

1. Description

Name of society, language, language family: U'wa people, Central Tunebo, Chibchan language family

ISO code: tuf

Location: Central Colombia, 7° N, 71° W

Brief history: "The conquistador Hernán Pérez de Quesada opened the way for colonization of the region with the establishment of encomiendas. . . in 1549, whereby the native communities were forced into servility. The U'wa resisted this imposition and fled to the woods or committed collective suicide. The threat of once more resorting to this latter strategy in the face of a multinational's intention to drill for oil in their territory has in recent times brought them to the attention of the world press." (4)

Influence of missionaries/schools/govts/powerful neighbors: ". . . repeated relocations to avoid the turbulence of the colonial era. Sustained missionary activities began in 1910, and Colombian settlers have been penetrating into Tunebo territory in increasing numbers. The Summer Institute of Linguistics has been in permanent contact with Tunebo subgroups since 1961. . . Tunebo culture has been strongly affected by Western ways, yet despite increasing missionary influence and ever-intensifying pressures to acculturate, the Tunebo continue to cling to their aboriginal culture, including their language." (6)

Ecology: ". . . roof overhangs the side walls to protect them from the rain. . . Trees are felled and their branches saved for firewood and raw material. . . Tunebo farmers do not burn their fields before cultivation but sow and plant their crops among the fallen tree trunks and boulders. . . After four years of cultivation, fields are left fallow for about twelve years." (6)

Population size, mean village size, home range size, density: approx. 1500 individuals, (6) 543,000 acres, 822 families (all Tunebo clans) (5)

2. Economy

Main carbohydrate staples: Maize, sweet manioc

Main protein-lipid sources: Local game (tapir, peccaries, deer, anteaters, monkeys, turkeys, etc.) ". . . bears, jaguars, and some snakes and birds are not hunted." (6)

Weapons: "Land animals are caught in snares or in log-fall and spring-snare traps; arboreal animals are shot with bows and arrows. Women capture small rodents in deadfall stone traps. Traditional hunters will not use firearms." (6)

Food storage: "They also build deep storage tanks in the ground in which leaf-wrapped packages of maize and other victuals are preserved for weeks and months under running water." (6)

Sexual division of production: Men hunt larger animals, women may hunt small rodents. "Fishing is mainly women's work, although men fish occasionally." "Women. . . and sometimes men supplement the garden products by gathering a large variety of wild-plant foods. . ." (6)

Land tenure: "Each man owns a particular hunting tract he has inherited from his great-grandfather, whose name he bears." (6)

Ceramics: "Women make earthen cooking pots, eating bowls, and water containers and have them fired by their men, who are responsible for firewood and fire making." (6)

Specified sharing patterns: No info

Food taboos: "Carnivorous animals. . . are not hunted. Some regional groups are reluctant hunters of large mammals like tapir and peccaries; they prefer rodents, iguanas, frogs, snails, grubs, caterpillars, and birds that are eaten throughout the region." (6)

Canoes/watercraft: No info

3. Anthropometry

Mean adult height/weight (m and f): No info

4. Life history, mating, marriage

4.1-4.6: No info

Percent marriages polygynous/percent males married polygynously: “Marriage is predominantly monogamous, but polygyny, frequently of the sororal type, is permitted, and remarrying widows appear to be subject to levirate marriage rules.” (6)

4.8-4.11: No info

Pattern of exogamy (endogamy): “Traditionally, clans were exogamous and considered themselves related to the two neighboring clans that flanked them on either side of their territory. . . The women of the eastern segment of a particular clan married men of the western segment of the neighboring clan to the east, and the women of the western segment of a given clan married men of the eastern segment of the neighboring clan to the west. This practice is still followed by the three existing clans.” (6)

4.13-4.16: No info

Preferential category for spouse: “. . . cross-cousin marriage, especially with a mother's brother's daughter, is preferred. Interclan marriage with a spouse of the mother's brother's category is subject to the prescription that a child resulting from the union be returned in the following generation to the spouse's siblings' group of origin.” (6)

4.18-4.23: No info

Kin avoidance and respect: “The lowest [social class is] babies of both sexes. . . who are not considered even to be people until after they receive a name.” (2)

4.24-4.28: No info

Is marriage within/outside community: (See pattern of exogamy above), “Today, weakening alliances between the remaining clans, population decline, and social dissolution are causing a decline in clan-exogamous marriages and hastening their gradual replacement by clan-endogamous unions.” (6)

4.30-4.31: No info

Warfare/homicide

4.14-4.18: No info

5. Socio-political organization and interaction

Mean local village group size: No exact numbers

Mobility pattern: “Motivated by economic and religious factors, clans migrate seasonally up and down their respective mountain valleys. . .” (6)

Political system: “The clans are governed by four principal shamans; they have no political chiefs and no paramount chief.” (6) “The chiefs' only authority is vested in their ability to persuade people to do what they want them to. In the even of disobedience, there is no established sanction.” (2)

Post marital residence: “Postmarital residence may be uxori-local or viri-local, according to the rules governing the exchange of women between allied clans or between segmental groups of the same clan.” (6)

5.5-5.7: No info

Village/house organization: “Tunebo houses are oriented in an east-west direction, with the front toward the sunrise. The principal door is set into the eastern facade and the secondary door into the western end of the house; this back door is rarely used, and then usually by women.” “Tunebo houses are sanctuaries, and each family owns two or more houses in different altitudinal zones of its clan's territory.” (6)

