PART 2. INDIANS OF THE GRAN CHACO

ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE CHACO, by Alfred Métraux

POST-CONTACT HISTORY

“The 17th century to the present day...” Protestant missions of the South American Evangelical Society have extended their protection since 1887 to the Lengua, and in more recent years to several Mataco and Toba groups. In short time they have obtained remarkable results and have helped the Indians in their harsh struggle for survival.”
(p.204)

SOURCES

“An article by Seymour Hawtrey (1901) on the Lengua is a much quoted source on these Indians.”
“By far the best monograph on a single Chaco tribe is Barbrooke Grubb’s An Unknown People in an Unknown Land (1913). This work, though superficial in many respects, is particularly useful for the light it throw on Indian psychology. Strangely enough, there is no modern detailed study of the total culture of a single Chaco tribe. On the other hand, several good sources may be consulted on the various aspects of culture, though some of them were intended to be a complete survey of a tribe’s ethnography.”
(p.208)

ARCHEOLOGY OF THE CHACO

“Only significant archeological material has come from the Chaco proper. Grubb (1913, p.73) alludes to potsherds ‘bearing scorings, as if made by the pressure of the thumb,’ which could be found now and then in the territory of the Lengua. A large jar, 4 ft. (1.25m) high, was unearthed at the Lengua mission of Makthlawaiya (Pride, 1926). Both the sherds and the jar appear to be of Guarani origin – a confirmation of early statements about sporadic Guarani infiltrations into the Chaco.”
(p.209)

CULTURAL INFLUENCES ON THE CHACO AREA

“The theory which assigns disease to soul-loss is perhaps characteristic of western South America,¹ and it never has succeeded in eliminating the more ancient Chaco belief that the magic intrusion of foreign substances in the body causes sickness.”
(p.211)

“The Chaco Indians share several culture traits with the tribes of Patagonia. According to Nordenskiöld, these are: Skin mats, bow-strings of leather, bows without notches at the ends, cloaks of several skins sewn together, skin skirts, leather girdles, hairbrushes, bags made of ostrich (rhea) necks, bags made of the whole skin of a small animal, hockey, and twisting of skin thongs. We may add: moccasins, decorative pattern on skin cloaks, harpoons with barbed heads (Mocoví), and bolas (Mocoví, Abipón, Lengua)”
(p.212-213)

LINGUISTIC AND TRIBAL DIVISIONS
- THE GUAICURUAN LINGUISTIC FAMILY

“The name Guaicurú seems to have been applied by the Guarani to the warlike and half nomadic Indians on the western side of the Paraguay River, most of whom in the 16th and 17th centuries belonged to the Mbayá tribe. Guaicurú and Mbayá may, therefore, be considered as synonyms, even though the former name may have been given to some Indians of the Muscoian or Matacoan families, e. g., the Lengua, Macá, and others. (See Boggiani, 1898-99.) There is no evidence to substantiate Azara’s contention that there existed a separate Guaicurú tribe which became extinct at the end of the 18th century.”
(p.214)

¹ The soul-loss theory seems more widely spread in tropical South America than our sources indicate.
THE MASCOIAN LINGUISTIC FAMILY

“Cocolot.—The Cocolot were probably not a tribe but a group of Toba bands called by a name which was also applied to the Mbayé and to the Lengua (Macá).”

(p.223)

“Lengua.—The Lengua (not to be confused with the Lengua-Enimagá or Macá) range along the western bank of the Paraguay River from Puerto Pinaasco to the Montelindo River and westward to Palo Blanco and Campo de Esperanza in the Mennonite country, viz., from lat. 22° 30’ to 24° S. and inland about 150 miles (240 km.) from the Paraguay River. They are split into 10 main bands. Part of the Lengua have lived since 1887 under British missionaries in various stations, the most important of which is Makthlawiya. The description of the Lengua by Grubb (1913), one of their missionaries, is an outstanding source on modern Chaco ethnography. Today the entire Lengua population is estimated at 2,300.”

(pp.226-227)

THE MATACOAN LINGUISTIC FAMILY

“Lengua-Enimagá and the so-called Cochaboth family.—Until recent years there has been a great deal of uncertainty about the linguistic classification of the tribes living north of the lower Pilcomayo River. The term ‘Lengua’ (meaning tongue), applied by the Spaniards to the Indians who wore flat labrets and thus looked as if they had two tongues, was mainly responsible for the confusion.

“Using information obtained by Father Francisco Amancio González, Arara (1809, 2:148-154) and Aguirre (1911, pp.292-296) speak of a Lengua tribe living north of the lower Pilcomayo River in the region formerly occupied by the ancient Guaicurú. He describes it as a once powerful nation which, at the end of the 18th century, verged on extinction. According to Amancio González, the male population was reduced to 120 men who resided in a missionary station or had taken refuge among their former enemies, the Pilagá. Azara, however, states that in 1794 only 22 Lengua remained.

“The Lengua were called Cochaboth by the Enimagá, who used the same name for themselves; the Toba called them Cocoloth; and the Mascoi, Quiese-manapen (Quiemagpipo). They called themselves Ouajadgé (Jugad fechy). A vocabulary collected by Father Amancio González and preserved by Aguirre (1911, pp.328-335) fails to show any linguistic affinity between the Lengua-Cochaboth and the modern Lengua, who speak a Mascoian dialect. On the other hand, the relationship between Aguirre’s Lengua, Guentusé, and Enimagá is obvious, and had already been stressed by Amancio González and Azara. Until recent years, the Lengua-Cochaboth, the Guentusé, and the Enimagá were merged into a single isolated linguistic family called either Enimagá or Cochaboth (Rivet, 1924; W. Schmidt, 1926).

