Chemical Study of the Seeds of *Ximenia americana*: Analysis of Methyl Esters by Gas Chromatography Coupled to Mass Spectrometry

**Abstract**

Fresh seeds of *Ximenia americana* presented high levels of protein (19.77%) and oil (27.71%). The oil components of the seeds, obtained by extraction with hexane, were subjected to the saponification/methylation reactions to produce methyl esters. The esters were then analyzed by gas chromatography-mass spectrometry allowing the identification of fatty acids. The main ones were oleic (55%), ximeninic (17%) and cis-19-octacosenoic (10%). The analysis process involved the fragmentation pattern exhibited by the methyl derivatives in their respective mass spectra.

**Keywords**: *Ximenia americana*; Olacaceae; Fatty acids; Ximeninic acid; GC/MS

**Introduction**

Beans are esterified natural fats with a prominent role in human nutrition, playing important biological functions for metabolism. Bones of the earth and the walls of the walls of the walls of the walls of the floor, resulting in proteção cardiovascular [1]. You may know that you are getting enough of these products to be used in the manufacture of sabers and detergents, or acidic products, for example, which are food-based. Although unsaturated fatty acids are the healthiest, studies are still needed to improve the conservation of edible oils, especially in oils with a high concentration of unsaturated as a result of auto-oxidation (rancidity) [2]. It is worth adding the use of natural fatty acids for the production of biofuels by esterification with light alcohols (methanol, ethanol).

Considering the main objective of the study, that is, the identification of *X. americana* seed oil components by gas chromatography coupled to mass spectrometry (GC/MS) and also for the purpose of comparison with the analysis made from derived by silylation [3], components of the oil were converted to esters of fatty acids by means of methylation reaction. Basically, two reactional pathways have been most frequently used to convert fatty acids to methyl esters: mild alkaline methanolysis and saponification followed by fatty acid methylation (saponification/methylation). The mild alkaline methanolysis is a single-stage transesterification reaction catalyzed by an alkali in the presence of methanol. In the first step alkali metal (saponification) long chain salts are formed, which, in a second step, are converted into volatile forms (methyl esters) for analysis by gas chromatography coupled to mass spectrometry (GC/MS).

Considering the already known biological activities of the bark, stem and roots of *X. americana* [5] and considering its abundance in the Brazilian Northeast, the present study aimed to contribute with the chemical knowledge of the species regarding the seeds of its edible fruits. Seeds with a high lipid mass, high levels of total protein (19.77%) and oil (27.71%) could eventually take advantage of nutraceutical (human or animal), medicinal, cosmetic [6-8], or as raw material for the production of biodiesel.

**Experimental**

**General methods**

Gas chromatography coupled to mass spectrometry (GC/MS) analyzes were performed on Shimadzu GC-2010 apparatus coupled to a GCMS-QP2010SE mass spectrometer equipped with Rtx®-5MS (95% dimethylpolysiloxane and 5% diphenyl) column of 30 m, 0.25 mm internal diameter and 0.25μm film thickness of the fixed phase. Conditions: 80°C (3 min) to 280°C (5 min) at 5°C/min, then 20°C/min to 300°C (5 min) using He as drag gas at a flow rate of 1.7mL / min; injector temperature of 250°C and detector of 300°C. The analysis with the mass detector was in the scan mode with analysis time in 40 min; the recording of the mass spectra was in the range of 35 to 500 Daltons by impact of electrons with ionization energy of 70 eV (voltage of 1.5 KV), quadrupole type analyzer and source of ions at 240°C; cc were performed using Merck H60 gel, and tlc with Si gel Merck 60 F 254. Total protein content (%) in the grains of *X. americana*.

**Keywords**: X. americana; Olacaceae; Fatty acids; Ximeninic acid; GC/MS

**Volume 7 Issue 3 - 2018**

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Received: January 25, 2018 | Published: February 12, 2018
The initial experiment consisted in determining the total protein content in the enzymatic system used, that is, the internal part of the grains of X. americana. Using the methodology of Nogueira and Souza [9], a considerable content of 19.77% was found.

**Moisture content (%) in grains of X. americana**

The grains (30.974 g) were oven-dried at a temperature of 105°C for 24h, time required to obtain a constant mass (21.394 g). The moisture content was obtained according to the equation below, with a value of 31.32%.

\[
\text{Moisture} \% = \frac{m_i - mf}{m_i} \times 100
\]

At where:

- \( m_i \) = initial seed mass.
- \( mf \) = final seed mass.

**Oil content (%) in grains of X. americana**

The oil content was determined from the internal part of the grains (dehydrated matter = 21.394 g) using a Soxhlet type extractor and hexane as solvent in a continuous and uninterrupted extraction process for 6:00 h. After this time, the solvent was evaporated under reduced pressure to give a mass of fixed oil (5.90 g), which represented 27.71% oil in the beans.

