

Macanas: the art of clubs from Amazonia

Macanas: el arte de las mazas de la Amazonia

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Abstract Wooden clubs from Amazonia, called macanas, have been identified and valued by Europeans since the Conquest and quickly became essential additions to Wunderkammern. However surviving pieces often lack a detailed collection history, as they have been brought to Europe over a period of five hundred years by various kinds of visitors with different goals and sets of mind. The first section reviews the early reports and descriptions mentioning those pieces, whether in situ (e.g. chronicles of Columbus voyages or later travelers), or in European collections. We present in the second part a non-exhaustive selection of eleven types of clubs from Amazonia that belong to European (mostly public) collections, and we try to connect these types to the abovementioned historical sources. The aim of this paper is to show the diversity of shapes and also the historical depth of the club tradition in Amazonia.

Keywords macana; Amazonia; club; conquest of the New World; Kunstkammer.

Resumen Las “espadas” de madera de la Amazonía, llamadas macanas, han sido identificadas y valoradas por los europeos desde la Conquista y rápidamente se convirtieron en piezas esenciales de los Gabinetes de Curiosidades. Sin embargo, las piezas que sobreviven a menudo carecen de un historial de colección detallado, ya que han sido traídas a Europa durante un período de quinientos años por varios tipos de visitantes con diferentes objetivos y mentalidades. La primera sección revisa los primeros informes y descripciones que mencionan esas piezas, ya sea in situ (por ejemplo, crónicas de los viajes de Colón o viajeros posteriores), o en colecciones europeas. Presentamos en la segunda parte una selección no exhaustiva de once tipos de macanas que pertenecen a colecciones europeas (en su mayoría públicas), y tratamos de conectar estos tipos con las fuentes históricas antes mencionadas. El objetivo de este artículo es mostrar la diversidad estética de formas y también la profundidad histórica de la tradición de las macanas en la Amazonía.

Palabras claves macana; Amazonia; Conquista; Nuevo Mundo; gabinetes de curiosidades.

* I thank the collector and expert Constantine Joicey for his helpful comments and suggestions and also for having triggered my interest for this material almost thirty years ago

“In hand-to-hand combat they generally use long swords, which they call *macanas*, which are however made of wood, as they don't have knowledge of iron.”

Peter Martyr d'Anghiera (1457–1526), *De Orbe Novo* (1504, 1885:116)

Amazonia offers the second largest variety of wooden clubs after Oceania. The two corpuses of pieces cannot be fairly compared as for historical reasons we are not really able to watch those through the same glasses. The Conquest of America happened in a very different set of mind than the discovery of the Pacific in the Age of Enlightenment. Three centuries have passed between those two events bringing additional losses of material and information coming with wars, revolutions, fires etc. As such it is now difficult if not impossible to imagine how rich was the clubs panoply used by the ancient Amazonians. In commenting on the Tradescant collection passed to the Ashmolean museum in Oxford, C. Feest explains: “The loss of objects in actual numbers is staggering. Of approximately one hundred items of Americana listed in Tradescant's 1656 catalogue, just over twenty have survived” (Feest 1995: 333). The author estimates that the percentage of surviving pieces from earlier collection dates is even lower.

The first part of this text evokes briefly the early collections and the context in which those pieces entered in European history following the Conquest, not researching for any missing provenance - this would require discovering new sources - but simply trying to date certain types of pieces. When the full history of a piece is not known, collection dates only gives a cap in time which leaves open the question of its previous life. A second caveat comes from the fact that types of objects can remain stable over long periods of time. Finally, studying the early reports provides an intuition of what material is unfortunately missing either because it is only mentioned by a chronicler or represented on an engraving but not recorded physically anymore, or simply when we have nothing but the inescapable conclusion that material has been brought back but later disappeared with its recorded information.

The second part will go through some specific types. It would go beyond the scope of this text to attempt a clubs typology for such a vast subject. The goal of this short presentation is to show the diversity of sculptures and praise the extraordinary creativity of the artists of ancient Amazonia.

1. Early collections and reports

Columbus landed in Bahamas in 1492 and made four voyages to the Caribbean Islands from 1492 to his death in 1504. He stayed in the region over seven years cumulated with thousands of men, soldiers, priest, chroniclers, administrators etc. After Columbus lost the exclusivity for Spain, the Italian Amerigo Vespucci explored the mouth of the Orenoco and Venezuela and realized by around 1500 that this land formed a new continent. At the same time, Cabral started the exploration of the northeast coast of Brazil and claimed it for Portugal by virtue of the Tordesillas treaty.

Those men must have met most of the tribes from the Islands and the coastal regions and seen their weapons. Unfortunately clubs are only mentioned occasionally in their reports. One *macana* is obtained by ransom by Columbus (Mendoza, 1868:5). According to Las Casas, Taíno chiefs would treasure their *macanas* and kept some wrapped in *yagua* leaves (1875 Vol. II: 174). Those two brief accounts highlight the importance attached on those pieces from both camps perspectives.

Oviedo (1478-1557), who was a major chronicler of the Voyages and the first historian of the West Indies, mentions (Oviedo 1851: 68) that the Hispaniolan *macanas* were: “... unos palos tan anchos como de tres dedos o algo menos, e tan luengos como la estatura de un hombre con dos filos algo agudos; y en el extremo de la macana tiene una manija, e usaban dellas como de hacha de armas a dos manos: son de madera de palma muy reça y de otros árboles.”

