

THE DRAGONFLY WING USED AS A NOSE PLUG ADORNMENT*

D.C. GEIJSKES

Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie, Raamsteeg 2, Leiden,
The Netherlands

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A Kofan Indian girl was observed in Santa Rosa de Sucumbios, Rio San Miguel, Colombia, to wear the wing of *Microstigma rotundatum exustum* Sel. (*Pseudostigmatidae*) as a nose plug ornament.

Some time ago my friend Borys Malkin, a well known collector of Amerindian ethnographica who also collects insects, sent me a colour slide he had made of a Kofan Indian woman in Santa Rosa de Sucumbios, Rio San Miguel, western Colombia.

This woman, named Celila Lusitante, is shown to have used the wing of a dragonfly as an adornment, set in a feather shaft nose plug. According to Mr. Malkin, Kofan Indians often wear feathers in their nose plugs. It was surprising to see such a fragile item as a dragonfly wing used for this purpose. The fact that Celila had been a skillful collector of Odonata for Mr. Malkin on his second trip in 1971 to Santa Rosa de Sucumbios may have had some influence.

The question intriguing us both was: to what genus and perhaps species does this wing belong? Fortunately, the collection of Odonata brought together from this interesting area of Colombia was at my disposal and it soon became clear that Celila had used the fore wing of *Microstigma rotundatum exustum* Selys, one of the long-bodied *Pseudostigmatinae* so characteristic of the Neotropics. The pale spot at the wing tip is of a vivid yellow colour, surrounded at the inner side by a dark brown margin which fades towards the wing base.

Some ethnographic notes on Celila's tribe: Kofan Indians live on both sides of

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Fig. 1. The *Microstigma rotundatum exustum* wing set in a feather nose plug and worn as an adornment by a Kofan Indian girl.

the Rio San Miguel and several tributaries of the upper Rio Putamayo, both in Ecuador and Colombia. The tribe numbers approximately 500 souls. Apart from their well known name, information on them is scarce. No monograph, just some short notes scattered through the literature. Both men and women wear nose plugs; the men prefer short lengths of reed, the women feather shafts. Both adorn these implements with small feathers. For ceremonial use the long feathers of oriole or even maccaw are popular with the men.

Incorporated in necklaces, head bands or as ear tassels, they do use insects or parts of insects. Often seen are the larger scarabaeid beetle wings, also thoraxes with horns, and wings of *Euchroma gigantea*, a large buprestid beetle. This is common among many Indian tribes in tropical South America. But it was the first and as yet the only time Mr. Malkin saw an odonate wing used as a nose plug ornament, and the observation seems to be worth the attention of odonatologists and ethnologists alike.

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