

1. Description

1.1 Name(s) of society, language, and language family:

Tacanec (Mame, Tacana Mam, Tilo, Western Mam, Tacaneco)

The most distinctive of all the Mam varieties

Mayan → Quichean-Mamean → Greater Mamean → Mamean → Tacanec (1.)

1.2 ISO code: MTZ (1.)

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude):

Tacana: 15.1325, -92.108611

Sibinal: 29.317458, -99.466435

Tectitan: 15.300769, -92.059167

Motozintla: 15.363786, -92.248068

Mazapa: 19.491632, -99.179199 (1.)

1.4 Brief history: People have inhabited Guatemala for 10,000 years and even some arrowheads have been found that might date back as far as 18,000 years ago. Early Tacanec were hunters and gatherers and lived indigenously until 1523 when the highlands were taken over by Hernan Cortes and his soldiers. Within a century, 90 percent of the Tacanec died from war, disease and slavery. In 1821, Mexico took over Guatemala, but in the 1870s they gained independence. Up until 1970, the only way to reach the Tacanec settlements was through footpaths, which helped protect them from attacks by European and Mestizo civilizations. Through the 1970s, roads were built to reach the villages. During the 1980s, a large group of Tacanec migrated to the United States. In recent years, the Tacanec have endured poverty and the government making more and more of their land communal. Many Tacanec seek employment as migrant laborers (2.)

1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors: The Tacanec have been heavily influenced by missionaries as 90 percent of the population is Catholic. Western society has also influenced the Tacanec who are relatively isolated due to geography. Most towns have only primary schools, so young people who wish to continue their education and have the economic resources to do so, travel to the department capital, which has increased the contact with outside cultures. There is currently land rights debates amongst the Tacanec with the government as more and more of their land has been turned over for communal use. The rarity of intermarriage between towns and isolation due to the rugged mountainous terrain are major contributing factor in the divergence of the Tacanec culture from many neighboring Mayan cultures (3.)

1.6 Ecology: At 5,000 above sea level, the Guatemala highlands are literally in the clouds. The climate at altitude is colder than that of the lowlands and generally has more rainfall. Because of the additional moisture suspended in the air as clouds, mist and fog, the forests are full of epiphytes or plants that grown on other plants. Some epiphytes have roots that hang down into the air to absorb water directly from the mist. Despite being in a mountainous region that is prone to earthquakes, there is an abundance of rich soil that may have been attractive to the first Tacanec settlers (4.)

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

There are a total of 20,000 Tacanec in Guatemala and 1,200 in Mexico as of 1991. The entirety of the Tacanec population lives in a 35 square kilometer area with a density of about 18 people per square kilometer. Village sizes could be a hundred people with a maximum of a couple hundred. Before the influence of conquistadors though, it was possible to differentiate between towns. Each had a separate and distinct identity whereby people from one town would regard people from another towns as strangers, even if they spoke the same language (3.)

2. Economy

- 2.1 Main carbohydrate staple: Corn (2.)
- 2.2 Main protein-lipid sources: In prehistoric times: deer. Today: chickens and cattle (5.)
- 2.3 Weapons: In prehistoric time, Tacanec presumably used bows and arrows and traps to hunt game (5.)
- 2.4 Food storage: The Tacanec do store some food, but long term preservation or foods with preservatives aren't a staple of the diet (3.)
- 2.5 Sexual division of production: Men work outside the house and in the distant cities. Men will travel to nearby other towns to sell surplus agricultural or craft products. Men are responsible for the public sphere of village life such as going to a regional market, shopping in stores, visiting a doctor or attending to legal matters. Women are the mainstay of family life and tradition, which is why, despite educational opportunities, most are monolingual. Women performed household functions, including craft production carried out in the compound (3.)
- 2.6 Land tenure: The Tacanec only allowed men to inherit land so in-marrying women had to leave upon death unless they remarried a lineage brother. Overtime though the acreage has decreased over time due to the influence of the government. There was likely terracing despite no irrigation and the use of natural fertilizer. The Tacanec are agriculturalists that raise corn, beans, potatoes, cabbage, wheat, chilies and squash (3.)
- 2.7 Ceramics: The highlands are not well endowed with useful mineral resources, but there are limited quantities of clay suitable for ceramics by waterways. Pottery is done on a small scale. Ceramics are often produced by women, who grind the clay, add water and fashion the vessel forms with their hands and a piece of leather or cloth. They smooth the pots after drying with a flat stone or split cane. No paint or slip is added (5.)
- 2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns: Not determined.
- 2.9 Food taboos: While it is not a literal food taboo, Tacanec men view their peers who do not farm with disapproval (3.)
- 2.10 Canoes/watercraft: There are no distinctive rivers in which to use canoes or watercrafts (4.)