Bartolomé de Las Casas (1484-1556) supplies a description of a *macana* from Cuba during the first voyage of Columbus (Las Casas 1875 Vol. I: 435) “... una espada de tabla de palma, que es durísima y muy pesada, hecha desta forma: no aguda, sino chata, de cerca de dos dedos en gordo de todas partes, con la cual, como es dura y pesada, como hierro, aunque tenga el hombre un capacete en la cabeza, de un golpe le hundirán los cascos hasta los sesos.” Another account (Las Casas 1875 Vol. II: 57) during the second voyage seems to describe a different type also from Cuba but with flat and not round heads “... como espadas, de forma de una paleta hasta el cabo, y del cabo hasta la empuñadura se viene ensangostando, no aguda de los cabos, sino chata; estas son de palma, porque las palmas no tienen las pencas como las de acá, sino lisas ó rasas, y son tan duras y pesadas, que de hueso y, cuasi de acero, no pueden ser más: llámanlas macanas.”

Columbus displayed to the Spanish King what he had brought back from his voyages: a few small samples of gold, pearls, native birds, gold jewelry from the natives and some Taino Indians he had kidnapped, flowers, and a hammock. No mention of any weapon. Of course more information might be found in the future studying the archives but it is hard to believe that the first Conquistadores did not bring back some weapons. People had to prove they had gone to those new and fierce lands. There was also an active market for curiosities from early collectors who were fascinated by those pieces because of their association with cannibalism (see later Hans Staden and Thevet descriptions of the Tupinamba sword).

Since the early XVIth c. European powers started challenging Spain and Portugal and established some presence in the West Indies especially in the Lesser Antilles. These settlements evolved over time into colonies, creating the geopolitical map we know. Such effort became possible as Spain and Portugal were more focused on the mainland, especially Zacatecas in Mexico and Potosí in Bolivia, from which they were extracting rich metals such as silver and copper. France started in the first half of the XVIth c. by allowing privateers to flourish from attacking and looting Spanish and Portuguese galleons on their way back to Europe. A significant proportion of the volunteers enrolled in those expeditions were Huguenots coming from Normandy like the famous Corsairs Jean de Fleury, Jacques de Sores, Le Testut and de Clerc. England came later to the game (after 1560) but became then the biggest counter power in the region, thanks notably to the individual talents of the “Sea Dogs” (Sir John Hawkins, Sir Francis Drake, Sir Martin Frobisher and Sir Walter Raleigh) and to the speed of their vessels. Those people also grew wealthy by getting actively involved in the slave trade. Netherlands and to a lesser extent Sweden and Denmark followed suit. Those expeditions were generally (but not always) against official treaties, hence against law, which makes chronicles and documents such as the Drake Manuscript (see later) very rare. Some weapons must have been brought back to Europe during this period.

After Jacques Cartier brought back some weapons from Canada one of the first collector of American clubs in Europe is André Thevet (1516-1590) who said he owned the Tupinamba sword of the Indian King *Quonambec*. Thevet stayed ten weeks in Fort Coligny in the Bay of Rio de Janeiro in 1555 accompanying Nicolas Durand de Villegaignon in a failed attempt to colonize the region. Thevet was cosmographer of four French kings (from Henri II to Henri III) and wrote several ethnographical books. He gave some pieces to the Royal Cabinet of France but the information is lost to properly identify those pieces. Thevet mentioned he brought back some pieces from his

trip. More importantly he had an extended network of suppliers of “rarities” to feed the collections of his *cabinet de curiosités* including Americana. Far from being isolated, those early collectors were also corresponding with each other and swapping pieces. The market for Americana and especially clubs was very active at since the early XVIth and continued into the XVIIth centuries. Amateurs were visiting harbors such as La Rochelle, Rouen, Bordeaux to collect specimens. Towards the end of the XVIth c. a European network of Princes, scholars and enthusiasts started building Kunst and Wunderkammern. This paper can only recall some notable figures.

After Thevet, Jean Mocquet (1575-ca 1617), a French adventurous traveler and antiquity dealer who had the ear of Henri IV, travelled to the mouth of the Oyapok in 1604 and brought back material. He later became “garde” of the “cabinet des singularitez du roy” in the Tuilleries Palace. He must have provided clubs between other curiosities to the Royal Cabinet.

The French writer Montaigne (1533-1592) had a collection of Brazilian artifacts displayed on a wall in a room called the *Brasiliana* in his castle of Saint-Michel in Southern France (Montaigne 1962: 206). Unfortunately there is no detailed description of this collection.

Paul Contant (1562-1629) an apothecary from Poitiers also had Brazilian weapons represented on a set of engravings, *Album des habitants du Nouveau Monde* by Antoine Jacquard where one can see a Tupinamba sword, a *boutou* and a Gê clubs with representations of cannibals (Hamy 1907 a: 236 and Lestringant 1991: p. 224 n. 23).

The great polymath and patron of the arts Fabri de Pereisc (1580-1637) in Aix-en-Provence had an important and eclectic collection including two paintings from Caravaggio whom he was one of the first supporters. His exotica pieces became the core of the collection of the Cabinet du Molinet now in Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève, Paris (which has now five weapons from Amazonia).

In the UK, Tradescant father and son in Oxford (1570-1638 et 1608-1662) were botanists, gardeners for King Charles I and George Villiers, the Duke of Buckingham. They were collectors who build the first public museum known: the *Musaeum Tradescantianum* in Lambeth, London. They had five long *macanas*, four of which are now in the Ashmolean museum in Oxford and one in the British Museum. Many other collectors were also active in this period in the UK and probably had Americana if not clubs.

