



Country MAKERS

Ka jobaji ama mia kutae kokotuka okonaminaya ebe atamo yana

World and Image of the Ancestral Artisan

by Sudán A. Macció





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ARTESANO GROUP FOUNDATION is proud about the publication of this book, for it represents the reaffirmation of our purpose to effectively support the dissemination and development of the artisanal activity in Venezuela. We aim at preserving the country's historic memory, and to make craftsmanship known as a tool for sustainable development.

The title “Country Makers” refers to the men and women who inhabit the whole national territory, and who make of artisanal work an activity with profound historic roots, and active permanence in time. We wish to honor them, because they are, at the same time, “country founders”. During thousands of years, the Guaraos have lived in their original territory. They are still struggling to preserve the essence and presence of their ethnic group identity.

The *Guarao* artisan occupies a place of special relevance in the family organization, because he manufactures the utilitarian objects that allow its survival. This task builds up an indissoluble link with the habitat, since for its preparation; they use exclusively local raw materials and techniques whose origin goes back several centuries.

The New World discovery meant the incorporation of new cultural and religious values by the inhabitants of this Land of Grace, who up to date have been slowly and progressively incorporating themselves to sociological changes imposed on them. As an element to ease the process of adaptation to a legal order imposed by the discoverer, catholic missionaries have served as a bridge between dissimilar cultures, from the end of the XVIIIth Century.

We hereby wish to share with you this semblance of a little-known country, seldom-told story with which we honor those who live in this country as the silent guardians of original values and traditions. Should it happen, we would be deeply satisfied.

DEDICATION This book is dedicated to the Guarao people, inhabitants of a land truly blessed by our Creator: Venezuelans who carry deep within them a sincere love for their home, the Orinoco's delta... to them who are the living memory of little known and seldom told history. It is also dedicated to those who give their lives to the preservation of this culture.

*Ka jobaji guarao, aubanoko ka jobaji dioso obonoya anona.
Jotaraotuma ka jobaji obonoya ama tamatuma kootuka
konaruya tamatikamo tatuma janoko saba. Ka jobaji a naba
irida tamaja ebe a tamo, sanuka mia ama sanuka guaraya.
Ama akate, tai kaje, ama, tamajatuma a tejo muae saba
guakunarae, oko namiyama kutae ekoronaja.*



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*Sadly, also a region that still awaits
the blessings and the progress that republican life
of the 19th and 20th centuries brought to other
regions of our land*

INTRODUCTION Through this book we wish to make known, the beauty of the traditional crafts of the Guaraó people. This, of course, requires an overview of their culture. Therefore, we have decided to address the issue from different angles to create an image that encompasses everything, rather than a merely objective, perhaps even cold, description of handmade pieces. In that sense, our research has been directed towards the reason that leads to the elaboration of an elaborate piece and its inherent symbolism.

We assume the premise that the universe of the Guaraó people is the caños (arms or branches of the river) through which they navigate and live. This is the cultural difference between our macrocosmic vision of the universe and theirs. Bearing this in mind we will start by offering descriptive information on the geographical and climatic characteristics of the Orinoco's delta and by presenting the photographic record of its lands and waters: with this, we hope to bring the reader closer to the Guaraó environment.

The second part titled "Our Roots" is a section devoted to the pre-Hispanic period of our history. In it, we will see the Guaraó as some of the original inhabitants of the land known today as Venezuela. Then we shall continue with a historical narrative that will take us through the periods of conquest, colony, independence, and republic, right up to the present day: in it, we shall refer to aboriginal tribes in general and to the Guaraó in particular. This chapter will be a window into their culture: their language, myths, family and social organization, and their economic activities.

The chapter entitled "The encounter of two worlds" is dedicated to reviewing the history of Catholic missionaries and their role as civilizing agents in the only part of the country that was spared the aggressions of conquest; a region that only came in touch with colonial life at the very end of the period, and in addition, the population was not involved in the war of independence.

About crafts, we shall start by offering general definitions of aboriginal artisan labor in our country, eventually focusing on the particular crafts developed by the Guarao tribe. We shall highlight the differences between traditional and contemporary crafts, review their utilitarian pieces and focus on their practical use. As we will see, the “Moriche” (palm) plays a paramount role as the nucleus of their culture.

As a support to the elaboration of the theoretical framework that sustains the concepts issued throughout the text, several bibliographical sources have been consulted. They will be detailed at the end of the book. This information has been complemented with a series of interviews from a field project carried out by a team that includes teachers, lawyers, psychologists, ethnologists, sociologists, missionary priest, brothers and sisters, all of them adscribed to State and private organizations. Of paramount importance was the cooperation offered by native communities.

The included photographic record aims at illustrating each of the topics presented. It portrays the communities and environments that were visited during our 1.200 km voyage through the Río Grande and the –caños– that structure the delta. The first stage took us from the city of Tucupita to the San Francisco de Guayo Mission. The second began in Guayo and followed the Rio Grande river arms –caños– up to the village of Santa Catalina. The third covered Barrancas, Piacoa, Santa Catalina, El Remanse, Boca de Aragua, Crucero de Araguaimujo, and San Francisco Guayo. The fourth covered Musimurina, Juanieda, Komaro, Jeribasanuka, Barakataina 1 and 2 and Nabasanuka. The fifth and last covered Guayo, Santa Catalina, Crucero de Aragua, Araguaimujo, and Boca de Aragua communities.

Every crafted piece in this volume was manufactured in these communities. All raw materials used were collected locally and the manufacturing techniques employed were developed entirely by the natives. We desire to show the reader the culture of a people that is the root of our nationality, as well the pleasure of sharing the magnificent scenery of land blessed by Creator.

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