

Article

Lacquers of the Amazon: *Cuias*, *Cumatê* and Colours by Indigenous Women in Grão-Pará in the 18th Century

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Abstract: The starting point of this proposal is a collection of decorated *cuias*, preserved in Portugal and produced by Indigenous women in Grão-Pará in the 18th century. The objects in question are an exemplary case of the global art history of the Amazonian communities. In order to investigate them, it is necessary to consider the procurement and ritual use of *cuias* (fruits of the *cuiçeira* tree–*Crescentia cujete*), the sophisticated techniques used to produce a durable, glossy, black varnish from *cumatê* (or *cumaté*, *cumati*), a natural dark red pigment extracted from the skins of the *cumatezeiro* or *axuazeiro* tree (*Myrcia atramentifera*), as well as the incorporation of fauna and flora motifs from Asian or Asian-inspired textiles and embroidery, which circulated worldwide. Their history brings together the nature of the forest, the myths of creation, and the knowledge and practices of Indigenous and riverine women, mainly from the lower Amazon. Studying these objects produced by Indigenous female painters in a colonial context of appropriation, in addition to contributing to their knowledge, can stimulate dialogues on the knowledge of the Brazilian Amazon rainforest with other locations in America, sharing their ancestry and resistance.

Keywords: lacquers; *cuias*; *cumatê* varnish; Indigenous women; Amazon; 18th century



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1. Introduction

I began the study of the collection of objects gathered by Alexandre Rodrigues Ferreira as part of his well-known *Philosophical Journey* (1783–1792) [1] in my doctoral research on architecture, art, and the establishment of Jesuit colleges and missions in the former State of Maranhão and Grão-Pará (renamed the State of Grão-Pará and Maranhão from 1750), which today is roughly equivalent to the territory of the so-called Legal Amazon. With an interdisciplinary approach using primary documents, field research, and the study and analysis of sacred, archaeological, and ethnographic art collections, the thesis entitled *Tintas da Terra, Tintas do Reino* (Colors of the Land, Colors of the Kingdom) (2009) [2] demonstrated the union of Indigenous, African, and *mestizo* peoples in the artistic production of the missions of the Society of Jesus in the Amazon in the 17th and 18th centuries.

Names and information about the artists and officials of the land (Indigenous people, Africans, and *mestizos*) came to light, either as individuals or as groups, as they almost always acted collectively in the different fixed or itinerant workshops of colleges and farms, demonstrating the intense circulation of knowledge flowing from the forests to the various workshops created in the missions. In this sense, the extensive work of the Jesuit priest Serafim Leite [3], on the documentation preserved in Rome [4], was an excellent guide that revealed the presence of these invisible but fundamental actors. Thus, the recent literature about the economy of the Jesuit missions, revealing the participation of Indigenous women through their work in the potteries, looms, herbaria, and vegetable gardens, tells of an artistic production that is almost always erased, yet extremely relevant in the missionary context; it provides original sources and data on the important role of Indigenous women in the history of the colonial period [5] and has drawn my attention in new research [6].

Likewise, a critical reading of the chronicles and letters of missionaries, especially João Felipe Bettendorff (1625–1698) [7], João Daniel (1722–1776) [8], and Anselmo Eckart

(1721–1809) [9], points out new paths that deserve greater attention and in-depth study: local artists, objects, materials, and techniques. The use of natural pigments and varnishes is evident in all the consulted sources regarding the knowledge of the peoples of the Amazon in the production of innumerable objects since time immemorial. These objects include those belonging to the Indigenous cultures as well as those brought by the colonisers. It is worth mentioning that both types of objects are fundamental for the project and maintenance of the religious missions: textiles, ceramics, feathers or sacred sculptures, altarpieces, desks, etc. In the texts mentioned above, pigments are highlighted, as hugely relevant for the production and application of paints and varnishes for their colourful and varied decorations [10]. Praised for their colours, figures, and durable, shiny, black varnish, most accounts speak of *cuias*—fruits of the *Crescentia cujete*, a domesticated tree—produced by Indigenous women in the area of the Aldeia de Gurupatuba, which became a Jesuit mission, then a Franciscan one and, later in Vila in Monte Alegre, a municipality in the state of Pará, in the lower Amazon region of the Brazilian Amazon (Figure 1) [11].

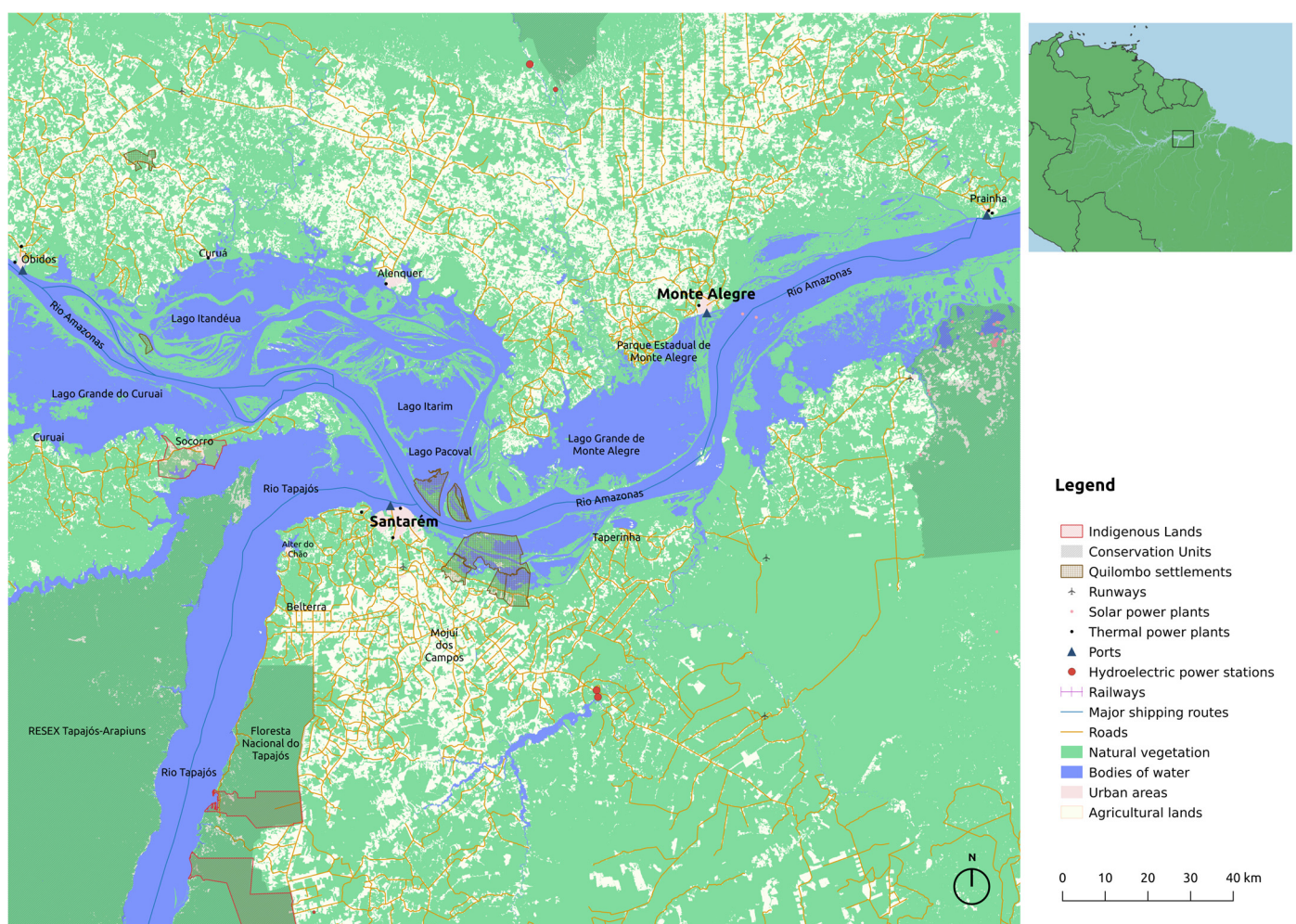


Figure 1. Map of land use, land cover, and transportation and energy infrastructure in the lower Amazon: Santarém, Monte Alegre, and surrounding areas. Data sources: ANEEL, IBGE, MMA, INPE/Terrabrasilis, FUNAI, MapBiomass Collection 7.0 (2021). Authors: Ana Livia Rügger Saldanha; Luis Felipe Clemente Nunes, 2024 [12].

