

practised by drawing the hairs of his fore-arm over the glans. I castrated him some time before death, but not until the ravages of mollities had very far advanced.

“In conclusion, I beg again to apologize for these unconnected remarks, which I have put together hastily and without being enabled to refer to any notes.”

The conclusion of the paper by Dr. Falconer and Captain Cautley on the Gigantic Fossil Tortoise of India was then read:—

“On a former meeting we went through the anatomical characters presented by the remains of the *Colossochelys Atlas*. Commencing with the plastron, we traced the modifications of form through the costal elements of the carapace and the dorsal vertebræ, all of which bear the closest resemblance to the ordinary type of the Chersite Chelonians, or true land tortoises. A like result followed the examination of the extremities, which, as exhibited in the remains of the humerus, femur and ungual phalanges, were seen to be constructed exactly on the plan of *Testudo*, with columnar legs and truncated club-shaped feet, as in the proboscidean Pachydermata. The same direction of affinity was observed throughout the conformation of the head. The only portions of the skeleton from which more or less direct evidence was not derived, were the neck and tail vertebræ, of which there were no specimens in the collection. The general result of the examination showed that the *Colossochelys Atlas* was strictly a land tortoise in every part of its bony frame; and the impressions of the horny scutes proved the like in regard to the arrangement of its dermal integument.

“The principal distinctive characters were found in the sternum, which is enormously thickened at its anterior extremity, along the united portion of the episternal bones, and contracted into a narrow neck, so that the width of the combined episternals does not much exceed their thickness: this thickened portion bears on its under side a deep massive cuneiform keel, which terminates upon the commencement of the entosternal piece. There is more or less thickening of this part in all the species of *Testudo*, and the amount of it is very variable in different individuals of the same species; but there is nothing approaching the same degree of contraction in reference to the thickness, nor aught like a developed keel, in any of the existing land tortoises which we have either had an opportunity of examining, or seen described in systematic works on the tribe. The keel in the fossil is feebly shown in the young animal, but strongly marked in the adult. Conceiving that generic distinctions are only legitimate in the case of well-defined modifications affecting some of the leading characters in the organization of an animal, we do not consider ourselves warranted in attaching a higher systematic importance to the *Colossochelys* than as a subgenus of *Testudo*, which may technically be defined thus (the distinction resting mainly on the form of the sternum):—

Subgen. COLOSSOCHELYS.

Testa solida, immobilis, sterno anticè in collum valdè incrassatum,

subtus carinâ crassâ cuneiformi instructum, angustato. Testudo terrestris, staturâ et mole ingenti (inde nomen κολοσσός et χέλυς) sui tribus prodigium! Olim in Indiæ orientalis provinciis septentrionalibus degebat.

“*Colossochelys Atlas.*—The first fossil remains of this colossal tortoise were discovered by us in 1835 in the tertiary strata of the Sewalik Hills, or Sub-Himalayahs skirting the southern foot of the great Himalayah chain. They were found associated with the remains of four extinct species of Mastodon and Elephant, species of Rhinoceros, Hippopotamus, Horse, Anoplotherium, Camel, Giraffe, Sivatherium, and a vast number of other Mammalia, including four or five species of Quadrumana. The Sewalik fauna included also a great number of reptilian forms, such as crocodiles and land and freshwater tortoises. Some of the crocodiles belong to extinct species, but others appear to be absolutely identical with species now living in the rivers of India: we allude in particular to the *Crocodylus longirostris*, from the existing forms of which we have been unable to detect any difference in heads dug out of the Sewalik Hills. The same result applies to the existing *Emys tectum*, now a common species found in all parts of India. A very perfect fossil specimen, presenting the greater part of the evidence of the dermal scutes, is undistinguishable from the living forms, not varying more from these than they do among each other. Prof. Thomas Bell, the highest living authority on the family, after a rigid examination, confirms the result at which we had arrived, that there are no characters shown by the fossil to justify its separation from the living *Emys tectum*. There are other cases which appear to yield similar results, but the evidence has not yet been sufficiently examined to justify a confident affirmation of the identity at present.

“The remains of the *Colossochelys* were collected during a period of eight or nine years along a range of eighty miles of hilly country: they belong in consequence to a great number of different animals, varying in size and age. From the circumstances under which they are met with, in crushed fragments, contained in elevated strata which have undergone great disturbance, there is little room for hope that a perfect shell, or anything approaching a complete skeleton, will ever be found in the Sewalik Hills. It is to be mentioned, however, that remains of many of the animals associated with the *Colossochelys* in the Sewalik Hills have been discovered along the banks of the Irrawaddi in Ava, and in Perim Island in the Gulf of Cambay, showing that the same extinct fauna was formerly spread over the whole continent of India.

