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Cultures and Peoples of the Amazon

1. Description

- 1.1 Name of society, language, and language family: Araona aka Cavina, Tacanan: Located in Bolivia
- 1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com): aro
- 1.3 Location (latitude/longitude): The Araona currently live in a territorial area between the rivers Manupare and Manurimi, delimited approximately by the parallels 12° and 13° South latitude and by the meridians 68° and 67° West longitude (1) in Bolivia
- 1.4 Brief history: The modern-day Araona community is descended from one Araona family and one Cavina family, the members of which escaped from white exploiters and a life of slavery at the beginning of the 20th century. (2)
- 1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors: 65% are Christians (3). Missionaries, rubber tappers and the slave trade have devastated this population. The Araona people we see today are descended from those who escaped captors and hid away. (1) In the past, the Tacana Indians seem to have been influenced by their powerful Andean neighbors. (5)
- 1.6 Ecology: The humid tropical habitat of the Araonas presents an elevated biodiversity, as much vegetal as animal. However, this is being threatened by the irrational exploitation of wood, by extraction companies from Santa Cruz, Pando and Riberalta, and of Brazil nuts, by colonists coming from Riberalta and Pando. (1)
- 1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density; There is only one population of the Araona and they number around 100 people who speak the language (4). They construct their houses roughly 15 minutes apart from one another. Each house is separated by Jungle, and families live separately. There is the main permanent house, then there are scattered buildings used for fishing and hunting.

2. Economy

- 2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s): collection of almonds, majos, motacu and mainly brazil nuts; and agriculture of yuca, banana, corn, guineo and rice are for the most part dedicated to internal consumption.
- 2.2 Main protein-lipid sources: Monkey, large birds, fish, and other prey caught in the wild.
- 2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns? Traditional weapons are limited to the bow and arrow, although modern weaponry has been introduced to them (4).
- 2.4 Food storage: Most food is harvested and prepared same day. Foraging items like Brazil nuts are stored in baskets. Meat is prepared in a "jerky" fashion to keep from spoiling. (5)
- 2.5 Sexual division of production: There is no specialization at all. Men and women are doing the same things. "Normally all the members of the Araona community know how to do everything, but given this, there are persons more able than others at a specific task" (1)
- 2.6 Land tenure: Slash and burn agriculture
- 2.7 Ceramics: Pottery and the art of weaving are developed in the Araona people. (5)
- 2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns: People within the community share with one another and do "favors" and expect the same to be returned. "The Araona hold to the idea that riches accumulated through production or other manner are not kept, but on the contrary are circulated among the families, generating an implicit link of reciprocity." (1)
- 2.9 Food taboos: None
- 2.10 Canoes/watercraft? None

3. Anthropometry

- 3.1 Mean adult height (m and f): male 163 to 165 centimeters (5)
- 3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f): Unknown

4. Life History, mating, marriage

- 4.1 Age at menarche (f): 12-14
- 4.2 Age at first birth (m and f): 16-19
- 4.3 Completed family size (m and f): Unknown
- 4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f): Unknown
- 4.5 Age first marriage (m and f): 16
- 4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce: Unknown, But since marriage does not have a mythical-religious character, the practise of divorce is common. When the union is incompatible or infidelity is present on the part of the woman, the Araona opt to separate with the same ease with which they united, each one following their own life freely. If they have children, the **paternal grandparents** are then responsible for them (1)
- 4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously: Polygamy is practiced by the Araona; but due to the difficulty of keeping many women and faced with the small number of women, currently only cases of bigamy are known. When the group was more numerous and a more extensive social organization existed it is possible that polygamy was more common. Today to have more than one wife means that the man must produce exceedingly and of a sustained form, and given the lack of an idea of accumulation of riches, capable of generating capital as to secure an "easy" future life would be difficult. (1)