As previously mentioned, the *cuias* collected by Alexandre Rodrigues Ferreira and largely attributed to the Indigenous people of Monte Alegre, form a valuable collection preserved in Portugal and distributed, as far as I know, between the Maynense Museum of the Lisbon Academy of Sciences (*Museu Maynense da Academia de Ciências de Lisboa*) and the

Science Museum of the University of Coimbra (*Museu da Ciência da Universidade de Coimbra*); from the fundamental work of Thekla Hartmann [13], they gained relevance in my doctoral thesis and subsequently in my ensuing studies, which today are important drivers of the research project that I am coordinating: *Barroco-Açu* [14].

In recent years, I have devoted myself to the study of objects, books, artists, materials, and techniques between Asia and America, mediated or encouraged by Europe and, above all, by the Jesuit missions. In doing so, I have constantly revisited documentation, such as the *Litterae Annuae* (the annual reports sent to Rome by the Provincial of a Jesuit Province) and the inventories of Jesuits expelled from Portuguese territories (1760). My studies in Bahia [15] and also in the Amazon [16] have shown that many Asian or Asian-inspired products were used by the Indigenous peoples, such as ivory crucifixes, the application of porcelain and fabric repertoires, tortoise shell and mother-of-pearl inlays, etc., as was the case elsewhere in the Americas. Due to the similarity between the glossy appearance and durability of certain Indigenous varnishes and Asian lacquers appreciated by the missionaries, the utilisation of a prized recipe derived from Amerindian technical traditions and materials from the Amazon rainforest was not an isolated case but involved the production of other objects within the scope of the worldwide success of Asian decorative taste. The gourds decorated by Indigenous women in Ferreira's collection soon also revealed themselves to be an exceptional case of objects with transcultural characteristics in their interwoven historical layers, complex adaptations, and reinterpretations.

In terms of the adopted decorative repertoire, there has been more recent progress in collaboration with researchers in related areas, proposing research, for example, on the relationship between archaeological objects and *cuias*, with archaeologist Márcio Amaral from the Mamirauá Institute of Sustainable Development (*Instituto de Desenvolvimento Sustentável Mamirauá*) [17]; or the adoption of embroidery and silk models from Europe, India or China by Indigenous women, with Prof. Luciano Migliaccio (FAU USP) [18]; or even the artistic work of Indigenous women from the Amazon in the colonial period, with Ana Livia Rügger Saldanha (FAU USP) [19]. The different approaches intertwine and meet each other in the *cuias*. The funded research made it possible to visit the aforementioned museums (2017, 2018, 2020, 2023) and also a locality where riverine women still make beautiful *cuias* using the traditional technique of painting from the shiny varnish of *cumatê* (made from the bark of the *cumatezeiro* or *axuazeiro* tree—*Myrcia atramentifera*) and applying human urine (ammonia), as described by Alexandre Rodrigues Ferreira [20] (pp. 35–39). In the community of Carapanatuba, Aritapera district, in the Santarém floodplain (about four hours by boat from Santarém, with stops in various communities, see map in Figure 2), I was warmly welcomed by the riverine artists Léila Almeida Maduro, her daughter Silvana Almeida Maduro, and Marinalva Correia de Sousa, at the beginning of January 2023 during the Amazonian winter (Figure 3). The sophisticated ways of making *cuias* in the lower Amazon region of Pará were inscribed in 2015 in the *Livro de Registros de Saberes do IPHAN* (Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional)¹ and the 'Associação das Artesãs Ribeirinhas de Santarém' (*Asarisan*), founded in 2003, which is related to bioeconomy and sustainable development (Figure 4).

The use of this varnish evokes very ancient and affective relationships with *cuias*, which are objects present in the creation myths of many Indigenous cultures and which are still used throughout the Amazon region. In this article, I intend to make an in-depth study of some examples of decorated *cuias* from the aforementioned collections, considering them, in this context, as 'Amazonian lacquers', either because of the production technique of fine and shiny varnish or because of the various vegetable and mineral colours that allowed the Indigenous women to reinterpret motifs from distant Asian and/or European Asian-inspired repertoires without the *cuias* completely losing their ancestral codes of meaning. The women artists of the Aritapera region continue to possess this knowledge and many other areas of knowledge, in this very long history of which they are a part. They haven't been invited yet to visit the collections of *cuias* in museums in Portugal, but they

continue to make their varnished *cuias*, ‘embroidering’, as they say, their coded messages of resistance on them (Figure 5).

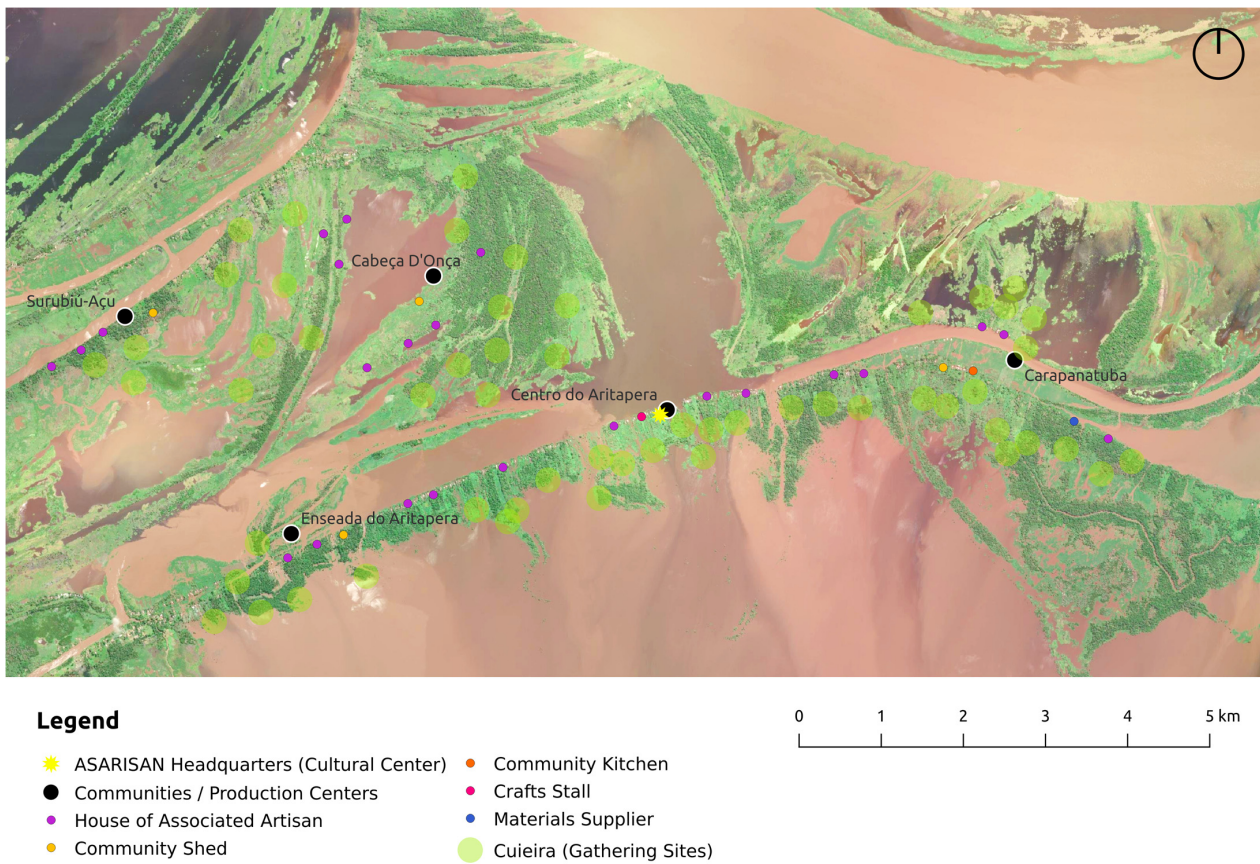


Figure 2. Territory of the artisans associated with ASARISAN (2011–2012), based on the map developed by Nova Cartografia Social da Amazônia [21]. lower Amazon, Santarém/Pará, PAE Aritapera. Authors: Ana Livia Rüegger Saldanha; Luis Felipe Clemente Nunes, 2024 [12].