In Italy the Medici in Florence collected Americana since Cosimo I (1519-1574) but many other important Italian collectors also had weapons like Ulisse Aldrovandi (1522-1605), Ferdinando Cospi (1606- 1686) in Bologna and probably few others.

The German Knorr von Rosenroth gives a detailed description in 1633 of a collection he saw in Amsterdam with a club “used by the Americans before they discovered iron”. A plate from the Haarlem collection of Levinus Vincent (1658-1727) shows some weapons on the wall. Bernard Paludanus (1550-1633) in Enkhuizen, Netherlands had a Brazilian club now in the ethnographic collections of the Nationalmuseet in Copenhagen (Dam-Mikkelsen and Lundbaek 1980: 20-36). The Danish physician and professor Ole Worm (1588-1654) also in Copenhagen had some pieces he gave to the Royal Kunstkammer.

Royal Cabinets in France, Danemark, Spain, Portugal (not in UK surprisingly), the collection of Archduke Ferdinand II in Schloss Ambras near Innsbruck (the most ancient museum in the world), the Green Vault of the rulers of the Electorate of Saxony in Dresden, Habsburg’s collection in the Schwarzes Cabinet in the Stallburg, Vienna had Amazonian clubs between other exotica coming from the New World. The Maurithius in The Hague housed the collection of the Prince of Nassau-Siegen who was governor of the Dutch colony in Brazil from 1637 to 1644 and must have had Amazonian weapons. Unfortunately no exhaustive description of its content was made before it burnt in 1704.

At the end of the XVIIth c. Europeans started entering into the hinterland of Brazil and Guiana and contacts were no longer limited on coastal regions. Before the end of the XVIIIth c. clubs are seldom mentioned and collected (Pierre Barrère in 1743 describes the warriors of Cayenne and their weapons).

Alexandre Rodrigues Ferreira (1756-1815), a Portuguese naturalist dubbed the Humboldt from Brazil as he was born in Bahia, spent nine years exploring and crossing north and central Amazonia (1783-1792). His journey took him from Marajo then going up the Amazon and the Rio Negro, continuing up on the Rio Branco and then going south till the Mato Grosso state. During his expedition he collected artifacts and inventoried species of fauna and flora recorded later in his *Diário da Viagem Filosófica* (1887). His collections and notes are now split between Coimbra, Lisbon, Rio de Janeiro and also Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève in Paris.

From the XIXth c. missionaries, naturalists, soldiers and travelers continued to explore and collect in Amazonia sometimes on behalf of public institutions starting building their collections.

2. Variety of types

The following selection is by no means an exhaustive inventory but a taste of the existing repertoire. Many but not all tribes had clubs. Arrows, bows, and also spears were the main weapons used for war or hunting.

2.1. Tupinamba clubs, bay of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

This type of paddle club (fig. 1) is commonly represented on mid XVIth c. engravings and woodcut prints from Thevet, Staden and de Léry. Several examples arrived in France in 1550 when about fifty Tupinamba Indians were brought to Rouen for a great show including a mock battle for the King Henri II where parrots and monkeys were thrown into the scene. We can see them holding their clubs on an engraving (Denis, F: 1850). We don't know what happened to this crew and their clubs after the event but some pieces must have stayed in Europe.

At least twelve Tupinamba clubs are known in museums but their full provenance is rarely documented. Five are in Paris: one in Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève (before 1687), three in Saint-Germain-en-Laye and one in Musée Branly), two in the Green Vault Cabinet in Dresden (before 1652) and then single

Figure 1.
Sword club, Tupinamba Bay of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, XVIth c. or before



specimens from Berlin (VB 3654), Vienna (from Schloss Ambras), Florence (probably from Medicis), Leiden (RV-360-1582) and Madrid.

Thevet describes the ritual where such a club was “prepared” by the Tupinamba before being used for the execution of prisoners who were ultimately eaten at the end of the ceremony. The clubs were anointed, painted, adorned with feathers, dressed with cotton, danced and consecrated with songs (Thevet 1575: 279-280). Hans Staden (1525-1576) a German soldier, adventurer and writer who was captured for nine months by the Tupinamba offers a similar account of this macabre ceremony. A plate (1557:210-211) represents and names the club as *Iwera pemme*. Both texts are very important first descriptions of a club used in ritual context.

2.2. Anchor axes, Gê, Eastern Brazil

Anchor stone-head axes are largely distributed in Eastern Brazil (fig. 2). We do not know if those pieces were ever mounted on a wooden shaft as only very few complete examples have survived. In those pieces often described as tomahawks, a very finely carved anchor axe is attached to a shaft by cords. The axe is in hard stone, probably diorite. Its fine polishing, refined shapes and very little damages suggest a ceremonial rather than utilitarian function. Should those pieces be considered as presentation axes or clubs? Indeed club-axes are common in Amazonia and more widely in the pre-Columbian world. For the Gê tribes living in Eastern Brazil, anchor axes could have already been archeological finds as similar axe heads have been excavated in Aratu-tradition sites.

