

# Arcana

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The Museum of Natural History;  
containing the most  
Recent discovered Objects  
embellished with coloured plates  
and  
Corresponding descriptions;  
with  
Extracts relating to Animals  
and  
Remarks of celebrated Travellers  
combining a

General Survey of Nature  
(Part 4, Geography)

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TO

J. C. LETTSOM, ESQ. M. D.

FELLOW OF THE ROYAL SOCIETY.

THE PATRON OF THE LIBERAL SCIENCES,

AND OF NATURAL HISTORY.

IN GRATITUDE AND RESPECT FOR THE NUMEROUS PROOFS

OF UNLIMITED KINDNESS AND REGARD :

AND IN REVERENCE OF THOSE EMINENT TALENTS

WHICH HAVE ALWAYS BEEN EXERTED

FOR THE GENERAL HAPPINESS OF MANKIND,

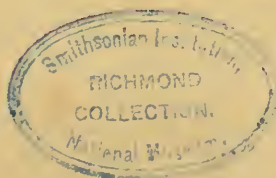
THIS SMALL TESTIMONY OF REGARD,

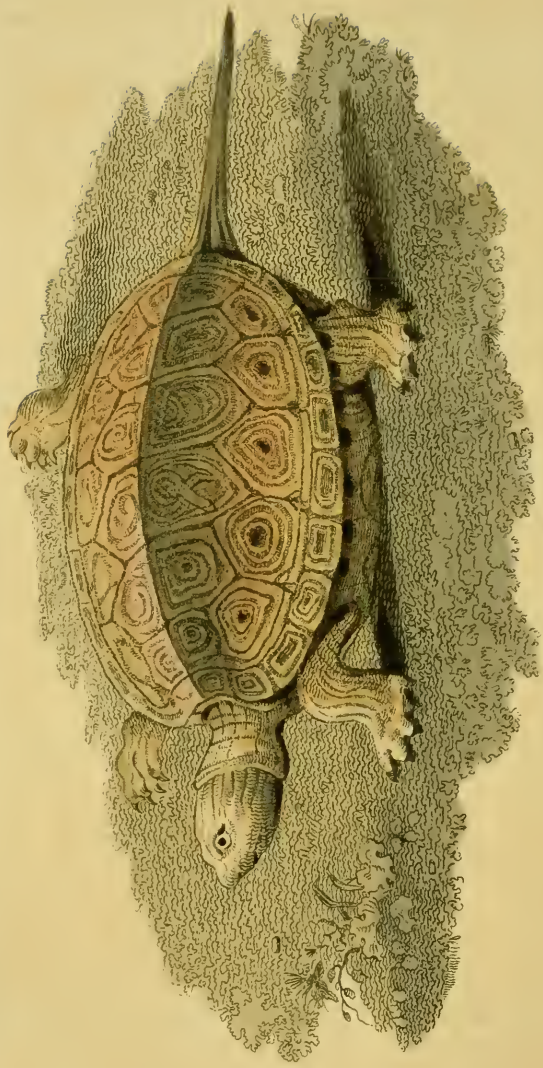
IS HUMBLY DEDICATED

BY HIS MOST OBEDIENT FRIEND,

AND OBLIGED HUMBLE SERVANT,

GEORGE PERRY.





G. Pory del

T. L. Busby. sc.

TORTOISE.

Pub. by J. Stralsford., Sept. 1830

Genus—TESTUDO, OR TORTOISE.

Species—TESTUDO PANAMA *Ching-Quaw.*

*Character.*—Body rounded and flattened, armed with scales geometrically arranged, resembling a coat of mail, legs very short, the head retractile, mouth armed with a hooked bill closing over the under mandible.

THIS Tortoise which is here represented for the first time, is drawn from a live specimen, at present in the possession of Capt. HOFFMAN, of Ealing; it has resided in England for three years, and has preserved its health exceedingly well. It is one of the smallest of its kind, hitherto discovered, and is a native of those countries of South America, adjoining to the Isthmus of Panama, inhabiting the fresh water rivers and pools of that region, which is called Terra Firma. Its general and favourite food consists of a small quantity of dressed meat; in cold weather and the nights of winter, it is constantly wrapped up in cotton, which has been deemed necessary to preserve it from the intemperate climate of Britain.

