

## 1. Description

- 1.1 Xavante (also Shavante, Chavante, Crixá; Curixá; Puxití; Tapacuí, Akuen, A'uwe, Akwe, Awen, or Akwen)
- 1.2 XAV (ethnologue.com)
- 1.3 Eastern Mato Grosso, Brazil: 13°20' S, 51°40' W. (Coimbra et. al. 17)
- 1.4 The Xavante people belong to the Je language family. From the European colonization of the sixteenth century to the present, the Xavante have had contact with the outside world, in one form or another. During the colonial period, the Portuguese Crown sought to bring the Xavante under state control so that their resources could be controlled. Xavante land was being seized for cattle herds to graze. These herds were used to provide meat and draft oxen to the large sugar plantations and coastal towns in Brazil. On top of herding, the discovery of gold also sparked much interest in Xavante land. This imposition forced many indigenous members to move into less populated regions, which actually helped prevent the spread of European and African diseases for the meantime. By the eighteenth century, Xavante members were either at war with the Portuguese settlers or forced into slavery. The rest left and occupied less inhabited regions in the Eastern Mato Grosso. Those who migrated toward more isolated areas enjoyed little contact from the outside world until the 1930s, when frontier expansion once again affected the Xavante. Viewed as hurdles to colonization and economic development, the Xavante were subject to Brazilian state intervention, along with disease, rapid population declines, less mobility and land loss. Since the 1930s, efforts to alleviate the interethnic tensions between the Xavante and the Brazilians have had little payoff. In the 1980s, the Brazilian government instituted the "rice project," which tried to incorporate the Xavante into the Brazilian economy as agricultural laborers. The "rice project" was a failure, and the Xavante continue to struggle for new methods of dealing with the outside world. In 1988, the Xavante were allowed to vote in the Brazilian elections (Coimbra et. al. 49-94, *Countries and their Cultures: The Xavante*).
- 1.5 Increased contact with the outside world has led to many diseases and sicknesses within the Xavante. Such illnesses have included the whooping cough, pneumonia, and the measles. These epidemics helped missionaries and the Brazilian government curry favor with the indigenous group. The Xavante's need for modern medicine resulted in mission and government posts being set up in villages. Ironically, easier access to medicine meant increased vulnerability to disease, due to close contact with disease-carrying members from these posts. Missionaries, in particular, have had a great influence on the Xavante society. The members of the missions were against the community's polygenic sexual behavior and polytheistic beliefs in "spirits." For instance, they sought to suppress the wai'a ceremony, which involved the ritual raping of certain women by males who are taking initiation rites. Missions set up schools and churches to both educate the Xavante and acculturate them to the Christianized lifestyle. They also taught members various trades such as carpenters, shoemakers, and machinists. On the whole, the missions greatly transformed Xavante culture. By the 1960s, the Xavante recognized Christianity as their primary religion. Polygyny has declined, though is still present. Accordingly, there is a profound influence of the missions on the Xavante people (Garfield 118-125).
- 1.6 The Xavante live on the Brazilian Plateau in the southeastern part of the Amazon River basin, also known as Central Brazil. Nearby rivers include the Tocantins, the Araguaia, and the Xingu. The ecology of the Xavante territory is characterized by a diverse type of vegetation called *cerrado*. Here, the Xavante practice horticulture and hunting and gathering. In the *cerrado* habitat, there is a dominance of "relatively dense, low scrub" and "hard, narrow-leaved grasses and sedges." However, the *cerrado* vegetation is diverse and can range from open grassland to closed canopy forests. Diverse vegetation allows for diverse faunal representation. Records show that there are over 950 species of birds and 300 species of animals. And this list is far from complete. Average annual temperature is 20 to 22°C, with highs reaching up to 40°C during the hottest times of the year, especially September. The coldest months are June and July with lows reaching 8°C. Annual rainfall fluctuates from 1,750 mm to 2,000 mm. Overall the Mato Grosso could be described as a "humid savanna (Coimbra et. al. 17-24).
- 1.7 According to a 2000 census, the Xavante population averaged about 10,000 people living in 64 sectors, 53 of which are considered "indigenous villages." There are about 1,877 households in the Xavante reserves, ranging from 7.2 to 11.8 residents. There is also a presence of large, extended family households, often comprised of 20 or more residents (Welch et. al.)