One of the earliest tomahawks can be found on a drawing of a native (probably an African model according to Feest, 1995: 332) attributed to Hans Burgkmair circa 1520 (now in the British Museum SL,5218.129). In this drawing the club is topped by a shrunken head. Feest notes that though the majority of those axes are from the Gê people, four ancient examples with straight and longer shafts like the one seen on Burgkmair’s drawing (as opposed to the more common shafts which are slightly bent, shorter and with oval sections) might actually come from the Tupinamba (Feest 1995:372). The two pieces in Vienna formerly in the Schloss Ambras collections are part of this set. One is formerly documented since 1596 and wrongly identified as Montezuma’s battle-axe having being given by Cortes to the Pope. It came to the Archiduke Ferdinand’s collection via de Medici family.

The Museo Pigorini in Roma holds the largest collection of anchor axes with 17 pieces. One example (inv. 4210) is complete and comes from the collection of Ulisse Alvorandi who received

Figure 2.
a, b: Anchor axes, Gê, Eastern Brazil, before XVIIIth c.



it as a gift from Antonio Giganti in 1586. Related to the Giganti piece is the tomahawk from the Cabinet du Molinet at Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève, Paris (BSG 1943, n° 130, probably Pereisc collection before 1687). Other examples can be found in the museum collections of Dresden, Brunswick, Stockholm and Zwolle.

2.3. Scepters with figures. The Guianas?

An example of this type of club is published on Molinet (1692: pl. 4) (fig. 3). It previously comes from the Harlay and Pereisc collections. Another related piece is in the collection of the Stockholm Ethnographic Museum (N.006555) with no central figure. It has lateral heads at the mid section together with shell inlays. Both pieces have Amazonian designs on the bulbous part of the shaft. The iconography of those two clubs is puzzling. What is this torso dominating the two heads? Is it a symbol of authority? Are those trophy heads or effigies since both heads are janus?

Those pieces are generally attributed to the Guianas. The Stockholm scepter comes the German ethnologist and explorer T. Koch-Grünberg (1872-1924) who has been travelling the Guianas. We don't know if this club has been collected in situ. If so, it would show continuity of the same iconography over at least 200 years.

Figure 3.

Scepter with figures, the Guianas, XVIIth c. or before



2.4. Tarairiu clubs, Northeast region, Brazil

This type of club (fig. 4) can be recognized on a famous painting from Albert Eckhout (1610-1665). Two comparable examples are mentioned in the early XVIIIth c. Gottorp catalogue from the Cabinet of Curiosities of the Dukes of Schleswig-Holstein-Gottorp which were probably part of the Johan Maurits of Nassau' collection and date from his days as Governor of the Dutch Indies (Dam-Mikkelsen and Lundbaeck 1980:32). They are now in the Copenhagen National Museum (Hb24, 25) and measure around 100cm. A third piece is in Munich according to Feest (195: 31). They have been attributed to the *Tarairu* Indians, an extinct tribe from North East Brazil.

Figure 4.

Albert Eckhout, *Tarairiu man*, 1641.



2.5. Boutous, Kalinago, Lesser Antilles & Orinoco delta

This type is illustrated for the first time on a plate (“Indians of Ihona”, fol. 85r) in *Histoire Naturelle des Indes*, dubbed *the Drake Manuscript*, written around 1586 by French Huguenots who perhaps sailed with Sir Francis Drake. It is now in the Pierpont Morgan library in NY. *Ihona* has not been identified but is likely in the West Indies or off Venezuela as suggested by the title and the other depictions of this report.

The name *boutou* (fig. 5) is mentioned in early XVIth c. descriptions of the Lesser Antilles as the Carpentras Manuscript written circa 1618-1620 (Moreau 1990: 167, 222). It may derive from *ouboutou* translated as “Commander in Chief” by Rochefort (1666, 313), a metonymy justifying considering those pieces as symbol of authority more than usual weapons. *Boutous* can be recognized on several XVIIth c. engravings such as in Robert Dudley’s *Dell’arcano del Mare* (1646–7), Rochefort’s *Histoire naturelle et morale des iles Antilles de l’Amerique* (1658) or du Tertre’s *Histoire générale des Antilles Habitées par les François* (1667). Described by Sieur de la Borde (1674): “... the *Boutou* is a sort of club of... hard Brazil-wood, massive, heavy, two or three feet long, three fingers wide, and towards the end flat like the hand, an inch thick, and carved according to their custom”.

Most of those pieces are 100 to 145cm long but a few are smaller. They all have a rectangular section and often a cotton cord when not lost above an hourglass shape handle. They are in hard and endemic woods identified as *Platymiscium* sp. and *Brosimum cf guianense* for the six pieces analyzed (the four Tradescant pieces from Oxford analyzed by J. Ostapkowicz and three clubs in private collections analyzed by private labs). The upper quarter of those pieces is generally (if not always) incised with several symmetrical motives developed mainly in two main strips. A recurring pattern is a double diamond shape with spirals. This iconography could be an abstraction of anthropomorphic figures as the same motive becomes more explicit in later pieces where the double diamond shape finds a more naturalistic expression (see fig. 6 a).

Around forty pieces of this old style are known mainly in museums and with (generally early) XVIIth c. provenance when the information is not lost. A third of those examples are in France: two are in Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève (before 1687), six in Branly, three in Saint-Germain-en-Laye and two in Lyon. Most of those pieces probably came from Royal Cabinets but their provenance stops at the Revolution. This corpus includes two pieces (one is fragmentary) found in 1983 from the shipwreck of the San Pedro in 1596 and now in the Bermuda museum.

Five examples were originally part of John Tradescant’s ‘Ark’ museum in 1656 (four are now in the Ashmolean museum in Oxford, and one at the British Museum). We do not know where the Tradescant acquired their examples. Tradescant father did not travel to West Indies but his son did. Nevertheless the family, like those prominent collectors such as Thevet, was well connected to providers of exotica coming from the New World and to other European collectors.