There is no part of natural history which has been subject to more errors, as to particular descriptions, than the genus Testudo; there seems indeed at first sight, to be a sort of natural division between the Tortoise, which has its five claws more distinct and lives wholly upon the land, and the Turtle, which exists chiefly as a marine animal, and in which the claws are fin-shaped, or more obscure in their markings, as well as irregular in their number. This division, however, of the Tortoise from the Turtle, is very

obscure, for several species exist, which resort both to the land and sea, or live on the edge of the larger rivers, whose waters are alternately salt and fresh. The present Tortoise from Panama (called by the natives of that country the Ching-quaw) is supposed to be hitherto wholly undescribed, it has a considerable resemblance at the first sight to the *Testudo Literatus* of Thunberg, but differs in the forms and markings of the back, and also in the number of plates forming the external circle. The head, back, and legs are of a bright orange colour, mixed in a very agreeable manner with dark circles of grey, the edges being of a bright gold colour.

The protection which Nature has kindly afforded to this animal, by the strong defence of its armour, is truly wonderful and striking, affording one of the strongest instances of previous skill and design. When retiring from its natural foes, it has the power of concealing its head, legs and tail under a shelly plated covering, which envelope both the upper and under side of its body. The tail is admirably contrived for balancing the motion of the feet, which answer for the purpose of fins, being webbed between the toes like those of a Duck. It is with much difficulty that when placed upon its back in the water, ever it can recover its natural position, and the strenuous efforts, which in this case it always makes, are truly entertaining; but at length by unequally extending its feet and a constriction of the neck to one side, it overthrows the equilibrium and restores itself to the wished-for position. Upon land this is still more difficult and even impossible, the sailors therefore when they catch them upon the beach are in the habit of turning over a great number successively, and afterwards return to carry them off: their eggs also serve as an excellent food.

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Of the sea Turtles, the most in request is the Green Turtle, so well known to epicures, which amongst other eminent discoveries of the moderns, is now esteemed a most wholesome and delicious food. About forty sloops are employed by the inhabitants of Port Royal in Jamaica, in the fishery; and as the account of the manner of taking them is rather interesting, we shall insert it at length.

“ The inhabitants of Bahama, who are very expert at the art, proceed in small boats to Cuba and the adjoining islands, where in the evening, especially on moonlight nights, they watch the return of the Turtles to and from their nests, some are so large that it takes three men to turn one of them over. At other times they strike at them with a staff or spear about twelve feet long, when tired and exhausted with the pursuit he sinks to the bottom, till those who are most expert in diving will descend and bring them to the top, while another slips a noose around their necks.”

The Tortoise of Ceylon which is extremely small, but elegant in its markings, has a considerable resemblance to the Ching-quaw; or, Panama Tortoise; but cannot be considered as the same animal, being the native of so distant a country, and the description we have of it is rather imperfect.

All the land Tortoises are remarkable for their longevity and their strong retention of life, even after the head has been divided from the body, and in this respect have a striking resemblance to the Eel; some of them have been authenticated to have existed for a hundred years, and one of that age is said to be now living at the City of Oxford.

The ingenuity of man has invented from the covering of the Tortoise a great variety of pleasing and useful toys,

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such as snuff boxes, knife handles, combs, doors of cabinets and other articles of ornament; their only practical disadvantage, and which seems to prevent the more general use of these, is their cheapness, and their yielding in elegance of lustre to the Nacre, or Mother-of-pearl.

The ancient lyre, so much celebrated in the history of Greece and other ancient nations, derives its form from the Tortoise-shell, out of which it was originally formed by the ancient artists, and still appears in the remains of their sculpture and basso-relievos, forming a most pleasing and interesting object. The Romans also adopted the name Testudo, for one of their most celebrated military arrangements in war, which consisted in placing a phalanx of their troops, closely wedged together, in such a manner that the whole of their shields should join at the top, forming a collected covering, like that of the Tortoise, impenetrable to all the arrows, stones, or darts, with which their enemies could assail them.

Thus from obyious hints, originally suggested by the simple forms of nature, arise the grander and more complicated arrangements of man, and from these alone the arts and sciences take their source, and from the Silk-worm, the Nautilus, and the Tortoise, mankind have borrowed the most useful or celebrated inventions, improved and extended through the different ages of the world.

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