3. Anthropometry

3.1 Mean adult height: 5 feet, 2 inches for men and 4 feet, 4 inches for women (6.)

3.2 Mean adult weight: 110 pounds for men, 85 pounds for women (6.)

4. Life History, mating, marriage

4.1 Age at menarche (f): Menarche occurred on average at an age of 12.5 years old (9.)

4.2 Age at first birth (m and f): Women were considered capable of giving birth during the middle of their teenage years (10.)

4.3 Completed family size (m and f): The average family size was roughly five to six people (10.)

4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f): The inter-birth interval was likely four years and the average women will produce 3.5 children in her lifetime (10.)

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f): First marriages among the Tacanec would occur during mid to late teenage years. Boys would have to become men by completing a rite of passage ceremony though before being marriage eligible (10.)

- 4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce: Divorce did occur. Divorce among other social wrongs would bring together clans members for an informal court, in which the facts of the case would be heard, a consensus judgment would be made and sanctions would be applied (5.)
- 4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously: Polygynous marriage was permissible until the integration of Catholicism. After that, the taking of multiple wives would have been grounds for expulsion from the church (5.)
- 4.8 Bride purchase: A father's claim over his daughter included among other things the right to choose her spouse, set her bride price, require labor of the son-in-law, and retrieve the daughter if the son-in-law did not live up to his obligations (5.)
- 4.9 Inheritance patterns: Kinship largely controlled its organization, the patrilineal principle of descent giving the directing role to the men. Descent is strictly in the agnatic line and even in-marrying women fail to obtain membership to the group (5.)
- 4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict: Not determined
- 4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals: Not determined
- 4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy): The Tacanec are endogamous, which is reflected in their pre-conquistador villages. Town endogamy led to different styles of dress, and craft and agricultural specialization that helped establish and maintain the identity of the town (3.)
- 4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these "other fathers" recognized? The Tacanec do not recognize partial paternity nor the idea of other fathers contributing to the incremental birth of an offspring (3.)
- 4.14 What is the belief of the mother's role in procreation exactly? Women are seen as the caretaker and a traditional maternal figure for child. Women are responsible for the development of offspring throughout childhood (3.)
- 4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process: No (3.)
- 4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape: While the rate of sexual coercion is unknown, there are multiple documentations of Spaniards raping local women (5.)
- 4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin): Bilateral cross-cousin marriage was preferred (12.)
- 4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms? Before the Spanish, many couples lived in union outside matrimony (5.)
- 4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring: Not determined
- 4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children? The father will likely take care of the children though it is largely considered the mother's responsibility to raise offspring through childhood (5.)
- 4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females: Roughly 40 percent of females are considered to be sexually active among the Tacanec. In a society of 21,200 people, this equates to a sex ratio of 2.5, assuming an even distribution of the sexes (3.)
- 4.22 Evidence for couvades: No (3.)

- 4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers: The Tacanec don't believe in multiple fathers combining to form a single child so there is no distinction between potential father's (2.)
- 4.24 Kin avoidance and respect? Not determined
- 4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations: The Tacanec use a patrilineal form of descent so all rights and associations given to offspring are based on the lineage of the father (12.)
- 4.26 Incest avoidance rules: Incest was considered a social wrong by the Tacanec and would bring together the informal trial by clan (5.)
- 4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony? Due to the influence of the Spanish, the Tacanec have a formal marriage ceremony (5.)
- 4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name? Not determined
- 4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? Marriage was preferred to be within the community in order to keep the individual village identity intact (3.)
- 4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)? Yes. Traditionally, lineage authorities controlled the performances of customary rituals, marriage arrangements (including care for lineage orphans), and most other problems affecting the normal course of rural social life (5.)
- 4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who: While there are no laws against intermarriage, rigid customary norms prevented it from occurring with much frequency (5.)