**Obtaining extracts**

Fresh seeds after drying at room temperature for one week were reduced in small granules. A sample (424.0 g) was extracted with hexane (1: 3 m/v) at room temperature for four consecutive times, each extraction lasting for three days. The solutions were filtered, pooled, and the hexane removed in vacuo yielding the hexane extract as yellow dense oil (EHXA, 148.0 g). Part of this oil was subjected to a silica gel filter column eluted with hexane, dichloromethane and ethyl acetate. The solvents were evaporated under reduced pressure giving the methyl esters obtained with hexane (1.87 g), which represented 27.71% oil in the beans.

**Obtaining the methyl esters**

**Saponification:** To one part (10.0 g) of the hexane fraction (FHEXA) in MeOH (80 mL) was added KOH (10.0 g) and the mixture was kept under reflux for 1 h. After cooling, distilled H2O (240 mL) was added and the alkaline hydroalcohol solution was extracted with hexane (3 x 50 mL) in decantation funnel. The organic phases were combined, dried over Na2SO4 and concentrated under reduced pressure, the unsaponifiables giving the pale yellow solid (1.87 g). The hydroalkalanic phase was acidified with 20% HCl to pH 3-4 and then subjected to extraction with AcOEt (3 x 50 mL). The organic phases were combined, dried over Na2SO4 and concentrated under reduced pressure to give the saponifiables as a bleached solid (7.15 g).

**Methylation:** To one part (2.0 g) of the saponifiable material in MeOH (20.0 mL) was added concentrated HCl (1.0 mL) and the mixture maintained under reflux for 1 hour. After cooling to room temperature, H2O (10 mL) was added, the reaction mixture was extracted with CH2Cl2 (3 x 10 mL) and the organic phases were combined and dried with Na2SO4. Concentration under reduced pressure gave the methylated crude product (1.39 g) which was then purified on a silica gel chromatographic column using hexane, hexane/CH2Cl2/hexane/ACOEt mixtures as eluents. The AGME fractions 24-28 (0.69 g), AGME 29-30 (0.36 g) and AGME 31-39 (0.19 g) (AGME = methylated fatty acids), eluted with 8:2 hexane-CH2Cl2, 1:1 hexane-CH2Cl2 and 6:4 hexane-ACOEt, respectively, in higher amounts and higher TLC purity were then subjected to GC/MS analysis.

**Results and Discussion**

**Analysis of methylated derivatives x identification of fatty acids**

The hexane fraction (FHEXA) was subjected to saponification reaction (KOH / MeOH) to obtain the fatty acid salts (Saponification). These, after acidification, gave the free fatty acids which were then esterified, (MeOH/HCl) to yield the corresponding methyl esters (AGME). Silica gel column chromatography of the crude ester product gave the fractions AGME 24-28, AGME 29-30 and AGME 31-39 (Methylation).

Analysis of AGME 24-28 in CG/MS showed the presence of ten fatty acids (Table 1), identified by the molecular ions [M] + (consistent with the respective molecular formulas) corresponding to the respective methyl esters represented by the peaks with retention (RT) and percentages (%) in the total ion chromatogram (Figure 1).

![Figure 1: Chromatogram of AGME total ions 24-28.](Image)

Mass spectra (MS) of the methylated components were also compared to mass spectra of fatty acid methyl esters reported in the literature and were consistent with the proposed structures, exhibiting characteristic m/z ratio fragments, as described below. The main components were Z-octadec-9-enoic acid (55.05%), octadeca-9-in-11-trans-enoic acid (17.38%) and Z-docos-13-enoic acids known as oleic acids, ximeninic and cis-19-octacosenoic acids, respectively (Table 1).