“Hunt (1915) was the first to notice that modern Macá (Towothli) is closely related to ancient Enimagá, Lengua, and Guentusé, which are known through a short vocabulary collected by Father Francisco Amancio González and incorporated in Aguirre’s diary, and through a few words published by Demersay (1860, p.445). Some years later Max Schmidt (1936 b, 1937 b), unaware of Hunt’s discovery, also compared Aguirre’s word list with a more recent Macá vocabulary that the modern Macá are the same as the ancient Enimagá (Imacá, Ini-macá, Imaga) or Lengua-Cochaboth.”

(p.236-237)

“Macá.—According to Azara and Aguirre, at the end of the 18th century the Macá were considerably reduced in numbers as a result of constant warfare and epidemics, and therefore merged for a while with Aguirre’s Lengua…”

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2 According to Belaieff (1941, p. 23), a Lengua subtribe which lives on the Mosquito River from its headwaters to a point 12 miles (20 km.) from Puerto Casado, is called Toba by the Paraguayans and Kilyetwaiwo by their Indian neighbors.
The present-day Macá are perhaps descendants of the combined Enimagá, Guentusé, Lengua, who may have joined forces during the 19th century.”

(p.237)

CULTURE
- SUBSISTENCE ACTIVITIES

“Collecting wild foods.”…The clouds of locusts that cross the Chaco sometimes are an important food resource. The Mocovi drove the insects toward a large straw fire which scorched them, or collected them by the hundreds and roasted them over a fire. Roasted or dried locusts are often poured in a mortar and boiled in water fried in fish oil (Mocovi, Lengua, and others). The Mocovi stored locusts which they could not eat on the spot; they also made a mush of locust eggs.”

“Water supply.”…The modern Lengua have wells 15 to 20 feet (4.5 to 6.1 m.) deep and 2½ feet (0.75 m.) in diameter. These are so made that a man can go down by footholds on either side.”

(p.249)

“Farming.”–The Lengua, who can find only small and scattered patches suitable for cultivation, raise few crops…”

(p.250)

“Water supply.”–…Even after they have moved to a new site, the Lengua, and probably most of the Chaco Indians, return from time to time to their old gardens to carry off the produce.”

“…The Lengua raise pumpkins (Cucurbita maxima), sweet potatoes, sweet manic, tobacco, and a little maize.”

(p.251)

“The care of the plantation is in the men’s hands among the Lengua, Kaskihá, and Guaná.”

“When a crop has been destroyed by blight, the Lengua consult a shaman who himself brings, or who seeds by someone else, charms to drive away the evil and to restore fertility to the soil. Unfruitful plants are spat upon to make them bear again (Grubb, 1904, p.81)”

(p.252)

“In the swampy regions near the mouth of the Pilcomayo River, fish are often so thick in the stagnant pools that they can be dipped out by hand. The Lengua catch fish in the same manner in small streams which they dam when the annual flood recedes. Both the Ashluslay and the Lengua fish in low waters with conical wicker baskets, about 2 feet (0.6 m.) high and open at the base and apex.”

“There is no record of native hooks other than those of the Lengua….The Lengua angle with very short lines from their canoes or as they stand in the water.”

(pp.252-253)

“Hunting.”…When the Lengua hunters discover a flock of rheas in scrub country, they block up the open spaces between the various copses with brushwood, and other Indians lying in wait at given points drive the birds toward the fence, which, however flimsy, prevents their flight (Grubb, 1913, p.85).”

(p.257)

“In order to establish a bond between themselves and the rheas which will facilitate their hunting luck, some bury a wooden egg in the ground and sit on it for a short while (Alarcón y Cañedo, 1924, p.50). The Lengua also use wax images as hunting charms, and on the night before a hunting party, they chant to the rhythm of their rattles to lure the prey to special areas… Lengua hunters always pluck the head feathers of birds they have shot and scatter them along the path to confuse and deceive the birds’ spirits.”

(p.260)

“The Ashluslay, Lengua, Mbayá, and probably other Chaco Indians make cakes out of algarroba flour kneaded with water and baked…The Mbayá grate palm pith to make it into a flour for cakes.”

(p.262)

- **HOUSES AND VILLAGES**
  “The Chamacoco, Lengua, Mbayá, Abipón, Toba, Pilagá, and Payaguá camp under bulrush mats laid on a flimsy framework of sticks, or stretch on the low branches of some tree…describes these ‘tents’ as follows: To two poles in the ground, they tie a mat folded two or three times to make a wind and rain shield. A ditch dug beside the tent drains off rain water. Some temporary *Lengua* or *Ashluslay* villages are composed of one or more long lines of such mat-houses.”
  (p.268)

- **FURNITURE**
  “…*Lengua*, who have been under Mestizo influence, sleep on crude bedsteads.”
  (p.270)

- **DRESS AND ORNAMENTS**
  “*Skin robes.*—…Skin robes have now disappeared altogether and have been replaced by blankets of wool (*Toba, Pilagá, Mataco, Chorotí, Macá, Lengua, etc.*)…”
  (p.271)

  “*Footgear.*—…the Indians only put on their sandals when they have to step on hot soil or cross a thorny tract…*Lengua* may cover their feet with crude moccasins made of a piece of skin tied in front and laced along the instep (pl.58, b)”
  (p.274)

  “*Beadwork.*—Beads of shell and, in post-Columbian times, of glass are strung into necklaces or are sewn as spangles on textiles and even on solid objects – for example, on rattles. Here again, Andean influences may be surmised. The *Pilagá, Ashluslay, Lengua*, and probably others make elaborate beadwork bands by threading glass beads on a simple loom, an art which the Indians learned from the missionaries, who introduced beads into the Chaco.”

