

## 1. Description

1.1) Name: Macuna (alternates: Baigana, Buhagana, Jepa-Matsi, Makuna, Paneroa, Wuhána, Yebamasã, Yehpá-Mahsá). Language name: Macuna. Language family: Tukano. (1)

1.2) myy (1)

1.3) (0.5, 70) – (-0.5, 70.5) (2)

1.4) The Macuna are mentioned in Portuguese chronicles from the eighteenth century. More regular contact dates from the late nineteenth century, when the commercial exploitation of wild rubber began in the Colombian Amazon. Although the most affected areas lie south of the Vaupés region, the Macuna also experienced the devastating impact of the rubber boom. Men were rounded up and taken away by force to work for White rubber patrons. The pattern was repeated in a less crude form during World War II. Intermittent contact with Catholic missionaries has existed at least since the eighteenth century, but the first mission station in the Pirá-Paraná area was established in the 1960s. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Pirá-Paraná experienced a new economic boom based on growing coca leaves for illegal cocaine production. The Macuna were heavily involved in the cultivation and trade of coca leaves with White patrons who established themselves in the area. The coca trade brought great quantities of money and trade goods to the region, but the boom ended as abruptly as it commenced. By the mid-1980s no Macuna produced coca leaves for sale, and the White traders had left the area. (2)

1.5) Intermittent contact with Catholic missionaries has existed at least since the eighteenth century, but the first mission station in the Pirá-Paraná area was established in the 1960s. The creation by the government of two *resguardos* (Indian reserves), which include most of the Macuna territory, has been an important development for the Macuna in their struggle for control over their land. (2) Since the 1970s, the Catholic Church has supported extensive missionary activities, as the name of the Makuna village of Santa Isabel suggests. Under Catholic influence, Makuna are abandoning the longhouse for individual homes, weakening the ties of clan membership and reciprocity. Also, education in Catholic schools teaches the children to ignore food and ecological taboos. Other religious groups have proselytized among the Makuna, though with less effect. (6)

1.6) The Macuna are a tropical-forest people of the northwestern Amazon. They occupy their traditional territory around the confluence of the Pirá-Paraná and Apaporis rivers in the Colombian Vaupés region. (2)

1.7) Population size: 1,110 (1); 560 (3); There are no reliable census data for the entire Macuna population. In 1973 it was estimated as comprising about 400 individuals. On the basis of a partial census in 1989, the present population is thought to include some 600 individuals. Despite the considerable increase, the Macuna hold that the population was much bigger in the past. (2)

Mean village size: 10-20, sometimes as many as 70 (2)

## 2. Economy

2.1) The staple is bitter manioc, but a large number of other food plants are also cultivated, including plantains, sweet potatoes, bananas, pineapples, and sugarcane. (2)

- 2.2) Fish is the principal source of protein, but considerable time is also spent on hunting. The most important game include pacas, peccaries, and tapir. Large birds, monkeys, and caimans also constitute a significant part of the diet. (2)
- 2.3) They specialize in the manufacture of blowguns and curare poison (3)
- 2.4) Basketry and pottery, but aluminum pots have replaced much of the traditional pottery (3)
- 2.5) Women do most of the gardening: they plant, harvest, and process the principal food crops. Men clear and burn the fields but engage in no other gardening activities except cultivating and harvesting the "male" tobacco and coca plants. Men do all the hunting and most of the fishing. Both men and women collect wild forest fruits, nuts, and seeds, as well as certain edible insects such as ants, termites, and various kinds of larvae. Crafts also follow a strict division of labor. Women make the pottery, whereas men do all the basketwork, including the weaving of hammocks. (2)
- 2.6) Each Macuna clan is considered the owner of a certain tract of land along specific affluents of the Río Pirá-Paraná. This ownership derives from the myth of creation. Within this clan territory, every member of the clan has the right to hunt, fish, and clear fields for cultivation. Forest and river are thus communal property. Individual families have exclusive usufruct rights only to their cultivated fields. (2)
- 2.7) Pottery is undecorated (5)
- 2.8) At least one meal daily was consumed jointly by the residence group, and most fish and game were shared among the families of the maloca. Today each nuclear family tends to form an independent domestic group, inhabiting a separate house. Food sharing and cooperation are consequently reduced. (2)
- 2.9) They eat many fish, although some species are taboo to particular clans. Makuna hunt tapir, puma, and ocelot for meat, again except when proscribed by individual or clan taboos. (6) During the rituals, only ceremonial foods are consumed: coca, tobacco, locally brewed beer, and occasionally the hallucinogenic drug *yage*. (2)
- 2.10) They are skilled manufacturers of canoes, besides supplying light and quite well-finished oars to the Indians of the upper Tiquié. (3)