J. Ostapkowicz has radiocarbon dated the four Tradescant clubs from Oxford using C14 analysis. The resulting dates range from 1311-1441 for three of the Tradescant clubs, and 1458-1638 for the fourth piece (Ostapkowicz 2018). Dating three clubs of the same style in private collections gives the following ranges: 1458-1558, 1020-1154, 1328-1435. Ignoring the old wood effect and assuming the pieces are from the age of their woods then those clubs could be pre-Columbian. If we admit this conclusion, the question of their previous life remains open. Did those pieces stay locally by passing several generations or did they remain unrecorded in European collections? Before addressing those issues more data (i.e more pieces dated) is needed to strengthen the results and eliminate the noise of the old wood effect. With only

III. 1.

Boutou illustrated in *Histoire Naturelle des Indes* c. 1586.



six data points we already have 450 years between the two extreme means (1087 to 1548 AD) which seems odd.

Are *boutous* the weapons described by Oviedo and Las Casas? Unfortunately the descriptions are not accurate enough to validate this scenario. J. Ostapkowicz attributes those pieces to the Lesser Antilles (Kalinago people from Trinidad) but does not invalidate the possibility that they may also come from the Carib mainland (Kalina tribes). In such case those pieces would be rare survivors of poorly documented cultures that became very quickly extinct. This regional attribution combined with the strong representation of those pieces

in French collections lead us to suggest that those clubs may have been collected from 1520 onwards by European Filibusters (mainly French before 1560) based in the Lesser Antilles.

A second group of *boutous* generally smaller in size (60 to 100cm) has been collected in the XVIIIth c. and seems to be a later evolution of the old style. There could be some subjectivity in separating between pieces from the XVIIIth c. type and the older style as the size is not the main criteria (though the longest ones tend to be from the older group). The style of the design is more determining. The carving of the older style has also more depth as opposed to shallower incisions in later pieces. I have seen a piece in private hands which presents on one face the typical deep incisions of the older type while the other face has the shallower incisions more typical of the later style. The style of those shallower incisions remains classical to the older style though and this may be an unfinished piece.

There is one piece in Dresden collected in 1721 and another in Madrid (Museo de America nº01651) with a label (now lost) supporting a 1729 provenance. Some other pieces entered French Royal Cabinet before 1789. Again, those pieces are weaker in style with shallower incisions but they maintain the same diamond-and-spirals motive (see Musée Branly 71.1881.45.85) while evolving in shape toward the next type of block-clubs.

If the old *boutous* are pre-Columbian or at least pre-XVIIth c., how old are the pieces collected in the XVIIIth c.? Should they also be translated back in time? More work need to be done to establish the exact chronology.

Figure 5.

a, b, c: *Boutous*, Kalinago, Lesser Antilles & Orinoco delta, XVIIth c. or before.



2.6. Block-clubs, the Guianas and Rio Branco, Brazil

The first description and drawings of those pieces is found in Barrère (1743: pl 168). At first glance those pieces (fig. 6) are like thicker and smaller versions of the *boutous*. Their sizes are generally around 40-60cm. Nonetheless this type differs from the previous one by several aspects. Most of the pieces are plain with no incisions but polished faces. Many examples have kept cotton adornments giving them a better handle. Given the shorter proportions of those pieces, the thinner cross-section of the middle accentuates the curvature of the faces versus the more elongated *boutous*, explaining why they've been described as block clubs. W. Roth

in the Smithsonian Handbook (1916-1917) calls them *mushi* (Arawak), *putu* or *aputu* (Carib).

A large group of those has been collected by Rodrigues Ferreira along the Rio Branco in Roraima state, Brazil, in his expedition at the end of the XVIIIth c. Comparable pieces have also been collected in the Guianas, i.e. the coastal region between the Orinoco and Amazon rivers covering now Guyana (ex British Guiana), Surinam (ex Dutch Guiana), Guiana (French) and part of Venezuela and Brazil.

The few ones with incisions have a less stereotyped iconography than the *boutous* with a recurring pattern of intertwined groups of two or three figures (see Stolpe's Atlas, 1896 for an iconographic overview). Their light incisions can be found on their six faces. *Boutous* are only incised on two faces. Some very rare examples deviate from the norm with a loop in the center, non-symmetrical shapes or an axe (in stone, metal or even bone) inserted in the upper head like tomahawks (see fig. 6).

Figure 6.

a, b, c, d: Block macanas, the Guianas or Rio Branco, XVIIIth c.



2.7. Sapakanas, Venezuela and the Guianas

Rodrigues Ferreira is the first collector of those paddle and sword clubs called *Sapakanas* (fig. 7) by the missionary Rev. W.H. Brett (1868:97). Hundreds are known, collected in the Guianas and in Venezuela during the XIXth c. by missionaries and travelers.

Sapakanas are always made of dense wood and can have a paddle shape or look more like swords in thinner models. Only rare sword models have designs incised on their blades. The top of the blade has occasionally holes for attaching feathers or other adornments. The striking head is generally flat but can also have a V-shape in later examples. The blade has sharply ground edges and can be separated from the shaft by “wings” giving the overall shape and anthropo-zoomorphic look for the more balanced examples (see fig. 7, a). Those wings are interesting and reminiscent on some similar features found on early *boutous* such as the piece coming from the San Pedro (1596). Between head and wings, woven rattan and fibers can be attached to the handle. The shaft is round and pointy at the end and can be used as a dagger.

