

Guaraní Indians

(Pronounced *Waraní*.)

One of the most important tribal groups of South America, having the former home territory chiefly between the Uruguay and lower Paraguay Rivers, in what is now Paraguay and the Provinces of Corrientes and Entre Rios of Argentina. The name by which they are commonly known is of disputed origin and meaning. They called themselves simply *Abá*, that is, men. They belong to the great Tupí-Guaraní stock, which extends almost continuously from the Paraná to the Amazon, including most of eastern Brazil, with outlying branches as far west as the slopes of the Andes. Upon the Tupí-Guaraní dialect is based the *lingoa geral* or Indian trade language of the Amazon region.

The Guaraní are best known for their connection to the early Jesuit missions of Paraguay, the most notable mission foundation ever established in America, and for their later heroic resistance — as the State of Paraguay, against the combined powers of Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay — until practically all their able-bodied men had been exterminated. In physique they are short and stoutly built, averaging but little over five feet, and are rather light in colour. In their primitive condition they were sedentary and agricultural, subsisting largely upon manioc, the root from which tapioca is prepared, together with corn, game, and wild honey, and occupying palisaded villages of communal houses, large enough to accommodate from ten to fifteen families each. They were expert and artistic potters and woodcarvers. Their arms were the bow and the blow-gun. According to the Jesuit missionary Dobrizhoffer, besides being cannibals, as were many other South American tribes, they, in ancient times, even ate their own dead, but later disposed of them in large jars placed inverted upon the ground. The men wear only the G-string, with labrets on the lower lip, and feather crowns. The women wore woven garments covering the whole body. Polygamy was allowed but was not common. Their religion was the animistic Pantheism usual among northern Indians. There was no central government, the numerous village communities being united only by the bond of common interest and language, with a tendency to form tribal groups according to dialect. At a minimum estimate they numbered when first known at least 400,000 souls.

The first entry into the Rio de la Plata, the estuary of the Paraná or Paraguay, was made by the Spanish navigator, Juan de Solis, in 1511. Sebastian Cabot followed in 1526, and in 1537 Gonzalo de Mendoza ascended the Paraguay to about the present Brazilian frontier, and returning founded Asuncion, destined to be the capital of Paraguay, and made first acquaintance with the Guaraní. Under the very first governor was initiated the policy of intermarriage with Indian women, from which the present mixed Paraguayan race derives its origin, and also of the enslavement of the native tribes who found no protector until the arrival of the Jesuits, the first two of whom, Fathers Barcena and Angulo, coming overland from Bolivia reached the Guaraní territory of Guayrá, in what is now the Province of Paraná, Southern Brazil, in 1585. Others soon followed, a Jesuit college was established at Asuncion, a provincial named for Paraguay and Chile, and in 1608, in consequence of their strong protests against the enslavement of the Indians, King Philip III of Spain issued royal authority to the Jesuits for the conversion and colonization of the Indians of Guayrá. It should be noted that in the early period the name Paraguay was loosely used to designate all the basin of the river, including besides the present Paraguay, parts of Uruguay, Argentina, Bolivia, and Brazil.

As usual in the Spanish colonies the first exploring expeditions were accompanied by Franciscan friars. At an early period in the history of Asuncion Father Luis de Bolanos translated the catechism into the language of the Guaraní in order to preach to those of that tribe in the neighbourhood of the settlement. In 1588-9 the celebrated St. Francis Solanus crossed the Chaco wilderness from Peru, preaching to the wild tribes, and stopped for some time at Asuncion, but without giving attention to the Guaraní. His recall left the field clear to the Jesuits, who assumed the double duty of civilizing and Christianizing the Indians and defending them against the merciless cruelties and

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butcheries of the slave dealers and the employers, including practically the whole white population, lay, clerical, and official. "The larger portion of the population regarded it as a right, a privilege in virtue of conquest, that they should enslave the Indians" (Page, 470). The Jesuit provincial, Torres, however, on his arrival in 1607, "immediately placed himself at the head of those who had opposed the cruelties at all times exercised over the natives" (Ibid).

