

1. Description

1.1 Name of society, language, and language family:

Tsáchila Indians (Tsachila, Tsafiki, Tsafiqui), Barbacoan language family.

1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com): ISO 693-3

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude): Located near the Southeast Pinchincha Province, along the Chihuepe, Baba, Tahuazo and Poste Rivers. (Latitude 0°, Longitude 80°W)

1.4 Brief history:

The Tsáchila are a tribe living in the canton of Santo Domingo in the Pichincha province of Ecuador. The name Tsáchila means “true people”, but the Spanish referred to them as “Colorado” which means “red”, a name chosen because the men of the tribe shave their hair off at the sides with the remaining hair sculpted with the use of a mixture of grease and red achiote seeds into a pointed peak cap-like shape (*The Unique Tsáchila Tribe of Ecuador*).

The first reference to an indigenous group called the Colorados places them in a Jesuit settlement in 1590 in Angamarca La Vieja, at 2,000 meters above sea level (Navas del Pozo 1990), where they might have lived well into the 18th Century. Pedro Vicente Maldonado (1950), Coleti (1771), Alcedo (1786) and Hervás (1880) refer to two groups of Colorados, one in Santo Domingo and one in Angamarca. An indigenous revolt in the latter, after Jesuit missions had left, would have seen them flee deep into the jungle and mix themselves with northern Yumbos, resulting in the current ethnic group of Tsachila of Santo Domingo, the name of a place where Dominican missions were established (*The Tsachila Indigenous People*).

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

Colorado religion has undergone three major influences: traditional, Highland Quechua, and Catholic. Catholicism has become the most visible influence (the Colorado observe Catholic ritual and ceremony), but traditional beliefs concerning the supernatural and the creation myth endure. Shamans cure by removing the effects of witchcraft (*Countries and Their Cultures*).

1.6 Ecology:

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

It is believed that the Tsáchila numbered around 20,000 as late as the 18th century and were spread over a large area. Due to disease and the influx of foreign settlers, the Tsáchila population has been drastically reduced, with only an estimated 2,000 Tsáchila remaining in eight small reservations (*The Unique Tsáchila Tribe of Ecuador*).

2. Economy:

Economy was based on hunting, river fishing, fruit picking and itinerant farming, and they developed an intense commercial activity with highland or coastal groups, being able to set out on commercial expeditions to remote oriental parts, probably to exchange medicinal herbs (*The Tsachila Indigenous People*).

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):

The banana is the principal food plant, several of which are cultivated. However the banana is not indigenous. Most esteemed by the Tsáchila is a plaintain known by the Spaniard as *platano-macho*. Prepared, they are stripped of their skin, half boiled, mashed with peppers and served with various meats. This fruit is seldom eaten raw (1, pg33).

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:

Flesh foods include deer (*mana*), monkey (*urungu*), and members of the rodent genre—principally the agouti (*curu*) and the huanta (*wale*)—comes a greater part of the supply. Fish include the boca chupa (*watsa*) and the boca chucu (*buncu*) of the Spaniard, and these, together with large water turtles (*tsara-umpi*), giant snails (*tonke*), and oysters (*katanterkran*) are all part of the Tsáchilas omnivorous diet. The large palm weevil (*Rhyncho-phorus palmarum*) is regularly eaten and considered a delicacy (1, pg32).

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?:

Blowguns with poison tipped darts. The device was 6 feet long with a cupped mouth piece. Tsáchilas are not skilled huntsmen and the blowgun was inferior to other tribes of Amazonia in craftsmanship. Also, the machete was an available weapon of more recent times along with primitive muzzle loading shotgun (1, pg39).

2.4 Food storage:

2.5 Sexual division of production:

Women make small cooking pots (*neda*) and small drinking cups (*bole*) from clay. These clay items are made throughout the year by almost all young women and girls (1, pg32).

Land is prepared for agriculture, and planted, by the men. Cultivation, harvest, and transport of the crops are equally shared workloads between men and women (1, pg36)

Men and women share the labor involved in the cultivation, harvest, and transportation of products to market. Men clear fields, hunt, fish, and weave nets; women cook, care for the children and domestic animals, and weave cotton goods. (*Countries and Their Cultures*)

Craftwork (i.e. basketwork and the ancient art of pottery to make clay utensils) is mainly but not exclusively performed by women, as well as by a few men who also elaborate baskets and fishing nets. Only the textile craftwork, that is, the weaving of traditional clothing (manpe tsanpa for men, tunan for women), is a specifically female task, and mythology attributes its origin to the Mother of the Stars (Tsabo Ayan) (*The Tsachila Indigenous People*).

