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SARAPÓ PANKARARU**

THE ENCHANTED FORCES, DANCE AND RITUAL AMONG THE PANKARARU



*“As Forças Encantadas:
Dança e Ritual entre os Pankararu”*



*Ensaio Fotográfico de Renato Athias com as imagens de Carlos Estevão de Oliveira de 1937.
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“The Enchanted Forces: Dance and Ritual among the Pankararu” is a photo exhibit with selected images from the collection of Carlos Estevão de Oliveira of the State Museum of Pernambuco, which is part of the project “Indigenous Peoples of Pernambuco: Memory, Documentation and Research” carried out by Centre of Studies and Research on Ethnicity (NEPE) of the Federal University of Pernambuco.

The researcher Carlos Estevão took these photographs in the year 1937, when he had been in the land of the Pankararu conducting ethnographic work with this people. The photos were selected to show the relationship of the Pankararu with the dimension of the sacred and their relations with the “enchanted forces” in the villages where they live in municipalities of Tacaratu, Jatobá and Petrolândia in the São Francisco River basin.

The “Enchanted Forces” are entities that are part of Pankararu cosmology and religion. They are present throughout the indigenous land and act as intermediaries between those who are on Earth (which are part of the human world) and a larger entity that is not present on this Earth. This relationship takes place at different times in rich and dynamic performance at “terreiros” (public places where the sacred establishes a relationship with the people of this world) in the various Pankararu villages. In these “terreiros” the “Praiás” – which are entities dressed in special ‘tunics’ made exclusively from the “caroá” fibre – manifest themselves to the

people present. The *Praia* is a mythological is an enchanted character that became an intermediary of the vital forces of movement and ritualistic dynamics of the Pankararu world. These 'enchanted' entities are present in parties, ceremonies and rituals of the Pankararu during the year.

The most important Pankararu religious manifestation it is the "Corridos do Umbu", The Umbu¹ "Races", (Umbu Is a Brazil plum, fruit that is endemic to the Northeast semi-arid region). This is when the year begins, after the storms of January, and with the starting of plantations after the first rains, with the appearance of *imbu* (umbu), as they say, holders of knowledge will choose the day for the "flechamento"(arrowing) of the first umbu fruit to appear. The weekend after the day of "flechamento", the races begin in two main religious communities: at the Brejo dos Padres and at the Serrinha community. For over 4 weekends the Pankararu come together in these "terreiros" to dance the "torés" and sting themselves with the "ortigas of cansação" (nettles of tiredness?) and above all to seek the enchanted force for the year. This party starts at dawn on Saturday, both in Serrinha village and in Brejo dos Padres with people remembering all the possibilities of life in dances of humans and animals, in beautiful choreographic movements with cheerful beats and a special rhythm to celebrate the enchanted forces, the beauty of animals and the relationship between humans and nonhumans in this present world. This party ends in the fourth weekend with the performance of "Mestre-Guia" (the Master-Guide), chief of all the enchanted forces. The Master-Guide's ritual, in its appropriate "terreiro" in Serrinha village, is seen with much consternation by all who consider themselves to be part of Pankararu identity. He is received with joy at a ceremony where silence is also an integral part in the ritual to receive the enchanted force.

Other rituals among the Pankararu are held according to a calendar which is not fixed. The ritual of the "Menino no Rancho" (Boy-in-Ranch) is a manifestation where all Pankararu are called to participate. It involves considerable logistics and greater organization. It is an initiation ritual and a public proclamation of a clear intervention of the enchanted in the boy. The boy's parents need to organize this ritual that lasts one night and a full day. The boy's parents also need to arrange a very large amount food to offer all the guests that sometimes exceed over 500 people. The boy's parents will invite a bride and two godmothers for the boy, and will try to enlist the highest possible number of godfathers. The bride will dance with the boy accompanied by the two godmothers. The godfathers will play an important role, as they will 'fight' with the parents to ensure that the child 'stays in this world'. It is a fight between the 'heavens' and earth in which the godparents will guard the boy. This

1. Umbu (Brazil plum) is a fruit that is endemic to the Northeast semi-arid region of Brazil.



fight can last a whole afternoon. When it is finished, the Praiás who will protect him for the rest of his life will finally save the boy.

Families that are keepers of the Praiás because each family has a certain number of these enchanted entities organize the other rituals. These families organize spaces (called “Poró”) where the Praiás are stored, and where certain obligations are carried out in order to keep alive the enchanted force between family members. In all these obligations you will find herbs, enchanted smoke (flavoured tobacco, unique in preparation for the enchanted forces) and “ajucá” wine (drink prepared from the “jurerema” plant). These elements are seen as a sign of respect for the sacred as they are considered vital for sustenance in this world.

translation

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