- 4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?: None
- 4.9 Inheritance patterns: When a man and a woman are married, they become self sufficient and make everything they own. When a person dies, they are buried where they often slept, and with their personal belongings.
- 4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict: From the moment of birth to almost six years of age, the care and education of the child is the job of the mother. The Araona woman constantly takes the child with her in a carry-blanket called an "ona". She meets all the needs of the child, and she nurses him/her in any situation. (1)
- 4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:
In Araona culture, homosexual practices have not been identified, not among women nor among men. It is possible that in previous times there existed manifestations of celibacy among the shamans and the araona priests dedicated to religious cult.
- 4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy): The ideal marriage is between members of distinct clans; but this is currently difficult given the scarcity of women in the Cabiña clan. The inter-clan exogamy, favors the Cabiña men that can choose more easily from the marrying youth of the Araona clan; The Araona men, given the small number of Cabiña women, often have to break the rule and marry a women of their same clan.
- 4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these "other fathers" recognized?
It is unknown what exactly they believe about contraception, but when the woman's menstrual flow stops, the family knows to expect a child
- 4.14 What is the belief of the mother's role in procreation exactly? (e.g., "receptacle in which fetus grows") See 4.13
- 4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)? Unknown / See 4.13
- 4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape: Unknown
- 4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin): Unknown
- 4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms? Unknown
- 4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring: Unknown
- 4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children? The [maternal grandparents](#)
- 4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females:
Exact ratio is unknown, but there is a great shortage of females
- 4.22 Evidence for couvades: The women recognize that they expect a family when their menstrual flow stops. From this point on the future mother enters a time of restrictions and prohibitions, for example to not ingest certain foods that are considered taboo. Sexual relations between the couple are stopped since continuation could result in negative consequences for the child in the process of gestation.
- 4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older): Unknown
- 4.24 Kin avoidance and respect? Unknown
- 4.24 Joking relationships? Unknown
- 4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations: Unknown
- 4.26 Incest avoidance rules:
Marriage between brothers and sisters is permitted, though not institutionalized, and a few isolated cases are known. The practice of incest is prohibited. The scarcity of women in the group occasions grave social and organizational problems
- 4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony? No, there are no religious aspects associated with marriage. A man and a woman get together for sheer convenience and they part the same way in instances of divorce. If there are children, they go to the grandparents.
- 4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name?
The children receive a name at two or three years of age. There does not exist any ceremony or party related to the event. The names given to Araonas almost always come from ancestors or important people of the culture. There are exceptional cases of names taken from natural phenomenon, for example: Beni (wind) and Badi (moon). Almost all carry a nickname which they are called with greater frequency.
- 4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?) Outside the community
- 4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)? Marriages are not arranged
- 4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:
It is custom for the men to take women from each other or dispute their possession with force.

Warfare/homicide:

The Araona are accustomed to living in peace. They build their houses about 15 minutes walk apart from each other making the "settlement" quite disperse. The surviving Araona are descendents who fled from slavery-like conditions imposed by rubber tappers.

There is a very small population of the Araona left, so making warfare or killing undesirable.

- 4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare: Unknown
- 4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death: Unknown
- 4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing: Unknown
- 4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations): Unknown
- 4.18 Cannibalism? No Evidence

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

- 5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size: Unknown
- 5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality): Stationary

5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes):

The Araona do not endorse the idea of a dominant chief or leader that decides and executes absolute power over the community. The community however recognizes some members of the group by nature of charisma or strength, or some special economic activity or ethical and religious character. The better hunters, the shamans, the imitators of animals, mainly those that selflessly share things are natural leaders in the community. Housing of some of these "leaders", through kindness and recognition may result in the community constructing their house. The elders, even though not in an institutionalized form, exercise a large influence over decisions related to the well being of the community.

5.4 Post marital residence: A married couple find a vacant spot out in the jungle and build their house. They are at this point economically independent.

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense): None

5.6 Social interaction divisions? (age and sex): One can only identify differences in relation to sex, when women or men participate in gender specific roles or activity. Women participate in the culture with domestic activities, while men have a greater social-political activity. The permission of the youth in the rituals to their gods is an issue determined by the elders and the shaman.

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships: Unknown

5.8 Village and house organization: The "settlement" is very open with houses separated by about 15 minutes. Each family has a spot out in the jungle and they are separated.

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses):

The first is the permanent house, where the family spends most of its time; another is the occasional construction of shelters for hunting and fishing in places that offer the possibility of finding meat; another curious house made by the Araona is the "nahuiltae" a small shelter designated for women. Finally there is the "babatae" or temple for the Araona gods that is constructed with great care using special materials such as the jatata leaf.

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere? Unknown

5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc: The Araona indigenous group is organized into two clans: Cabiña and Araona. This organization in clans is in practice, almost exclusively along matrimonial lines and the geographical residence of their members. The kinship relationships become pertinent, to the clan, in defining an extended family through linkages. The word "doemetsecana" refers to all family relevance and has meaning with a globalizing character - "those whom are with me".

