

# Trumai

Data source: eHRAF

Secondary source

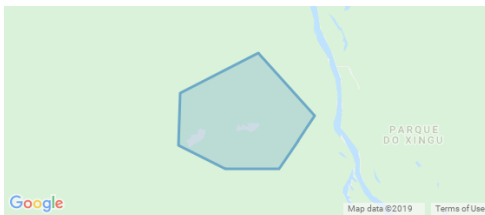
Entered by Emily Pitek, Human Relations Area Files

*\* Data Source entry, prepared based on data sourced from an external project.*

*\* Secondary Source entry, prepared from a literature review by a Ph.D. RA*

Entry tags: South American Religions, Religious Group

"The Trumai are one of several indigenous peoples of central Brazil, living in small, ethnically based communities widely dispersed in a region that formed the headwaters of the Xingu River, one of the largest tributaries of the Amazon (Adem, 2010)." This entry is based on ethnographic information obtained by anthropologist Buell Quain during his 1938 stay at the Trumai village of Vanivani, along the Kuluene River. The Trumai population was already diminishing by the time of Quain's visit; he recorded that the village contained four households and a total population of 43 individuals. The village was led by a chieftain who received varying levels of respect from the community. His primary responsibilities were to give daily speeches and coordinate communal projects. Two sub-chiefs were present, and had the sole function of taking office if the chieftain was away from the village. It was possible for a chief to also be a shaman, but at the time of Quain's visit the chieftain was only able to employ the shamanistic art of curing, which was a skill most adult males could perform. A shaman is distinguished by having the special powers of locating enemy war parties and the ability to see the afterworld. Supernatural beings (ghosts and various non-human spirits) are present, and are the main characters of many Trumai legends/stories, but do not have direct causal efficacy in the earthly realm. Rain (Ka'wizu) was the only being mentioned to interact with the world, and was said to be the agent of rain and storms. A variety of ceremonies were also present during Quain's visit, with the most important being the ole (manioc) ceremony, which is associated with crop fertility. Religion and the supernatural realm generally do not appear to be of major concern/importance in the daily lives of the Trumai, and many practices and ceremonies have been lost to memory. Murphy and Quain (1955:101) note that "in the case of the Trumai, disinterest in the religious sphere was closely related to disinterest in other aspects of their culture." Just 10 years after Quain's visit the Trumai population shrunk to 25, which is hypothesized to be the result of introduced diseases and low birth rate. Note that this entry considers the Trumai religious group to be coterminous with Trumai society.



Date Range: 1910 CE - 1940 CE

Region: Trumai village of Vanivani, central Mato Grosso State, Brazil

Region tags: South America, Brazil

Trumai village of Vanivani, central Mato Grosso State, Brazil ca. 1938

## Status of Participants:

✓ Religious Specialists    ✓ Non-elite (common people, general populace)

## Sources

Print sources for understanding this subject:

— Source 1: Divale, W. 2004. Codebook of Variables for the Standard Cross-Cultural Sample. World Cultures: The Journal of Cross-Cultural and Comparative Research.

– Source 2: Murdock, G.P. & Wilson, S.F. (Jul., 1972). Settlement patterns and community organization: Cross-Cultural Codes 3. *Ethnology*, 11(3), 254-295.

– Source 3: Tuden, A. & Marshall, C. (Oct., 1972). Political organization: Cross-cultural codes 4. *Ethnology*, 11(4), 436-464.

Online sources for understanding this subject:

– Source 1 URL: <https://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/document?id=sp23-001>

– Source 1 Description: Murphy, Robert Francis, and Buell H. (Buell Halvor) Quain. "Trumai Indians Of Central Brazil." *Monographs*, J. J. Augustin, 1955, p. xii,108.

– Source 2 URL: <https://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/document?id=sp23-000>

– Source 2 Description: Adem, Teferi Abate. Culture Summary: Trumai. Human Relations Area Files, 2010.

## General Variables

### Membership/Group Interactions

Are other religious groups in cultural contact with target religion:

– Yes

Notes: "Here [among the Trumai], there was no large scale transmission of Western culture and no direct interaction with Brazilian society. But slight though the contact of the upper Xingú Indians with the whites was, it resulted in the introduction of respiratory infections that contributed greatly to their depopulation" (Murphy and Quain, 1955:97).