Warfare/homicide

- 4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare: Effectively zero (3.)
- 4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death: Violence was incredibly limited among the Tacanec. In more modern times, a violent outburst would likely have been spurred by the continuously tumultuous relationships with the Spanish over land usage (3.)
- 4.16 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies: While there are over 300 townships in Guatemala, the Tacanec's external relations were limited because of the natural boundary created by the mountains. Contact with outsiders came through what little trade there was or in modern times, when Tacanec go to other towns to do business (3.)
- 4.17 Cannibalism? No (3.)

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

- 5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size: The normal village size with range from a hundred Tacanec up to a couple hundred (3.)
- 5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality): The Tacanec don't move based on seasonal conditions. Being agriculturalists they are committed to growing crops, which requires long-term maintenance. Also, the abundance of resources present in the natural environment makes moving less feasible (3.)
- 5.3 Political system: There was some authority hierarchy that include chiefs, then officials, and then individual family heads who exercised patriarchal authority over the members of the family. The extent of power that each position had is not clear (5.)

5.4 Post-marital residence: Not determined

5.5 Territoriality: Because the Tacanec lived in relative isolation for the entire existence until recently, there was no need for strict boundaries. Lands were likely distinguished by geographic demarcations such as valleys and plateaus and overlapping between areas was highly probable (5.)

5.6 Social interaction divisions? There is a strong sexual division of labor, which impacts the social interactions as well. Men are often the ones going to the market and school, and have the opportunity to socialize more than the women who are often designated to the home. There is also great reverence for the elderly (5.)

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships: There is joking about the accents of other people from neighboring towns because the Mam language branch is so distinctive. Certain people, like the Colotenango are considered more assuming than others (3.)

5.8 Village and house organization: Not determined

5.9 Specialized village structures: There is no evidence of specialized housing to divide people based on gender (3.)

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere? Tacanec would either sleep on the ground or in hammocks. The hammocks are not part of traditional culture, but were introduced prior to the Spanish conquest (5.)

5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc: The traditional descent groups, which are clans and lineages, remain the most important social units. Some of the largest clans had more than 50 families and over 200 members although some may have been associated with more than one group (5.)

5.12 Trade: Because of the traditional patterns of trade and commerce by which certain towns are linked to other towns, either as sources of certain specialized craft or agricultural items or as outlets for the good produced locally, people have had limited contact with only a few other towns in the area and contact with distant towns is rare (3.)

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies? There was some authoritative structure that included chiefs, officials and lineage heads at the bottom. The extent of stratification is difficult to determine, but it became increasingly complex with the take over of the Spanish. For the most part, before colonizers, the distribution of goods must have been roughly equal from family to family, with some variation related to ease of access to natural resources. This even distribution reflects a more egalitarian society (5.)

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion

6.0 Time allocation to RCR: The Tacanec have a strong sense of service to the community that includes the performance of rituals deemed necessary for the community's welfare. The rituals and explanations within the worldview form a ritual matrix (11.)

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine): Though revered, few shamans practiced full time and had to subsist through farming like many other Tacanec. The position was considered to be pre-determined. Occasionally, they would be given food and leather sandals. Shamans were responsible for using witchcraft and folk medicine replete with cures and preventatives. Medicinal practices centered around herbal remedies. The shamans were also responsible for dealing with the evil forces and enemies' supernatural attacks. (5.)