The four saturated fatty acids (1, 5, 7 and 9) exhibited the same fragmentation pattern, with peaks due to breaks in the allene chain [M-15 (CH2) to M-183 (C16H31)], M-295 (C20H39), M-323 (C24H47) and M-351 (C28H55), major peaks in m/z 41, 43, 55, 57, 74, 87 and 143 and base peak in m/z 74, the latter, resulting from Diels-Alder retro fragmentation.
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### Table 1: Fatty acids identified as methyl esters (AGME 24-28).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Substance</th>
<th>Common Name</th>
<th>T&lt;sub&gt;r&lt;/sub&gt; (min)</th>
<th>Content (%)</th>
<th>M.M</th>
<th>EM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hexadecanoic acid</td>
<td>Palmitic acid</td>
<td>23,16</td>
<td>1,46</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>C₁₆H₃₃O₂</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cis-octadec-9-enolic acid</td>
<td>Oleic acid</td>
<td>26,63</td>
<td>55,05</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>C₁₈H₃₁O₂</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Octadeca-9-yn-11-trans-enolic acid</td>
<td>ximeninic acid</td>
<td>28,85</td>
<td>17,38</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>C₁₈H₃₁O₂</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cis-tetracosa-15-enolic acid</td>
<td>Nervonic acid</td>
<td>36,64</td>
<td>3,00</td>
<td>366</td>
<td>C₂₀H₄₁O₂</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tetracosanoic acid</td>
<td>Lignoceric acid</td>
<td>36,99</td>
<td>2,05</td>
<td>368</td>
<td>C₂₀H₄₁O₂</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cis-hexacos-17-enolic acid</td>
<td>Ximenic acid</td>
<td>39,54</td>
<td>3,06</td>
<td>394</td>
<td>C₂₄H₄₃O₂</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hexacosanoic acid</td>
<td>Ceric acid</td>
<td>39,84</td>
<td>3,34</td>
<td>396</td>
<td>C₂₄H₄₃O₂</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cis-octacos-19-enolic acid</td>
<td>Acid Ximenisico&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>41,81</td>
<td>9,85</td>
<td>422</td>
<td>C₂₄H₄₃O₂</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Octacosanoic acid</td>
<td>Montanic acid</td>
<td>42,01</td>
<td>2,28</td>
<td>424</td>
<td>C₂₄H₄₃O₂</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trans-triacosantoic acid</td>
<td>Lumequeic acid</td>
<td>44,13</td>
<td>2,22</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>C₂₄H₄₃O₂</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

T<sub>r</sub>: Retention time; M.M: Molar mass (g mol⁻¹); EM: Molecular formula.

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<sup>a</sup>common name used in this work.

1. T<sub>r</sub> 23,164: M⁺ m/z 270 ([fórmula molecular C₁₆H₃₃O₂]), 239 ([M-31]), perda de OCH<sub>3</sub>, 227 (M-43); 213 (M-57); 199 (M-71); 185 (M-85), 171 (M-99), 143 ([C₆H₁₂O₇CH<sub>2</sub>]), 101 ([C₆H₁₂O₇CH<sub>2</sub>]), 87 ([C₆H₁₂O₇CH<sub>2</sub>]), 74 ([H₂C=CH(O)OCH₃]), 55 ([H₂C=CH=C(OH)OCH₃]), 57 ([C₆H₁₂]), 43 ([C₆H₆]), e 41 ([C₆H₆]): Palmitic acid.

5. T<sub>r</sub> 36,990: M⁺ m/z 382 ([fórmula molecular C₁₆H₃₃O₂]), 367 (M-15), 351 (M-31), 353 (M-29), 339 (M-43), 325 (M-57), 311 (M-71), 297 (M-85), 283 (M-99). Os picos principais foram em m/z 41 ([C₇H₉O]), 43 ([C₇H₉]), 55 ([H₃C=CH=O]), 57 ([C₇H₉]), 74 ([H₃C=CO(OH)OCH₃]), 87 ([C₇H₇COOCH₃]), 143 ([C₉H₁₅O₇CH<sub>2</sub>]): Lignoceric Acid.

7. T<sub>r</sub> 39,538: M⁺ 410 ([fórmula molecular C₁₆H₃₃O₂]), 395 (M-15), 381 (M-29), 376 (M-43), 353 (M-57), 339 (M-71), 325 (M-85) e 311 (M-99). Os picos principais foram em m/z 41 ([C₇H₉]), 43 ([C₇H₉]), 55 ([H₃C=CH=O]), 57 ([C₇H₉]), 74 ([H₃C=CO(OH)OCH₃]), 87 ([C₇H₇COOCH₃]), 143 ([C₉H₁₅O₇CH<sub>2</sub>]): Ceryl-c acid.

9. T<sub>r</sub> 42,006: M⁺ 438 ([fórmula molecular C₁₆H₃₃O₂]), 409 (M-29), 395 (M-31), 381 (M-43), 376 (M-57), 353 (M-85) e 339 (M-99). Os picos principais em m/z 41 ([C₇H₉]), 43 ([C₇H₉]), 57 ([C₇H₉]), 55 ([H₃C=CH=O]), 74 ([H₃C=CO(OH)OCH₃]), 87 ([C₇H₇COOCH₃]) e 143 ([C₉H₁₅O₇CH<sub>2</sub>]): Mushroom Acid.

The five monounsaturated acids (2, 4, 6, 8 and 10) exhibited the same pattern of fragmentation, with the principal peaks in m/z 41, 43, 55, 69, 74, 83, 97, 98 and 111. It is worth highlighting in all these cases the peak due to the fragment in M-32 (M-CH₃OH), as well as the base peak in m/z 55.

