



ETHNOHISTORIES

Rey Montezuma

English

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FOREWORD

To facilitate reading in Ngäbere, we have adapted, with some modifications, the system in the short Ngäbere-Spanish dictionary Kukwe Ngäbere by Melquiades Arosemena and Luciano Javilla, published in 1979 by the Directorate of Historical Heritage of the National Institute of Culture (INAC), now the Ministry of Culture, and the Summer Institute of Linguistics.

VOWELS	CONSONANTS
a - Like in Spanish	/b/ch/d/g/j/l/m/n/ñ/r/s/t/v/y/ Like in Spanish
ä - Deeper than in Spanish	c - Like the soft sound of the /c/ in Spanish
e - Like in Spanish	td - Intermediate sound between /d/ and /t/, like /th/ in English
i - Like in Spanish	k - Like the strong sound of the /c/ in Spanish as in "casa"
í - Guttural sound between vowel and consonant, like the "klick" of some African languages	ng - In Ngäbere it exists in initial position, but in Spanish it does not exist in initial position as in "congo"
ii - An /i/ longer than in Spanish	IMPORTANT: It should be noted that in Ngäbere there is no /f/
o - Like in Spanish	
ö - Deeper than in Spanish	
ó - More accented than /ö/	
u - Like in Spanish	
ü - Deeper than in Spanish	
ú - Like the /w/ in English	

It should also be clarified that this story comes from narrators residing in the village of Potrero de Caña, formerly the Tole district of the Chiriquí province, now the Müna district of the Ngäbe Buglé region, from which the Agronomist Roger Séptimo, the compiler and writer is a native. Consequently, the phonology corresponds to the dialectal or regional variation "Guaymí del Interior" (Pacific slope) which differs from the "Guaymí de la Costa" (Caribbean slope of the province of Bocas del Toro and the now district of Kusapin in the Comarca Ngäbe Buglé) in the *Guaymí Grammar* of Ephraim S. Alphonse Reid, published in 1980 by Fe y Alegría. This variant corresponds to what Arosemena and Javilla call "Chiriquí" and which contrasts with the Caribbean variants of Bocas del Toro and the coast of Bocas.

This ethnohistory was published in 1986 in Kugü Kira Nie Ngäbere / Sucesos Antiguos Dichos en *Guaymí* (Ethnohistory *Guaymí*), by the Panamanian Association of Anthropology, with the PN-079 Agreement of the Inter-American Foundation (FIA) managed by Dr. Mac Chapin, Anthropologist, who encouraged us to follow the example he had set by compiling *Pab-Igala: Histories of the Kuna Tradition*, published in 1970 by the Center for Anthropological Research of the University of Panama, under the direction of Dr. Reina Torres de Araúz.

This book represented the work of the Agricultural Engineer Roger Séptimo, when he was a student in his second year at the Center for Agricultural Teaching and Research in Chiriquí (CEIACHI), Faculty of Agricultural Sciences, University of Panama (FCAUP), not only writing in Ngäbere the stories that he had heard from his family members in his community, but also his effort to translate them into Spanish as a bilingual person that he is, like other indigenous people in Panama, who are striving to receive a formal education.

The ethnohistories were compiled, recorded on cassettes and written by the Agronomist Roger Séptimo in 1983 and 1984.