- 6.2 Stimulants: The Tacanec were known for excessive drinking during ceremonies, but outside of alcoholic beverages, was the likely use of tobacco and other stimulants that would serve to amplify the affects of the performances. (5.)
- 6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal): When a child was born, there was a ceremonial washing that would wash away the evils. There is also evidence of rites of passage ceremonies for boys who are transitioning to becoming men. As for death, it was seen as a consequence of refusing to call the services of shaman (11.)
- 6.4 Other rituals: There is documentation of unsightly dances, excessive ritual drinking and traditional marimba music despite the fact that Tacanec have a traditional Catholic Holy Week. There is also a burning altar ritual in which a native shaman uses an altar to burn incense. The spot of the burning was considered sacred and able to unite people. In general, rituals that were carried out under the direction of the clans and lineages within the rural canton had the weakest church ties (5.)
- 6.5 Myths (Creation): The traditional belief is that gods first made animals, including birds and deer. The animals were commanded to speak by the gods, but failed to do this. They were thusly condemned to live in the forests where they were to be hunted as food for humans. The maker gods continued experimenting with human figures of different materials such as mud and wood. On the fourth attempt, the maker gods successfully made humans out of corn and water. These human beings are the Mayan ancestors. Earth and sky exist for the praise and nurturance of the gods, but this praise and nurturance is funneled through human beings in the form of the praise and food offered to the gods during the rituals (11.)
- 6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games): While the Tacanec had musical inclinations, seen particularly at ceremonies; their use of art was more predominant. Temples were often lined with engravings people and gods. There were also numerous figurines and statues. In modern times, there is evidence of guitars, drums and flutes during ceremonies (7.)
- 6.7 Sex differences in RCR: Men perform and lead all of the rituals and ceremonies. In church, women are designated to sit on the ground (11.)
- 6.8 Missionary effect: The primary religion among the Tacanec is Catholic with a 90 percent adherence rate. The Evangelicals only make up between .1 and 2 percent of the population. The symbols of Catholicism parallel Tacanec beliefs as the Tacanec used them and adapted them in their own way. For example, the Tacanec will call on Catholic saints as well as their own gods (2.)
- 6.9 RCR revival: There is no evidence of a religious revival. The gradual transition towards modernization comes at the cost of traditional religion (3.)
- 6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs: The Tacanec hope that after death one returns so as not to appear dead. Simply put, death is a journey, or a change of clothes, because the spirit never dies (11.)
- 6.11 Taboo of naming dead people? Not determined.
- 6.12 Is there teknonymy? No (3.)
- 6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.) - Ritual and religion are a complex synthesis of Catholic and traditional beliefs that functions to create and maintain a separate social identity for the Tacanec people. For instance, there is marked praise for the earth as well as ancestor even though neither is part of traditional Catholicism. There is also evidence of material rituality offered to deities. This is a byproduct of the church's lenient attitude towards fulfillment of religious obligations (3.)

7. Adornment

- 7.1 Body paint: The use of body paint is not seen in everyday Tacanec life. If used, it would have been for ceremonial purposes (8.)
- 7.2 Piercings: The Maya had some facial piercings, but mainly the earlobes. If there were tongue or nose piercings, the purpose was religious or a sign of social class respectively (8.)
- 7.3 Haircut: Tacanec hair black and worn at a traditional length: shorter for men and longer for women. Women often wrapped their hair in colored shawls or scarfs (8.)
- 7.4 Scarification: There was likely some scarification associated with Tacanec religion. Cutting would be the most common practice were precision cuts into the skin with a scalpel-esque tool would be made to create a predesigned pattern or shape (5.)
- 7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.): Outside of wearing colorfully embroidered clothing, the Tacanec women would wear multiple necklaces adorned with beads, feathers, flowers or metals. Women were also known to wear lace and wear gaudy earrings (8.)
- 7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment: Beyond the traditional garb of Catholicism, it was not uncommon for Tacanec to dress up for ceremonies. One might wear elaborate clothing and a mask in order to portray a certain figure while the attire of the shaman appears relatively simple (11.)
- 7.7 Sex differences in adornment: Men traditional wore loincloths or woolen aprons and plaid pants of thick wool. The Spanish changed the Tacanec attire to be more formal with standard pants and jackets. Women's dress was less impacted as many continued to wear detailed skirts with headbands, shawls and wraps. Both men and women started to use shoes more often (5.)
- 7.8 Missionary effect: Not only do more Tacanec learn Spanish, but also the once distinct communal dress has faded to Western culture. Among girls that go to school, there is an evident exchanging of clothing, but it is the men that wear traditional dress less often. It is not uncommon to see a Tacanec woman wearing a blouse one day, a skirt another and high heels the next (3.)
- 7.9 Cultural revival in adornment: Despite the transference of Western culture through dress, women still retain at least one piece of traditional clothing in their outfits (3.)

8. Kinship systems

- 8.1 Sibling classification system: Father's brother's children and mother's sister's children are considered to be brothers and sisters of EGO. Father's sister's children and mother's brother's children are given their own separate term (12.)
- 8.2 Sororate, levirate: Neither system is prevalent amongst the Tacanec (5.)
- 8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.): The Tacanec use the Omaha kinship system, which utilizes patrilineal descent groups. This means that father and father's brother get a singular term and mother and mother's sister get a singular term. Father's sister and mother's brother get separate terms and their children aren't considered to be brothers and sisters (12.)

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