2.6 Land tenure:

A slash and burn procedure is used. The land is planted at the beginning of the rainy season (1, pg34). Land property is communal (*The Tsachila Indigenous People*).

2.7 Ceramics:

Women make small cooking pots (*neda*) and small drinking cups (*bole*) from clay. These clay items are made throughout the year by almost all young women and girls (1, pg32).

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:

2.9 Food taboos:

2.10 Canoes/watercraft?

Travel is largely by foot and canoe transportation has not been at all developed (1, pg18).

3. Anthropometry

The Colorado's are solidly built. The torso of the male tends to be slim and less thick than that of a female, and the legs are disproportionally highly developed. The feet are broad with widely spread toes. They are believed to have brachycephaly, flat head syndrome. The nose is well developed with seemingly normal nostrils, although no index has been made. The ears are proportionate to the head. (1, pg18)

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f):

The Tsáchilas are of middle height of 160-165 cm. (1, pg18)

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):

4. Life History, mating, marriage

According to various sources, the Tsáchilas have been reported as very secretive to matters pertaining to women, courtship, and marriage. Information on the subject is limited due to the secretive nature of the culture regarding the matter.

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):

When a boy reaches 10 to 12 years of age, his nose is pierced in a ritual by a shaman, and he then begins to paint his body in an adult fashion. Boys marry sometime after puberty, but girls marry almost immediately thereafter (*Countries and Their Cultures*).

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce:

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously:

Oral traditions as well as mythology indicate that polygyny formerly existed, probably as a privilege for chiefs (miya) and shamans (pone). However, this type of organization was first severely punished by missionaries who maintained sporadic contact with the Colorado people since the beginning of colonization, and then subsequently was forbidden by cultural norms (*The Tsachila Indigenous People*).

4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?:

In the past, marital unions were decided by the parents of a very young man, and just before the union the young man was required to give presents, mainly meat, to the girl's family. Once the engagement was accepted, the girl had to start making her "contradon" (local type of dowry), in this case a "manpe tsanpa" (traditional male skirt) and other ornamental clothing (*The Tsachila Indigenous People*).

4.9 Inheritance patterns:

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):

Some authors described communal endogamy; there is a significant number of inter-communal weddings (*The Tsachila Indigenous People*).

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")

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)

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

4.26 Incest avoidance rules

4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?

A marriage ceremony, confirmed by the Shaman, is then celebrated by the entire village while drinking fermented sugar-cane juice (1, pg42).

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

The male Tsáchila are distinguished by two names, one given at birth by their parents; usually the name of an animal. Traditionally, no information was provided. Modernly, the second name is given by Dominican padres at the time of baptism. Women have two names, however in the time of the authors 2 year study a woman was never addressed by a formal name (1, pg44)

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)?

Marriages must be given consent by the father of the bride. Leading up to consent, the potential husband helps the potential father in law hunt, work, and various tasks (1, pg40). In the past, marital unions were decided by the parents of a very young man, and just before the union the young man was required to give presents, mainly meat, to the girl's family (*The Tsachila Indigenous People*).

4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:

Warfare/homicide

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):

The fact that Tsáchilas have few enemies may explain why they find no necessity for protective weapons and readiness for attack is of little worry (1, pg36).

4.18 Cannibalism?

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):

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

There is no political system. Authority is divided among three Shamans (1, pg40)

5.4 Post marital residence:

The new wife goes to live with the new husband and his family (1,pg40).

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex):

Women and men eat separately. The eldest woman serves stew from a clay bowl (1, pg34).

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:

5.8 Village and house organization:

The dwellings of the Tsáchilas are placed in the deep forest, preferably on a rising knoll of ground near a stream of water. Two houses are never within sight of each other, although clusters are built within a 2 mile radius. The tendency is to maintain long intervals between houses, with 4 to 6 dwellings within 300 yards of each other. The houses (*yaa*) consist of two sections, a large unwallled area in which visitors are received, and an enclosed portion where the cooking is done and members of the family sleep. The houses are rectangular and vary depending the size of the family. The average is 30 x 15 feet and ration of length to width remains constant. The thatch roves are constructed of palm and under normal conditions need not be changed but every 5 to 10 years. The enclosed part of the house is divided into a men's quarters and women's quarters, which is implied more so than actual. No distinct division pertaining to gender and living quarters seems to exist (1, pg30).