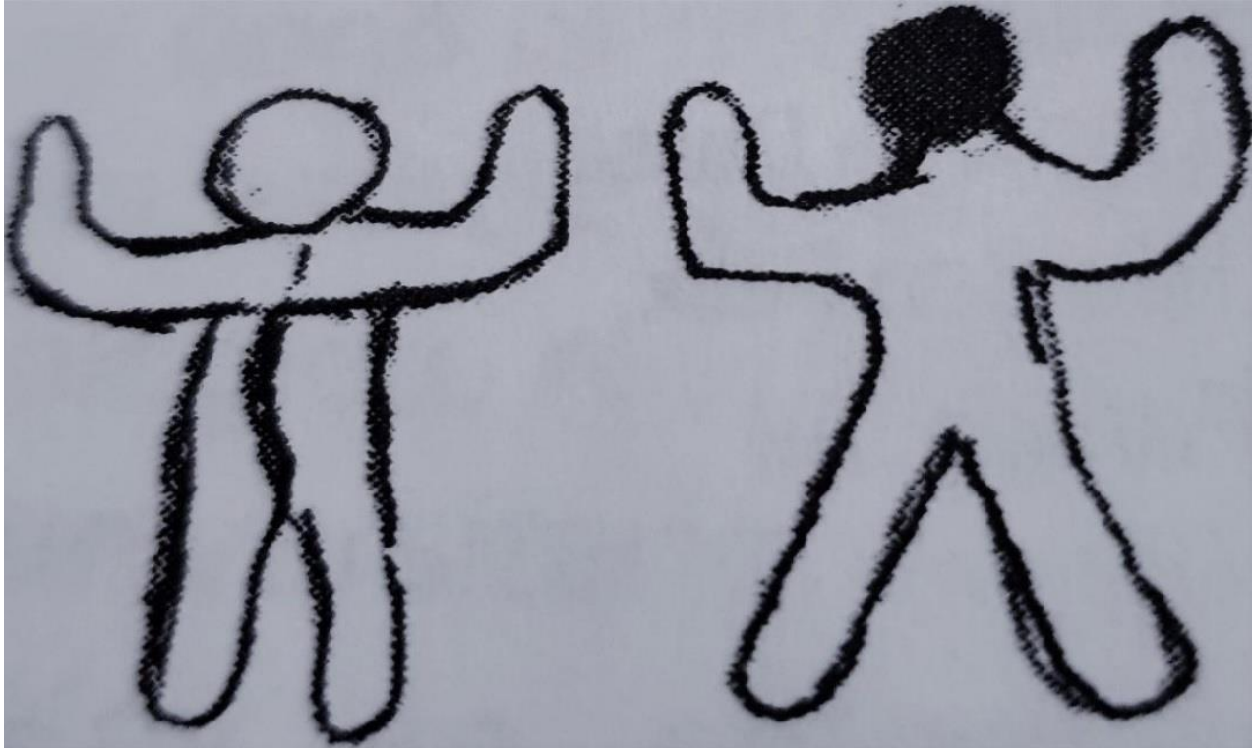
As Professor-Researcher of Anthropology and Rural Sociology at the CEIACHI of the FCAUP, Luz Graciela Joly Adames, Anthropologist, Ph.D., encouraged Roger, as one of her students, to write the stories, convince him and show him that she would not exploit or abuse his work, but that he would get credit. Consequently, the anthropologist limited herself only to making some corrections of form and style in the Spanish translations without altering their content.

We encourage students from the seven indigenous peoples in the Republic of Panama, and teachers in public and private schools, colleges and universities in Panama, to write in their own languages and translate the ethnohistories and songs they hear in their families and communities into Spanish, as part of their informal education.

We also encourage readers of these ethnohistories in Ngäbere, Spanish and English, to draw the scenes that they liked the most, as they did in 2002, students in an Education and Society course, directed by Dr. Joly, at the Faculty of Education, Autonomous University of Chiriquí.

Article 13 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, approved by the General Assembly, in its 107th plenary session on September 13, 2007:

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, promote and pass on to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to name and maintain their communities, places and people.
2. The States shall adopt effective measures to ensure the protection of this right and also to ensure that indigenous peoples can understand and make themselves understood in political, legal and administrative actions, providing for this, when necessary, interpretation services or other appropriate means.



Two anthropomorphic figures engraved in a petroglyph at Cuchilla de Bongo. In *Know the Rock Art in Panama: Some Petroglyphs in Chiriquí*. Joly Adames, Luz Graciela, Compiler, 2007: .28. David, Chiriquí, Panama: Modern Impressions.

REY MONTEZUMA AGAINST MARCO CONCEPCIÓN

Rey Montezuma (1), that was the name of a *suguiá* who lived in the mountain ridge of San Félix. Unfortunately, we do not know with certainty in what years he lived. He was a very powerful *suguiá*, chief of the Montezumas of San Félix.

This *suguiá* culminated his life in a contest that he had with another *suguiá* named Marco Concepción. Not much is known about Rey Montezuma as far as his life as a *suguiá*, nor is it known which were the battles that he had with the colonizers. What has been mostly remembered through time was his encounter with the *suguiá* Concepción, to measure the capacity and power of both.

The *suguiá* Concepción lived on the other side of the Vigú river, on the border with the province of Veraguas, near the place known nowadays as Cerro Pelado or as La Palma. Nowadays we still have his descendants, who still live in the same place.



Torres de Araúz, Reina. 1980: 216 INDIGENOUS PANAMA. Panama: National Institute of Culture, Historical Heritage.