  “*Headdress.*—…The distinctive headdress of men in the southern tribes (*Mataco, Toba Pilagá, Macá, Lengua, Ashluslay*) is a red woolen band bedecked with shell disks or glass beads arranged into simple geometrical figures (triangles, lozenges) and fringed with natural (spoonbill or flamingo) or dyed scarlet feathers sewn along the upper edge (pl.57, g). These frontlets are generally made of belts fitted to the head with the fringed ends falling down the back…”
  (p.275)

  “*Ear ornaments.*—*Lengua* shamans glue mirrors to the front surface of their plugs in order to see the reflection of the spirits.”
  (p.276)

  “*Lip ornaments.*—The ancient *Lengua* (Tongue), ancestors of modern *Macá*, received their name because of a semicircular wooden ornament worn in a long cut in their lower lip which resembled a second tongue sticking out of the chin (Azara, 1809, 2:150)…but neither their descendants, the modern *Lengua*, nor the *Macá* remember wearing a labret.”
  (p.277)

  “*Necklaces.*—…A necklace popular among the *Chorotí, Ashluslay, Toba, Pilagá, Lengua, Angaite*, and others consists of a row of rectangular pieces of mussel shell with both lateral edges slightly concave and the surfaces, which are very much like mother-of-pearl, decorated with a series of half-drilled holes.”
  (p.278)

- **TRANSPORTATION**
  “*Boats.*—As Chaco rivers are not easily navigable, only the tribes living on or near the Paraguay River use canoes (*Lengua, Sanapaná, Mbayá-Caduveo*).”
  (p.284)
“Weaving.—...Dyes.—Black and white are generally natural-color wools; red is obtained from the cochineal that develops on cacti (Mbayá, Mocovi, Lengua) or from a crocuslike lower; brown from the bark of the tusca tree (Acacia montiflora) or from guayacán (Caesalpinia melano-carpa) seeds; yellow from the flowers of Euglypha rojiasiana.”
(p.289)

“Skin preparation.—The Chaco Indians employ skin to a far greater extent than do most South American tribes. Tanning, however, has remained unknown to them, in spite of the fact that the Chaco forests are exploited today mainly for the trees which are rich in tannic acid. A lengthy mechanical softening process is used only for skins intended for cloaks and skirts, an arduous task performed by women. The skins are first stretched on a frame or nailed with wooden pegs on the ground and cleansed of all flesh particles. Then the hair is scraped off with a pointed stick and the softening is achieved by folding the skin diagonally about every half inch. The creases are accentuated by pressing the smooth lip of a large snail shell along them (Lengua). The skin is then twisted and ‘its surfaces rubbed together after an application of wood ashes and water’ (Grubb, 1913, p.69).”
(p.291-292)

“Weapons.—...In the Bermejo and Pilcomayo River regions (Chorotí, Mataco, Toba, Lengua, Ashluslay), bow strings of caraguat fiber or of twined skin or tendons occur in the same tribe.”
(p.295)

“When shooting, the Indians hold the arrow between the thumb and the index finger, and pull the string with the middle and fourth fingers (Payaguá, Lengua, Pilagá, Ashluslay, Macá).”
(p.296)

“Bolas.—The Abipón and Mocovi hunted with bolas which, like those of modern gauchos, consisted of three stones folded in rawhide and connected to one another by twisted thongs. Bolas are used today by the Ashluslay and Lengua for hunting rheas.”
(p.297)

- SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

“The foot Indians.—The basic social unit of these tribes is the composite band which consists of a few extended families and numbers from 50 to 200 individuals. These bands are localized, own their hunting and fishing territories, have a distinctive name, and are under the authority of a chief. The various families aggregated in a band are often related by marriage or by blood ties. Identity of name is not a bar to marriage within the same band...

“During the algarroba season, when large quantities of beer are brewed every day or when an important decision concerning the...”
(p.302)

“...tribe is made, several bands will meet in the territory of some influential chief, where all together they will build a large camp. Each band, however, maintains its individuality. Bands which constitute subtribes now and then coalesce into a single big camp.”

“Political organization.—Among the tribes of the Bermejo and Pilcomayo River area a chief is an influential man, generally the head of an extended family, who rises to a dominant position as the result of his wisdom, skill, and courage. Many chiefs owe their authority to their reputation as shamans. A chief is expected to provide for the welfare of his people, to represent his group in dealings with the members of his band. As he cannot refuse to give up any object coveted by a follower, he is often a shabby-looking person.

3 They gathered the larvae in a vessel and pounded them.
4 The seeds are crushed and boiled. The threads are immersed in the decoction.
“No chief would be to impose a decision at variance with the desires of his followers. He generally finds out the wishes of the majority by listening to conversations and then carries the matter through as if it were his own idea. A chief normally takes the initiative in hunting and fishing expeditions, and he suggests that the camp be moved when game or food plants in the vicinity are becoming scarce. He has also some vague judiciary powers; for instance, he may force a thief to restore stolen goods. When the council of mature men meets, one of the chief’s functions is to address the crowd. Formerly, he delivered a speech to his band every morning and evening, even though no one seemed to pay the slightest attention to him. Likewise, before a drinking party he always exhorts the men to enjoy themselves in peace and harmony. If a chief is stingy or unable to protect his band from disaster, the families who were his followers rapidly desert him to join the band of a more satisfactory leader.