Figure 7.

a, b, c, d: Sapakana clubs, the Guianas, XIXth c. or before



2.8. Mayoruna swords, Yavari River, Brazil and Peru

Those are large swords of reddish hard woods partially incised on the blades with interconnected spirals deeply carved and distributed in a diamond shape recalling the motives found on old *boutous*. The handle has a unique H shape and a rectangular section.

This type has been collected for the first time by the biologists Johann Baptist von Spix and Carl Friedrich Philipp von Martius in an expedition (1817-1820) initially accompanying Maria Leopoldina of Austria, Empress of Brazil. We do not exactly know where those pieces originate from as Spix and Martius did not record precisely the locations of their collects. There is still a debate around the exact provenance of those pieces which have been attributed to the Juri Indians near the Japura River, the Mayoruna around the Javari or the Paumari from the Purus. All those tribes cover a surface of around 2000km²...

Only six examples are known: one at the British Museum (BM Am.8726) and one in Munich (Inv. Nr. 629) both collected by Spix and Martius, two in Dresden (Nr. 205 & 206) with a 1843 provenance, one in the Weltmuseum of Vienna (N.1463 collected by J. Natterer before 1835) and one in private hands (see fig. 8).

Mayoruna has been chosen for this type because of the more secured provenance for the Dresden pieces but all the six pieces may not be coming from the same tribe.

Spix and Martius collected simpler versions of this type (see Munich Inv. Nr. 620 with no incisions and plain handle) as well as other types of clubs including an XVIIIth c. type *boutou* and a *Sapakana* (see Zerries, 1980 p. 86)

Figure 8.
Mayoruna sword.
Yavari or Galvez
Rivers, Brazil or Peru,
early XIXth c.



Figure 9.
a, b: Clubs, Ucayali
river, Peru, early XXth
c. or before



2.9. Shipibo-Conibo and Cashibo types, Ucayali river, Peru

Shipibo-Conibo tribes live near the Ucayali river valley at the border of Peru, Brazil and Ecuador. They have been in contact with Europeans since the XVIIth c., especially with Franciscan missionaries trying to convert them. They have produced long paddle clubs (fig. 9) with crescent heads and abstract motives on their blades recalling the classical designs found on their pottery. The shaft with oval section is often covered with cotton bindings and/or rattan. The tip of the shaft is elaborately carved in a diamond shape (see Smithsonian in Washington MAI Nr. 15/3410 collected in the 1920's). Some variations of this club (with no incisions) have been collected from the Asháninka (MAI 15/4508 collected in 1920) or the Kaxinawa (Branly 71.1929.8.158). Most of the recorded pieces of this type and the following ones entered the collections in the early XXth c. as contacts were limited before.

The Cashibo are neighbors to the Shipibo-Conibo and live in the Ucayali region in Peru near the Aguaytia, San Alejandro and Sungaro rivers. They

have been described as very warlike. We know one type of club from this tribe (see MAI 19/7372 collected in the 1920s). Those are rare and complex spear-clubs that can be painted and adorned with cotton cords, feathers and human hairs. They are generally described as dance batons though their pointed heads would make them efficient in combat.

2.10. Kaiapo/Karaja clubs, Para state, North Brazil

Those tribes have also been in contact with Europeans since the XVIIth c. (mainly missionaries) but the pieces have mainly entered museums at the end of the XIXth c. Kaiapo is a name given at this time to a group of Gê speaking Indians living between the Tocantins and the Xingu rivers (fig. 10). Karaja are living near the Araguaya River. Specific club attribution between those two tribes traditionally enemies mainly relies on historical provenance as some types are shared by both. Most of those pieces have kept their rattan decorations and are well represented in museum collections.

The most common pieces are 100 to 130cm long with a circular section growing gradually towards the upper end and decorated with vertical grooves. Some rare pieces are fully wrapped with palm leaves remaining possibly from occasional dresses (see N.S. 59 038 reproduced in Verswijver 1995/ 297).

The second most common type is a tall sword club of around 150cm with mid section often adorned with cotton bindings. Those pieces are used in a formalized combats. Smaller versions of this type can also be found within the Apinayé living in the Tocantins state.

A particularly interesting type of Kaiapo club has an axe inserted on the upper part on meter long straight shaft decorated with rattan and feathers. Those pieces are used in ritual dance initiations (see Verswijver 1995: 265, 303).

2.11. Kayabi types, Mato Grosso, Brazil

Those paddle shape clubs are generally in dark palm wood (fig. 11). They have a concave blade and a thin handle finely wrapped with cotton binding and decorated with rattan inserts. Those pieces have been produced by the Kayabi tribes originally living in the Para state and the Rio dos Peixes region of western Mato Grosso before being concentrated with other tribes in the Xingu Park since 1950. Kayabi Indians had a reputation of being warlike and cannibals. The first contact with Europeans was established either by the French naturalist Francis de Castelnau (1843-1847) or earlier during the Langsdorff expedition (1825-1829). This Russian expedition crossed the Para and Mato Grosso states and established contacts, if not

Figure 10.
a, b: Karaja or Kaiapo
clubs, Para state, North
Brazil, early XXth c. or
before



Figure 11.
Paddle shape club
Kayabi, Matto Grosso
State, Brazil, early XXth
c. or before



with the Kayabi, with their neighbors and enemies which they collected trophy heads from: the Mundurucú and the Apiaká, depicted on Hercules Florence drawings.