Figure 3. Silvane Almeida Maduro, *cuieira* artist, canoeist, etc., leaving us by canoe on the boat to return to Santarém. In the background, the palafitte where the artist Marinalva Correia and her family live. Photograph: Renata Maria Martins, 2023.



Figure 4. Lélia Almeida Maduro, artist from the Carapanatuba riverine community and president of the *cuieiras* association of the Aritapera region, in her palafitte examining the *cuia*s at different stages of the process. Photograph: Renata Maria Martins, Carapanatuba, 2023.



Figure 5. Silvane Almeida Maduro and Marinalva Correia de Sousa, artists from the Carapanatuba community, presenting the process of their work on the *cuia*s. In the background, *Crescentia cujete* trees. Photograph: Renata Maria Martins, 2023.

2. Materials and Manufacture

In 1786, in the village that was then called Monte Alegre (formerly Aldeia de Gurupatuba, first the Jesuit mission and later the Franciscan mission of Gurupatuba, according to Alexandre Rodrigues Ferreira [22]), the main activities of the Indigenous women were the manufacture of *cuia*s and gourds and nets (hammocks) for sleeping. In the report on the *cuia*s sent in a large box to Portugal, Ferreira says that around 5000 to 6000 *cuia*s were made in the village per year, which the Indigenous people sold, or the Europeans traded with

Lisbon. In the collections of the Maynense Museum of the Lisbon Academy of Sciences and the Science Museum of the University of Coimbra, there are vessels of this type with characteristics closer to those of the Indigenous tradition (in Lisbon), as well as others decorated with decorative motifs of European, Asian, and Asian-inspired origin produced in Europe (in Lisbon and Coimbra).

In January 2023, while visiting the community of Carapanatuba in the lower Amazon region in the present-day state of Pará, I found that, for the most part, the manufacture of *cuías* still follows the process described by Ferreira. Fundamental issues, such as the planting of *cuieira* trees (*Crescentia cujete*) and the ripening of its fruits for the selection and preparation of the varnished and decorated vessels, represent some of the knowledge that the populations and especially the riverine women have; they mainly use materials found in the Amazon Forest for the preparation: the sandpaper leaf of *embaúba* (*Cecropia obtusa* Trécul-Urticaceae), the scale and tongue of the *pirarucu* fish (*Arapaima gigas*), the bird feather brushes, and the varnish of the *cumatezeiro* (*Myrcia atramentifera*) (Figure 6). The art of those who '*cuida em cuia*' or '*cuida na cuia*' - as D. Lélia Maduro, Silvane Maduro, Marinalva Correia, Francisca Pereira, Socorro Pereira, and other artists from the communities of the Aritapera region (Enseada do Aritapera, Centro do Aritapera, Cabeça d'Onça, Surubim-Açu, Carapanatuba, etc.) describe their artistic work—possesses much ancestral knowledge about the rivers, plants, fauna, and nature of the place.



Figure 6. Materials and tools for making *cuías* by female artists from Carapanatuba, Aritapera region, lower Amazon, Pará. Photograph: Renata Maria Martins, 2023.

In the three days I spent there, after a boat trip of about four hours from the city of Santarém (where the Tapajós and Amazon rivers meet), following each stage of production with the women artists of the riverside community of Carapanatuba, not only did I learn about the art of preparing *cuías*, I was also generously offered medicinal preparations made with local species, recipes for fish dishes, flour and cheese produced in the region, and tours and 'rides' in the *bajara*, the small motorised canoe that is the most commonly used means of transport. I learnt what it is like to live on stilts in times of ebb and flood, but above all, I learnt lessons about solidarity and sharing.

The *cuias* of Aritapera, sold in shops, craft centres, and markets, bear the traces of the lives of these very strong, wise, and talented women in their shapes, cuts, varnishes, and engravings. In turn, those paintings preserved in museums in Portugal that Ferreira took with him on his journey make direct reference to the artistic production of the Indigenous people of the Amazon and also form part of the history and memory of Lélia, Silvane, Marinalva, Francisca, Socorro, and many women from other communities in the region, who today continue to maintain their traditions and ways of life.

When Ferreira describes the fruits with which the Indigenous women work, he highlights both the smooth (natural) *cuias*, which are more common and numerous, as well as the more complex artificial process of making *cuias* in segments, such as the two specimens preserved in the Maynense Museum of the Lisbon Academy of Sciences (Inv. ACL green-671; Inv. ACL green-672). In the garden that surrounds D. Lélia and Mr Antônio Maduro's house in Carapanatuba, there are different types of trees that produce smooth, round, oval fruits of various sizes. These are picked by the women at the desired point of maturity: when, on hitting the bottom, the ripe *cuias* produce a specific sound. Then, they cut them and hollow them out, or as they say, 'straighten' them and 'soften' them.

It is impressive to see the speed and efficiency with which these artists climb the trees, the technique they master to choose each ripe fruit, and the strength and skill to split them perfectly with a machete or saw and scrape them completely inside with a metal spoon. The *cuias* are then placed in a large pot of water to heat, softening the skins and making them easier to prepare. Then, after a further soaking in water, the outer skin of the fruit is carefully removed with a blade and the edge of the *cuia* is carefully smoothed with the tongue of the pirarucu fish (*Arapaima gigas*) or the inner part with the scale of the same fish.

The preparation of the *cuia* to receive the varnish is completed by scrubbing the external and internal surfaces to make them completely smooth with the large leaves (divided into lobes, with a white underside) of the *embaúba* tree (*Cecropia*), a species also present in the area near the Almeida Maduro family's residence. The treated but unvarnished *cuia* is called *pitinga*.

This knowledge, which is quite similar to that reported by Ferreira in Monte Alegre and Santarém and passed down through generations of women, is fundamental, so that after drying the fruits, it is possible to obtain perfect *cuias*, which can shine by applying *cumatê* varnish (Figure 7). After being painted with several coats of ink (Figure 8), they are left to rest on a bed of sand (or ashes) sprinkled with human urine, where they remain 'asleep' and covered for a whole night. After all of these stages, the *cuias* are decorated or 'embroidered'; today, these are basically engravings made with a small knife. The process of painting directly onto the surface or incisions with vegetable or mineral dyes is no longer adopted today, even though many dye-producing plants are known to the riverine artists (Figure 9).

On this occasion, it is important to address the preparation of 'Amazonian lacquer', the black gloss obtained from the reddish *cumatê* varnish and, albeit briefly, the production of plant-based colours used on 18th century *cuias* preserved in the Ferreira collection in Portugal. The decorative repertoires used on some pieces, which are in dialogue with the Asian and/or Asian/European universe, reinterpreted and reinvented with mastery and originality by Indigenous painters, are also of interest. The variety of motifs found in the decorations is quite large; therefore, each piece must be analysed carefully and individually.