5.12 Trade: Unknown

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?

The men who are best at hunting, fishing, and making bows and arrows are the most respected next to the elders.

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6 Time allocation to RCR: Unknown

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine): There is a general knowledge of medicine among the elder women.

Elder men dedicate most of their time to religious ceremony and ritual.

6.2 Stimulants: When a stranger arrives in the village, the men start to chew leaves, which they blow in the face of the visitor. This has the goal of removing the evil spirits that the visitor could bring.

6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal): There are sacred places and objects dedicated to the rituals that celebrate the Gods. The Babatae is a temple where only the older men enter. There they dance and recite religious canticles, that in some instances have therapeutic functions. There are also rites that are carried out in the jungle, at locations where the manifestation of a spirit has been seen. Normally the carriers of these jichis are large trees, since it is deduced that the size is related with magical aspects. One of the rituals practiced is that of purification.

6.4 Other rituals: There are a couple rituals associated with death, but other rituals are not named.

6.5 Myths (Creation): Following Araona mythology, Baba Bizo and Baba Jote created the male and the female from pieces of tree branches that fell in a strong wind, converting the men first and the women last. Of the leaves that were scattered by this wind came the birds.

The elk /obelisk was created from mud and the resin of the siringa plant. The peccary was made from the vegetal sap (tadada and huini selena), the monkeys, turkeys and tucans were created from rattans and the reptiles were made from blood. The creator of all the animals was Baba Jote.

The creation of the agoutis and squirrels is attributed to a small being called Nizo. These animals maintain a symbiotic relationship with certain venomous reptiles.

Araona religion has many gods, in accordance with their material and existential needs. They consider all of life to be regulated by the action and presence of the divinities, both good and bad.

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games): Flutes made of bone. The men played a game where they wore a bark belt around their stomachs and bounced a ball off of their stomachs from one player to the next. (5)

6.7 Sex differences in RCR:

Women are prohibited participation in Araona religious practices, cannot know the names of their gods, nor participate in the ceremonies dedicated to them. (1) However they were allowed to play the bone flute at ceremonial occasions. (5)

6.8 Missionary effect: According to the Joshua Project, 65% have become evangelical Christians. (3)

6.9 RCR revival: Unknown

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs: Following Araona beliefs the spirits of the dead wander without direction throughout the forest, especially near places where the deceased was accustomed to stopping. This spirit takes revenge on its enemies in these habitual places. The spirit takes revenge on the enemies that it had in life, and therefore for a great time after a death, the Araonas take care not to go far from the village for fear of this curse. Until a few years ago the Araona annually carried out in the Babatae, a religious ritual dedicated to the death and to their god "Baba Sicuasi", to appease its angers and avoid misfortune. They would dance and offer fresh food to the spirits and the gods. (1)

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people? No, Names are often given after ancestors

6.12 Is there teknonymy? Unknown

6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.)

The Araona's religion is strongly based on deism. "Araona religion has many gods, in accordance with their material and existential needs. They consider all of life to be regulated by the action and presence of the divinities, both good and bad." (1)

7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint: Unknown

7.2 Piercings: Unknown

7.3 Haircut: Men's hair ranges from bald to bearded and everything in between. Women have long, straight black hair. (5)

7.4 Scarification: Unknown

7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.): The Araona women wore little aprons woven from the bark of a tree called "biboci" and sometimes woven from cotton. The toucan feathers are kept in cane tubes. The Araona wear necklaces made of pierced wild boar teeth. Rows of seeds are also used.

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment: Toucan headdresses

7.7 Sex differences in adornment: Women wear necklaces, trinkets, and bracelets between the calf and the knee

7.8 Missionary effect: 65% are now evangelical Christian

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment: Unknown

8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system: Unknown.

8.2 Sororate, levirate: Unknown

8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.):

The suffix "cata" is added to particularize the specificity of kinship. The intensity of the kinship relationships are shown with "esi" (greater) or "lipi" (less). There exists some stratification based on sex and age.

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

Numbered references

1. <http://www.blueiceonline.com/blueweb/araonapeeps/araona1.html>
2. http://www10.gencat.cat/pres_casa_llengues/AppJava/frontend/llengues_detall.jsp?id=699&idioma=5
3. <http://www.joshuaproject.net/people-profile.php?peo3=10403&rog3=BL>
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