## 2. Economy

- 2.1 Primary carbohydrates are roots and fruits. Carob, burití, and piquí are important fruits for the Xavante. Also, when given the chance, the Xavante eat honey whenever they come across a beehive (*Countries and their Cultures: The Xavante*). Manioc, rice, and pumpkins are also cultivated (Coimbra et. al. 183)
- 2.2 Nuts, especially babassú nuts, and palmitos (edible shoots of a palm) are eaten year-round. However, the Xavante prefer to eat meat. Deer, anteaters, and armadillo account for 76 percent of the game meat for the Xavante diet

- (Weber et. al. 66). Pigs, steppe rats, monkeys, turtles, and most birds are eaten (*Countries and their Cultures: The Xavante*). Beans are also cultivated (Coimbra et. al. 183).
- 2.3 Bows, arrows and clubs are still used in Xavante society for hunting and warfare. But modern shotguns and rifles are now preferred (Coimbra et. al. 161).
- 2.4 There is a prominent usage of basketry for food storage (Garfield 73). Gourds are also utilized to store water and seeds (70).
- 2.5 Men's primary duties are to hunt, while women are required to perform household duties. With regards to horticulture, men are expected to clear the land for the women to cultivate crops. Then, the food is handed out by the elder women to the village. Women also weave cotton to make cloth and make baskets. Men construct bows and arrows (Garfield 72-73).
- 2.6 Agricultural plots, according to *Indigenous Struggle at the Heart of Brazil*, are "tended by individual households." Because the Xavante culture is both patrilineal and matrilocal, the pattern of inheritance varies among households (Coimbra et. al. 41-42).
- 2.7 Basketry takes precedence over ceramics in Xavante society (Garfield 73).
- 2.8 With hunting, there is a large emphasis placed on cooperation and generosity. Community-wide hunts are usually performed in the dry season by "able-bodied" men, and the meat is distributed equally among all village members. The elders' job is to see that the meat is distributed properly. In smaller hunting parties, customs are different. The man who spotted the game (not the one who killed it) had rights to the meat. This meat would then be delivered to the hunter's wife, who would give it to her mother to distribute within the household (Garfield 72-73)
- 2.9 Capybara, anaconda, and savanna fox are not consumed by the Xavante, despite the fact that these species are readily available and, ironically, were consumed in the past (Weber et. al. 66).
- 2.10 Canoes constitute a method of transportation for the Xavante (Coimbra et. al.).

### **3. Anthropometry**

- 3.1. 169.2 cm (Males), 155.5 cm (Females) (Coimbra et. al.: 97)
- 3.2. 72.9 kg (Males in 1990), 60 kg (Females in 1990) (Coimbra et. al. 251)

### **4. Life History, mating, marriage**

- 4.1 Age at menarche (f): Between 8 and 13 years of age (Coimbra et. al. 31-32)
- 4.2 N/A
- 4.3 Large, extended family households are made up of over 20 family members (Welch et. al.).
- 4.4 N/A
- 4.5 Females: 10-14 years old, Males 20 years old (Coimbra et. al. 33-35)
- 4.6 N/A
- 4.7 In 1990, 41 percent of women had more than one husband, whereas 23 percent of men had polygynous unions. Some villages practice polygyny more than others. In the village of Sangradouro, only 4.1 percent of men and 8.3 percent of women had more than one spouse (Coimbra et. al. 33)
- 4.8 In order to gain the respect of his future in-laws, the husband will present meat from his hunts to the household of his future father-in-law. However, it is not until the first child is born that the husband is allowed to move into the household (Coimbra et. al. 35).
- 4.9 Because the Xavante culture is both patrilineal and matrilocal, the pattern of inheritance varies among households (Coimbra et. al. 41-42)
- 4.10 N/A
- 4.11 N/A
- 4.12 In Xavante society, exogamy occurs when individuals marry outside each other's moiety. However, endogamy also is present due to the high value placed on lineage and establishing alliances. This is why cross-cousins are encouraged to marry (Coimbra et. al. 74-75).
- 4.13 Partible paternity is present. Also, a child can have more than one father. Even the child's uncle on the father's side is referred to as "father." (Rodrigues 333).
- 4.14 N/A
- 4.15 N/A
- 4.16 There is a ritual occurrence of rape during the *wai'a* ceremony, in which certain women are raped by males who are taking initiation rites (Garfield 118-125).
- 4.17 Cross-cousin marriage is encouraged to reinforce kinship alliances (De Souza).
- 4.18 Females can be regarded as "sexually free" because they are encouraged to engage in sexual relations and have multiple husbands (Coimbra et. al. 33). However, this concept becomes a grey area when females are ritually raped by males during the *wai'a* ceremony (Garfield 118-125)
- 4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring

4.20 N/A

4.21 N/A

4.22 Couvades are present within Xavante society. The potential fathers undergo food taboos. Honey, beans, large fish, and some meats (i.e. Jaguars) are restricted from the male couvade diet. There is also the thought that if the potential fathers ate turtles, then the child would be born without a brain. Another restriction is the consumption of parrots, so that the child does not develop a long nose (Reed 44).

4.23 Sources on the Xavante make no distinction between potential fathers. They are all simply referred to as “father” (Rodrigues 333)

4.24 Kin respect is pertinent with the ZS and the MB because the MB chooses the name for the ZS (Da Matta 81).

4.24 N/A

4.25 Patrilineal (Coimbra et. al. 41)

4.26 Incestuous marriages are discouraged in Xavante society, although there is evidence of cross-cousin marriage (*Countries and their Cultures: The Xavante, De Souza*).

4.27 Marriage is an ongoing process that starts with an engagement and proceeds with the prospective husband making courtship visits to the bride by night. After a few months, if the marriage seems likely to turn out successful, the groom will go hunting and deliver the meat from his hunt to the home of his future father-in-law. However, the husband may not move into the father-in-law’s home until after a baby is born by the wife (Coimbra et. al. 35).

4.28 Naming in Xavante society represents a relationship on a person-person base. At birth, female members are given an informal “girl’s name” that is used around the household and a formal “woman’s name” that is acquired later in life through a public ceremony. Male members are named by their mother’s brother through a formal ceremony, as well (Da Silva 333).

4.29 The Xavante prefer marriage to be within the moieties of the community, although out-group marriage has been recorded (Coimbra et. al. 150)

4.30 Parents arrange the marriages (*Countries and their Cultures: The Xavante*).

4.31 The idea that parents arrange their children’s marriage shows evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who (*Countries and their Cultures: The Xavante*).

#### **Warfare/homicide**

4.14 N/A

4.15 N/A

4.16 N/A

4.17 N/A

4.18 N/A

#### **5. Socio-Political organization and interaction**

5.1 Large villages hold over 150 people. Smaller villages have between 10 and 50 people (*Brasilien Portal*)

5.2 Before making contact with the outside world, the Xavante were very mobile hunters and gatherers. However, the indigenous group became more sedentary as outside intervention took hold. Today, its people live on a reserve in the Eastern Mato Grosso (Coimbra et. al. 49-94)

5.3 The Xavante political system is comprised of two exogamous moieties. These moieties are broken up into clans based on patrilineal lineages. Social status is heavily influenced by which lineage a person comes from. Lineages are used to form political alliances among members within a village. On the whole, political affairs are overseen by a village chief, but the most power in policy making is held by the *warã*, a council of elders. There is also a presence of dualism in which the men in the villages have more of a direct impact on politics than women (Coimbra et. al. 74-75).

5.4 The Xavante culture is matrilineal and patrilineal (Garfield).

5.5 The Xavante are historically known to be very hostile and warlike. They have been known to conduct both out-group warfare and in-group warfare with neighboring villages (Coimbra et. al. 28).