It is worth mentioning that chemical/physical analyses of the pigments used on the oldest vessels preserved in Portugal have not yet been carried out. Consequently, the knowledge of techniques and materials is based mainly on the reports of missionaries and travellers, particularly the Jesuits, and on Ferreira's reports, as well as on the comparison between the ancient texts and the knowledge still preserved today by Indigenous and riverine communities.



Figure 7. *Cuias*, *Cumatê* varnish, and feather brush, Carapanatuba, Aritapera region, Pará. Photograph: Renata Maria Martins, 2023.

This article considers the six pieces (five *cuias*—four decorated and one plain (Inv. ANT. Br. 150; Br. 151; Br. 152; Br. 193; Br. 194)—and one gourd (Inv. ANT. Br. 195) conserved by the University of Coimbra, all collected by Alexandre Rodrigues Ferreira and studied during a visit to the technical reserve of the Museum of Sciences between the end of January and February 2023 (Figure 10). In addition, seven other pieces (Inv. ACL green-658; 660; 667; 668; 820; 882; 919) of the approximately twenty-three specimens conserved in the Maynense Museum of the Lisbon Academy of Sciences were analysed during a visit that took place in February of the same year. Some of these contain inscriptions, such as the *cuias* (Inv. ACL green-667, Inv. ACL green-919) (Figures 11 and 12). All are examples of the reconciliation phenomenon between the artistic productions of the Indigenous cultures of the lower Amazon and the global taste for Asian objects, which led to the qualification of such products as ‘Amazonian lacquerware’. Other objects from the two collections can be mentioned when relevant, especially for the study of the production processes and the use of *cumatê* varnish from colonial times to current practice.

Drawings of textiles, porcelain, and embroidery, which circulated among the four continents, as well as motifs of Amazonian flora and fauna, can be found on the black (originally shiny) or reddish-brown surfaces of objects of exclusively Indigenous origin; these are fruits that evoke Mother Earth, with complex meanings and varied uses—formal re-readings and inventive solutions for the application of these ‘coded messages’ on the hemispherical or globular body of the *cuiã*. The decoration takes on new forms through the hands and minds of Amazonian women, painters, and producers of dyes and varnishes, who also mastered and still master the techniques of ceramics, textiles, weaving, gardening, and so many other productions. The biography of these objects in the 18th century is marked by a dialogue with other equally important manifestations in Latin America, such as the objects in Pasto varnish, known as mopa-mopa in Colombia and Ecuador, and painted objects such as *maque*, the so-called ‘Mexican lacquer’. Thus, the *cumatê* varnish worked by Indigenous people on the *cuias* of the lower Amazon in Brazil adds to the range of ‘American lacquers’.



Figure 8. Painting the *cuias* with *cumatê* varnish by the hands and knowledge of the artist Marinalva Correia, Carapanatuba, Aritapera region, Pará. Photograph: Renata Maria Martins, 2023.



Figure 9. *Earth Dyes*. A combination of dye plants, vegetable skins, and resins that produce colourful pigments: reds, yellows, violets, golds, etc. Gathered and named from the knowledge of the traditional communities, *erveiras* and *erveiros* of the State of Pará (*Estado do Pará*). Marked with popular nomenclature. Collection of the author. Photograph: Renata Maria Martins, 2023.



Figure 10. *Cuias and Gourds.* Indigenous women. Pará, Brazil. Materials: *cuieira* fruits (*Crescentia cujete*) and gourd (*Lagenaria*). Science Museum of the University of Coimbra. Alexandre Rodrigues Ferreira Collection (1783–1792). From top left to right: Inv. ANT. Br. 151; Br. 152; Br. 193; Br. 194; Br. 195. Photograph: Renata Maria Martins, 2023.



Figure 11. *Cuiá*. Inscription 'Amor Firme'. Indigenous women from Monte Alegre and/or the Belém of Pará Factory? Pará, Amazon, Brazil. Maynense Museum of the Lisbon Academy of Science. Inventory No: ACL green-667 or ACL-ETN-0224. Materials: *cuieira* fruit (*Crescentia cujete*), resin/varnish, pigment. Dimensions: W × C × L × D: h 8 × 20.5 d (max.) cm. 18th century. Ethnographic collection. Sub-collection: Brazil (BR). Photograph: Paulo Barros.



Figure 12. *Cuiá*. Inscription 'Para' (Pará). Indigenous women from Monte Alegre and/or the Belém of Pará Factory? Pará, Amazon, Brazil. Maynense Museum of the Lisbon Academy of Sciences. Inventory No: ACL green-919 o ACL-ETN-0235. Materials: *cuieira* fruit (*Crescentia cujete*), resin/varnish, pigment. Dimensions: W × D × L × D: h 17 × 20 d (max) cm. 18th century. Ethnographic collection. Sub-collection: Brazil (BR). Photograph: Marta Santos.

3. Results

3.1. The Production of 'Cuias', 'Cumaté' Paint, and Colours

In his *Memory of Cuias (Memórias sobre as Cuias)*, Alexandre Rodrigues Ferreira talks in detail about the *Crescentia cujete* tree and the planting and harvesting of its fruits and also about the long process of making the vessels by the Indigenous women of Monte Alegre: from the choice of the best cuias and gourds to their completion with painting and decoration [23].

As it is still done today, the *cuia* was split in half and the pulp was completely removed. The pieces were then immersed in water to soften them and then scraped and sanded. They were then washed and left to dry for a short time and then dyed with reddish cumaté varnish obtained from the bark of the *cumatezeiro* or *axuazeiro* tree (*Myrcia atramentifera*) and placed on a pallet. After drying, they were taken to a *puçanga*, a kind of 'bed' to cover them first with ash and sand, and then with the urine of women or children. Many hours later the varnish turned black due to the ammonia present in the urine, and finally, they were ready to receive painted or incised decorations [23] (p. 61).

The materials, instruments and techniques used were the same as those used by the Indigenous cultures of the Amazon, such as sandpaper from the scales of the pirarucu fish (*Arapaima gigas*), *gipyoca* root soap, ginned cotton strainer, the aforementioned *cumaty* (*cumatê*) varnish, *cury*, *tabatinga*, *tauhá*, *anil* (indigo), and *urucum* (annatto), dissolved with water and cotton root. The paint pots in which the Indigenous women dipped their brushes were their own thighs and legs, or castor leaves. The brushes were made of *siracura*, *jacamy*, and white acará feathers, and the stilettos used 'to splash the desired decoration made with a knife-like instrument' were made of *jamacaru* thorns (*Cereus jamacaru*) and *patuá* palm tree (*Oenocarpus batauá*) [23] (p. 59).

A *cuia* (Inv. ANT. Br. 194, see bellow) and a gourd (Inv. ANT. Br. 195, see bellow) from the Alexandre Rodrigues Ferreira collection in the Museum of Sciences of the University of Coimbra have a reddish-brown surface, which seems to indicate, as deduced from the process still used today by the Carapanatuba artists, that the two pieces were covered by layers of *cumatê* varnish but did not go through the resting process, which leaves them with a black, lacquer-like sheen. Most of the vessels preserved in the two collections are black but have lost much of the shine of the varnish. Such a progressive loss is a phenomenon that can also be seen in the gourds produced today. As I found out locally with the artists, in order to maintain and/or quickly recover the shine of the *cuias*, it is necessary to 'hydrate' them, that is to say, leave them in a bath of cold water, dry them with a cotton cloth, and then, at the end, leave them to dry for a short time. This same process is also always carried out after the first painting so that they acquire even more shine.