Now we shall narrate what happened and why they had to reach the extreme rivalry of their power, being both indigenous men and Guaymí (Ngäbe), above all. On the other hand, having external enemies, they should have fought them together and not provoke an internal fight between the two. It so happens that among the Guaymí (Ngäbe) there were many *suguiás* with extraordinary powers to protect their people and that together they looked after the wellbeing of their fellow citizens. All of them had a plural number of followers, who were free to choose which *suguiá* to consult whom they thought was the proper one. Therefore, there were Guaymí (Ngäbe) persons who would willingly go to various *suguiás*; or, as well, were recommended by the same *suguiás*, to join forces in common.

Under such circumstances, the Guaymí (Ngäbe) would travel long distances to where there were famous *suguiás*. It occurred that in San Félix, many indigenous people would go to the *suguiá* Marco Concepción, to consult him and seek his protection from evils. As is the tradition, the *suguiás* always authorize the religious ceremony of the wake to dispel evils. For such a case, the Guaymí (Ngäbe) who go to the *suguiás* always take cocoa so that the wake may be effective.

Thus, it occurred that many indigenous people from San Félix would go to the *suguiá* Concepción. They were neighboring families who periodically gathered and would go together to the aforementioned *suguiá*. Almost all would take cocoa so that they could receive the order to make their wakes. These facts were what one day provoked the contest between the two *suguiás*. According to the indigenous narrative, it occurred in the following way.



*Drinking cocoa during a wake, In Torres de Araúz, Reina. 1980:251.
Indigenous Panama. Panama, National Institute of Culture, Historical Heritage.*

As it was always customarily, a considerable numerous group of Guaymí (Ngäbe) people from the mountain ridge of San Félix arrived where the *suguiá* Concepción lived to consult with him and at the same time to give them the order to do the wake. It happens that before, it was customary to do a diet beginning with the first day of the wake, and it continued around five days for each wake. The diet consisted in not to eat salt, nor drink chicha (fermented beverage), nor eat any meat roasted over fire. Nowadays, very little or nothing is kept of this diet. When the order was given to hold the wake to several people at the same time, it was the norm that, as soon as the first wake ended, the second one began, and so successively until the last one ended, according to the order that the *suguiá* gave to each person. It meant that, not until the last wake ended, no one could break the customary diet.

These groups of indigenous people, as the days of the wake went by, they could not resist keeping the diet. As there were numerous families who were celebrating the wake, one after another, there would pass months without being able to eat salt, drink chicha, or eat anything roasted over fire.

These groups wanted to break the diet, as they could not resist any more to eat food without the condiment of the salt. They undertook the task to talk with each other, saying to try to eat salt. It was

argued that the *suguiá* was living far away from where they lived and that, therefore, it was not possible for him to become aware of the same. Some said: "I don't believe that he can become aware; he lives far from here; besides, there are many hills in between that make it difficult to see from there to here, and it is not possible that the *suguiá* can see or become aware that we have broken the diet." Not being satisfied with the theory, they put into practice their desire.

With this idea, one of them, in the food that was being cooked, threw some salt. In the instant that the salt made contact with the food that was being cooked, all became ashes. In this way, they witnessed that it could not be done. No matter at what distance was the *suguiá*, this was impossible, as somehow his presence was wherever a wake was being held. In this way, their desire to break the diet was reduced to nothing.



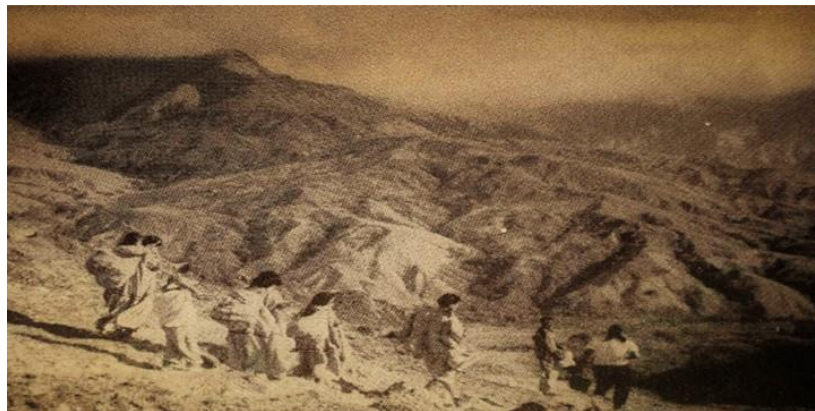
Plate from the book of Girolano Benzoni showing indigenous domestic activities.

In Torres de Arauz, R. 1980: 56 Indigenous Panama. Panama: National Institute of Culture, Historical Heritage. Benzoni, G. "The History of the New World." Library of the National Academy of History. Caracas, 1967.