5.6 Age groups are divided by an age set cycle, which comprises of eight age sets that last between five to six years each. A complete cycle can last from forty to fifty years. This method helps distinguish one age group from another (Coimbra et. al. 29-31)

5.7 Similar to other Je cultures, the Xavante incorporate “formal friendships (Coimbra et.al. 27).”

5.8 Traditional villages are organized in a semicircle with the open side facing a river or stream. At the village center is an area used for social events and rituals. Households surround the village center in a horseshoe shape as if the village were an arena. Each house is constructed in a beehive shape and is represented by the clan and lineage of the senior male member (Coimbra et. al. 41-42)

- 5.9 Xavante villages have a *hö*, also known as a bachelor's hut, where young men spend up to five years learning how to hunt, fish, and garden while performing songs and dances as ritual. Living in the *hö* is a type of male initiation rite.
- 5.10 Sleeping pads were originally used before hammocks were introduced due to outside contact (Coimbra et. al. 43).
- 5.11 Xavante society is a village chiefdom organized into exogamous moieties that are broken up into clans. Status is often based on lineage (Coimbra et. al. 74-75).
- 5.12 Attempts by the Brazilian government to trade with the Xavante (i.e. the Rice Project) have been made, but have been unsuccessful.
- 5.13 Social hierarchy depends primarily on the lineage of an individual (Coimbra et. al. 74-75).

## **6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)**

- 6 In Xavante villages such as Etéñitépa, rituals and ceremonies are highly institutionalized and take place daily. Such daily rituals include the men's evening council meeting (referred to as the *warā*) along with the singing and dancing of the young male members around the village. There are also seasonal ceremonies, like log races during the rainy season in addition to ceremonies during the dry season for hunting with fire. Initiation rites and weddings are also peppered into the yearly RCR displays (Coimbra et. al. 35).
- 6.1 Shamans in Xavante culture are regarded as healers and harmers. It is common for Xavante members to believe that sickness is not a result of natural causes, but of sorcery. Thus, shamans are called upon to communicate with spirits in order to help cure illnesses in people. However, a shaman could also be accused as a witch if a village experiences a large number of deaths in a given period of time. In order to inflict sickness and death on others, a shaman must go through a series of rituals using "magical substances" and powders. The role of the shaman in Xavante culture has been suppressed by missions in some villages more than others (Coimbra et. al. 141-143).
- 6.2 N/A
- 6.3 Initiation rites are especially important in Xavante culture. Young men reach manhood by first spending up to five years living in a *hö*, or a bachelor's hut. There, they learn how to hunt, fish, and garden. Young men are also introduced to having sex with female members. Rituals are performed regularly by the boys such as singing and dancing around the village. Boys finally become men (that is, eligible for marriage) during the ear piercing ceremony. Short white ear sticks are begun to be worn by the male as a sign of maturity and fertility. The piercing of the ear with the stick alludes to the insertion of the penis into the vagina during sex (Coimbra et. al. 29-31). A seasonal ritual includes log racing during the rainy season. Both men and women are included in this event. For this ritual, members are painted to identify with their age set. During the dry season, ceremonies are conducted with regards to hunting with fire (35). Concerning death ritual, the Xavante bury the belongings of the dead with the actual body, which eliminates the prospect of inheritance of those possessions (Garfield 73).
- 6.4 There is a three-day ceremony called the *wai'a*. During this ceremony, all initiated men are involved in trying to get in touch with spiritual powers. One of the purposes of the *wai'a* is to gain spiritual protection (Coimbra et. al. 36).
- 6.5 According to the Xavante, creation started with Aiwamdzú, the Xavante version of God. Aiwamdzú rose up from the earth, which was empty at the time, and created all that is to be seen (*Countries and their Cultures: The Xavante*). Legend holds that the Xavante came from where the sun rose and "crossed a wide river on the backs of river porpoises." Some accounts say that the people were fleeing from the white man. Then, a village was founded and the Xavante flourished, only to be interrupted once again by the white man. Every Xavante village has a different version of this creation myth. But the main theme that connects them all is the relation to contact with outsiders during the colonial period (Coimbra et. al. 49).
- 6.6 Log races are performed during the rainy season (Coimbra et. al. 35).
- 6.7 A greater emphasis is placed on male rituals and ceremonies in Xavante culture. Also, only males can conduct sorcery (Coimbra et. al. 143).
- 6.8 Missions have suppressed many Xavante ceremonies and rituals. This occurs in some villages more than others. Missionary influence on RCR has had little impact on such Xavante villages as Etéñitépa. But in others, rituals like the *wai'a* and the male initiation rituals are no longer performed (Coimbra et. al. 36).
- 6.9 Xavante ceremonial life has continued to press on even in the midst of outside influences, either by missions or the Brazilian government. Words that many Xavante live by are to "remain Xavante forever." This motto was coined by the chief of the Etéñitépa village, named Warodi (Coimbra et. al. 36).
- 6.10 N/A
- 6.11 N/A
- 6.12 N/A
- 6.13 Great importance in Xavante religion is placed on sorcery and magic. The Xavante also worship spirits as well as their creator Aiwamdzú (Coimbra et. al. 49, 143).

