

# HIJOS DE LA SELVA / SONS OF THE FOREST

*The Ethnographic Photography of Max Schmidt*

with texts by Federico Bossert and Diego Villar  
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In the latter part of the 19th century, the Ethnological Museum of Berlin contained the largest collection of cultural artefacts in the world. German ethnographic explorers, notable among them Alexander von Humboldt, Adolf Bastian and Karl von den Steinen, created a dynamic and a fertile environment for the development of theories on culture and language origins. It was in this environment that Max Schmidt developed his passion for ethnographic research, first as a volunteer researcher in the museum, and later as a pupil of Karl von den Steinen. The latter encouraged Schmidt's interest in conducting ethnographic fieldwork, particularly in regard to the Mato Grosso region of central Brazil, an area little known to Europeans which Schmidt hoped to explore and return from with first-ever accounts of some of its native populations. Schmidt's hands-on yet largely unobtrusive approach to fieldwork and documentation of indigenous cultures in Brazil and Paraguay between 1900 and 1931 has increasingly been recognised in the field of ethnography as ground-breaking. Studying these societies *in situ*, as Schmidt did on his pioneering, lightly-manned and -equipped expeditions, is now the accepted anthropological method.

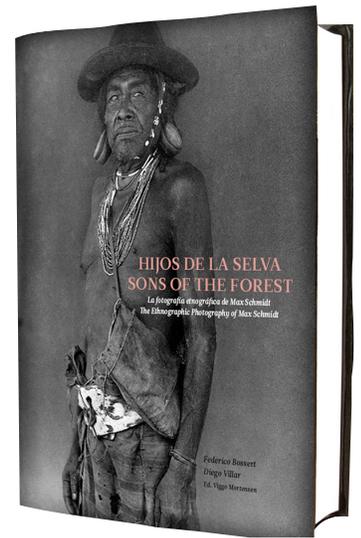
In 1916, Schmidt presented his thesis of ethnology "The Arawak", an important South-American ethno-cultural study that embraced two fundamental topics: the cultural diffusion of this linguistic family in the tropical forest area, and the ethnic dispersion of villages of neolithic culture.

In 1918, Schmidt was appointed Professor of Ethnology at the University of Berlin, and in 1919 was named Director of the South American Section of the Ethnological Museum of Berlin. In 1929, he resigned these positions, along with their associated pensions, and left Germany to settle in Cuiabá, Brazil. This may have been primarily prompted by his expressed longing to return to his fieldwork and adventures in the forests of South America, although it may also have resulted from a personal distaste for the radical changes in museum and university policies that resulted from the rise of nationalism in German institutional politics in the 1920s. This growing trend of politicising the administration of scientific research and education accelerated when Adolf Hitler came to power, causing the study of ethnology to fall into the hands of administrators who

endeavoured to make the field the hand-maiden of blatantly racist theories designed to underline the superiority of Aryan culture in what came to be termed a "colonial science".

After two years in Brazil, Schmidt accepted, in 1931, the invitation of the president of the Scientific Society of Paraguay, Dr. Andrés Barbero, to assume the formation and direction of the Ethnography and History Museum in Asunción, Paraguay. Today this institution is known as the Museo Etnográfico Andrés Barbero, and is where Schmidt's remarkable collection of glass plate photographic negatives, made in the field during various expeditions, is preserved. It was during his tenure at the museum, which lasted until 1946, that Schmidt started his ethnological and archaeological research among the indigenous groups of the Gran Chaco region and its neighbouring cultural areas.

The Schmidt photographs and documents reproduced in *HIJOS DE LA SELVA/SONS OF THE FOREST* belong to his legacy in the Museo Etnográfico Andrés Barbero. The photographs come from glass-plate negatives originally prepared and processed by Max Schmidt. Whenever possible, the captions for the photographs were generated including the information on the index cards from the museum's photographic catalogue, originally produced by Schmidt himself and later systematised by Branislava Susnik, who inherited Schmidt's position at the museum in Asunción. The glass plates were transported to the United States to be photographed with the highest possible digital resolution. This task was completed with the assistance of Hugh Milstein and the company Digital Fusion in Culver City, California. The preliminary selection of the photographs made in Asunción was finalised in Los Angeles following an evaluation of the results of the digital reproduction and restoration. The hope of the authors and of Perceval Press is that this book have as much an academic value as an artistic one, and we trust that the pioneering ethnographic work and exceptional images of Max Schmidt may help us attain that goal.



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