

# Ticuna Fibres of Resistance

## From the Spirits of the Amazon to the Museum

### The Project

A cross-disciplinary participatory study focused on material culture & practices associated with the 'Young Woman's Festival', a Ticuna rite of passage aimed at protecting young women during puberty.

In collaboration with the Ticuna, the largest indigenous nation of the Brazilian Amazon, we will study a historic collection of *tururi* (*Ficus radula* and *Poulsenia armata*) bark artefacts housed at Museu de Arqueologia e Etnologia, Universidade of Sao Paulo (MAE-USP), Brazil, and compare them to contemporary examples in the Amazon.

Different groups of stakeholders will work together to explore aspects of continuity and change in manufacturing technologies, socio-cultural articulations, current use and significance, deterioration mechanisms and preservation of *tururi* bark.

Methods include archival research, qualitative data collected during fieldwork in Benjamin Constant and Sao Paulo de Olivença (both located in the state of Amazonas, Brazil), visual examinations and instrumental analysis of samples from the MAE-USP's collection, as well as contemporary material accessed during fieldwork.



The climax of the Young Woman's rites happens when the 'ngo'o' attempt to kidnap the young women. Image (3): Harald Schultz (1950s).

Museu de Arqueologia e Etnologia, Universidade de Sao Paulo (MAE-USP) houses around 600 Ticuna items, many related to The Young Woman's Festival. The collection was assembled & documented by ethnographer & photographer Harald Schultz between 1950-1960. It presents examples of the three colours of *tururi* bark (white, brown and red) and is accompanied by Schultz' photos & videos. Images (1): Ader Gotardo (2015).



### The Young Woman's Festival

Three-day festival with the participation of all the local Ticuna community, who prepare the village & produce artefacts to be used during the ceremonies, many of which with a local tree bark known as '*tururi*'.

Trumpets, flutes, drums and dance masks bearing symbols of Ticuna clans and non-human creatures are made out of *tururi* and other organic materials. A 'seclusion room' is built in the house where the festival will take place. The masks, which can only be made and worn by men, are danced during the most important part of the ceremonies, when the 'ngo'o' (non-human creatures or evil spirits) attempt to kidnap the young women. Different ceremony stages involve important aspects of Ticuna culture and strengthen their cohesion whilst ensuring the safety of the women.



Ticuna man works on *tururi* bark. Image (2): Harald Schultz (1950s).



Left: Traditional extraction of *tururi*. Images (4): Harald Schultz (1950s).

Right: The process is followed in some Ticuna villages today. Images (5): Edson Tosta Matarezio (2015).

The young women are kept in seclusion & have to stay awake throughout the festival.

Their hair is pulled out and their body is painted with *jenipapo* (*Genipa americana*) tincture, whilst they listen to harsh advice given by older women. The whole community gets involved in attempting to protect the young women. The rites make the community more cohesive and prepare the young women for the dangers of the forest and village.

### Preliminary results

EDXRF analysis and condition assessments performed on a sample of the MAE-USP Ticuna masks suggest that:

- Barks of different colours undergo different decaying mechanisms.
- Current condition may have been affected by previous undocumented treatments and pesticide applications.
- Fibre breakage and stains may have been caused during the manufacturing processes and original uses of the masks.



Left: Villagers prepare the 'seclusion room'. Right: The young women are prepared for the rites. Images (6 & 7): Harald Schultz (1950s).

### References

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Authors: Ana Carolina Delgado Vieira<sup>1</sup> & Renata F. Peters<sup>2</sup>  
[ana\\_carolina.Vieira@usp.br](mailto:ana_carolina.Vieira@usp.br) [m.peters@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:m.peters@ucl.ac.uk)

<sup>1</sup> Museu de Arqueologia e Etnologia, University of São Paulo, MAE/USP;  
<sup>2</sup> Institute of Archaeology, University College London.