## 7. Adornment

- 7.1 For the most part, adults only paint their bodies for ceremonial occasions. Children, however, are almost always painted. For adults, body painting can be used to show identification with a particular clan. Adult paintings are also designed with respect to age groups, ceremonial parties, competing sport groups, weddings, funerals etc. To make body paint, the Xavante people mix charcoal with juice from the “Pau-de-leite” to form a black-blue color along with seeds from the Urucum for a red-white pigment. For preparation, a person first rubs his or her body with Babaçu oil. Then they proceed to mark the desired designs with paint (*Brasilien Portal*).
- 7.2 As a male initiation ritual, boys have their ears pierced to show that they have made the passage into adulthood. Short white ear sticks are worn by the male as a sign of maturity and readiness for marriage. The piercing of the ear with the stick alludes to the insertion of the penis into the vagina during sex (Coimbra et. al. 29-31).
- 7.3 Hair style, for both men and women, is traditionally “cut straight off with wide fringes (Berte-Stine 77).”
- 7.4 Tattoos are present within Xavante culture (*Brasilien Portal*).
- 7.5 As with many Brazilian tribes, the Xavante originally went virtually nude. Their naked bodies were adorned with ornaments, such as ear piercings and feathers, traditional hairdos, body paint, and tattoos. In particular, from the day male initiates enter the *hö*, they sported penis sheaths made from palmito bark. The penis sheaths covered the tip of the penis and would only be removed during sex or urination (*Countries and their Cultures: The Xavante*).
- 7.6 During the rainy season log races, both men and women are covered with body paint (Coimbra et. al. 35). During male initiation rituals, ear piercings are given to initiates as a symbol of the passage into manhood (31).
- 7.7 Records only describe males as being recipients of ear piercings as a part of initiation rites (Coimbra et. al. 31). However, both sexes use body paint during ceremonies (*Brasilien Portal*).
- 7.8 Missions have influenced Xavante by providing the community with clothes from modernized western society. This has led many Xavante to substitute their traditional style of dress for T-shirts, shorts, and skirts, among other types of clothing (*Countries and their Cultures: The Xavante*).
- 7.9 Adornment, much like Xavante ceremonial life, has remained present within the culture, despite outside forces (Coimbra et. al. 36). However, as a result of contact with the modernized world, many Xavante have adopted westernized clothing and haircuts (*Countries and their Cultures: The Xavante*).

## 8. Kinship systems

- 8.1 N/A
- 8.2 As a result of the practice of polygyny, the Xavante people are largely sororal. In other words, a young male can marry the eldest daughter of a household and then proceed to marry the younger daughters (if any) when they come of age. A levirate system is also practiced, in which two or more brothers can be married to the same daughter(s) of another household (Coimbra et. al.: 33).
- 8.3 The MB has the duty of naming his ZS. Names are not given at birth. Children receive their names after they reach a particular age (Da Matta 81). It is also common for children to have multiple fathers. For instance, the father’s brother could also be referred to as “father.” The Xavante kinship classification system contains traces of Crow-Omaha kinship typology (Rodrigues: 333). There is also an encouragement for the marriage of cross-cousins, in a Dravidian kinship structure (De Souza).

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