

# *Paraguay*

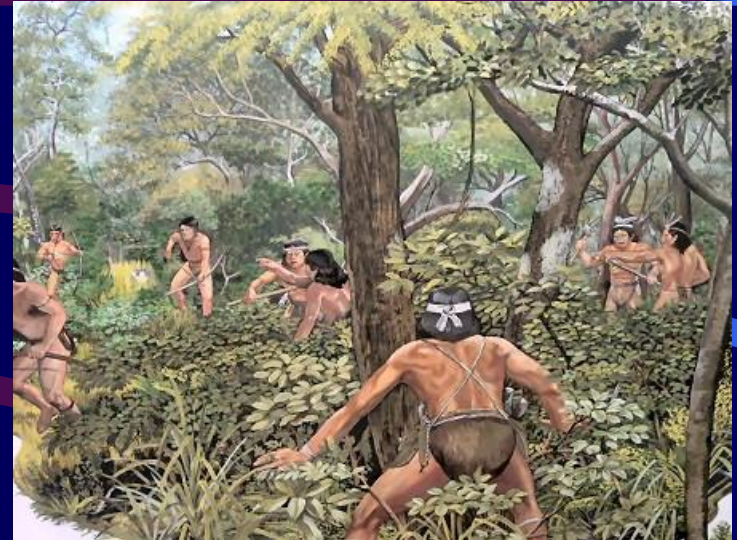
*Formerly known as Arcadia, the Land of Women or Mohammed's Paradise*

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The Spanish conquerors came to Paraguay in the 16th. century in hopes of making it a stepping stone into the Inca El Dorado.

They found no precious metal in Paraguay but failed to notice the presence of a green gold far more profitable than the real gold: the green tea from the natives to which



soon the whole continent became addicted. This was a century before the English discovered tea in India and proceeded to turn it into a trade boom.

The yerba mate grows in the wild in Paraguay. The Jesuits priest who built magnificent cities in the middle of the forest to house Indians in the attend to escape the benevolent slavery of the Spanish settlers or the harsher often lethal



Los guaraníes y la yerba mate. Grabado de Paucke

slavery of the Portuguese, had discovered how to cultivate the yerba but it was a trade secret they took with them when the King of Spain, Carlos III, expelled the Jesuits "from all Spanish possessions " in 1767.

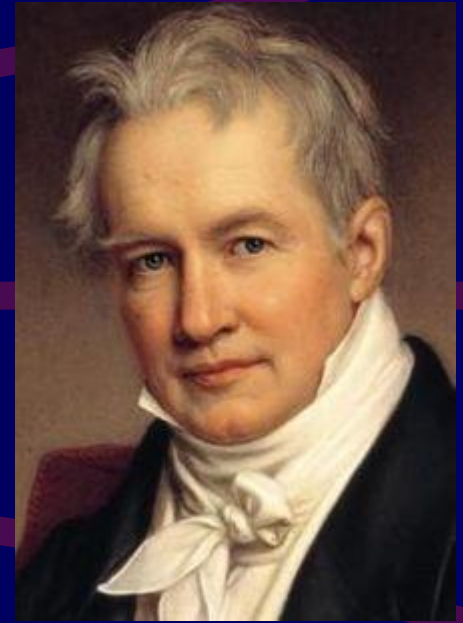
Non other than Aimé Bonpland the French botanist who accompanied Baron Alexander Von Humboldt in the scientific discovery of South America, and later gardener to Empress



Aimé Bonpland

Josephine of Beauharnais, before the Holy Alliance destroyed the Bonapartists, decided to come to Paraguay precisely to

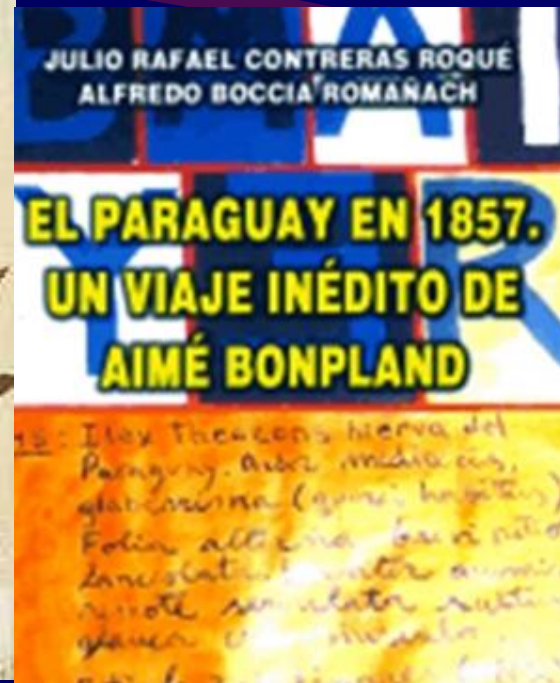
conduct field research to turn the yerba in agricultural commodity.



Baron Alexander Von Humboldt

Paraguay's governor at the time held a rather unusual title., that of "Supreme Dictator for Life," and fearing that Bonpland's business would imperil his monopoly of the yerba trade, imprisoned him and held the French scientist as hostage

for ten years and wanted to negotiate his freedom in exchange for political recognitions and arms supply from the kingdom of France. Nothing came over of it and Bonpland was released in 1829 and expelled from the country.



The yerba, although still highly appreciated by its users, soon was overtaken by the Brazilian coffee and remains until today a boutique infusion, adored largely by a few connoisseurs.



*The mate is one of the strongest cultural expression of Paraguay and the rest of Mercosur countries*