2. T<sub>r</sub> 26,634, M⁺ 296 ([fórmula molecular C₁₆H₃₃O₂]), m/z 265 (M-31), 264 (M-32), 222 (M-74), 111 ([C₆H₁₂CH=CHCH(CH₃)CH<sub>2</sub>CH=CHCH₃]), 98 ([C₆H₁₂CH=CHCH(CH₃)CH=CHCH₃]), 97 ([C₆H₁₂CH=CHCH(CH₃)CH=CHCH₃]), 87 ([C₆H₁₂CH=CHCH(CH₃)CH=CHCH₃]), 83 ([C₆H₁₂CH=CHCH(CH₃)CH=CHCH₃]), 74 ([H₂C=CH(O)OHCH₃]), 69 ([CH₃CH=CHCH(CH₃)CH=CHCH₃]), 55 ([CH₃CH=CHCH(CH₃)CH=CHCH₃]) e ou H₃C=CH-CO): Nervonic acid.

8. T<sub>r</sub> 41,809, M⁺ 436 ([fórmula molecular C₁₆H₃₃O₂]), m/z 405 (M-31), 404 (M-32), 362 (M-74), 111 ([CH₃CH=CHCH(CH₃)CH=CHCH₃]), 97 ([CH₃CH=CHCH(CH₃)CH=CHCH₃]), 87 ([CH₃CH=CHCH(CH₃)CH=CHCH₃]), 83 ([CH₃CH=CHCH(CH₃)CH=CHCH₃]), 74 ([H₂C=CH(O)OHCH₃]), 69 ([CH₃CH=CHCH(CH₃)CH=CHCH₃]), 55 ([CH₃CH=CHCH(CH₃)CH=CHCH₃]) e ou H₃C=CH-CO): Ximenic acid (cis-19-octacosenoic acid).

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In the case of the component with retention time 28,853 (3) a distinct fragmentation pattern was observed. Except for the peaks in m/z 41 and 43, fragments common to all and the peak in m/z 55, observed in the unsaturated acid spectra 2, 4, 6, 8 and 10, the mass spectrum of 3 showed the peaks m/z 67, 79, 80, 93 and 150, with the base peak in m/z 79. The highlights were the peaks due to fragments in m/z 261 (M-31 loss of OCH₃), 219 -CH=CHCH=CH (CH₃)₂-CH₄ + en m/z 150 ([H, C=CHCH=CH (CH₃)₂-CH₄]+), both indicative of a C₆-ene structure with the triple bond between C₆ and C₁₄ carbons [10,11]. The base peak in m/z 79 ([C₅H₄]+) indicated the presence of more than one double or triple bond in the fatty acid chain [12].


The structures of the fatty acids identified in the grains of X. americana are shown in Figure 2. The fractions AGME 29-30 and AGME 32-39 (Methylation), by GC/MS analysis, practically led to the same constituents of the AGME fraction 24-28.

Figure 2: Structures of fatty acids identified in grains of X. americana.

Conclusion

Analysis of the oil of X. americana seeds by gas chromatography coupled to mass spectrometry using the saponification/methylation route allowed the identification of ten fatty acids. Four of these acids (palmitic, oleic, ximeninic and lignoceric) had already been identified by analyzing the oil of these seeds via derivatization by silylation, also by gas chromatography coupled to mass spectrometry. It was possible to identify other six fatty acids (ceric, nerve, montane, ximenic, oxymic and lumeochemical), as well as to confirm the presence of the first four, contributing significantly to the knowledge of the composition of the oil of the species under study. It is worth mentioning the high content (19.77%) of total proteins and the high percentage (about 27.71%) of oil in the seeds of the edible fruits of this plant species, which, together with its spread in Northeast Brazil, possible use as a nutraceutical, in cosmetology or even for the production of alkyl fatty acid monoesters (biodiesel). In addition, the present study contributed to increase knowledge about the medicinal potential of X. americana. Cataplasms of plants of the genus Ximénia are used as masks for treatment of the skin. The ximeninic acid and its ethyl ester (ximenoil) have topical action, being used in the form of emulsions with anti-cellulite action.

Acknowledgement

The authors thank the funding agencies (CAPES, CNPq and FUNCAP) for funding this work and for supporting the Postgraduate Program in Chemistry of the Federal University of Ceará. Special thanks to the Foundation for Research Support of the State of Piauí (FAPEPI).

Conflict of Interest

None.

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Chemical Study of the Seeds of Ximenia americana: Analysis of Methyl Esters by Gas Chromatography Coupled to Mass Spectrometry