“Over the band chiefs there is often a greater chief who is recognized as such by all the bands of a certain district. His village is generally a gathering place for several bands. The paramount chief of a subtribe enjoys great prestige, but his power depends entirely on his personality. White people have somewhat increased his authority by dealing with him as the tribal representative and by giving him military titles. Unfortunately, White people sometimes promote an unscrupulous interpreter to the rank of chief, thus destroying the cohesion of the group and hastening its disintegration.

“Chiefly status is rarely hereditary. After the death of a chief, any man who, in the group’s opinion, has the required qualities for the position may take his place.”

(p.303)

“...Descendants of a famous chief boasted of their connection and enjoyed a certain esteem which may be regarded as a step toward the formation of a nobility. The band chiefs were, at least in principle, subordinate to a subtribe or district chief, who often was a man of great influence and of forceful personality.”

(p.304)

- ETIQUETTE

“In many Chaco tribes (Lengua-Macá, Kaskihá, Choroti, Vilela, Chamacoco) a person who returns from a long absence is greeted with tears and funeral laments if someone has died in the group while he was away. Such manifestations of grief serve to notify the traveler of the sad event.”

(p.311)

- WARFARE

“The Abipón and the Mbayá were among the few Indian tribes of South America that challenged Spanish domination and repeatedly defeated the Whites.”

(p.312)

“The Lengua continually skirmish with the tribes along their western borders.

“A Lengua band preparing for war summoned the other bands by sending messengers with red arrows, who told them the place of rendezvous.”

(p.313)

“The Lengua posted messengers at set intervals so that the scouts could always communicate with the main troops.”

(p.314)

“Victory feasts.—...They shouted to the scalps, ‘May he die,’ an apostrophe directed either at the soul of the enemy or at his kin.”

“Peace making.—A Lengua band that wanted peace sent emissaries carrying bundles of arrows and bows tied together. They were received by a deputation from the enemy village. Peace could not be sealed before both enemy groups had paid the wergild for all the dead of the respective families. Members of neutral bands were used as go-between.”

(p.316)
“Signals.”—Chaco Indians on the warpath or on hunting trips have various methods of communication. They warn of an impending danger with columns of smoke. Bunches of grass knotted in a certain way and placed on a forded limb show stragglers the direction taken by their companions. The position and the nature of an object left as a signal convey various kinds of information. The inclination of a stick tells the distance from one point to another, probably showing, as a sundial, the time needed for covering it. Objects hanging from a branch announce to late-comers that the band has left for a feast. An arrow means war or trouble (Toba, Payaguá, Lenga) (p.317)

- LIFE CYCLE

“Abortion and infanticide.”—A deserted woman always kills her newborn offspring. The Lengua invariably dispose of the first child, if it is a girl. Chaco women get rid of any abnormal baby, for instance, one with black skin...

“The preferred sex varies from tribe to tribe. The Lengua and Guaná kept only a few girls…” (p.320)

“Naming.”—There are only brief references to teknonymy in the Chaco...Lenga parents were called "mother and father of so and so."

(p.321)

“Girls puberty rites.”—The manner in which spirits threaten her is ritually dramatized by the Lengua. Women strike the ground with long staves, at the top of which are attached bunches of deer hoofs, and beat the time of their chant while walking around a choir leader. This precentress goes ‘through many strange contortions of the body, at times pretending to tear out her own hair.’ The men also form circles, each chanting to the rhythm of a gourd rattle. Lines of boys dressed in rhea plumes and wearing masks representing evil spirits, weave in and out among the crowd, jingling bunches of hoofs., and from time to time uttering prolonged shrill cries. Whenever they come near the girl, the women drive them off (Grubb, 1913, p.178)” (p.323)

“Marriage.”—The Lengua emissary visits the girl’s parents for several days, smoking tobacco.” (p.324)

“Marriage.”—The Lengua celebrate marriage by a long feast, which ends when the bridegroom ceremonially kidnaps the bride. At a given time, he runs off with his bride and hides a short distance from the village. After a mock pursuit, the couple returns. They pretend to be exhausted and are surrounded by women who pour water over them to cool them.”

(p.325)

“Death observances.”—The Lengua-Cochaboth, Lule, and Lengua were kind to the sick, but abandoned the hopelessly ill as if they had already passed away. The Lengua are loath to bury a person after sunset. Consequently, ‘whether he is dead or not, if there is no possible hope of his living through the night, his funeral begins in order that it may be completed before darkness sets in’ (Grubb, 1913, p.162). Asked by the missionary why they rushed to bury a man still alive, the Malbalá answered, ‘It doesn’t matter, he will die on his way to the grave.’” (p.328)

“The Lengua mutilate the corpse, before or after placing it in the grave. A wound is made where the evil spirit is supposed to have entered the body. They put a dog’s bone, a heated stone, an armadillo’s claw, and red ants in the gash. The stone is supposed to go to the Milky Way and later to fall as a shooting star on the sorcerer. The armadillo claw burrows underground and contributes to the destruction of the evildoer. These Indians also stop the mouth and the nostrils of the corpse with wax or clay.”
Disposal of the dead.—Most Chaco Indians bury the corpse before rigor mortis sets in, in a flexed or squatting position in a shallow grave. The Lengua, it is said, broke the dead man’s neck by bending the head down on the chest. The Lengua strapped the body to a pole and carried it to a shallow grave at the edge of a wood, where they always turned it toward the west. They trampled the grave and covered it with thorny plants.” (p.329)

Destruction of the property of the dead.—The Mbayá, Abipón, Tereno, Lengua, Chorotí, Mataco, Toba, Lule, Vilela, and probably all other Chaco tribes, set fire to the house and sometimes to the whole village where someone had died, and hurriedly abandoned the ghost-threatened place.