Rey Montezuma, becoming aware of this fact, murmured saying: "So that is the thing, it means that this *suguiá* is extraordinary in strength and power; then, it is necessary that we meet him, to see if he has such power and see if he can also win me with his power."

It did not pass too much time so that all the inhabitants became aware of this incident and were very surprised.

The *suguiá* Montezuma, who was accustomed to confronting the colonizers with his power, not fearing anyone, recognized that he could win anyone at any time that he wanted. With this purpose, he organized a marathonic trip from San Félix to the Viguí river, to the place where the *suguiá* Concepción lived. The group was formed by his family, neighbors, and close followers. The majority where men and women who went to see how this contest was going to be and what would be its result. As the contest was between these sovereign men and it implied extraordinary strength and power, the followers were only going to be spectators.



Guaymés crossing the Tabasará mountains.

In Torres de Araúz, Reina. 1980:89 INDIGENOUS PANAMA. Panama: National Institute of Culture, Historical Heritage.

It was customary to find where the *suguiás* lived many persons who daily went for consultation and to ask for a wake. During the colonization, when the indigenous Guaymí (Ngäbe) had not been mixed into a Hispanic-Indigenous society, when still there were no influences of Christian religions, they only believed in *suguiás* who were their spiritual guides. They did not offer cult to any man, nor practiced religions with strange and fearful precepts. They only believed in a supreme being, whose maximum representatives on earth were the *suguiás*. Therefore, the *suguiás* had numerous followers, and every day could be found many people concentrated where the *suguiás* lived.

When the *suguiá* Concepción became aware of the maneuver that was going to be done by his homologous *suguiá* Montezuma who was getting close to arrive at his house, he warned his followers who were at that precise moment in his house. He advised his followers to be calm and to remain together when the visitors arrived. If anything strange occurred that no one should look, nor make any comments, and much less laugh at that moment. All informed of the case and the conduct that had to be observed, they remained waiting for the arrival of Montezuma and his followers.

Effectually, the visitors presented themselves in the house of the *suguiá* Concepción, led by their chief, Rey Montezuma, who immediately greeted Concepción, and at the same time indicated which was the motive of his visit. Then, Montezuma himself indicated the manner in which the contest would be held. The other *suguiá* made no objection and only limited himself to obey and accept the rules of the contest.

Montezuma set the following conditions to prove the capacity and powers of both: not urinate nor defecate for four days and nights. During those days, the two would remain awake, but drinking cocoa all the time, and walking embraced and discussing without anyone knowing what they were talking.

The followers of the *suguiá* Concepción, the men accommodated themselves on the seats inside the house and the women accommodated themselves on the bed made for visitors. The followers of the *suguiá* Montezuma accommodated themselves in the same way.



*Bed inside a Guaymí (Ngäbe) house in Hato Pílon, San Félix.
In Torres de Araúz, Reina. 1980: 232 INDIGENOUS PANAMA. Panama: National Institute of Culture, Historical Heritage.*

The seats were always of elaborated trunks, several meters long, in which visitors would be accommodated and that were used for great events, meetings for many persons. On one of these seats, the followers of the *suguiá* Montezuma sat and the contest formally began with the rules previously established. Knowing beforehand that both really had hidden powers, both the visitors as well as those of the house remained expecting what would occur.

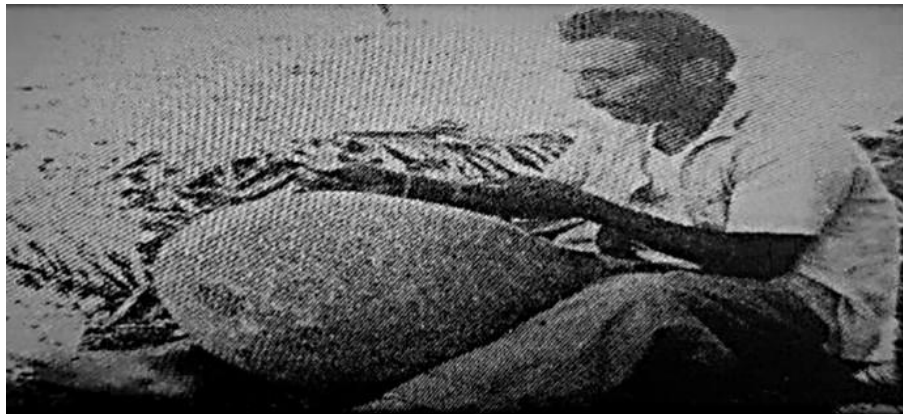
In one of their discussions, Montezuma said to Concepción: “We are not going to urinate nor defecate during these days, we will eliminate them in each of us in the form of winds and rain,” and thus he constantly would remind the other. In the beds on which the women of the house and followers of the *suguiá* Concepción had accommodated themselves, a few hours after the contest began, Rey Montezuma initiated his first attack in the house of his rival. The beds in which the women were

sitting, the woods and forked poles that supported the beds burst in half, all at the same time, leaving the women spread on the floor. The companions of Montezuma burst in laughter, while those of the house remained silent.