As for the colours, it would be important to carry out analyses (using the least invasive techniques possible) so that the mineral and/or vegetable pigments used in the paintings on the *cuias* collected in the last decades of the 18th century could be identified. The artists of the Aritapera region did not colour the surface of the *cuias* directly and, except when the decoration was incised, were hesitant to state which qualities of natural paints could be used after applying cumaté and bathing/resting with human urine so that the colours would remain fixed on the black background for centuries, as can be seen in the specimens today in Coimbra and Lisbon. The technique of applying certain colours to the incised drawings on the surface allows, in turn, the use of a wide range of vegetal paints (as in the *cuia* Inv. ANT. Br. 152, in Coimbra) (Figure 10), which can be identified thanks to the knowledge of the current riverine communities, the treatise *On the most special inks of the Amazon* by the Jesuit João Daniel, or through the texts of Alexandre R. Ferreira. [2,10,24–26].

In his *Memórias sobre a louça que fazem as índias deste Estado*, written in Barcelos, Amazonas on 5th February 1786, Ferreira mentions the *jutaí* / *jutaícica* resin used to varnish the clay, leaving it glazed. The naturalist lists the following among the clays and dyes used in ceramics by the Indigenous people: '*tauá*, which is iron ochre, *curi*, which is clay dyed with the same ochre that has already been burnt, *urucu* (*urucum*, *Bixa orellana*) and *carajuru* (or *crajiru*, *Arrabidaea chica*), which are the dyes they use in their different paintings' [27]

(p. 33). Ferreira already mentions in *Memória sobre as salvas de palhinhas pintadas pelas índias da vila de Santarém* that the method of dyeing the braids is performed by cooking the skins and starches such as carajuru (mentioned above), *pau de guaribá* (*Clarisia racemosa*), ginger or saffron of the earth (*Cúrcuma longa*), and *jenipapo* (*Genipa americana*) [28] (p. 47).

For his part, João Daniel emphasises the durability of the varnishes and paints produced by the Indigenous people of Gurupatuba and used to paint the *cuias*, affirming that they are equal or superior to the best Chinese varnish [8] (p. 386, volume 1). José de Moraes, also a Jesuit, tells in his 'History', made in Pará College in 1759, that 'This village is famous for the painting of certain gourds, which are painted with an ink called *cumatê*, so fine and of such good taste that it competes with the best lacquers of China' [29] (p. 508). In comparing the varnishes produced by the Indigenous people of Monte Alegre with the traditional Chinese lacquers—lacquer, sealing wax, or varnish (the *acharolados / chiliau* or *chi-yau* in China)—one can perfectly understand the adoption of Asian repertoires, already used all over the world in the decoration of these objects belonging to the Indigenous tradition [6,15]. Other Jesuits have shown great interest in lacquer, such as Martino Martini in *Atlante Cinese* (1655), Athanasius Kircher in *China Illustrata* (1667), Filippo Bonanni in *Trattato sopra la vernice detta comunemente cinese* (1720)—published in French in 1723—and Pierre Nicolas d'Incarville in *Mémoire sur le vernis de la Chine* (1760) [6] (358), who lived in China from 1740 until his death in 1757.

In the *cuias* that have been preserved, the surface is either varnished in black, or in the reddish-brown colour of *cumatê*, or even coated in white, imitating the background of Coromandel silks or embroidered bedspreads. The decoration in red and golden yellow, among other colours, and the fine drawings of flowers, fruits, birds, and animals show formal influences from Asia, some of which have already been reinterpreted to European tastes. The Indigenous painters produced gourds that really seem to be inspired by Asian objects, such as the boxes, cups, and pots painted with vegetable lacquer (*Rhus vernicifera*), produced in Asia and destined for the Western market [6], but also possibly inspired by European productions, especially those from Portugal.

As Ferreira relates in his *Memoria sobre as cuias*, some *mazombas* (daughters of Europeans, mainly Portuguese, born on the land) in the city of Belém imitated the Indigenous women by working on *cuias* stimulated by the Europeans and the taste and richness of gold or silver colours and paintings, which was not different to the luxurious *charão* (lacquer) [23]. The *mamelucas* (*mestizo*), daughters of the resident Manoel Ribeiro Pinto, were making a tea set made with *cuias* to package during the same period. In the Maynense Museum of the Lisbon Academy of Sciences there is a vessel with the inscription '*Fabrica da cidade de Sta. Maria de Belem do Gram Para*' and another with the inscription '*Para*' (Pará), i.e., it is practically certain that there was a factory for decorating *cuias* in Belém of Pará at the end of the 18th century. The artists may have been Indigenous, *mestizo*, or the daughters of Europeans born in Pará. In addition to the aforementioned gourds, a third of the Coimbra collection (Inv. ANT. Br. 193, see Figure 13) seems to be part of the same universe as the 'Factory' of Belém.

The existence of an active workshop in Belém does not rule out the possibility that the *cuias* were mainly produced by those who had more experience in export production, i.e., the Indigenous women of the House of Monte Alegre. The aforementioned pieces, as already indicated, are the best and most impressive in terms of shine, paint, colours, and motifs. In this sense, it is worthwhile taking a closer look at the decorations present on the *cuias*, based on an analysis of the repertoires and figures adopted.



Figure 13. *Cuia*. Sight 1. Indigenous women from Monte Alegre and/or the Belém of Pará factory. Pará, Amazon, Brazil. Materials: *cuieira* fruit (*Crescentia cujete*), resin/varnish, pigment. Dimensions: 17.5 cm high × 19 cm diameter. Science Museum of the University of Coimbra. Alexandre Rodrigues Ferreira Collection (1783–1792). Inv. ANT. Br. 193. Photograph: Renata Maria Martins, 2023.

3.2. The Motifs Adopted on *Cuias* and Gourds: Between Europe, Asia, and the Americas

The objects selected for this article are mainly characterised by the adoption of a wide variety of decorative motifs from an Asian or Asian-inspired repertoire, which circulated widely between Asia, the Iberian crowns, and their colonial dominions. Thus, what stand out are the models already known in Portugal, through objects of decorative arts (lacquerware, porcelain, fabrics, lace, embroidery, etc.), which were produced in Asia for the export market. Thus, through the flow of similar models, there are some coincidences between the motifs used in the decoration of gourds from the Brazilian Amazon in the colonial period in Gurupatuba/Monte Alegre and those adopted in objects also produced by Indigenous people in Peru or Mexico during the same period, especially in terms of the ways flora and fauna are represented. This is a theme of important development in terms of the connections between the Portuguese dominions and Hispanic America, showing, through the Iberian presence in Asia and the network of Asian artists, models, and objects circulating in Europe, formal coincidences and convergences in various artistic fields, such as altarpiece carving, furniture, and textiles. I chose to focus my analyses and propositions on the latter points.

We highlighted the great relevance of the European printed sources for embroidery and textiles exported from the production centres of China and India as sources for the choice of motifs adopted in the decorative arts of the colonial period in Portuguese America [18]. Among the objects that could contribute to the confirmation of this hypothesis, the *cuias* collected during Alexandre Ferreira's Philosophical Journey in the Amazon are also included. Although our study is still in its initial phase, there is a considerable coincidence in the ornamental repertoire of Asian or Asian-inspired textiles, made for the European market by Asian or non-Asian artists, and the *cuias*, especially in the compositions and the way flowers and birds are represented. This is also noticeable in other objects in Portugal, such as tiles for altar fronts, bed quilts, and locally produced earthenware.