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

- 4.6) Traditionally, divorce in established marriages was extremely rare or even legally nonexistent. Annulment, implying the dissolution of a marriage before it is fully completed, is increasingly common. (2)
- 4.7) Polygyny is considered a prestigious form of marriage but is not common in actual practice. (2)
- 4.9) There is little property to be inherited. Land is not individually owned, and most traditional artifacts—household goods, tools, and weapons as well as the house itself—do not enter a formalized system of inheritance. Only the ritual wealth—the sacred feather headdress and other ceremonial paraphernalia—seems to be formally inherited, ideally from father to eldest son. (2)
- 4.10) Children are raised permissively. Young children are taken care of by the mother and elder siblings. By the age of 10, the children already know the rudiments of their distinct sex roles; girls accompany their mothers and elder sisters during garden work and domestic chores, whereas boys accompany their

fathers and elder brothers on hunting and fishing trips. Today there are government-sponsored primary schools in most villages, attended by most Macuna children. (2)

4.12) The Makuna view themselves as a group of clans united by intermarriage. (6)

Wives are expected to be (and usually are) taken from adjoining groups. (7)

4.17) Consonant with the prescriptive kinship terminology, the ideal Macuna marriage takes the form of a sister exchange between bilateral cross cousins. Most marriages today involve actual, genealogical cross cousins. Owing to the close genealogical ties between the families involved, the immediate exchange aspect of the marriage is not stressed. (2)

4.25) A newborn child ideally receives the name of a deceased grandparent. (2)

4.26) The Macuna are divided into patrilineal and exogamous descent groups. These are in turn categorically related to one another as elder/younger "brother people" or "brother-in-law people" (affines). Marriage is prohibited between clans classified as "brothers," but permitted and encouraged between those referring to one another as "brothers-in-law." (2)

4.27) No marriage ceremony is performed (2)

4.28) A newborn child ideally receives the name of a deceased grandparent. Names are thus recycled within the clan in alternating generations. (2)

4.29) Today most marriages are local. Bride-capture was common in the past. (2)

4.30) Marriages are negotiated between senior men of the families involved. (2)

### **Warfare/homicide**

4.16 & 4.17) In the remote past, tribal wars were fought between the Macuna and their traditional enemies; these wars were grounded in cosmological beliefs and apparently had no practical ends such as the acquisition of land, women, or ritual property. Bride-capture was a common source of political conflict as well as a means of expressing it. Today, the competition for political leadership occasionally leads to social conflicts. Unequal distribution of White trade goods and the individualization of the domestic economy tend to create tensions in the village community. (2)

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

5.1) The traditional residence group inhabiting a maloca was a local descent group. Larger spatial groupings—the former neighborhood and actual village—are based on the interplay between the two principles of descent and marriage alliance, forming closely tied kinship communities. At present, the size of the residence group inhabiting a maloca generally varies between 10 and 20. During important collective ceremonies, however, 70 or more people are easily accommodated in the maloca. (2)

5.3) Macuna society is unstratified and lacks centralized leadership. The conceptual scheme of five specialist roles, polarizing chiefs and servants, provides a hierarchical political ideology that has no counterpart in actual political practice. Every maloca had—and still has—its headman. Sometimes an influential headman gains authority over an entire neighborhood or a larger territorial group. Each clan is further symbolically associated with one of five specialist roles: chief, chanter or

dancer, warrior, shaman, and servant. (2)

5.4) Virilocal postmarital residence is the norm. Today each nuclear family tends to form an independent domestic group, inhabiting a separate house. (2)

5.6) By the age of 10, the children already know the rudiments of their distinct sex roles; girls accompany their mothers and elder sisters during garden work and domestic chores, whereas boys accompany their fathers and elder brothers on hunting and fishing trips. Although men dominate women and elder brothers have authority over younger ones, even these authority relations are essentially expressed in terms of mutual complementarity. (2)