Specialized village structures: “The elliptical communal dwellings are ceremonial men's houses, the semielliptical houses shelter the women and the children, and the rectangular dwellings house nuclear families.” (6)

Sleep in hammocks/ground/etc: “people sleep on leaves covering the ground or on platform beds; men sometimes sleep in hammocks.” (6)

Social organization/clans/etc: “The subtribal divisions of Tunebo society are clans only in the sense that they claim descent from a particular ancestor and are socially integrated groups. They lack, however, a specific unilinear rule of descent and a postmarital residential unity consistent with the definition of a true clan.” (6) “The U'wa were grouped into eight clans from time immemorial to the 20th century. Three clans survived their dramatic population loss in the last hundred years and structure their communal life today: Kubaruwua (Cobaria), Tagrinuwa (Tegria) and Kaibaká (Bokota), each of which includes multiple communities.” (5)

Trade: “Tunebo wives and unmarried daughters wear a dark brown woolen poncho, which their husbands and fathers obtain for them through trade. . . Men also trade for the material from which they make white cotton loincloths for themselves.” (6)

Social hierarchies: “Older men and women are very respected among the Cobaria Tunebos. The well-established shaman practitioners and chiefs are respected even more. Women in general are not respected to the same degree as men, but can hardly be said to suffer from disrespect. . . Those higher in rank are obligated to use their influence for protection against outsiders and to maintain the social structure within the group.” (2)

6. Ritual/ceremony/religion (RCR)

Time allocation to RCR: Fairly extensive; many organized dances/songs, religious ceremonies that last all night (~25 miles of walking around the central bonfire). (3)

Specialization (shamans/medicine): “. . . The spiritual life of each group is in the hands of a shaman or witch doctor, known as a *kereka*. The *Kareka's* authority derives not from religious sanctions but from magical powers and communion with the spirit world, and is based largely on intimidation.” (3)

Stimulants: Used for the long ceremonies – “Coca dispels fatigue; yopa is said to induce hallucinations.” (3) “Tobacco- and yopo-using shamans keep these complementary worlds and their perpetual interactions in balance. . .” (6)

Passage rituals: Have “a fixed ceremonial calendar of ritual blowing, chanting, and sacrifice. Ceremonies of ritual blowing also punctuate individual life cycles, ending with a person's death, when the shaman's blowing accompanies the departed into the grave. Burial takes place either in a special cemetery or in the house, and the house of the deceased is sealed and abandoned.” (6) “At that time [teen years] the girls have a puberty ceremony and become *cahbara*, while the boys become *si bijiya* ('pack carriers').” (2)

Other rituals: “The U'wa have two main ceremonies, reowa and aya. The reowa is a rite for renewal and purification. It is celebrated four times during bara, the June solstice season, between May and August, the rainy season in which there is no fishing or hunting and when they live in the depths of the forest.” (4)

Myths: “The first song deals with the creation of the world in the form of a house, supported on beams and columns over the sea, beneath which is hell. . . among the beams supporting the earth lies an old man in a hammock, who is in charge of the world. . .” They scream and shout during the song “to symbolize the delight of the first Tunebos when God appeared to them at Cobaria.” Another song tells about the population of the world by the animals, and the “song of the wild pigs tells how they were made by God in heaven, and were sent down to Earth. . .” (3)

Cultural material: Some songs described above; “There are eight songs altogether, forming a single cycle which is repeated without variation on each of the seventeen nights. Each song is repeated several times a night.” Specialized dances, musical instruments (“humming tops, globular flutes with stops,

long and short endflutes with stops and panpipes. . .conch shells and the gourd rattle or maraca”). (3)

Sex differences in RCR: Ceremonial dances: “When the women and children are safely in the hut. . .the chief, the *kareka*, and two or three tribal elders come down from the village and join the waiting menfolk.” (Dancing starts), “Women and children join in when they wish, following the men.” (3) Only males can be chiefs and leading shamans. (2)

Missionary effect: “Modern missionary influence began in 1910, and a mission station was established in 1923. . . In spite of fifty years of missionary effort, little progress has been made in the conversion of the Indians, but a vigorous program is being pursued against both the *karekas* and the dances. . . The missionaries have also prescribed a new set of songs for the annual dances, based on Christian doctrine, and have forbidden the dances to take place without a missionary being present – a prohibition which has had little effect.” (3)

6.9-6.12: No info

Religion: “The primary religion practiced by the Central Tunebo is ethno-religion, a system of religious practices closely tied to the identity of the ethnic group. . .this people group is less than 2% evangelical.” (1) “Their religious tradition includes an obligation to gather in the summer months and “sing the world into being” as well as to maintain equilibrium between the layers of the world: earth, water, oil, mountains, and sky.” (5) “Unless the *kareka* “breathes with” (i.e., waves) the *rubriza* [magic wand] over a dead body the soul cannot rise to heaven; and it is also used in baptismal rites. It is believed to have valuable medicinal properties.” (3)

7. Adornment

7.1-7.5: No info

Ceremonial/ritual adornment: “The dancers wear no special uniform, but appear in their ordinary brown ruanas or ponchos of thick felted cloth, with a cotton loincloth and teeth necklaces. The principal singers wear ceremonial hats of plaited straw interlaced with brightly colored feathers. . .” (3)

7.7-7.9: No info

8. Kinship systems

8.1-8.2: No info

Kinship typology: Cross-cousin, mother's brother's daughter preferred. (6)

9. Other interesting cultural features

-Believe that “when a *kareka* dies he may become a jaguar and join forces with the devil, who is usually depicted in the form of a jaguar.” (3)

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