Protection from the ghost.—Lengua mourners, fearful of the ghost, often sought the hospitality of some other band. These Indians believed that the chilly spirit of the departed man would return to his deserted camp looking for a fire. Lest the disappointed spirit cast cold ashes into the air and so bring bad luck upon the living, the ashes were always collected and buried before the village was abandoned. After burying a person, the Lengua drank hot water washed themselves, and purified the air with a firebrand of palo santo, with they carried around the village.” (p.331)

Among the Lengua, near relatives of the dead lived in isolation for a month, after which they purified themselves with hot water, and sang and danced around a fire. Boys dressed to represent dragonflies introduced a comic element into the feast by their antics and mimicry of these insects.

The Lengua trace black streaks under their eyes to represent tears.

Life after death.—…Some Lengua place it in the west and describe it as a true city in which the souls are grouped according to family or band relationships and continue their mundane occupations. The Mataco and some Lengua locate their afterworld beneath the earth, where the dead continue to live exactly as they did when alive.

(p.332)

The near relatives of the deceased or, if he were a chief, the members of the extended family, took a new name (Vilela, Abipón, Mocoví, Lengua, Macá, Tereno), hoping to deceive the ghost, who might have been tempted to return and to drag his fellow tribesmen with him to the afterworld (Azara, 1809, 2:153)…” (p.333)

Life after death.—….The Lengua, however, did not like to leave this world without atoning for wrongs done to a fellow member of the band, lest the quarrel be continued in the hereafter.” (p.334)

- ESTHETIC AND RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Games and sports.—…A line of boys is attacked by a ‘serpent’ that tires to bite off the last one. He renews his attacks until a single boy remains, who must kill the ‘serpent’ (Lengua). The same game is played by the Mataco, who call it ‘purchase of a girl.’

‘A monkey,’ pursued by a ‘jaguar,’ climbs for refuge on the backs of his comrades, the ‘trees,’ who stoop in a long line. The ‘jaguar’ may pounce if he is exactly under the ‘monkey,’ and he may not jump over the line (Lengua).” (p.338)

Singing.—….Grubb (1904, pp.95-96) says of Lengua singing:

The men’s voices are loud, rough, slightly tremulous, and not at all flexible. Baritone is the most usual male voice, the compass being ‘B’ in the second space below the stave to ‘D’ in the fourth line. The voices of the women are high-pitched.” (p.339)

Singing.—…In solo songs to drive away bad spirits, the themes are somewhat longer than those of the feast songs and may change as many as four times (Lengua). (See Grubb, 1904, p.97.)"
“During Lengua feasts, choirs relieve one another, so that the music never ceases.”

(p.341)

“Musical instruments. – Rattles. – Hoof rattles are fixed to the end of long poles which the women strike on the ground when dancing around a menstruating girl.”

(p.342)

“Musical instruments. – Stringed instruments. – The musical bow is a favorite instrument of young men (Mataco, toba, Lengua, Guaná), who spend many leisure hours playing it (pl. 71). It consists of two interlocked bows strung with horsehair. One bow is held against the teeth and the other used like a fiddle bow. The faint sound is audible only to the player.”

(p.345)

“Tobacco. – The ancient Mbayá, like modern Lengua, pounded the leaves in a mortar and kneaded the mass into small cakes that were exposed to the sun or to fire. When the tobacco had turned black, it was minced, crushed, and left for a time in the sun (Sánchez Labrador, 1910-17, 1:184). These Indians stored their tobacco in artistically engraved gourds; modern natives carry it in embroidered skin pouches.”

(p.346)

“Tobacco. – Pipes. – As a rule, Chaco pipes are carved of wood…Clay pipes, both turbular and curved, occur in various tribes (Mataco, Pilagá, Lengua). In fact, the Lengua word for ‘pipe’ means also ‘clay.’”

(p.347)

- RELIGION

“Supernatural beings. – The Beetle (escarabajo), who, according to the Lengua, made the Universe and peopled it with spirits and men, remains aloof from his creation and is never invoked.”

(p.350)

“Supernatural beings. – Lengua girls asked Lightning for a husband… Lengua looked at the whirlwinds as the manifestations of a spirit… threw… sticks, to drive them away.”

“The Lengua greatly fear the White demon of the swamps or lagoons, who supposedly sails over the waters.”

(p.351)

“Supernatural beings. – The Lengua believe in a spirit, called Hakumyi, who now and then helps men in their gardening. They also speak of another spirit that is harmless but has thievish proclivities.”

(p.352)

“Ritual. – When girls come of age (Mataco, Ashluslay, Lengua), the women and boys ritually dance to dramatize the attacks of the spirits and their final defeat.

“When a strong south wind blows, the shake their blankets in hope of throwing the sickness out into the wind…”

“Ceremonial objects, charms, and amulets. – The Lengua regard red head bands with feather fringes as a protection against evil spirits, especially water demons.”

(p.354)

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5 “The theme of every chant is short, and even the most joyous is in a minor key. The theme is repeated indefinitely; if it be a quick measure, it is kept up till the singers lose their breath; if it be slow, till they are tired, when, if the occasion be a feast, which may continue sometimes for days together, they are relieved by another choir of singers, so that the music may not cease” (Grubb, 1904, p.96)

6 Grubb (1913, p.73) adds the following details about the Lengua: ‘The pulp is then made into small round cakes, moistened with saliva and pressed between the hands. They are not allowed to bake in the sun until quite hard. A hole is made in the centre of each cake, and several are strung together for convenience.’
“Collective rites.—...The Lengua use wax images to bring good hunting luck.”
(p.355)

“Omens and dreams.—...The Lengua explain that during sleep the soul leaves the body and has many adventures which often are construed as real. Dreams are regarded by the Indian ‘as warnings and guides to his conduct’ (Grubb, 1913, p.127). The actions of a person seen in a dream are often regarded as the expression of his actual intentions, and the dreamer subsequently acts accordingly.”
(p.356)

- SHAMANISM

“Every Chaco band has many individuals who are capable of treating a sick person or chanting to avert some impending disaster. It is, therefore, sometimes difficult to distinguish between a person with smattering of magical arts and a professional shaman.

