

## Maquira sclerophylla - Rapa dos Indios

- Moraceae - Tropical zones of South America



Rapa Dos Indios, which means "Indian snuff", is believed to have been made from the fruit of an enormous forest tree, *Maquira sclerophylla* (known also as *Olmedioperebea sclerophylla*), and is part of the fig family. In the Pariana region of the central Amazon in Brazil, the indians formerly prepared a hallucinogenic snuff of the dried fruits. The snuff was taken in tribal ceremonies, but encroachment of civilization has obliterated its use.

The preliminary chemical investigations made so far have not indicated what the active principle may be, though the tree is known to have cardiac glycosides. The cardiac glycosides are an important class of naturally occurring drugs whose actions include both beneficial and toxic effects on the heart. Plants containing cardiac steroids have been used as poisons and heart drugs at least since 1500 B.C. Throughout history these plants or their extracts have been variously used as arrow poisons, emetics, diuretics, and heart tonics. Cardiac steroids are widely used in the modern treatment of congestive heart failure and for treatment of atrial fibrillation and flutter. Yet their toxicity remains a serious problem.