Is there violent conflict (within sample region):

– Field doesn't know

Notes: SCCS Variable 1649, Frequency of Internal Warfare (resolved rating), indicates that no resolved rating was made. Source of information: Ember and Ember, 1992; Retrieved from Divale, 2004.



Is there violent conflict (with groups outside the sample region):

– Yes

Notes: SCCS Variable 1650, Frequency of External Warfare (resolved rating), originally coded the Trumai as 2.25, which is between original code 2 (external warfare seems to occur once every 3-10 years) and original code 3 (external warfare seems to occur at least once every two years). Source of information: Ember and Ember, 1992; Retrieved from Divale, 2004.

Does the religious group have a general process/system for assigning religious affiliation:

– No

Notes: Because the religious group is coterminous with the society, there is no process for assigning religious affiliation.

Does the religious group actively proselytize and recruit new members:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence indicating that the Trumai would recruit new members.

## Size and Structure

Number of adherents of religious group within sample region (estimated population, numerical):

– Estimated population, numeric: 43

Notes: "The Trumai were once feared by the other tribes of the upper Xingú and were evidently a relatively numerous and vigorous people. However, when Quain [principal ethnographic authority] visited them in 1938, they numbered only 43, and only ten years later, in 1948, the population had shrunken to a meagre 25. Their small numbers had forced them to abandon village life once since Quain's visit, but they subsequently reunited in a new community" (Murphy and Quain, 1955:10).

Are there recognized leaders in the religious group:

– Yes

Notes: "The shamanistic art of curing was known and employed by nearly all the adult males of the village, and in this sense parallels the practices recorded among the Kamayurá by Oberg. There is, however, a type of specialist among the Trumai that is not reported for the Kamayurá, and it is to this type that the term 'shaman' is applied in the following description. The Trumai 'shaman,' in this sense, is a man who possessed extra-visionary powers through which he could locate enemy war parties and 'see' the afterworld" (Murphy and Quain, 1955:62).

↳ Are leaders believed to possess supernatural powers or qualities:

– Yes

Notes: "The Trumai 'shaman,' in this sense, is a man who possessed extra-visionary powers through which he could locate enemy war parties and 'see' the afterworld" (Murphy and Quain, 1955:62).

↳ Powers are acquired by individual deeds carried out in past lives:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of a belief in reincarnation.

↳ Powers are acquired by individual deeds carried out in the current life:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: "The source of the visionary shaman's and also the curing shaman's power is revealed nowhere in Quain's notes, nor do we have any information on other aspects of the associated belief system" (Murphy and Quain, 1955:63).

↳ Powers are inherited:

– Yes

Notes: "Inheritance of shamanistic power was nominally patrilineal" (Murphy and Quain, 1955:63).

↳ Powers are culturally transmitted from a supernatural being:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: "The source of the visionary shaman's and also the curing shaman's power is revealed nowhere in Quain's notes, nor do we have any information on other aspects of the associated belief system" (Murphy and Quain, 1955:63).

↳ Powers are culturally transmitted from another human (e.g. teacher):

– Field doesn't know

Notes: "The source of the visionary shaman's and also the curing shaman's power is revealed nowhere in Quain's notes, nor do we have any information on other aspects of the associated belief system" (Murphy and Quain, 1955:63).

↳ Powers are associated with leadership office they assume:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: "The source of the visionary shaman's and also the curing shaman's power is revealed nowhere in Quain's notes, nor do we have any information on other aspects of the associated belief system" (Murphy and Quain, 1955:63).

↳ Are religious leaders chosen:

– I don't know

## Scripture

Does the religious group have scriptures:

Scripture is a generic term used to designate revered texts that are considered particularly authoritative and sacred relative to other texts. Strictly speaking, it refers to written texts, but there are also "oral scriptures" (e.g. the Vedas of India).

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of scripture.

## Architecture, Geography

Is monumental religious architecture present:

– No

Notes: According to Murdock and Wilson (1972), column 6 (large or impressive structures), "There are no structures in the community that are appreciably larger or more impressive than the usual residential dwellings."

Are there different types of religious monumental architecture:

– No

Notes: According to Murdock and Wilson (1972), column 6 (large or impressive structures), "There are no structures in the community that are appreciably larger or more impressive than the usual residential dwellings."

Are pilgrimages present:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of pilgrimages.