3. Symbols of power from a Pre-Columbian tradition

The art of clubs in Amazonia is part of a long tradition that goes back to Pre-Columbian times. It is not an isolated corpus from remote tribes from the forest. The *Antisuyu*, mainly Amazonia, as described by Orellana in 1541, was densely populated (eight to ten millions according to estimates). This region represented a quarter of the *Tawantinsuyu*, the Inca Empire. Moreover, we should consider the art of clubs in Amazonia in a broader context and connect those pieces at least to the Taíno scepters and Costa Rican mace heads on one hand and on the other hand to the vast corpus of Peruvian weapons including the Inca *porras* (better recorded because of their bronze or stone mace heads) or the Mochica batons.

With more data we could probably extrapolate and guess that like in Oceania, clubs were not just weapons but should be seen as sculptures that represent weapons, and act as symbols of authority.

The most famous icon of the Peruvian pantheon, identified as Viracocha often represented on textiles, terracotta pots, stone carvings since over 2000BC (a painted gourd found in Norte Chico region, Peru) is a stereotyped frontal figure as the one seen on the famous Puerta del Sol in Tihuanaco, holding two clubs.

Annexes

III. 1. *Boutou* illustrated in *Histoire Naturelle des Indes* c. 1586.

Text (translated):

“Hindes De Ihona (Indians of Ihona)

When the Indians have defeated their enemies, they make them lie down on the ground, then pound on them and, after that, give them a blow on the head with their sword. When the blood starts flowing, they hold it back promptly, thinking that by this means the body will make a better roast for a solemn feast, calling this a deed of prowess”. Source: National Humanities Center, 2006: www.nhc.rtp.nc.us/pds/pds.htm

Image © The Morgan Library and Museum, Bequest of Clara S. Peck, 1983, MA 3900 (fol. 85r)



III.2. Cabinet du Père du Molinet in Molinet (1692:pl.4)

Source: Bibliothèque de l'Institut national d'histoire de l'art, collections Jacques Doucet, Fol F 278



III.3. Distribution of the 11 types of clubs mentioned

Figure 1

Sword club, Tupinamba

Bay of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, XVIth c. or before

Wood, plant fiber, feather spines

Dimensions: 120 x 20 x 10 cm

Musée du Quai Branly-Jacques Chirac Inv. 71. 1917.3.62

Previous history: Bibliothèque nationale de France; Musée de l'Armée, Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro; Musée de l'homme

The presence of this piece in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France goes back to the mid 19th c. but we know that this institution inherited pieces from Royal Cabinets after the Revolution. Thevet said he gave to the Royal Cabinet a club he had been given by the king Tupinamba *Quoniambec*, “the half giant” represented on one of his engravings. A legend in the museum pretends this piece is the one from Thevet though the engraving shows *Quoniambec* holding a piece with a thinner head like the one in Dresden.

Radiocarbon dating with C14 has been done on this piece by the Centre de Recherche et de Restauration des Musées de France in 2007 resulting in dates ranging from 1398-1524 AD for the wood and two later date ranges for the plant fibers (which could have been replaced during the club's life): 1483-1645 AD and 1466-1641AD.

Figure 2

a, b: Anchor axes, Gê, Eastern Brazil, before XVIIth c.

a. Stone (probably diorite), wood, natural fibers

Dimensions: 56 x 20 x 3 cm

Sothebys Paris, 18 June 2014 Lot 1

CJ collection, Athens

This is the only known example of this type in private hands. The shape of the handle is similar to the Giganti example (Pigorini inv. 4210). Radiocarbon dating with C14 of the wooden handle gives a range of 1502 to 1652 AD at 95% probability. The anchor axe could be earlier.

b. Stone (probably diorite), wood, stone, natural fibers, shells, gum

Dimensions: 79 x 11,5 x 4 cm

British Museum Am1949,22.178

Oldman Collection n.902 before 1949 and in collection of Sir A. Lamb of Beaufort Park, Bath formerly

Published in McEwan (2009:58)

“The end of the handle is surmounted by a powerful predatory bird, seen here in profile. The upstanding feather crest on its head and prominent circular bulge on its beak identify it as the harpy eagle (*harpia harpyja*). This fearsome aerial predator descends without warning from the heights of the forest canopy to snatch prey such as the monkey, which here sits on its talons”, British Museum.

C-14 testing could help supporting a pre XVIIth c. date consistent with this early style.

Figure 3

Scepter with figures, the Guianas, XVIIth c. or before

Wood, fibers, resina, shells, paintings

Dimensions: 68 x 11 x 9.5 cm

Cabinet of curiosities of Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève, Paris, inv. 1943, n°145

Previous history: Possibly from the Harlay collection before 1687 and before the Pereisc collection.