5.8) The traditional Macuna settlement consisted of a single, large multifamily longhouse, usually referred to as a *maloca* in the ethnographic literature. The malocas were widely dispersed along streams and rivers in the forest. There are basically two types of malocas: one round, common in the Apaporis area; the other rectangular and prevalent in the Pirá-Paraná area. The latter type could measure 30 meters in length, 20 in width, and 10 in height. Both types can still be seen among the Macuna, but now rather as ceremonial centers in village communities composed of a number of small single-family houses. Early accounts describe huge malocas containing some 100 inhabitants. At present, the size of the residence group inhabiting a maloca generally varies between 10 and 20. During important collective ceremonies, however, 70 or more people are easily accommodated in the maloca. In the 1970s the maloca commonly contained three to five agnatically related nuclear families—an aging father and his married sons or a group of young or middle-aged married brothers (who were later likely to split up and form independent settlements). The malocas, in turn, were vaguely grouped into extensive neighborhoods of agnatically and affinally related residence groups; elderly brothers and brothers-in-law lived in separate but adjacent malocas. Today these local groups of neighboring malocas have largely turned into village communities that are based on the same structural principles of agnation and marriage alliance but subdivided into small family units, each inhabiting a separate house. (2)

5.10) Hammocks (2)

5.11) The Macuna are divided into patrilineal and exogamous descent groups (*masa*; lit., "people"), called clans or sibs in the ethnographic literature. These are in turn categorically related to one another as elder/younger "brother people" or "brother-in-law people" (affines). Marriage is prohibited between clans classified as "brothers," but permitted and encouraged between those referring to one another as "brothers-in-law." The Macuna clans thus form two exogamous and intermarrying phratries. The clans of each phratric set are hierarchically arranged in order of seniority, defined by the mythical birth order of the clan ancestors. Each clan is further symbolically associated with one of five specialist roles: chief, chanter or dancer, warrior, shaman, and servant. Today, however, this organizational scheme is purely conceptual; it portrays an ideal social order with no counterpart in present social practice. (2)

5.12) Traditionally, a large-scale trading system seems to have operated over the entire Vaupés region, integrating many of the tribal groups of the area. All metal tools—including axes, knives, machetes, and much of the hunting and fishing gear (hooks and nylon lines, shotguns, and ammunition)—are bought from White

traders. (2)

5.13) Each clan is further symbolically associated with one of five specialist roles: chief, chanter or dancer, warrior, shaman, and servant. Today, however, this organizational scheme is purely conceptual; it portrays an ideal social order with no counterpart in present social practice. (2)

## **6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion**

6) The yearly round is punctuated by a series of collective feasts, each with its own songs, dances and appropriate musical instruments, that mark important events in the human and natural worlds - births, initiations, marriages and deaths, the felling and planting of gardens and the building of houses, the migrations of fishes and birds, and the seasonal availability of forest fruits and other gathered foods. These ritual gatherings are referred to as 'houses', a term that connotes at once an occasion, a group of people, and a symbolic world. They take three basic forms: cashirís (beer feasts), dabukuris or ceremonial exchanges, and *Yuruparí* rites involving sacred flutes and trumpets. (3)

6.1) The important religious functionaries are the shaman ( *cumu/yai* ), the chanter ( *yuam* ), and the ritual dancer ( *baya* ). Their presence is necessary at every collective religious ritual. The shaman mediates between people and the spiritual beings. There are shamans who specialize exclusively in managing the relations between this world and the spirit world of ancestors and mythical beings. Other shamans are fundamentally healers; it is their duty to cure afflicted people. The chanter is the "voice" of the shaman. Whereas the services of the shaman are required continuously, the chanter's role is essentially limited to ritual performances. The chanter ceremoniously recounts the mythical creation story, which is dramatically reenacted during the major dance rituals. The dancer is the lead dancer during all collective rituals. Today only men hold these important ritual offices, but it is said that in the past there were several female shamans. (2)

6.2) Coca, tobacco, yage (2,3)

6.3) Births, initiations, marriages and deaths (3)

6.4) The felling and planting of gardens and the building of houses, the migrations of fishes and birds, and the seasonal availability of forest fruits and other gathered foods (3)

6.5) According to the Macuna, the world and everything in it were created by four godlike mythical heroes (*Ayawa mesa*) and the Ancestral Mother of all people, referred to as the Woman Shaman (*Romi Cumu*). The sexual union between the mythical heroes and the Ancestral Mother gave birth to the first clan ancestors. The mythical heroes are manifest today in thunder and lightning, whereas the Ancestral Mother is alternatively conceived of as a star constellation (the Pleiades) or the earth itself. The mythical heroes and first clan ancestors are mystically represented by the *yurupari* instruments that are brought forth and played during the most important of Macuna rituals. According to myth, the Woman Shaman owned the primordial *yurupari* instruments. These were later stolen from her by the mythical heroes, who thus established the present social order of male supremacy. The clan ancestors were believed to have the form of huge anacondas, which transformed into people. (2)