## Beliefs

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### Burial and Afterlife

Is a spirit-body distinction present:

Answer "no" only if personhood (or consciousness) is extinguished with death of the physical body. Answering yes does not necessarily imply the existence of Cartesian mind/body dualism, merely that some element of personhood (or consciousness) survives the death of the body.

– Yes

Notes: "Waniwani, the village of the afterworld, was located in the heavens. In order to get there one had to travel the Milky Way" (Murphy and Quain, 1955:75).



Spirit-mind is conceived of as having qualitatively different powers or properties than other body parts:

– I don't know

Belief in afterlife:

– Yes

Notes: "Waniwani, the village of the afterworld, was located in the heavens. In order to get there one had to travel the Milky Way" (Murphy and Quain, 1955:75).



Is the spatial location of the afterlife specified or described by the religious group:

– Yes

Notes: "Waniwani, the village of the afterworld, was located in the heavens. In order to get there one had to travel the Milky Way. This was the abode of Panther, and the road was lined with many panthers who inflicted dangerous wounds on the wayfarers. After passing through this gamut, the dead entered the Trumaí village. Here many Trumaí resided, and the rivers and lagoons teemed with kate fish. These were usually caught by poisoning, as the tawasi tree grew in abundance. There was no death in this afterworld; it was only on earth that death was feared, said the Trumaí" (Murphy and Quain, 1955:75).

↳ Afterlife in vaguely defined “above” space:

– Yes

Notes: "Waniwani, the village of the afterworld, was located in the heavens. In order to get there one had to travel the Milky Way" (Murphy and Quain, 1955:75).

↳ Afterlife in vaguely defined “below” space:

– No

Notes: (Murphy and Quain, 1955:75)

↳ Afterlife in vaguely defined horizontal space:

– No

Notes: (Murphy and Quain, 1955:75)

Reincarnation in this world:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of a belief in reincarnation.

Are there special treatments for adherents' corpses:

– Yes

Notes: "Neither the village site nor the house of the deceased had to be abandoned following death. Burial took place in the village plaza. The corpse was interred lying on its back in an extended position, wrapped and bound in its hammock. Numerous cooking utensils, including a ja'meo (ceramic griddle for baking beijú) were buried with both male and female deceased" (Murphy and Quain, 1955:90).

↳ Cremation:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of cremation.

↳ Mummification:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of mummification.

↳ Interment:

– Yes

Notes: "Burial took place in the village plaza. The corpse was interred lying on its back in an extended position, wrapped and bound in its hammock" (Murphy and Quain, 1955:90).

↳ Corpse is flexed (legs are bent or body is crouched):

– No

Notes: (Murphy and Quain, 1955:90)

↳ Corpse is extended (lying flat on front or back):

– Yes

Notes: "The corpse was interred lying on its back in an extended position, wrapped and bound in its hammock" (Murphy and Quain, 1955:90).

↳ Corpse is upright (where body is interred in standing position):

– No

Notes: (Murphy and Quain, 1955:90)

↳ Cannibalism:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of cannibalism.

↳ Exposure to elements (e.g. air drying):

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of exposing corpses to the elements.

↳ Feeding to animals:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of feeding corpses to animals.

↳ Secondary burial:

– No

Notes: According to SCCS Variable 1850, Secondary bone/body treatment (original scale), "secondary contact with the body or bones of the deceased does not occur" (Schroeder, 2001; Retrieved from Divale, 2004).

Are co-sacrifices present in tomb/burial:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of co-sacrifices.

Are grave goods present:

– Yes

Notes: "The corpse was interred lying on its back in an extended position, wrapped and bound in its hammock. Numerous cooking utensils, including a ja'meo (ceramic griddle for baking beijú) were buried with both male and female deceased" (Murphy and Quain, 1955:90).

Are formal burials present:

– Yes

Notes: "Neither the village site nor the house of the deceased had to be abandoned following death. Burial took place in the village plaza. The corpse was interred lying on its back in an extended position, wrapped and bound in its hammock. Numerous cooking utensils, including a ja'meo (ceramic griddle for baking beijú) were buried with both male and female deceased" (Murphy and Quain, 1955:90).

↳ As cenotaphs:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of cenotaphs.

↳ In cemetery:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of cemeteries. The deceased were typically buried in the village plaza. (see Murphy and Quain, 1955:90).

