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THE ETHNIC AFFINITIES OF THE GUETARES OF
COSTA RICA.

BY DANIEL G. BRINTON, M.D.

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The Guetares, or Huetares, of Costa Rica, included various tribes speaking related dialects now believed to be wholly extinct. They dwelt on the lofty plateau of the interior, in the vicinity of Cartago and San José de Costa Rica, and for that reason received their name from their Nahuatl neighbors, which is a corruption of the Nahuatl *uei tlalli*, great land (Peralta).

They were a people of no mean culture, as the fine examples of worked gold ornaments and deftly carved stones obtained from their sepulchres and exhibited at the Madrid and Chicago exhibitions testify. Many of the best specimens now in the Museum of Costa Rica were collected from these interments by the director, Señor Anastasio Alfaro.

These remains justify the description of Juan Vasquez de Coronado, who was among them in 1562. He depicts them as of active intelligence, war-like in disposition, tall and well built, wearing cotton clothes skillfully woven, and having in their possession much gold. From other sources we learn that they were celebrated among the surrounding nations for their *mitotes*, sacred songs and dances; and that they were accustomed to make human sacrifices at the burial of important individuals.¹

But where the Guetares belonged in the linguistic classification of American tribes has up to the present been an unsolved problem.

Writing in 1890, M. Alphonse Pinart asks: "In Costa Rica, those tribes called Guetares, who dwelt at first on the southern declivity of the Sierra and were driven thence by the invading Nahuas, were they not related to the Carib family of the southern continent?"² And in 1893, Manuel de Peralta, in his excellent study of Costa Rican ethnography, observes, "It is almost impossible to ascertain the ethnic affinities of the Guetares, since no vocabulary of their language has been found; but archæology shows that if they

¹ See M. de Peralta, *Costa Rica, Nicaragua y Panama en el Siglo xvi*, pp. 792, 770 (Madrid, 1882).

² Pinart, *Limite des Civilisations dans l'Isthme Americain* (Paris, 1890).

were not actually related to the Nahuas, they were at least under their cultural influence."¹

These two guesses, so widely asunder, by eminent living authorities, indicate how uncertain ethnographers are as to the relationship of this once important and cultured people.

This uncertainty I shall endeavor to dispel by an examination of a few words preserved by early writers supposed to be in the Guetar language; by a comparison of some proper names stated to be from their tongue; and by the aid of an unpublished vocabulary obtained from what was believed to be the last remnant of the tribes, about forty years ago.

The traveler Benzoni visited the area of Costa Rica in 1528, and gives the following five words of the language of the "Suerra" (to be pronounced according to the Italian alphabet):²

Earth, *ischa*.

Men, *cici*.

Sickness, *stasa*.

Gold, *chiaruela*.

Great, *matto*.

A wild animal, *casuii*.

These words mostly belong without doubt to the Talamancan linguistic substock. Thus, *ischa* = Talamanca *ischiko*, earth, and Cabecar *hizhku*. The word for men, *cici*, is the Cabecar, *jiji*; that for gold, *chiaruela*, appears a modification of the Talamanca *txela*, copper, perhaps yellow metal. The word for large, *matto*, belongs probably to the Cuna, which has *tumati*; and *casuii* has too vague a meaning to identify. The term *stasa* for sickness does not appear in modern vocabularies.

But the "Suerre," although assumed by Dr. Berendt and others as identical with the Guetar tongue, is not positively known to be so; and geographically it appears to have been on the north coast along the river of the same name, some distance from the province of the historical Guetares.

I have found but one word of the ancient Guetar language preserved by the early conquistadores, but it is almost convincing of their linguistic position. This is *ueritecas* or *biritecas*, applied by them to the women of the neighboring province of Coto, because they went forth to battle with the men and joined like them in

¹ Translated in my *Report upon the collections exhibited at the Columbian Historical Exposition, Madrid*, p. 40, sq. (Washington, 1895).

² Benzoni, *Historia del Mondo Nuovo*, fol. 77 (Venice, 1572).

the fray.¹ This is clearly in the Talamancan tongue compounded of *era* or *wa-re*, woman, and probably *ituk*, to shoot, chop or strike.²

To this evidence may be added that of some geographical names. It is considered by local antiquaries that the names of several mountains in the region referred to belong to the extinct Guetar dialect. Examples of these are Excasu, Atarazu and Irazu. Here the termination *zu* cannot be else than the Cabecar *tsu* (Gabb), meaning hill or mountain.

Finally, I have a vocabulary taken at least forty years ago from some natives surviving near San José de Costa Rica, in the ancient Guetar territory. It is called Talamanca, but Mr. Gabb, who saw it, pronounced it to be of a different dialect; and Dr. Berendt, from whose collection it came, marked it as "antigua Talamanca." I believe it to be the only specimen of the Guetar dialect known, and as such I quote from it the list of words I used in my *American Race*, adding their similars in some other dialects of the stock.

VOCABULARY OF "ANCIENT TALAMANCA" OR GUETAR.

Man,	<i>pejelilli</i>	(Cabecar,	<i>pejettillè = vir</i>).
Woman,	<i>palacrak</i>	(<i>id.</i> ,	<i>palacrak</i>).
Sun,	<i>cagune</i>	(<i>id.</i> ,	<i>cagune</i>).
Moon,	<i>furia</i>	(<i>id.</i> ,	<i>tura</i>).
Fire,	<i>yocó</i>	(<i>id.</i> ,	<i>yocó</i>).
Water,	<i>dicre</i>	(<i>id.</i> ,	<i>dicre</i>).
Head,	<i>sotacii</i>	(<i>id.</i> ,	<i>sotacu</i>).
Eye,	<i>seguebra</i>	(<i>id.</i> ,	<i>seguebra</i> , or <i>wobra</i> , Gabb)
Ear,	<i>secuque</i>	(<i>zgo-ku</i> ,	Gabb).
Mouth,	<i>sequeque</i>	(<i>ko-kavu</i> ,	<i>id.</i>).
Nose,	<i>seyiquete</i>	(<i>jik</i> ,	<i>id.</i>).
Tongue,	<i>seguccte</i>	(<i>kok-tu</i> ,	<i>id.</i>).
Tooth,	<i>saka</i>	(<i>ka</i> ,	<i>id.</i>).
Hand,	<i>seyura</i>	(<i>ura</i> ,	<i>id.</i>).
Foot,	<i>ecuru</i>	(<i>kru-kwe</i> ,	<i>id.</i>).
House,	<i>tu</i>	(<i>hu</i> ,	<i>id.</i>).

This comparison leaves no room for doubt that this modern dialect, supposed to represent the ancient Guetar, is Talamancan, and closely allied to the Cabecar still spoken in Costa Rica; and from all the evidence above brought forward, the identification of the Guetares as a branch of the Talamancan linguistic group is sufficiently conclusive.

¹ Juan Vazquez de Coronado, in Peralta, U. S., p. 775.

² Gabb, *Indian Tribes and Languages of Costa Rica*, p. 533.