It is reproduced in Molinet (1692: pl.4)

Figure 4

Albert Eckhout, Tarairiu man, 1641. Dim 272x161 cm. Denmark National Museum, Copenhagen, N.38A1

Figure 5

a, b, c: Boutous, Kalinago, Lesser Antilles & Orinoco delta, XVIIth c. or before. Wood, lime (?)

a. Dimensions: 124.5 x 10.5 x 2 cm

Musée du Quai Branly-Jacques Chirac Inv. 71.1934.33.526 Am D

Previous history: Musée de l'Homme

The classical thick diamond and spirals motive is comparable to those found on two of the Tradescant pieces (AN1685 B.128 and AN1685 B.129) and Copenhagen NO4 EHb19 and few others.

b. Dimensions: 110 x 10 x 2.2 cm

Private collection, Paris. This piece sold in 2021 in an estate near Angoulême, France with no further provenance. See Musée du Quai Branly 71.1917.3.84 D and 71.1881.17.3 and Etnografiska museet, Stockholm Nr. 15088 for comparables.

c. Dimensions: 111 x 10 x 2 cm

Musée du Quai Branly-Jacques Chirac Inv. 71.1881.17.2

Previous history: before French Revolution, probably Royal Cabinet

The classical motive is like rotated by half of the blade, transforming the diamond and spirals design into a central cross. Comparables are Tradescant AN1685 B.130 and Field Museum Chicago 91376 and Firenze Inv. 287 ex Medici.

Figure 6

a, b, c, d: Block *macanas*, the Guianas or Rio Branco, XVIIIth c.:

a. Wood, white pigment (lime?)

Dimensions: 46.3 x 10 x 6cm

Private collection, Paris. Previously Tobi Jack, London circa 1990

The design of this piece seems transitional between two classical styles: the spirals and diamond of the old *boutous* and the intertwined figures of the early block-clubs. Such “connecting” iconography (like BM Am1980.Q.282) may suggest that the more figurative designs of the block-clubs could derive from the abstract motives of the older *boutous* and/or give an anthropomorphic interpretation to the spiral and diamond motive

b. Wood, white pigment (lime?)

Dimensions: 40 x 8 x 4.3cm

Private collection, Paris. Ex Armand Arman, NY circa 1980

Incised model with a rare design of a figure surrounded by an irradiating halo

c. Wood, white pigment (lime?)

Dimensions: 41.4 x 7.2 x 3.6cm

Private collection, Paris. Ex private UK collection circa 1970

Rare incised model with multiple intertwined figures and a central loop with an horizontal groove probably for attaching a string with adornment (see Musée du Quai Branly 71.1954.19.3 D for a comparable piece).

d. Wood, white pigment (lime?), stone, gum

Dimensions: 35.2 x 6.3 x 4.3cm (without the stone)

Private collection, Paris. Previously A. Meyer collection, 2005

Rare incised model with intertwined figures and a stone inserted (see University of Coimbra Br 30 for a piece with stone and central loop or Br. 31 for one with the twin figures, both pieces collected by Rodrigues Ferreira). The stone (probably diorite) is glued with some natural gum inside a crude hole made in the club. The stone could have already been an archeological find when inserted on the shaft. Indians in Mesoamerica still attribute magical powers to ancient stone axes traditionally called “*pedras de rayo*” as those fortuitous finds often appear after storms.

Figure 7

a, b, c, d: *Sapakana* clubs, the Guianas, XIXth c. or before:

a. Paddle shape club

Dimensions: 49 x 8 x 2 cm

Private collection, Paris; Ex Tobi Jack, London circa 1990

b. Incised sword club

Dimensions: 86 x 8.8 x 3.5 cm

CJ collection, Athens

Rare type of *Sapakana* with incisions of the same style as the ones found on block-clubs from the XVIIIth c. Cf Göteborg 24.23.2 for a comparable piece.

c. Sword club

Wood, rattan, cotton

Dimensions: 66.5 x 6.5 x 2.5 cm

Private collection, Paris. Ex Christies Paris

Cf Musée du Quai Branly 71.1917.3.33 D for a similar example

d. Asymmetric club

Wood, Cotton

Dimensions: 45x9.5x6 cm

Musée du Quai Branly-Jacques Chirac Inv. 71.1917.3.36 D

Figure 8

Mayoruna sword. Yavari or Galvez Rivers, Brazil or Peru, early XIXth c.

Wood and white pigment (lime?)

Dimensions: 101 x 10 x 2.2 cm

CJ collection, Athens

Figure 9

a, b: Clubs, Ucayali river, Peru, early XXth c. or before:

a. Shipibo club with crescent head

Wood, cotton, pigments

Dimensions: 140 x 12.7 x 2.5 cm

CJ collection, Athens

b. Cashibo ceremonial spear club

Palm wood, cotton, pigments and feathers

Dimensions: 145 x 8.7 x 1.5 cm

CJ collection, Athens

Figure 10

a, b: Karaja or Kaiapo clubs, Para state, North Brazil, early XXth c. or before, wood, rattan, cotton:

a. Sword club

Dimensions: 172.7 x 14 x 4cm

Private collection, Paris. D. Petty, London, circa 2000 before.

b. Round club

Dimensions: 98.5 x 7 cm

CJ collection, Athens

Figure 11

Paddle shape club

Kayabi, Matto Grosso State, Brazil, early XXth c. or before

Wood, cotton and rattan

Dimensions: 112 x 12 x 3 cm

Private collection, Paris; previously Alan Steele, NY

Photo ©:

Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève, Paris: fig. 3

Vincent Girier Dufournier: fig. 5-b, 6, 10-a

Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art, Paris: Ill. 2

John Lee and the National Museum of Denmark: fig. 4

Kifissia, Bekios Dimitrios: fig. 7-b, 8, 9, 10-b

Musée du quai Branly - Jacques Chirac, photos P. Gries fig. 1, 5-c; *C. Germain*: fig. 5-a, 7-d

Sothebys: fig. 2-a

The Trustees of the British Museum: fig. 2-b,

Arthur Verdier: fig. 7-a-c, 11

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