The great centre and depot of the Indian slave trade was the town of São Paulo, below Rio de Janeiro in the south of Brazil. Originally, a rendezvous of the Portuguese, Dutch, and Spanish pirates, it had become a refuge for the desperate criminals of all nations, who, finding a lack of wives of their own class and colour, had intermixed with Indian and negro women, producing a mongrel and bloodthirsty breed, without law, religion, mercy, or good faith. "Slave dealers of profession, they speedily overrode the influence and power of the Church, and drove out its ministers. Their town became the great slave market whence issued thousands and thousands of Indians to be bartered away on the public squares of the Atlantic cities. Here they assembled day after day as party after party returned from its inhuman expedition, the crowds of trembling, bleeding wretches who had been hunted and captured in some distant wilds . . . These well-trained, well-armed, roaming, pillaging Paulistas, or Mamelucas as they were popularly called, became the dread and scourge of this beautiful land" (Page, 476). To oppose these armed and organized robbers, the naked tribes had only their bows, the Spanish government strictly prohibiting fire-arms, even to the civilized Indians. It is estimated that in the space of 130 years 2,000,000 Indians were slain or carried into captivity by these Brazilian slave-hunters. With the royal authority as guarantee of protection the first of the Guatrá missions, Loreto, was established on the Paranapané by Fathers Cataldino and Marcerata (or Maceta?) in 1610. The Guaraní flocked to them in such numbers, and listened so gladly and so obediently to these the first white men who have ever come to them as friends and helpers, that twelve missions rose in rapid succession, containing in all some 40,000 Indians. Stimulated by this success, Father Gonzalez with two companions in 1627 journeyed to the Uruguay and established two or three small missions, with good promise for the future, until the wild tribes murdered the priests, massacred the neophytes, and burned the missions.

But while the Guaraní missions grew and multiplied the slave raiders were on the watch and saw in them "merely an opportunity of capturing more Indians than usual at a haul" and as "nest of hawks, looked at their neophytes as pigeons, ready fattening for their use" (Graham). In 1629 the storm broke. An army of Paulistas with horses, guns, and bloodhounds together with a horde of wild Indians shooting poisoned arrows suddenly emerged from the forest, surrounded the mission of San Antonio, set fire to the church and other buildings, butchered the neophytes who resisted, and all who were too young or too old to travel, and carried the rest into slavery. San Miguel and Jesu Maria quickly met the same fate. In Concepción Father Salazar defended his flock through a regular siege even when reduced to eating snakes and rats, until reinforcements, gathered by Father Cataldino, though armed only with bows, drove off the enemy. No other mission was so fortunate. Within the space of two years all but two of the flourishing establishments were destroyed, the houses plundered, the churches pillaged of their rich belongings upon which almost the whole surplus of the mission revenues had been lavished, the altars polluted with blood in sacrilegious frenzy and 60,000 Christian and civilized converts carried off for sale in the slave markets of São Paulo and Rio Janeiro. To insure the larger result, the time chosen for attack was usually on Sunday, when the whole mission population was gathered at the Church for Mass. As a rule the priests were spared — probably from fear of government reprisals — although several lost their lives while ministering to the wounded or pleading with the murderers. Father Maceta and Mansilla even followed one captive train on foot through the swamps and forests, confessing the dying who fell by the road and carrying the chains of the weakest, despite threats and pricks of lances, to plead with the Paulista chiefs in their very city, and then to Baja, five hundred miles beyond, to ask the mediation of the governor-general himself, but all in vain, and they returned as they had come.

It was now evident that the Guayrá missions were doomed. The few thousand Indians left of nearly 100,000 just before the Paulista invasion had scattered to the forests, and could hardly be made to believe that the missionaries were not in league with the enemy. Father Antonio Ruiz de Montoya was able to buy 10,000 cattle,

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and thus transform his Indians from farmers to stock raisers. Soon again the work was on a prosperous basis, and under Fathers Rançoncier and Romero the Uruguay missions were re-established, only to be again destroyed (1632) by the old enemy, the Mamelucos, who had discovered a new line of attack from the south. This time the neophytes made some successful resistance, but in 1638 all of the twelve missions beyond the Uruguay were abandoned and their people consolidated with the community of the Missions Territory. In the last raid Father Afaro was killed, which at last brought about tardy interference by the governor.