Thus, the universes of these global connections are intertwined with the 'cultures of the earth'. Textiles, porcelain, and *cuias* are decorated with messages of affection and love, such as winged and arrowed hearts, small declarations of devotion, and cupids, which are popularly used even today. On this point, among the pieces analysed in the Science Museum of Coimbra and the Maynense Museum of the Lisbon Academy of Sciences, we highlight two gourds with winged and arrowed hearts (Inv. ANT. Br. 194 in Figure 14 and Inv. ACL-green-658). In the Museum of the Lisbon Academy of Sciences, there is a *cuia* split horizontally in two with a cupid on one side and a winged heart pierced by an arrow on the other (Inv. ACL green-822). There is also another with a bird on one side and a winged heart on the other side (Inv. ACL green-820), as well as a *cuia* with the exterior part engraved with flowers and the phrase '*amor firme*' (firm love) inside another winged heart (Inv. ACL green-667, see Figure 11).



Figure 14. *Cuia*. Sight 1. Indigenous women of Monte Alegre. Pará, lower Amazon, Brazil. Materials: *cuiçeira* fruit (*Crescentia cujete*), resin/lacquer, pigment. Dimensions: 17.5 cm high × 19 cm diameter. Collection: Science Museum of the University of Coimbra-Alexandre Rodrigues Ferreira (1783–1792). Inv. ANT. Br. 194. Photograph: Renata Maria Martins, 2023.

Inevitably, the message of love in Portuguese suggests poems, ‘lovers’ handkerchiefs (“lenços de namorados”), or even hearts painted in fabrics, embroidery, small ceramic or wooden objects, etc., which are traditional in the Minho region in northern Portugal and have very ancient roots that ought to be studied in detail. On the other hand, lacquer boxes are elaborated with the intention of being gifted as a display of affection. The fact that the reminder of love in Portuguese was painted by an Indigenous woman who probably did not know the language and could not read, records, so to speak, an encrypted message that denounces, even centuries later, the extinguishing of her culture and the violence suffered by the original cultures of the Amazon, and at the same time, their resistance, reinterpretations, and reinventions.

The ornate *cuias*, painted and encrusted with silver and gold, are described by the Jesuit Anselm Eckart (1721–1809) in the old residence of Gurupatuba (Monte Alegre) in 1756 (at that time no longer under the direction of the Jesuits, but of the Capuchin friars), and the decoration formed by phytomorphic and zoomorphic motives, particularly the birds, is also highlighted [9]. In the three analysed pieces of the collection from Coimbra, there is a beautiful variety of birds, one of which looks like a hummingbird, and the remaining two are similar to the scarlet ibis (*Eudocimus ruber*—a bird present in the Amazon region) on the long gourd (Inv. ANT. Br. 195, see Figure 15); and there are also other birds (Inv. ANT. Br. 195 and Inv. ANT. Br. 193, see Figure 13) that adorn the brownish or black surface of the pieces. On the inside of the white painted top of one of them (Inv. ANT. Br. 194, see Figure 16), there is a bird perched on a delicate branch, where it pecks a flower surrounded by other plant designs that could imitate a fabric. In the Lisbon collection, there are still vestiges of a blue bird in the middle of a gourd, also covered in white, surrounding a winged pink heart pierced by an arrow (Inv. ACL green-822). Another *cuia* from the Lisbon collection helps us reconstitute that partially lost composition, given that there is also a winged heart in a frame with two blue birds symmetrically positioned on either side. This seems to have been created by the same artist that created the cited piece. On the other side of the *cuia*, a dark-coloured bird placed sideways among different types of pink, blue, and multi-hued flowers, and their green stems, branches, and leaves, attracts attention. In another one, we see a curious scene that represents the battle between three masculine figures and a dragon with three big flowers in the background. In one of them, there is a parrot perched with other flowers and berries on its peak (Inv. ACL green-668).

Other animals appear in the *cuias*: four-legged creatures that could be two dogs or two small felines like the ones called *margay cat* (*leopardus wiedii*) (Inv. Br. 195), or a deer eating berries in a small tree (Inv. ANT. Br 193, see Figure 16) in the Coimbra specimens. Additionally, there is another yellow unidentified creature (perhaps a fictional animal) in the cited gourd with the scene of the battle against the dragon, conserved in Lisbon. It can also refer to the local universe, a bluish-grey crustacean that could be a burrowing crab (*Ucides cordatus*) that inhabits the mangroves of Brazil, or a blue crab (*Callinectes sapidus*), found in the Brazilian coast. Although less likely, this could be a mention of the Cancer zodiac sign.

Regarding the foliage, two beautiful fruits and cashew nuts (*Anacardium occidentale*), plants native to the northeastern region of Brazil and brought by the Portuguese to Asia, appear on the exterior of the lid (Inv. ANT. Br. 194) in a composition with various flowers (Figure 16). On the base of the beautiful black gourd (Inv. ANT. Br. 193), there are three flowers and two fruits, which could be fruits of the native cacao tree (*Theobroma Cacao* L.) or another species of the Amazon. I dare to interpret from the experience of someone born in the Amazon that perhaps it is the open fruit of the *bacuri* (*Platonia insignis*), revealing the white pulp—soft and fragrant—due to its cocoon shape and to the small surrounding flower buds (Figure 17).



Figure 15. Gourd. Detail (hummingbird and flower). Indigenous women of Monte Alegre. Pará, Amazon, Brazil. Materials: gourd (*Lagenaria*), resin/lacquer, pigment. Dimensions: 14 cm diameter. Science Museum of the University of Coimbra. Alexandre Rodrigues Ferreira Collection (1783–1792). Inv. ANT. Br. 195. Photograph: Renata Maria Martins, 2023.



Figure 16. *Cuia*. Sight 2. Indigenous women of Monte Alegre. Pará, lower Amazon, Brazil. Materials: *cuieira* fruit (*Crescentia cujete*), resin/varnish, pigment. Dimensions: 17.5 cm high × 19 cm diameter. Collection: Science Museum of the University of Coimbra. Alexandre Rodrigues Ferreira Collection (1783–1792). Inv. ANT. Br. 194. Photograph: Renata Maria Martins, 2023.



Figure 17. *Cuia*. Indigenous women of Monte Alegre and/or Belém of Pará factory. Pará, Amazon, Brazil. Materials: *cuieira* fruit (*Crescentia cujete*), resin/lacquer, pigment. Dimensions: 17.5 cm high × 19 cm diameter. Science Museum of the University of Coimbra. Alexandre Rodrigues Ferreira Collection (1783–1792). Inv. ANT. Br. 193. Photograph: Renata Maria Martins, 2023.

However, the universe of fruits and flowers is too large when referring to the Amazon, and it is always a risk to attempt to reconstruct or identify native or non-native species in pieces with weakened paintings or with much damage.

In light of this, I do not dare to talk broadly or at great length about the species of flowers since they appear in abundance in all the analysed gourds: in the form of capsules, stems, on trees, in branches, demonstrating the transit of these representations, but also of their own species, probably some local ones already known by the Indigenous women who painted them, in addition to the European and Asian flowers, many already acclimatised in Brazil at that time.

Fabrics have proven to be an important key to reading and understanding the origins and selection of floral motifs. Some of the most recurrent in the textiles, embroidery, and lace of European or Asian origin or inspiration are repeated in one or more gourds. On the inner part of the lid of a *cuia* (Inv. ANT. Br. 193), with a white background (Figure 18), could be the representation of a chrysanthemum, native of Asia, or a blue dahlia (*Dahlia pinnata*), from Mexico, as well as a lily (*Lilium* L.), or *açucenas* or even Amazon lilies (*Eucharis*

amazonica), at the base of another (Inv. ACL green-660). Another possibility, suggested in a conversation by archaeologist Márcio Amaral, considering that Indigenous women knitted, was that the flowers and buds represented on the exterior of the lid of the *cuiá* (Inv. ANT. Br. 193) are from a cotton plant (*Gossypium hirsutum*). To help identify the possible species cultivated locally, the illustrations of the *Philosophical Journey* serve as a clear reference for the flowers as well as the fruits and birds, and for the very *cuias*. Thus, the portrayal of valuable sketches like the bowl tree, its fruits, the elaboration of the pieces in the house of the Indigenous people of Monte Alegre and, in the set of objects (utensils), some decorated *cuias*.