6.6) Macuna art is fundamentally embodied in their crafts, architecture, and ceremonial property. Body painting and decoration of ceremonial regalia are basically geometrical. These arts are fundamentally structured by collective tradition but leave room for individual creativity. Pottery is undecorated, and there are no sculptured or graphic representations of deities. In the Macuna territory, there are ancient petroglyphs elaborated by those to whom the Macuna refer as "ancestral people." (2)

6.7) Each clan collectively owns a set of sacred instruments (trumpets and flutes), called *yurupari* in the ethnographic literature, which represent the clan ancestors. These instruments can be seen, handled, and played only by adult (initiated) men; women and children are prohibited from seeing them. (2)

6.8) Effective missionary penetration began towards the end of the 19th century with the arrival of the Franciscans. The Franciscans, and the Salesians who followed them, saw all that has been described above through the lens of their own closed religious categories: the Indians' malocas were "hotbeds of license and sexual promiscuity, their dance-festivals occasions of "drunken debauchery", the payés were charlatans who held the people in their thrall, and the Yuruparí cult was none other than the cult of the Devil himself. Without knowing or caring what these things really meant, the missionaries set about destroying one civilization in the name of another, burning down the Indians' malocas, destroying their feather ornaments, smashing their cashirí containers, persecuting the payés, and exposing the Yuruparí to women and children assembled together in church. As the priests attacked the cornerstones of the Indians' culture, so they transformed their society, herding the people into villages of neatly ordered houses, each for a single family, and forcibly removing their children to be educated in boarding schools or internados. Under the internados' strict regime, the children were taught to reject their parents' values and way of life, encouraged to marry within their own groups, and forbidden to speak the languages that gave them their multiple, interlocking identities. For the missionaries, only one identity mattered, a generic Indian identity that stood in the way of "civilisation". (3)

6.10) At death, the soul is believed to wander off to the sky world or down into the underworld and finally, on the earth, settle in the ancestral birth house ("peoples' waking-up house") of its clan. The funerary ritual, like the birth ritual, is essentially a private ceremony. The body of the deceased is buried in the longhouse. The grave consists of a deep hole with a cave on one side, where the corpse is placed. After the burial, the shaman burns bees' wax in the house. The smoke is said to carry away the soul of the dead. The ritual is referred to as the "throwing away of sorrow." (2)

6.11) The Macuna believe that, at birth, the soul of a deceased grandparent enters the newborn baby, who receives the name of its soul giver; there thus exists among the Macuna a belief in the reincarnation of souls in alternate generations. (2)

6.13) Makuna religion is a kind of ecosophy. They consider saltlicks and fish-spawning places to be sacred, and their shamans carefully mediate the reciprocity among humans, fish, and game animals to keep it in balance. Traditionally, therefore, Makuna managed their environment and did not plunder it. In Makuna cosmology, the world is periodically destroyed. Many believe that such destruction is underway now and there will soon be no room for the Makuna. This fear is

aggravated by the gold-mining operations dismantling some hills near the headwaters of the Comena, a catastrophic development since the Makuna believe these hills are their ancestors holding up the world. Furthermore, gold is the light necessary for the vision of the shamans; removing the gold means the shamans will no longer see visions or foretell the future. (6)

## **7. Adornment**

7.1,2,4) No evidence found

7.6-7.7) During the dance for the harvest season of palm fruit, men and male children wear masks and bark-cloth costumes representing 100 or so different animal spirits and mythical beings. Throughout the year, other communal-dance rituals are held, during which the male dancers wear ceremonial headdresses of macaw feathers and the down, plumes, hairs, and bones of other animals. (2)

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## **9. Other interesting cultural features**

- Makuna shamans attribute healing mainly to the power of words and thoughts, rather than to medicinal plants. Words and thinking can also change the course of events, such as heading off guerrilla incursions. (6)
- Certain types of food gathering, such as termite catching, are undertaken as a group (3)
- A characteristic feature of the Macuna, distinguishing them from many other Tucano groups, is that they utilize no plant medicines. Prevention and healing of illness basically involve the practice of blowing and silent chanting over foods, drinks, or certain magical substances. These acts of blowing and chanting can be performed by any knowledgeable adult man. Certain serious afflictions are treated by curing shamans (*yaia* ; lit., "jaguars") who suck out

the disease agent (usually a dart) or remove it by pouring blessed water over the patient. The Macuna disease etiology centers on food as the fundamental disease agent. All food is considered inherently dangerous; it has to be blessed by blowing before eaten. Most diseases are believed to be caused by eating food that has not been properly blessed. (2)

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