“Initiation and training.—Among the Lengua, the profession of shaman often runs in a family, but, here as elsewhere, it is not strictly hereditary.

“In theory, all the power and knowledge of the Mataco shamans come from spirits. A spirit abducts the soul of the would-be shaman, teaches him the spirit language, and treats him as he will later treat his own patients. Among the Toba, a novice, in order to become a fullfledged shaman, must receive a revelation in which he sees a spirit who teaches him a new chant. But, in both cases, the candidates also observe the manipulations of professionals and learn from them the methods and secrets of their calling.

“Before practicing his art, a medicine man must live in solitude, wandering aimlessly in the bush or sitting in a tree; during the period of retirement, he observes a rigorous fast, eating only such foods as raw dog meat (Toba, Mataco) or toads and snakes (Lengua). The diet of the Lengua novice includes little birds plucked alive which transmit to him their power of singing. During his apprenticeship, the candidate repeats his medicine chant continuously as though impelled by a superior force. Afterward an old shaman shoots a small stick at him which penetrates his body without, however, causing any injury (Toba). This stick is probably the same one which the shaman is supposed to shoot into his enemies’ bodies. When a Mbayá apprentice shaman, male or female, had acquired proficiency in chanting, all the shamans of the community gathered in his hut for 2 days to chant special songs while brandishing tufts of rhea feathers. The teachers drank at the expense of the disciple, who spent a whole night chanting and rattling his gourd to show his skill.

“The Kaskihá novice shamans have to fast for about 3 months before practicing. Throughout this period, they endure periods of several...”
(p.360)

“...days of complete abstinence from food and water, followed by brief intervals during which they may drink water and eat sweet potatoes.

“The training of the Tereno Shaman starts in childhood. During the last year of training, he must abstain from fresh meat, fat, salt, manioc, and fruit. On a certain day the instructor produces from his mouth a frog, a small snake, or a tarantula, and gives it to his pupil to eat. Finally, the novice must chant at night until a spirit reveals itself to him.

“In most Chaco tribes, old women often have medical knowledge and are called to treat a sick person. They also know charms and dances which prove helpful in many circumstances. But true shamans

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7 Additional details on the Kaskihá shaman’s initiation rites are given by Hassler (1894, pp. 356-67), who unfortunately is not reliable. The profession is hereditary in the male line. To consecrate his son, a shaman builds a special cabin, in each corner of which he places a small pot containing herbs soaked in water. The decoction varies with the points of the horizon. During 5 days, the hut is taboo to all except the father. Then the son is taken inside amidst the howls of women. He finds a ceremonial vessel made according to strict rules. The father pours out the contents of the pots, beginning with the one in the east corner. The novice drinks the fermented and ill-smelling beverage, and his father breaks the ceremonial vessel on his head. The candidate then retires for several days in the new hut and observes a strict fast. The power of the shaman resides partly in his saliva impregnated with the magic force of the beverage he has absorbed as a novice. Those who specialize in curing snake bites suck a serpent and eat raw slices of its flesh.
are usually men, except among the Abipón and Tereno, where some female ‘jugglers’ seem to have had great influence and were constantly active. Among the Mbayá some young girls practiced medicine (Sánchez Labrador, 1910-17, 2:32).

**Techniques of the shaman.** A shaman has at his service a familiar spirit who performs all the difficult tasks on his behalf and informs him of secrets or future events. *Lule* and *Mataco* shamans sniff a powder made of the seeds of the cebil (*Piptadenia macrocarpa*) to put themselves in a state of mild trace or excitement, when they send their souls in the form of yulo birds to the other world. Their metamorphosis is facilitated by blowing a whistle made from the leg bone of a yulo. The shaman’s soul goes to the land of the spirits or visits the Sun, who is a medicine man of great wisdom. If it meets a rival, a battle ensues in which the life of one of the contenders is at stake.

**Lengua** shamans hypnotize themselves by ‘sitting in a strained position for hours, fixing their gaze upon some distant object’ (Grubb, 1913, p.146) In this condition, they are supposed to throw their souls out.

“Spirits appeared to the *Tereno* shaman in the guise of hawks (*Herpetotheres* sp.), which they conjure up by chanting and rattling their rattles for a whole night, often with the assistance fo their relatives. Familiar spirits sometimes took the appearance of jaguars (*Mbayá*).

**The curing function of the shaman.** In native eyes the main function of shamans is to cure sick people. There are two theories…” (p.361)

“…about the nature of diseases: they may be caused by the intrusion of some object or animal into a person, or by the **loss of the soul**. Spirits acting either of their own accord or through the will of some witch are held responsible for the presence of pathogenic substances in the patient’s body. Some Indians even believe that the pathogenic objects or animas are transformed spirits. For instance, when a person is bitten by a snake, the spirit of the snake enters the body, but it is conceived to turn then into an actual serpent (*Pilagá*). The **Lengua, Tereno**, and **Mataco** ascribe their ailments to the presence in the body of spirits in the form of snakes, rats, goats, kittens, or beetles. The **Lengua** fear a beetle flying by because it is regarded as the materialization of the evil which the shaman extracts from his patients’ bodies.

