, blowpipes, manioc graters, bowls, and bead necklaces, among other items. Pemon have managed to mesh cash purchases of outside goods with traditional exchange at fixed rates, thus keeping all Pemon in the network whether or not they have cash (4).

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6 Time allocation to RCR:

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):

In the old days, when somebody became ill, the local shaman or paisan connected the cause of the illness with one of the many mythical spirits. For healing, the shaman uses his taren recipes. These are a mixture of medicinal plants and charms. The taren is believed to be a magic spell that can aid in the birth of a child, counter the bite of various snakes, heal headaches and stomach pains, and so forth. The taren can only be taught to one person at a time, and it is performed in the presence of as few people as possible (1).

6.2 Stimulants: cachiri, is made with bitter yucca paste, which is grated and chewed and mixed with a red root, cachiriyek, that has also been grated. The mixture is then boiled for a whole day. This brew is mildly intoxicating (1).

6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal):

Traditional rites of passage were associated with the life cycle (birth, adolescence, and death), but most are no longer celebrated. Baptism in a Catholic mission is now the only important rite of passage (1).

Traditionally, a boy's passage into adolescence was marked with a special ceremony. A Pemon religious leader lashed a boy's body, made incisions in his skin, and applied what were believed to be magic substances to the wounds. For one year after the ceremony, certain foods could not be eaten (1).

A girl's passage into adolescence was marked by a haircut before the first menstruation. In addition, the edges of a girl's mouth were tattooed in a traditional design. At the first sign of menstruation, the girl retired to her hammock and was considered impure. Her grandmother would then paint her whole body in a special way.

6.4 **Other rituals:** As most Pemon have been Christianized, their major holidays are the same as those celebrated by Catholics. Holy Week and Christmas are the most important (1).

6.5 Myths (Creation):

The Makunaima is a series of creation stories of the Pemon land, crops, techniques, and social practices. It starts with the creation of a wife for the first Pemon—the Sun—by a water nymph. At that time, the Sun was a person. One day he went to the stream and saw a small woman with long hair. He managed to grasp her hair, but she told him, "Not me! I will send you a woman to be your companion and your wife."

Her name was Tuenkaron, and the next day she sent the Sun a white woman. He fed her, and she lit a fire. But when the Sun sent her to the stream, she collapsed into a little heap of clay. The woman was made of white earth, or clay. The next day Tuenkaron sent him a black woman. She was able to bring water, but when she tried to light a fire, she melted. The woman was made of wax. The third woman was red, a rock-colored woman. The sun tested her and she did not melt or collapse. She was strong and able to help run the household. The woman and the Sun had several children, and these are the Pemon (1).

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):

The Pemon culture is rich in oral literature: tales and legends that the American Indians call *pantón*. There is no specific time dedicated to telling stories, but the favorite moment is just before going to sleep. The morning is the time for telling and interpreting dreams, and storytelling might happen again after meals. Stories and legends are considered luxuries. People take special trips to visit other groups in order to collect them. The possessor of stories is called *sak*. A guest who tells stories or brings news or new songs is always welcome (1).

Basketry is another major art form. Men make all of the baskets and fiber articles, including the eating mats and strainers used in everyday household work and cooking. But everyday basketry is different from the more complicated forms, which can be used in trade. As in the case of pottery, only certain men are skilled at making complex baskets (1).

6.7 Sex differences in RCR:

6.8 Missionary effect:

6.9 RCR revival:

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:

The Pemon have traditionally believed that each person has five souls, which look like the shadows of a human being. The fifth soul is the one that talks and that leaves the body to travel around when the person is dreaming. This is the only one that goes away—to the Milky Way—after death. Before arriving there, it meets the Father of the Dogs. If the person has mistreated his or her dogs, the dogs' souls will recognize the person and kill him or her.

One of the other four souls lives in the knee and stays put for a while after death; later, it turns into a bad spirit. The other three souls turn into birds of prey after death. All animals and plants are believed to have souls. Stones do not have souls, but they house bad spirits (1).

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?: Personal names in Pemon are taboo (4).

6.12 Is there teknonymy?

6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.): In spite of the strength of Catholicism, the Pemon still believe in Kanaima —the spirit of evil. Also, some social traditions, such as the marriage of cousins, that are opposed by the church are practiced by many Pemon. The Pemon have also mixed traditional cult saints with Catholic saints (1).

As most Pemon have been Christianized, their major holidays are the same as those celebrated by Catholics. Holy Week and Christmas are the most important (1).

7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint:

7.2 Piercings:

7.3 Haircut:

7.4 Scarification:

7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.): In the past, the Pemon went naked or used only loincloths. The traditional clothing of a Pemon woman was an apron made of cotton or beads. In the twentieth century, the men's loincloths were made of a bright red cloth obtained from the criollos (Venezuelans of mixed descent) (1).

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:

7.7 Sex differences in adornment:

7.8 Missionary effect: By 1945, the Pemon had started wearing Western cotton clothing. The men tend to wear khaki, while the women make their dresses using cotton fabrics printed with patterns (1).

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system:

8.2 Sororate, levirate:

8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.): Traditional terms approximate the Iroquois type, with variation in the cousin terms (4).

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

* Pemon do not trace genealogies beyond their grandparents (4).

Numbered references

1. "Pemon - Introduction, Location, Language, Folklore, Religion, Major Holidays, Rites of Passage, Relationships, Living Conditions." Countries and Their Cultures. Everyculture.com. Web. 28 Nov. 2011. <<http://www.everyculture.com/wc/Tajikistan-to-Zimbabwe/Pemon.html>>.
2. Lewis, M. Paul (ed.), 2009. Ethnologue: Languages of the World, Sixteenth edition. Dallas, Tex.: SIL International. Online version: <http://www.ethnologue.com/>.
3. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pemon_people
4. <http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Pemon.aspx>