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses):

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?

The whole bed, which does not stand more than 10 inches from the ground, is very light and comparatively soft. The same toga-like material used for inclement or cool weather is used as sheeting at night (1, pg31).

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

5.12 Trade:

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6 Time allocation to RCR:

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):

Any rule that may exist is divided among three Shamans in various districts of the tribal territory. These shamans engage in auguries, cure the sick, and even settle disputes when they arise. All are wealthy, in terms of Indian riches, and are considered as great sorcerers among Indians and whites (1, pg40).

6.2 Stimulants:

Nepe, which is identical to *ayahuasca* used by the tribes east of the Andes, is a narcotic vine used by the Tsáchilas (1, pg36).

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

The nose piercing rite occurs when a boy has reached an age of 10 or 12 years. In preparation, he paints himself head to toe with achiote, paints black lines on his face, drinks considerable amounts of a fermented drink *makachisa*, and in some cases drinks the narcotic *nepe (ayahuasca)*. The piercing may be performed by one of the Shamans or the elder of the boys house. The puncture is made with a thorn of the Chonta Palm. The boy is to prove his manhood by not uttering a sound. There appear to be no puberty rituals for females (1, pg43).

6.4 Other rituals:

The red body dye is considered a charm against witch-craft, and in particular, protection from falling branches created as a Shaman blows across magical stones (1, pg26). The chonta palm is regarded by Shamans as having ritualistic and magical powers due to the vines on its trunk (1, pg35).

6.5 Myths (Creation):

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):

In an effort to stay awake on the first night after the death of a relative, the corpse is encircled and a ball is thrown in a criss-cross fashion until someone drops the ball. The Indian who drops the ball must offer drinks to the others. This is referred to as Ceremonial Playing (1, pg55)

6.7 Sex differences in RCR:

6.8 Missionary effect:

6.9 RCR revival:

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:

On the first night after death, the relatives are required to stay awake to watch over the corpse. If any member falls asleep, evil and sickness will fall on the remaining relatives. The corpse is then buried in the forest with a large hollow chonta palm serving as a coffin. A string is tied to the finger of the corpse before burial and attached to the deceased's hut. When the cord rots and is broke, the soul of the deceased is said to have left the grave and grieving is over (1, pg54).

Dead Tsáchilas will become evil spirits (*jukang*) if they do not find rest in the grave. This causes them to wander about in revenge bringing death and sickness. Spirits presumably haunt the forest and move about in the dark. Hence, they have a strong fear of the dark. Also, it is believed *jukang* have connection with natural disasters, hurricanes, storms, beasts, and venomous reptiles. When a death takes place, the home and plantations of the deceased are abandoned. It is believed that the disease-and-death-demon continues to look for victims among the surviving family (1, pg53).

A deceased Colorado individual is dressed in his or her best clothing and is waked for a day by relatives, who weep, drink, and play special games in order to remain awake and to repel spirits that cause disease. The corpse is buried underneath the floor of the house, with a string around its neck connected to the roof to aid the soul in leaving. After the burial, the house is abandoned (*Countries and Their Cultures*).

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?

6.12 Is there teknonymy?

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

Tsáchilas religion is Ancestor worship and animism, where dead Tsáchilas will become evil spirits (*jukang*) if they do not find rest in the grave. This causes them to wander about in revenge bringing death and sickness. Spirits presumably haunt the forest and move about in the dark, hence, a strong fear of the dark. Also, it is believed *jukang* have connection with natural disasters, hurricanes, storms, beasts, and venomous reptiles (1, pg53).

7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint:

Their bodies and necks are smeared with achiote, a red body paint (1,pg 17). Perhaps the most singular custom of the Tsáchila is the coating of hair and entire body with the red dye, achiote, obtained from the bush *Bixa Orellana* (1, pg23).

7.2 Piercings:

Nose piercing, practiced by males, is the sole form of deliberate body mutilation (1, pg.'s 19-20).

Contrary to the general primitive method of piercing the nasal septum for the suspension of ornaments, the Tsáchila puncture the center of the nose through the right nostril, and wear a small wooden plug (*kimfudse*, from *kimfu*: nose) in this aperture (1, pg28). During festivals, the wooden plug is replaced by a silver ornament (*sopue*). Tsáchila do not pierce their earlobes or wear ear-rings (1, pg28).

