

Sleeve Palm Fruits on the Puerto Rican Coast

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The water-borne and sea-eroded nuts of the sleeve palm (*Manicaria saccifera*) were first brought to my attention in January, 1957, by a local fisherman at Pitahaya, Puerto Rico, a fishing hamlet on the southwestern end of the island about four miles west of La Parguera. He handed me a nut which he had just picked up from the beach and said that these nuts grew on the bottom of the sea and are cast up on the beach at certain times of the year. Since it obviously was not a marine plant, my curiosity was aroused. For identification of this fruit, I am indebted to Dr. Harold E. Moore, Jr., of Cornell University.

In March, 1957, my seven-year-old daughter found several more of these round grayish nuts which were about 1½ inches in diameter at Papayo Beach about one mile east of La Parguera. These nuts were not new to her because she and her schoolmates had collected them to eat the inside layer of white meat which is like mild coconut. Unfortunately, these nuts were all old and either cracked, dry, or moldy inside.

N. L. Britton, in *Botany of Porto Rico and the Virgin Islands* (vol. 1:120. 1923) says "The fruits of the South American Palm *Manicaria saccifera* Gaertn. are occasionally washed up on the sea beaches of Porto Rico." According to local fishermen who call this nut *coco del mar* or *coquito*, the nuts are washed up on the beaches of Puerto Rico from July to November, or during the hurricane season. The beaches at Papayo and Pitahaya are protected from open surf because they lie behind offshore reefs. The nuts are presumably

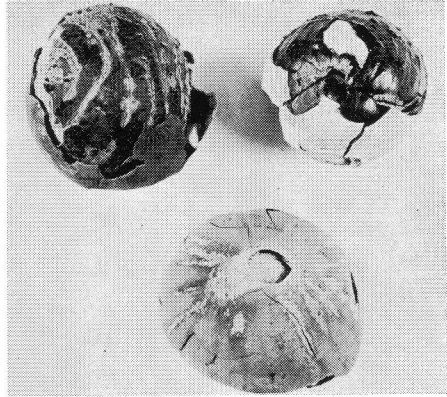


Fig. 46. Sea-eroded fruits of *Manicaria saccifera* washed ashore in Puerto Rico, about two-thirds natural size.

deposited high up on the beaches during the highest flood tides which always occur during that time of year.

The more southerly winds occurring during the hurricane season probably account for the northerly current drifts of flotsam from the south. From published charts of the South Equatorial Current, it would appear most probable that these nuts come from Brazil or the Guianas. To date I know of them only from the southwestern end of the island and have not seen them elsewhere on the coasts of Puerto Rico.

The occurrence of cuttlebones (*Sepia*) on the north coast of the island of Anegada in the Lesser Antilles (Erdman, "Vagabond Cuttlebones" in *The Nautilus* 70:106. 1957) is an interesting corresponding result of the effects of the North Equatorial Current. The probable origin of these cuttlebones is North Africa.