

**AMAZONIAN
TORTOISE
MYTHS, PP. 1-38**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649239016

Amazonian Tortoise Myths, pp. 1-38 by Ch. Fred. Hartt

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

CH. FRED. HARTT

**AMAZONIAN
TORTOISE
MYTHS, PP. 1-38**

AMAZONIAN
TORTOISE MYTHS

BY

CH. FRED. HART, A. M.

PROFESSOR OF GEOLOGY

IN

CORNELL UNIVERSITY

ITHACA, N. Y.

RIO DE JANEIRO

WILLIAM SCULLY, PUBLISHER

Typographia—Academica—rua Sete de Setembro n. 73

1875

F&K Lms
Dauber
3-10-41
42806

TO MY ESTEEMED FRIEND

MAJOR OLIVER CROMWELL JAMES

THIS LITTLE PAPER

IS

RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED

Ten years ago to-day, on placing foot for the first time on Brazilian soil, at the Palace Square of Rio de Janeiro, I directed myself to the first person I met, and asked the way to the office of the "Thayer Expedition." It was an incident apparently of no importance, but it has nevertheless deeply influenced the course of my subsequent scientific life.

As if providentially, and just at the fortunate moment, I met one, not only well acquainted with Brazil and its people, but who, as the result of several years of expeditionary work in the "Far West" in the service of the United States Government, together with a long, and intimate acquaintance with the mining industries of Pennsylvania, was fitted to take a deep, and intelligent interest in my own scientific work.

To the aid and sound advice of this friend, I owe much of the success of my journey, as an *attaché* of the "Thayer Expedition" in 1865 and 1866.

After my return to the United States, I planned with him my Expedition to the Brazilian coast in 1867, the accomplishment of which would not have been possible but for his generous pecuniary aid.

In the preparation of a volume on the "Geology and Physical Geography of Brazil", I was helped in many ways by the same friend, who even went so far as to make, under my direction, a journey in the Province of São Paulo, for the purpose of ascertaining the general geological structure of this part of the Brazilian plateau. His carefully made observations have since been verified.

The same friend acted as my agent in connection with the two "Morgan Expeditions" to the Amazonas in 1870 and 1871, and to his judicious management was largely due the success of these two Expeditions, as well as the safety of the collections. But for his constant assistance and encouragement I would not be in Brazil to day; indeed, but for Major O. C. James, I should long ago have been forced to abandon Brazil as a field for research.

In deference to his express wish, I have hitherto reluctantly refrained from making a full acknowledgment of my indebtedness; but to day, with it brought freshly to mind, I cannot refrain from giving this expression to the feelings of my heart.

CH. FRED. HARTT.

Rio de Janeiro, April 23rd. 1875.

AMAZONIAN TORTOISE MYTHS

The Geologist on the Amazonas who is not interested in some other branch of science, must lose much time, because geological localities are so widely separated, that he must often travel, for days together, without being able to make an observation of importance.

In 1870, I found myself on the great River, reviewing the work of Professor Agassiz, and occupied in a search for evidence to establish or disprove his hypothesis of the glacial origin of the Amazonian valley.

Brought into very intimate contact with the Indian population of the country, I became interested in the *Lingua Geral*, or modern Tupi, as spoken at Ereré, Santarem, and on the Tapajos River, and I employed my leisure time in its acquirement, making fair progress in collecting material to illustrate its structure.

Mr. Henry Walter Bates, in his charming sketch of his life on the Amazonas, and Madame Agassiz, in her "Journey in Brazil," had called attention to the number of myths existing among the Amazonian Indians. These myths had never been studied, and, being aware

of their great value, I set myself to work to collect them.

For a long time I was baffled, for the whites, as a general rule, were unacquainted with the Indian folklore, and neither by coaxing, nor by offers of money, could I persuade an Indian to relate a myth. The story-teller of the locality was always represented to be an old woman, who could make one split his sides with laughter at odd stories about the *Kurupira* and the *Yurupari*, and all sorts of animals, that used to talk and play pranks on one another, in the olden time when speech was not the exclusive possession of man. But quite invariably, this old woman was absent, or inaccessible. Once only, at Ereré, did I find an ancient squaw, said to be a wonderful repository of *tendas*, but nothing could I obtain from her.

One night, while wearily paddling up the *paraná-mirim* of the Itukí, near Santarem, my faithful steersman, Maciel, began to talk to the Indian boatmen in Tupí to keep them from going to sleep. I listened with all my ears, and, to my great delight, found him recounting a story of the *Kurupira*. I followed him as best I could, jotting down in my note-book the leading points in the story, meanwhile joining heartily in the laughter of the men to encourage the narrator. The next day, I took the first opportunity to tell Maciel how much I had enjoyed his story, and to beg

that he would dictate it to me in *Lingua Geral*. He had already received a long training in dictation, and my first Tupí myth was soon recorded; but, for a long time it was all in vain that I coaxed him to tell me another.

I soon found that the Indian myth was always recited without mental effort, its function being simply to please, like a ballad, and not to communicate information, and that when the Indian, unsurrounded by the evening circle of listeners about the camp-fire, and by all those circumstances that make story-telling proper and enjoyable, is soberly asked to relate a mythical tale, he is incapable of the mental effort required to recall it, and, for that reason, he promptly and stoutly pleads ignorance. So, the myth collector will usually go empty away, if he attempts to gather a harvest simply by asking. The only way is to seek for, and create occasions when story-telling would be natural, and, if necessary, to set the ball rolling by recounting some native myth, with which those present are known to be well acquainted, taking care not to show too much curiosity in the stories it elicits.

"Ce n'est que le premier pas qui coûte." After one has obtained his first myth, and has learned to recite it accurately and spiritedly, the rest is easy. I may here remark, in passing, that one must be on his guard on the Amazonas, and elsewhere, for that matter,

among savages or people of low culture, not to ask a leading question, for an Indian will always unconsciously acquiesce with the interrogator, who is thus likely to be misled. On one occasion, talking of this peculiarity with the captain of my little steamer, he suddenly stepped up to the Indian pilot, who stood by the rail gazing stolidly ahead, and, pointing out a palm by the riverside, said: "That palm is called *Urubú*,* is it not?" "Sim, Senhor!" answered the Indian gravely, without moving a muscle. The question was repeated with the same result. The captain then asked: "What is the name of that palm?" when he promptly answered "*Jauari*".

If the myth collector wishes to obtain the myth in its purity, and prevent his own personality entering into it, he must, above all, avoid asking of his pundit a leading question, either in writing out the myth for the first time, or in its after revision.

The Indian myths are, so far as my experience goes, rarely ever heard in Portuguese, those of the Tupi speaking population being quite invariably related in the *Lingua Geral*. Their form is a stereotyped one, and the same myth may be found, with but little variation, from near the mouth of the Amazonas, to Tabatinga, on the frontier of Peru.

While some of the myths have clearly been intro-

* *Urubú* is the name of the common Brazilian culture.