“The view that diseases are caused by the kidnapping of the soul by some demon or spirit occurs simultaneously with the intrusion theory among the **Toba, Lengua, Mbayá, Tereno**, and probably other Chaco tribes.

“Some diseases and accidents are attributed to the violation of a taboo by the victim or his relatives. The *Mocovi* traced any infant’s ailment to an imprudence of the father, who might, for instance, have eaten tabooed food.

“If disease is caused by an intrusion, the shaman, in order to remove the pathogenic substance, proceeds in the following way: He blows (pl. 73) and spits on the patient and chants monotonously in rising and falling tones. The chant has no words, although the shaman may order the evil to go away. The blowing is followed by violent suction which often draws blood. Some **Toba** shamans scratch the ailing region with a knife or with a small board engraved with designs purported to represent a person (Ducci, 1904, p. 173). The shaman, contracting the muscles of his face, acts as if he will vomit, and spits out mucus, which he may claim to be fragments of the object or animal that he has removed from the patient. Often he exhibits a beetle, a piece of wood, or a pebble, which he pretends to have extracted. Among the **Lengua**, the shaman announces in a special chant that the intruding spirit has been cast out and that it is, therefore, safe for the absent soul to return (Grubb, 1913, p. 134).

“If the disease is the consequence of **soul loss**, the shaman sends his familiar spirit or his own soul to discover its whereabouts and to rescue it.

“The **Mbayá** shaman cured sick people in a round enclosure made of mats, which nobody could enter lest he lose his sight or his life. He chanted, shaking his rattle, then became silent, when his soul went to….” (p.362)

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8 Payaguá shamans, naked except for a rope around the neck, began their treatment by smoking tobacco in a long pipe, then proceeded to frighten off the disease by a variety of sounds from a trumpet made of two halved calabashes sewn together. The cure subsequently followed the usual pattern.

“...the cemetery to bring his patient’s soul back. Sometimes he might declare that his own soul was wandering through the bush in search of the vagabond soul. After the quest, he always sucked the patient’s body and spat out objects, which he buried in a hole. When extracting foreign bodies, shamans pressed heavily on the patient’s stomach with their fists. During the whole treatment the patient was not allowed to open his eyes.

“If, during the search for the wandering soul, the Mbayá shaman saw it mounted on a horse, he knew the case to be hopeless and abandoned the patient to his fate. Nevertheless, he generally asked the relative to pay him, though, infuriated by his failure, they might pelt him with firebrands instead. When resentment against an unsuccessful shaman was great, he often joined some other band lest he be murdered by his patients’ kinfolk.

“The Tumerehã blame illness on the sun. Their shamans treat a sick person by spitting in their hands and rubbing the ailing parts of the patient’s body. The cure is accompanied by chants and dances, in imitation of the voice and behavior of animals which are regarded as demons (Baldus, 1931 a.p.89)

“Other functions of the shamans.--An important duty of shamans is to protect their band by chanting and shaking their rattles at night when there is a danger from the supernatural world.

“When the Abipón sensed impending danger, they consulted their female shamans, who gathered in a hut and spent the night beating two large drums and muttering incantations, accompanied by a continual motion of the feet and arms. The next day, the singers received presents, and were anxiously asked what the spirit had said (Dobrizhoffer, 1784, 2:83). When a storm arose, Mbayá shamans chanted, shook their rattles, and blew at the clouds to disperse them. Lengua shamans provoked rain by tossing the blood of a certain kind of duck upward. Mbayá, Lule, and Mataco shamans dispatched their souls to the sky to bring back rain.

“Shamans also can learn about the future by traveling at night to the land of the spirits. Mataco medicine men send their souls to the Sun for the same purpose, but the journey is perilous, as the Sun, a great Cannibal, does not wish to be bothered by visitors. He places in the shamans’ way various traps which they must avoid before they can come near him. Yet, if they succeed, the Sun is ready to answer all their queries.

“Formerly, when a Mbayá, Abipón, Toba, or Mataco shaman wished to consult a spirit—among the Abipón, the soul of a relative—he crept under a blanket, shook his rattle, and muttered incantations. After a while he trembled and felt a shock, which was unmistakable evidence that a spirit had arrived. The shaman then conversed with the spirit, who answered in a characteristically shrill voice.”

(p.363)

“Mbayá shamans not only could forsee future events, but by their magic they could prevent their realization. Thus, they could forestall diseases, wars, and famines that might have destroyed their people. Shamans among the Guaicuruan-speaking tribes accompanied military expeditions and by their charms brought victory to their party. They were credited with power to kill their enemies merely by blowing at them. When a Mbayá band traveled, the shamans chanted every night to insure the success of the journey.

“Influence and prestige of shamans.--The influence of the shamans on their community is often considerable, and now and then they become the actual leaders of the band. On the other hand, chiefs are often shamans. Some shamans perform miracles to increase their prestige. Lengua medicine men claimed to be able to eat a very poisonous root without feeling any ill effect. By simple tricks, they made the Indians believe that they could spit seeds which promptly developed into full-grown ripe pumpkins.

“Tereno shamans knew many sleight-of-hand tricks: They extracted feathers from their nose; swallowed arrows; and pretended to remove a limb, arm or leg, which they later replaced. They also were serpent charmers. Mataco shamans walk on hot ashes without suffering harm.