↳ Family tomb-crypt:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of tomb-crypts.

↳ Domestic (individuals interred beneath house, or in areas used for normal domestic activities):

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of domestic internment. The deceased were typically buried in the village plaza. (see Murphy and Quain, 1955:90).

↳ Other formal burial type:

– Yes [specify]: Village Plaza

Notes: (Murphy and Quain, 1955:90)

## Supernatural Beings

Are supernatural beings present:

– Yes

Notes: "The Trumaí were certainly not preoccupied with the supernatural. Quain [principal ethnographer] makes no mention of the spirit owners of animal, plant, and fish species that figure so prominently in the Kamayurá [neighboring group] belief system, nor does he speak of the 'ole spirits' attributed to the Trumaí by Oberg. Beliefs, which are a more covert part of culture, are particularly difficult for an ethnographer who lacks familiarity with the language to learn about, and it is understandable that Quain's notes are weak on this point...In short, the day-to-day world of the Trumaí was little influenced by extra-corporeal forces or personages. The deities were nearly all culture heroes



and creators, who did their work in the dim past of the 'grandfathers of all the Trumaí'" (Murphy and Quain, 1955:72).

↳ A supreme high god is present:

– No

Notes: SCCS Variable 238 (Note, identical to Ethnographic Atlas Column 34), Religion: high gods, indicates that "a high god is absent or not reported in substantial descriptions of religious beliefs" (Murdock, 1962-1971; Retrieved from Divale, 2004).

↳ Previously human spirits are present:

– I don't know

Notes: The spirits of the dead are said to inhabit the village of the after world, located in the heavens. Ethnographic evidence does not describe previously human spirits in further detail. (Murphy and Quain, 1955:75).

↳ Non-human supernatural beings are present:

– Yes

Notes: "The most important of the Trumaí creation deities was Sun (Atehle). This was not the visible, celestial sun. The Trumaí explained that the celestial sun was only the aton (pet) of the real Sun, who was important in all the creation myths. Sun no longer actively intervened in life, but in the days of the creation he was an anthropomorphic personage having great supernatural powers. Sun's mother was the wife of Panther (Fetde), who appears in the tales of the after life...At one time Moon was in the heavens with Sun, who, however, became angry with him and cast him out to his present isolated position...Crow appeared as a trickster and, although not a creator deity, managed to bring forth new things in the process of his machinations...Rain (Ka'wixu) was apparently the only Trumaí deity capable of interfering with the world in its present form...There was also a class of malignant beings that were important as omens" (Murphy and Quain, 1955:72-73).

↳ These supernatural beings can be seen:

– I don't know

↳ These supernatural beings can be physically felt:

– I don't know

↳ Non-human supernatural beings have deliberate causal efficacy in the world:

– I don't know

↳ These supernatural beings have indirect causal efficacy in the world:

– Yes

Notes: "Rain (Ka'wixu) was apparently the only Trumaí deity capable of interfering with the world in its present form. Although he appeared as a character in the mythology,

he was also believed to be the active agent behind rains and storms. The Trumai were extremely frightened of thunder and lightning, and thought storms to be the result of someone's having antagonized Rain" (Murphy and Quain, 1955:73).

### Supernatural Monitoring

Is supernatural monitoring present:

This refers to surveillance by supernatural beings of humans' behaviour and/or thought particularly as it relates to social norms or potential norm violations.

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of supernatural monitoring. It appears that Trumai supernatural beings were generally not involved with the affairs of humans. Likewise, the Trumai were not concerned with these beings on a daily basis. (See Murphy and Quain, 1955:72-73).

### Messianism/Eschatology

Are messianic beliefs present:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of messianic beliefs.

Is an eschatology present:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of an eschatology.

## Practices

### Membership Costs and Practices

Does membership in this religious group require celibacy (full sexual abstinence):

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of required celibacy.

Does membership in this religious group require castration:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of required castration.

Does membership in this religious group require fasting:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of required fasting.

Does membership in this religious group require forgone food opportunities (taboos on desired foods):

– No

Notes: Menstruating women were prohibited from eating fish, but this food taboo does not appear to be religious in nature (Murphy and Quain, 1955:88).

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of adults:

"Adults" here referring to an emic or indigenous category; if that category is different from the popular Western definition of a human who is 18-years-old or older and who is legally responsible for his/her actions, then please specify that difference in the Comments/Sources: box below.