In the same year Father Montoya, after having successfully opposed both governor and Bishop of Asunción in attempts upon the liberties of the Indians and the mission administration, sailed for Europe, accompanied by Father Diaz Taño, and succeeded in getting from Urban VIII a letter forbidding the enslavement of the mission Indians under the severest church penalties, and from King Philip IV, the long-desired and long-refused permission for the Indians to be furnished with fire-arms for their own defense, and to be trained to their use by veteran soldiers who had become members of the Jesuit order. When the next Paulista army, 800 strong, entered the mission territory in 1641, a body of Christian Guaraní armed with guns and led by their own chief met them on the Acaray river and in two pitched battles inflicted such severe defeat as put an end to the invasions for ten years. Differences with the Franciscans and with the Bishop of Paraguay on the old questions of jurisdiction and privilege, gave only a temporary check to the missions, now numbering twenty-nine, but in 1651 the war was between Spain and Portugal, the latter represented in America by Brazil, gave encouragement to another Paulista attempt on a scale intended to wipe out every mission at one blow and hold the territory for Portugal. And now the Spanish authorities roused themselves and sent promise of help against the invading army, advancing in four divisions, but before any of the government troops could reach the frontier the fathers themselves, arming their neophytes, led them against the enemy, whom they repulsed at every point, and then turning, scattered a horde of savages who had gathered in the rear in the hope of plunder. In 1732, the year of their greatest prosperity, the Guaraní missions were guarded by a well-drilled and well-equipped army of 7000 Indians. On more than one occasion this mission army, accompanied by their priests, defended the Spanish colony.

The missions, of which the ruins of several still remain, were laid out upon a uniform plan. The buildings were grouped about a great central square, the church and store-houses at one end, and the dwellings of the Indians, in long barracks, forming the other three sides. Each family had its own separate apartments, but one veranda and one roof served for perhaps a hundred families. The churches were of stone or fine wood, with lofty towers, elaborate sculptures, richly adorned altars, and the statuary imported from Italy and Spain. The priests' quarters, the commissary, the stables, the armoury, the workshop, and the hospital also usually of stone, formed an inner square adjoining the church. The plaza itself was a level grass plot kept cropped by sheep. The Indian houses were sometimes of stone, but more often of adobe or cane, with home-made furniture or religious pictures, often made by the Indian themselves. The smaller missions had two priests, the larger more, the population varying from 2000 to 7000 in the different missions. Everything moved with military precision, lightened by pleasing ceremonial and sweet music, for both of which the Guaraní had an intense passion. The rising sun was greeted by a chorus of children's hymns, followed by the Mass and breakfast, after which the workers went to their tasks. "The Jesuits marshalled their neophytes to the sound of music, and in procession to the fields, with a saint borne high aloft, the community each day at sunrise took its way. Along the way at stated intervals were shrines of saints, and before each of them they prayed, and between each shrine sang hymns. As the procession advanced it became gradually smaller as groups of Indians dropped off to work the various fields and finally the priest and acolyte with the musicians returned alone" (Graham, 178-9). At midday each group assembled for the Angelus, after which came dinner and a siesta; work was then resumed until evening, when the labourers returned singing to their homes. After supper came the rosary and sleep. On rainy days they worked indoors. Frequent festivals with sham battles, fireworks, concerts, and dances, prevented monotony.

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Besides the common farm each man had his own garden. In addition to agriculture, stock raising, and the cultivation of the maté or native tea, which they made famous, "the Jesuits had introduced amongst the Indians most of the arts and trades of Europe. Official inventory after the order of expulsion, shows that thousands of yards of cotton were sometimes woven in one mission in a single month." In addition to weaving, they had tanneries, carpenter shops, tailors, hat makers, coopers, cordage makers, boat builders, joiners, and almost every industry useful and necessary to life. They also made arms, powder, and musical instruments, and had silversmiths, musicians, painters, turners, and printers to work their printing presses; for many books were printed at the missions, and they produced manuscripts as finely executed as those made by the monks in European monasteries (Graham). The produce of their labour, including that from the increase of the herds, was sold at Buenos Aires and other markets, under supervision of the fathers, who portioned the proceeds between the common fund and the workers and helpless dependents, for there was no provision for able-bodied idleness. Finally "much attention was paid to the schools; early training was very properly regarded as the key to all future success" (Page, 503). Much of the instruction was in Guaraní, which was still the prevailing language of the country, but Spanish was also taught in every school. In this way as the Protestant Graham notes (183), "without employing force of any kind, which in their case would have been quite impossible, lost as they were amongst the crowd of Indians", the Jesuits transformed hordes of cannibal savages into communities of peaceful, industrious, highly-skilled Christian workmen among whom idleness, crime, and poverty were alike unknown.