7.3 Haircut:

Men's hair is cut round and hangs like a mop, but is confined to the head. Women place their hair in long tresses and allow it to hang (1, pg18). Men's hair is smeared with the wax of achiote and combed into bangs (1, pg19). The black lustrous hair of women is left long and is parted down the middle of the crown. The female does not dye her hair, but is content on festive occasions to rub a bit of achiote paste of the crown of the head only (1, pg19-20). Depilation is not practiced. There is no attempt to remove facial hair that appears in advanced years (1, pg19).

7.4 Scarification:

7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.):

There is no tattooing among them. The women bind their arms above the elbow, usually with a strand of small cotton stuff, and sometimes with glass beads strung in a loose pattern. Neither the legs nor the arms of the male are bound. Silver pieces around the wrists of the males are purely ornamental, and are loosely attached. Teeth are blackened with a small seed they call *ampo* (1, pg21). A popular ornament among women is a necklace of the sheaths of the vanilla bean and of other spices. These are worn throughout life and are continuously replaced as the aromatic fragrances disappear from the pods. One of the most used pods is that of the bush called *mutru* and to a necklace of these (*mutruku*) are attached mirrors, old silver pieces, small empty bottles, and other curious objects (1, pg27). No feathers of the various beautiful indigenous birds are used in any way for ornament or decoration (1, pg28).

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:

For festive occasions, the male places on his head a sort of calotte (*mishoshuli*) of wound cotton fiber.

This is originally white, but becomes red with contact with the achiote body dye (1, pg21).

7.7 Sex differences in adornment:

Women solely paint portions of the face and roots of the hair with achiote during festivities (1, pg26)

7.8 Missionary effect:

The Tsáchila religion is now a mix of traditional religion and Christianity. The traditional dances were said to be a mix of more sophisticated cultures and their own (Von Hagen).

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.):

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

Interestingly, the Tsáchila only started the practice of painting their hair red after the Spanish occupation of the area. Legend has it that a Tsáchila leader asked the gods to provide a remedy to ward off the death-dealing European illnesses brought to the area by the Spanish invaders. When the leader awoke, the sun was shining on the achiote plant and to this day the Tsáchila men continue to paint their hair red in this unusual way (*The Unique Tsáchila Tribe of Ecuador*).

According to Tsachila traditions, the Earth contains many spirits (*oko*) . Most of them come from the natural world as we find mountain spirits (*du oko*) or powerful animal spirits, like the tiger spirit (*kela oko*). Others are immaterial, like the *luban oko*, omnipresent in the mythical Tsachila world, and against which there exist countless formulas. Some spirits have the power to transform themselves into human beings, a trick very often used to harm humans. In the past, shamans (*pone*) could similarly transform themselves into animals, a

recurring feature of mythological stories. The most important mythological figures shape the Tsachila cosmological geography. Most of the knowledge-holder Tsachilas, particularly the elders and shamans, agree on some prominent mythological themes: in the subterranean world lives the mother of the earth, To Ayan, only visible to shamans under different forms, such as tortoise, horse or rabbit. When To Ayan is moving, the whole earth shakes, causing earthquakes. In the subterranean world also dwells kela ayan, mother of tigers. She is an ancient woman whose children, tigers, go out at night in search of food and partners. These tigers are represented by black marks on red background, typical of Tsachila body painting. Under the earth also reside the Mimiyo, little creatures similar to the Tsachila, who hunt but only feed on smoke from cooked meat, for which they never defecate. On the Earth, apart from human beings and other natural beings, live the oko spirits, spreading illnesses and other pathologies. Above these spirits we find the Wa Tsachila, giants living in the same way as the Tsachilas. On a higher level we have Tsabo Ayan, mother of the stars, to whom is attributed the origin of the tunan and manpe tsanpa, traditional ethnic outfits. And above them all can be found the sun (yo) and the moon, man and woman respectively, who were sacrificed and sent to us by the shamans when the tiger of obscurity ate the sun. The sea (lamari) is found imprecisely under the earth, and beyond the sea is Pipua, the world of the dead (puyan oko), where the souls of dead people rest peacefully, once the living creatures have performed the Tenka ereka ceremony, a ceremony to ensure that the souls of the dead go to their own world where they can no longer bother humans by their presence in this world (*The Tsachila Indigenous People*).

Numbered references

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