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of human sacrifice.

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of children:

"Children" here referring to an emic or indigenous category; if that category is different from the popular Western definition, please specify that different in the Comments/Sources: box below.

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of human sacrifice.

Does membership in this religious group require self-sacrifice (suicide):

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of human sacrifice.

Does membership in this religious group require participation in small-scale rituals (private, household):

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of small-scale rituals.

Does membership in this religious group require participation in large-scale rituals:

i.e. involving two or more households; includes large-scale "ceremonies" and "festivals."

– I don't know

Notes: Several large-scale rituals are present among the Trumai, including the curing ceremony, the old (manoi) ceremony, the piqui (tsinon) ceremony, the spear-throwing contest, and teh bull-roarer rites (Murphy and Quain, 1955:66-71). However, it is not clear if participation is mandatory. Moreover, the principal ethnographic authority, Quain, notes "Another thing I must mention is the complete lack of emotional content in religious ceremonies. These are mildly pleasant chores. Although their structure is designed for a public pageant, nobody pays attention" (Murphy and Quain, 1955:106).

## Society and Institutions

### Levels of Social Complexity

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The society to which the religious group belongs is best characterized as (please choose one):

– A band

Notes: The Trumai have no political authority beyond the local community, which is indicative of autonomous bands and villages (Ethnographic Atlas column 33, Murdock, 1967; retrieved from Divale, 2004). "Trumai society was relatively simple. There was no social stratification based on wealth, nor were the mechanisms of social control and cohesion highly developed. This was in accord with the individualization of productive effort and the low level of economic surplus. The political unit was a single community, the sole bearer of Trumai culture" (Murphy and Quain, 1955:40). "The Trumai had one chieftain (aek), Maibu, and two sub-chiefs, Katauka and Matiwana. At the outset it should be understood that Katauka and Matiwana at no time during Quain's stay exerted any chiefly prerogative or function. They were not men of especially high status – indeed, Matiwana was looked down upon as an old man. Their main function, Quain was told, was to take over the office of chief when Maibu was away from the village...The chief's main function was to urge his fellow Trumai to carry out those projects or tasks which were the responsibility of the community as a whole or in its interest, but he frequently exhorted the villagers to pursue their individual affairs. Maibu made speeches in the evening men's circle or in the early morning, telling the men to plant their gardens or urging all to gather piqui fruit...The chief was accorded much more respect by his housemates and close kinsmen than by the rest of the villagers. The people resisted him in varying degrees, depending on their relationship to him and their individual personalities" (Murphy and Quain, 1955:54-55).

### Bureaucracy

Do the group's adherents interact with a formal bureaucracy within their group:

– No

Notes: See question on social complexity, above, for more details.

### Public Works

Does the religious group in question provide public food storage:

– No

Notes: SCCS Variable 20, Food Storage, indicates that food is stored in individual households (Murdock and Morrow, 1970; Retrieved from Divale, 2004).

### Enforcement

Does the religious group in question provide an institutionalized police force:

– No

Notes: Tuden and Marshall (1972) column 10, Police (note, equivalent to SCCS variable 90, Police) indicates that "police functions are not specialized or institutionalized at any level of political integration, the maintenance of law and order being left exclusively to informal mechanisms of social control, to private retaliation, or to sorcery."

Does the religious group in question provide institutionalized judges:

– No

Notes: Tuden and Marshall (1972), column 9, Judiciary (note, equivalent to SCCS variable 89, Judiciary) indicates that "supreme judicial authority is lacking at any level above that of the local community."

## Food Production

Does the religious group in question provide food for themselves:

– Yes

Notes: "It is difficult to assess the relative importance of horticulture, fishing and gathering in the subsistence economy of the Trumaí. At different times of the year each made the major contribution to the diet" (Murphy and Quain, 1955:22).



Please characterize the forms/level of food production [choose all that apply]:

– Gathering

– Hunting (including marine animals)

– Fishing

– Small-scale agriculture / horticultural gardens or orchards

Notes: The Trumai rely on extensive/shifting agriculture, fishing, and gathering for subsistence. Hunting supplements the diet. Source of information from Ethnographic Atlas (Murdock, 1962-1971), retrieved from Divale, 2004; Variables 203-207, 232.