“The Abipón, fearing vengeance, accounted it a crime to contradict their shamans’ words or to oppose their desires or commands. Throughout the Chaco, shamans derive substantial benefits from their profession. After an expedition, the Abipón awarded the shaman who had accompanied them the best part of the spoils. Dobrizhoffer (1874 2:87) remarks that medicine men ‘had plenty of excellent horses, and domestic furniture superior to that of the rest.’ Toba shamans insists that their clients pay them speedily on the ground that if they are remiss, the offended spirit will punish both the doctor and his patient.”

(p.364)
- MYTHOLOGY

“Meteoric phenomenon.”–Like many North American tribes, the Chorotí, Lengua, Ashluslay and hold that thunder is produced by mythical birds

“Creation myth.”–The Lengua attribute the creation of the Universe to an enormous beetle. First he caused evil spirits to come out from under the earth and then produced a man and a woman from the ‘grains of soil he had thrown away.’ The first couple was glued together until Beetle separated them.”

“Cataclysms.”–According to Chaco mythology, four different cataclysms destroyed the world: (1) A flood was caused by a menstruating girl who went for water and thus offended a water python (Rainbow) (Toba, Mataco, Lengua).”

(p.367)

“Spirits.”–They are eager to marry or kidnap the men and women of this world. According to Lengua folklore, the golden age ended when a girl responded to the call of a tree spirit (Alarcón y Cañedo, 1924, p.76).”

(p.369)
THE PRESENT-DAY INDIANS OF THE GRAN CHACO, by Juan Belaieff

CULTURE

“There were three mission centers: The first had about 300 Paisiapto-Lengua and some Sanapaná; the second, some Ashluslay (Chulupí) of the Pilcomayo River; the third, part of the Angaité tribe. A few hundred of these Indians now work in the fields and some of the first group own cattle. A strict regime is observed at the missions, and no alcoholic drinks are allowed the Indians. High moral standards are required.

“The missions helped improve relations between the estancieros, or ranchers, and their Indian workers. This mutual understanding was furthered by the spread of the Lengua speech.

“Subsequent to the Chaco war, most cattlemen in the south used the natives as cowboys. Similarly, several estancias of the central area have Lengua, Mascoi, and Ashluslay (Chulupí) laborers.”

(p.371)

- SUBSISTENCE ACTIVITIES

“Herd...-...They use sheep’s wool to weave the magnificent cloaks and belts which are still the pride of an Ashluslay (Chulupí), Macá, Mascoi, or Lengua woman.”

(p.373)

“Some Lengua, whose villages were repeatedly visited by troops, also suffered. Many of the Lengua near Puerto Casado, Nanawa, and elsewhere contracted smallpox, and tribes near the frontier acquired venereal diseases...”

“In view of these circumstances, the leaders of every tribe tried desperately to save their kinsmen by inducing them to take up farming. Among the forward-looking men were chiefs...Ayala and Lopez of the Lengua...”

“Many of the northern tribes...and the Lengua in Casado and Piasco – make a living through hard work in the quebrachales...

“Today the majority of the Indians are fully aware of the necessity of readjusting their lives. Some of the Lengua, Angaité, and Ashluslay (Chulupí) are already accustomed to farming, which they learned long ago in the missions.”

(p.374)

“The hunting tribes, such as the Chamacoco, are rather exigent, but the poorer Lengua from Piasco and Casado, who are armed only with bows and arrows, eat snakes and big lizards as well as caiman’s tails...”

- DRESS AND ORNAMENTS

“Garments.-The women among the southern tribes – Macá, Ashluslay (Chulupí), Mascoi, Lengua, and Pilagá – are more conservative and still wear a carefully softened deer or rhea skin, which hangs from the waist to their knees and is held by a woolen belt...”

“Painting.-...All the tribes of the river plains still tattoo and paint themselves, though the Toba and Lengua are giving up the custom.”

(p.375)
CULTURE

- SUPERNATURALISM

“Disease and Shamanism.—...Northern Cayapò and Apinayé...Both of these tribes, as well as Sherente, recognize soul-loss as a cause of disease; and there is a widespread fear of sorcerers, who are mercilessly killed by the Cariri, Timbira, Sherente, and Cayapò.”

(pp.395-396)

THE CAINGANG by Alfred Métraux

CULTURE

- RELIGION

“Shaminism.—...When illness is caused by the loss of the soul, the patient may recover if appropriate words are spoken to induce the soul to return. It is often promised food. If the shaman’s diagnosis reveals that the disease has been brought about by invisible missiles shot by a spirit, the cure consists of extracting them with the mouth. This procedure, however, was observed only among the Aweikoma-Caingang of Santa Catarina.”

(p.471)

THE NORTHEASTERN AND CENTRAL GE, by Robert H. Lowie

CULTURE

- SUPERNATURALISM

“Animism.—The Apinayé have a common term for the soul, ghost, shadow, image, and bull-roarer. Men, animals, and plants all possess souls, but those not human soon dissolve into nothing after death. Soul-loss by kidnapping or straying is one recognized cause of disease...”

“...The Sherente share the ideas of soul-loss and of spirit relatives surrounding the dying in order to conduct his soul to their village...”

(p.512)

“The Botocudo, by Alfred Métraux

CULTURE

- RELIGION

“Souls and ghosts.—Every adult has a series of souls (nakandyung), some people as many as six. Of these, however, only one resides within the body, the rest remaining nearby. A child gets his first soul when about 4 years old, gradually acquiring others. In sleep the primary soul may leave the body and have experiences of its own—the sleeper’s dreams; its loss causes illness. Before a person dies this soul dies with him; the others accompany the corpse to the grave and soar above it, weeping unseen. These souls no longer eat and would perish unless pitying sky spirits, the marét, carried them off to their land, whence the souls never return and henceforth lose all significance for mortals.”

(pp.538-539)