Figure 18. *Cuiá*. Sight 3. Indigenous women of Monte Alegre and/or Belém of Pará factory. Pará, Amazon, Brazil. Materials: *cuiêira* fruit (*Crescentia cujete*), resin/lacquer, pigment. Dimensions: 17.5 cm high × 19 cm diameter. Science Museum of the University of Coimbra. Alexandre Rodrigues Ferreira Collection (1783–1792). Inv. ANT. Br. 193. Photograph: Renata Maria Martins, 2023.

Having made these considerations about the motifs, which seemed important in order to start thinking about the adopted repertoires, brought by Europeans but reinvented and reinterpreted locally by female artists, we proposed a more detailed analysis of some pieces of black lacquer that we had the opportunity to examine in the two museums mentioned. In previous works [6,30], the examination of the specimens preserved in Lisbon, carried out solely through published photographs or inside showcases, did not allow a more detailed and precise reading of some of the figures represented. However, unfortunately, on the one hand, due to pictorial losses, and on the other hand, due to the smallness of certain images, even in an analysis with a magnifying glass and photography, it was not always possible to identify with certainty certain human or animal figures and mythological beings represented; so, there remain some unknowns in this field.

For example, there is a collection of curious figures with a white background on the inside of the lid of the *cuiá* that reads 'Pará' (Pará) (Inv. ACL green-919). On one side, there is a seemingly large building whose facade includes a focal point, two windows, and one door. On the other side, there is a tree that is not so large that seems to have some oval-shaped green fruits, similar to *cuias*. In the centre, on a much bigger scale, is a human figure, likely male, that sports a long white dress down to the legs with small red stains

that could suggest a damask fabric. He wears a pair of red slippers without ties and a white cap on his head. The figure looks like it is holding a red umbrella or a fabric bag, or perhaps a piece of fabric, in one hand and in the other, a compass or a sharp object. The drawing could perhaps be related to the fabric building in Belém of Pará and may allude to the presence of Asian culture in the Amazon through the fabrics and the umbrella and an artisan carrying the compass to draw on the gourds that sprout from the tree.

Without a doubt, the most detailed news and descriptions of the objects are found in texts written in the late 1980s and beginning of the 1990s (catalogue) by Thekla Hartmann [31,32]. It would not be productive to repeat all of the information compiled by the researcher, but based on her research and in the process of resuming some issues laid out in this text, I organised and summarised some fundamental details about the analysed pieces.

The four pieces related by their inscriptions or by stylistic or technical similarity with the fabric of Belém do Pará, one from the Coimbra collection (Inv. ANT. Br. 193) and three from Lisbon (Inv. ACL. Green-658; 660; 919), were all produced from globular fruits of *Crescentia cujete* cut at the top, creating a circular lid and tied with ribbons of damask fabric (today, almost always in poor condition). The external surface is painted black, and it was most probably glossy before, directly serving as support for the ornament formed by the floral motifs painted using similar palette colours, where red, whites, and yellows are highlighted. However, even with varying inscriptions and the organisation of the decorative motifs, the similarities of the decorative repertoire formed by birds and/or winged hearts stands out.

A conversation with Prof. Luciano Migliaccio, from the Faculdade de Arquitetura e Urbanismo da Universidade de São Paulo—FAUUSP—outlined how difficult it is to identify the workshop that produced these four *cuias*, which are characterised by excellent technical quality and design in the composition and painting of the flowers. It is likely that they were created by female artists who acted as ‘officials’ in the production of *cuias*, using precisely their experience in a workshop. Furthermore, these women—Indigenous, *mestizos* or *mazomba* (person with foreign parents)—could have come from Monte Alegre to Belém and taught other women [2]. Due to our knowledge about the Jesuit workshops, we know that the movement of artists was something very important and customary between the settlements and estates and the capital of Grão-Pará [2].

The elongated calabash (*Lagenaria siceraria*) of the collection of Coimbra (Inv. ANT. Br. 195), like the *cuiá* (Inv. ANT. Br. 194) (*Crescentia cujete*) from the same collection, seem to originate from another group of Indigenous artists from Monte Alegre or Santarém. They have a non-varnished opaque brown surface (perhaps only covered with the application of *cumatê*), which serves as a background for the painting of flowers, animals, and, over the calabash, also a winged and arrowed heart. The two fruits, as well as the four pieces described above, were cut at the top and tied with ribbons from small circular holes cut into their surfaces, so that it was possible to join the two parts.

Also, from the same group of artists are the two other very particular and beautiful *cuias* analysed in Lisbon. The fruits were cut in half and the two parts were coated in white both on the inside and outside, always painted with floral-based compositions in lighter colours that resembled embroidery and prints in Chinese textiles. As previously described, there are many qualities of flowers, some birds, winged hearts with arrows, and even a cupid. Without a doubt, it is the fabrics, embroidery, cretonnes, and lace that hold the main key for the study of motifs. The very language of these artists and the ones that describe the gourds from the 18th to 21st centuries refer to the textile world while speaking of the embroidery they intend, of the embroidery of the *cuias*, etc.

Bringing important connections between the production of textiles in the Amazon and Asia, João Daniel informs us that the cotton in America would have had more ‘advantages’ than that of India and China, and perhaps even from all of Asia, and that it would also be of better quality. This idea would have been confirmed by a Chinese missionary and by other religious figures living in China. Daniel also praises the production of Chinese fabrics, which were admired throughout the world because they were so finely spun. However, he

points out that in Amazonia, although thickly spun, they were precious [8] (pp. 527–528, volume 1).

Checking the multitude of fabrics that circulated in the Amazon, in the inventory of the Ibirajuba Farm in Pará there are calico fabrics covered with cotton with which the altar was covered; two cotton towels from India in the Church of Nossa Senhora da Madre de Deus da Vigia in Pará; and a carpet in the Church of Tabatinga; there were also tailors—probably Indigenous, *mestizo*, and/or African—who produced the missionaries' clothing at the São Luís College in Maranhão [2] (pp. 219–235, volume 2).

In the Igreja da Casa de Exercícios e Recreação Religiosa de Nossa Senhora de Deus in Maranhão, there are listed 'three new embroidered garments from China' and 'three white satin chasubles embroidered in China...' [2] (pp. 273–274, volume 2). It is proven that from the transit and presence of Asian textiles in the State of Grão-Pará and Maranhão, autochthonous artists also produced painted imitations of Chinese embroidery, as in the above-mentioned church in Maranhão, where 'ten exquisitely painted frontals were made imitating the Chinese embroideries that were used daily' [2] (p. 273, volume 2).

As we have seen, the field of research is very broad, objects have always been in dialogue, 'exchanging' decorative motifs with each other (porcelain, fabrics, fans, screens, etc.), and in different 'languages' (Amerindian, Spanish, Portuguese, Hindi, Chinese, etc.). Why would gourds not participate in this 'conversation', since they were recognised as a strong expression of cultural convergence, between the *cumatê* varnish and the shine of the Asian lacquer admired throughout Europe?

4. Conclusions

The analysis of the *cuias* of the 18th century and the process of varnishing and then embellishing them with coloured or engraved decorations provides, as we have seen, relevant data on the ancestral knowledge of Indigenous women and their readjustments in the violent process of the formation of the colonial world. The objects created by the Amerindian cultures underwent a series of transformations, in technique and in the decorative repertoire, depending on their commercial use for export to the global market, and to adapt to new times. Fortunately, this knowledge is still present today, thanks to the resistance of many Indigenous and riverside artists. The preservation of the 'way of making *cuias*' by the artists we know in the Aritapera region should have the same importance as the conservation of the set of *cuias* and gourds present in the collections that keep the collection of Alexandre Rodrigues Ferreira in Portugal. Although separated and living in different realities, the 18th century *cuias* of Monte Alegre, Santarém, and Belém and the women of the Carapanatuba community share a long history of persistence. These are stories and memories that can be accessed through the difficult and laborious preparation of shiny containers with *cumatê* varnish.