A moment later, Concepción also responded to the feat of his adversary. The followers of Montezuma who were sitting on the elaborated boards of wood, the boards split violently in the middle, broken in halves, and all who were sitting on the boards fell to the floor.

The cocoa beverage did not cease at any moment, day and night. The women were in charge of getting water out of a well and the men went after firewood.

During one of the many manifestations of power, at the precise moment that the women went to get water out of the well, the water changed into different colors. Then, when the women were on their way to the house to inform what was happening, the water would recover its normal color, and then the women would fill the gourds to take the water to the house.



*The preparation of big gourds for water and chicha is a male task.
In Torres de Arauz, Reina. 1980:245 PANAMA INDIGENA. Panamá: Instituto Nacional de Cultura, Patrimonio Histórico.*

This was the feat of Rey, to turn the water into colors; while the other *suguiá* also did his part, transforming the water into its normal color. Supposedly, the different colors of the water were the evils that Rey threw to see if he could finish his adversary and all his followers when they drank the water.

One after another, the incidents occurred in the contest of powers without letting any of the two, escape. Both remained embraced, without letting each other free.

When three days had passed, Rey urinated in his pants while embracing the *suguiá* Concepción, but they continued as it was obligatory for the contest to last four days. When they arrived at the fourth day, Rey defecated in his pants. It had been agreed upon that no one would make his necessities during the stipulated days. Meanwhile, Marco Concepción remained standing without passing through any of the two phases. This meant the defeat of Rey Montezuma, in his pretention, in not being able to comply in all the instances with the norms of the confrontation.

When the *suguiá* Concepción saw that his rival could not comply with the proposed rule, he let him free to return to his house. The followers of Montezuma saw with their own eyes the defeat of their chief.



Olmecoid design slope, coming from the west of the Isthmus. Taken from the Lothrop Archeology of Southern Veraguas book. In Torres de Araúz, Reina 1980: 54 Indigenous Panama. Panama: National Institute of Culture, Historical Heritage.

After the fourth day, the visitors left for their houses, being victims in another form of the *suguiá* Concepción. Now the attack was not against his rival Montezuma, but against all his followers. They could not sit anywhere on the ground, nor on rocks, neither on tree trunks, because they would immediately become attached without their becoming aware of it. When they wanted to get up, they couldn't and then they would begin to cry until they could be detached from the place where they had sat and continue on their way home.

Thus, they went on until they arrived at their place in San Félix. According to the narrator, all saw what occurred. As they were getting near to their houses, they began to die one after another. At last, only Rey remained alive, but also fell dead, thus finishing the contest.

Meanwhile, Marco Concepción became very ill, but survived.

In this way finished the famous *suguiá* then known as Rey Montezuma. His death is attributed to the fact that he underestimated the power of the *suguiá* Concepción, and that his people did not keep the obligatory diet. As a result, the consequence of the confrontation between the two *suguiás* was futile, leaving as a result the death of Rey and his followers who were not to blame. If this event had not occurred, there would not have been any contest in which Rey would have been involved, who could have lived longer and that, perhaps, his frontal fights against the colonizers would be better known and, perhaps, with not pleasant results for the colonizers who established themselves in Remedios, from where they continued expanding.



Guaymí (Ngäbe) family head with all his wives and children, Cerro Culantro, San Félix. In Torres de Araúz, Reina. 1980:242 PANAMA INDIGENA. Panamá: Instituto Nacional de Cultura, Patrimonio Histórico.

(1) This Rey Montezuma cannot be mistaken with the Rey Montezuma of Mexico, even though the name is the same. Apparently, the Rey (King) of Mexico was known by the colonizer Hernán Cortés and the one in Panama was known afterwards, during the full colonization. It is known that he was a fierce adversary of the colonization, that he fought it bravely, never bending his head until his death. The surname Montezuma is common among the indigenous population of San Félix.

JOLLY

Luz Graciela

PUBLIC DOMAIN CONTENT