In 1732, the Guaraní missions numbered thirty, with 141,252 Christian Indians. Two years later a visitation of smallpox, that great destroyer of the Indian race, swept off 30,000 souls. In 1765 a second visitation carried off more than 12,000 more, and then spread westward through all the wide tribes of the Chaco. In 1750 a boundary treaty between Spain and Portugal transferred to the latter the territory of the seven missions on the Uruguay, and this was followed soon after by an official order for the removal of the Indians. The Indians of the seven towns, who knew the Portuguese only as slave-hunters and persecutors, refused to leave their homes, rose in revolt under their own chiefs and defied the united armies of both governments. After a guerrilla warfare of seven years, resulting in the slaughter of thousands of Indians and the almost complete ruin of the seven missions, the Jesuits secured a royal decree annulling the boundary decision and restoring the disputed mission territory to Spanish jurisdiction. In 1747 two missions, and in 1760 a third were established in the sub-tribe of the Itatines, or Tobatines, in Central Paraguay, far north of the older mission group. In one of these, San Joaquin (1747), the celebrated Dobrizhoffer ministered for eight years. These were the last of the Guaraní foundations.

The story of the royal edict of 1767 for the expulsion of the Jesuits from Spanish dominions is too much a matter of world history to be recounted here. Fearing the event, the viceroy Bucareli intrusted the execution of the mandate in 1768, to two officers with a force of some 500 troops, but although the mission army then counted 14,000 drilled warriors of proved courage, the fathers, as loyal subjects, submitted without resistance, and with streaming tears turned their backs on the work which they had built up by a century and a half of devoted sacrifice. With only their robes and their breviaries, they went down to the ship that was waiting to carry them forever out of the country. The Paraguay missions so called, of which, however, only eight were in Paraguay proper, were then thirty-three in number, with seventy-eight Jesuits, some 144,000 Christian Indians, and a million cattle. The rest of the story is briefly told. The missions were turned over to priests of other orders, chiefly Franciscans, but under a code of regulations drawn up by the viceroy and modelled largely upon the very Jesuit system which he had condemned. Under divided authority, uncertain government support, and without the love or confidence of the Indians, the new teachers soon lost courage and the missions rapidly declined, the Indians going back by thousands to their original forests or becoming vagabond outcasts in the towns. By the official census of 1801, less than 45,000 Indians remained, cattle, sheep, and horses had disappeared, the fields and orchards were overgrown and cut down and the splendid churches were in ruins. The long period of revolutionary struggle that followed completed the destruction. In 1814 the mission Indians numbered but 8000 and in 1848 the few who remained were declared citizens. The race however persists. Nearly all the forest tribes on the borders of Paraguay are of

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Guaraní stock; many of them are descendants of mission exiles, while in Paraguay the old blood so predominates in the population that Guaraní is still largely the language of the population.

The Guaraní language has been much cultivated, its literature covering a wide range of subjects. Many works written by the fathers, and wholly or partly in the native language, were issued from the mission press in Loreto. Among the most important treatises upon the language are the "Tesoro de la Lengua Guaraní (Madrid, 1639), by Father Montoya, the heroic leader of the exodus, published in [Paris](#) and Leipzig in 1876; and the "Catecismo de la Lengua Guaraní" of Father Diego Díaz de la Guerra (Madrid, 1630).

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About this page

APA citation. Mooney, J. (1910). Guaraní Indians. In The Catholic Encyclopedia. New York: Robert Appleton Company. Retrieved May 5, 2011 from New Advent: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07045a.htm>

MLA citation. Mooney, James. "Guaraní Indians." The Catholic Encyclopedia. Vol. 7. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910. 5 May 2011 <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07045a.htm>>.

Transcription. This article was transcribed for New Advent by M. Donahue.

Ecclesiastical approbation. *Nihil Obstat.* June 1, 1910. Remy Lafort, S.T.D., Censor. *Imprimatur.* +John Cardinal Farley, Archbishop of New York.

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