The shine of the *cuias* when they 'wake up' from the long process led by the riverine women really impresses with its perfection, quality, and beauty, even more so in a setting in contact with nature, among the *cuiêira* trees, the songs of the birds, navigating the rivers, tasting the riverside food, in leisurely conversations, among important narratives of the people who keep the forest alive. In turn, the *cuias* from Ferreira's collections, today almost all of them opaque or having lost much of their shine, touch the soul for the wonder of their colours and decorations and are equally disconcerting for revealing all the pain that the imposition of founding and developing a factory possibly implied; they explore the work and knowledge of Indigenous women artists, and also, taught by them, the *mestizos* and even the daughters of Portuguese born in Pará. The new motifs represent, as we know, the loss and transformation of the original ones; far beyond a decorative choice, there are reinventions and re-significations of all kinds, in many layers and levels. Those *cuias* from the 18th century, some still with drawings linked to Indigenous cultures, full of meanings, leave clues that tell us about the persistency, which continued uninterruptedly, more or less visible on the surfaces of objects, such as *cuias*, gourds, and ceramics.

The history of these sensible objects in European collections reveals the resistance practices that those artists could have exercised and the possible encrypted messages that they managed to leave on the surface of the fruits, in the form of various decorations, either painted or incised. Lace and embroidery, sometimes in dialogue with Asian porcelain or produced in Europe for export, sometimes by non-European artists, were my starting point and served as a reading key for the beautiful images transferred to the gourds: flowers, legends, and lace. There are many textile models for *cuias* and gourds, and my latest research papers have dealt, not by chance, with this theme in colonial times, especially in the area of the missions in the Amazon: native fabrics and those from India; in the brocade, silk, satin, and embroidery from China; the rugs, cretonnes, cotton rugs, and cotton tablecloths from India; and the linen tablecloths from Brittany, with lace from Guimarães, in the north of Portugal. Hence, the importance of approaching the still preserved materiality, especially in the Portuguese collections that I have visited, with some regularity, in the last six years, despite the restrictions imposed by the years of the pandemic.

On the other hand, the even closer relationship with other objects in the Ferreira collection, especially the artistic production of women, such as ceramics, straw items, and paintings, has opened up new perspectives. These are linked to the economy and the women's agency in the missions, almost always erased from the official history of missionary settlements [33]. The *cuias* also reclaim space in history and life through their 'vegetable voices' [34]: considering the 'life of plants' [35] and the 'revolution of plants' [36]. It also calls for a contemplation of life and memory [37] of the *cuias* without ceasing to talk about the *cumatê*, for the elaboration of the 'Amazonian lacquer' and the plant species that produce the inks and the very special colours of the Amazon. Therefore, all of these 'voices': *pau brasil*, *caju do mato*, *barbatimão*, *açafraão da terra*, *jatobá*, *crajirú*, *pau campeche*, etc., need to be heard. In this way, ethnobotany and archaeobotany, linked to the ritual and medicinal knowledge, etc., of the riverside peoples and traditional communities of the Amazon, are innovative research fields of international importance and interest, with which I have sought exchange, organising meetings and events, intending to also generate dialogue and share interests through the orientation of new research, such as that of Mônica Bertoldi André on the places of worship of the Jesuits in Portuguese America (FAU USP/FAPESP master's degree [38]). In short, interdisciplinarity has set the tone for advances in the biography of *cuias*, seeking to open new perspectives in broader fields of activity, not only linked to art history, although this is my main area of activity.

More recent collections, formed between the 19th and 20th centuries, which I have also visited in recent years, as well as the objects that are currently sold in fairs and markets in the Amazon, are fundamental to understanding the breadth of this production with a global reach, and, at the same time, the strong return to local traditions in the use of Indigenous motifs, alterations, and innovations adopted in the iconography that includes figures of *muiraquitã*, of rock art from the Monte Alegre region, Amazonian landscapes, fruits of the earth, etc. In a visit to Prainha em Pará 1859, also in the lower Amazon, the German physician Robert Avé-Lallemant described the *cuias* sold there at very low prices as 'Chinese bowls' as they were painted in 'a Chinese style.', but also as 'genuine natural products of Amazonian art and tapuia' [39] (p. 73).

Cuias have always been and are part of the life of those who live in the Amazon, even in big cities, and even more so in riverside communities. Walking through the city of Santarém, where the waters of the Tapajós River and the Amazon River converge, the port from where we left for the Carapanatuba community, the *cuias* are in the *tacacá* stalls along the street, in the best restaurants, and in hotels, markets, boats, in the houses. The Tapajós craft centre, Cristo Rei, receives and sells the *cuias* (from the collective brand *Aíra*), made by the women of the Santarém Riverside Artisans Association (*Asarisan*), founded in 2003 [40,41], and promoter of the registration of the "Modos de fazer Cuias no baixo Amazonas, Pará", as the cultural heritage of the IPHAN, implemented in 2015.

The study of these objects, due to different trend and periods, either individually or in collaboration with other researchers and students, was my greatest inspiration to

launch a project proposal, now in its second phase, financed by the Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa–FAPESP, which I coordinate at the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism of the University of São Paulo–FAU-USP, entitled ‘*Barroco-Açu*. Portuguese America in the Artistic Geography of the Global South’, which includes two groups of studies created in 2019: Abya-Yala and Global Asia and in 2024: Manis. Through the continuity of the generous and fundamental collaboration of the curator Carla Coimbra Alves of the Museu da Ciência da Universidade de Coimbra, researchers and institutions from Portugal and the Amazon, and the development of a new project on the *cuias* of the lower river region Solimões, with Márcio Amaral, Geórgia Holanda, and other specialists from the *Instituto de Desenvolvimento Sustentável Mamirauá*, it will be possible to expand the dialogues in the Amazon region. The *cuias* of the 18th century, as ‘lacquers from the Amazon’, and for all the aforementioned aspects, as sensitive objects, of the people of the forest and of the forest cities, with an intense, Amerindian, South American, and global life, have the power to bring together fundamental and urgent issues.

At this time, the exchange of knowledge and learning with the artists of the lower Amazon, the possibility of including the use of new technologies and an updated reflection on the history of this production, throughout the Amazon region, can promote the development of the bioeconomy in favour of the riverside communities and sustainable practices for the conservation of the forest and their ways of life, recognising and promoting knowledge, arts, and the role of women in the Amazon.

Please note that the Spanish version of this article is available as Supplementary Materials File S1.

Supplementary Materials: The following supporting information can be downloaded at: <https://www.mdpi.com/article/10.3390/heritage7090230/s1>, Supplementary Materials File S1: Text in Spanish.

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Notes

- 1 Available online: [http://colaborativo.ibict.br/taianacan-iphan/bens-culturais/modos-de-fazer-cuias-do-baixo-amazonas/?order=ASC&orderby=date&perpage=12&taxquery\[0\]\[taxonomy\]=tnc_tax_65757&taxquery\[0\]\[terms\]\[0\]=6662&taxquery\[0\]\[compare\]=IN&search](http://colaborativo.ibict.br/taianacan-iphan/bens-culturais/modos-de-fazer-cuias-do-baixo-amazonas/?order=ASC&orderby=date&perpage=12&taxquery[0][taxonomy]=tnc_tax_65757&taxquery[0][terms][0]=6662&taxquery[0][compare]=IN&search) (accessed on 7 August 2024)

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