“This is not the place to enter upon the geological question of the age of the Sewalik strata; suffice it to say, that the general bearing of the evidence is that they belong to the newer tertiary period. But another question arises: ‘Are there any indications as to when this gigantic tortoise became extinct? or are there grounds for entertaining the opinion that it may have descended to the human period?’ Any *à-priori* improbability, that an animal so hugely disproportionate to existing species should have lived down to be a

contemporary with man, is destroyed by the fact that other species of Chelonians which were coeval with the *Colossochelys* in the same fauna, have reached to the present time; and what is true in this respect of one species in a tribe, may be equally true of every other placed under the same circumstances. We have as yet no direct evidence to the point, from remains dug out of recent alluvial deposits; nor is there any historical testimony confirming it; but there are traditions connected with the cosmogonic speculations of almost all Eastern nations having reference to a tortoise of such gigantic size, as to be associated in their fabulous accounts with the elephant. Was this tortoise a mere creature of the imagination, or was the idea of it drawn from a reality, like the *Colossochelys*?

“Without attempting to follow the tortoise tradition through all its ramifications, we may allude to the interesting fact of its existence even among the natives of America. The Iroquois Indians believed that there were originally, before the creation of the globe, six male beings in the air, but subject to mortality. There was no female among them to perpetuate their race; but learning that there was a being of this sort in heaven, one of them undertook the dangerous task of carrying her away. A bird (like the Garūda of Vishnoo or the Eagle of Jupiter) became the vehicle. He seduced the female by flattery and presents: she was turned out of heaven by the supreme deity, but was fortunately received upon the back of a tortoise, when the otter (an important agent in all the traditions of the American Indians) and the fishes disturbed the mud at the bottom of the ocean, and drawing it up round the tortoise formed a small island, which increasing gradually became the earth. We may trace this tradition to an Eastern source, from the circumstance that the female is said to have had two sons, one of whom slew the other; after which she had several children, from whom sprung the human race.

“In this fable we have no comparative data as to the size of the tortoise, but in the Pythagorean cosmogony the infant world is represented as having been placed on the back of *an elephant, which was sustained on a huge tortoise*. It is in the Hindoo accounts, however, that we find the fable most circumstantially told, and especially in what relates to the second Avatar of Vishnoo, when the ocean was churned by means of the mountain Mundar placed on the back of the king of the tortoises, and the serpent Asokee used for the churning-rope. Vishnoo was made to assume the form of the tortoise and sustain the created world on his back to make it stable. So completely has this fable been impressed on the faith of the country, that the Hindoos to this day even believe that the world rests on the back of a tortoise. Sir William Jones gives the following as a translation from the great lyric poet Jyadeva: ‘The earth stands firm on thy immensely broad back, which grows larger from the callus occasioned by bearing that vast burden. O Cesava! assuming the body of a tortoise, be victorious! Oh! Hurry, Lord of the Universe!’

“The next occasion in Indian mythology where the tortoise figures prominently is in the narratives of the feats of the bird-demigod ‘Garūda,’ the carrier of Vishnoo. After stating the circumstances of

his birth, and the disputes between his mother Vinūta and 'Kudroo,' the mother of the serpent, it is mentioned that he was sent on an expedition to bring 'Chundra' the moon, from whom the serpents were to derive the water of immortality. While pursuing his journey, amidst strange adventures, Garūda met his father Kūshgūfa, who directed him to 'appease his hunger at a certain lake, where *an elephant and tortoise were fighting*. The body of the tortoise was eighty miles long—the elephant's 160. Garūda with one claw seized the elephant—with the other the tortoise, and perched with them on a tree 800 miles high.' He is then, after sundry adventures, stated to have fled to a mountain on an uninhabited country, and finished his repast on the tortoise and elephant.

"In these three instances, taken from Pythagoras and the Hindoo mythology, we have reference to a gigantic form of tortoise, comparable in size with the elephant. Hence the question arises, are we to consider the idea as a mere fiction of the imagination, like the Minotaur and the chimæra, the griffin, the dragon, and the cartazonon, &c., or as founded on some justifying reality? The Greek and Persian monsters are composed of fanciful and wild combinations of different portions of known animals into impossible forms, and, as Cuvier fitly remarks, they are merely the progeny of uncurbed imagination; but in the Indian cosmogonic forms we may trace an image of congruity through the cloud of exaggeration with which they are invested. We have the elephant, then as at present, the largest of land animals, a fit supporter of the infant world; in the serpent Asokee, used at the churning of the ocean, we may trace a representative of the gigantic Indian python; and in the bird-god Garūda, with all his attributes, we may detect the gigantic crane of India (*Ciconia gigantea*) as supplying the origin. In like manner, the *Colossochelys* would supply a consistent representative of the tortoise that sustained the elephant and the world together. But if we are to suppose that the mythological notion of the tortoise was derived, as a symbol of strength, from some one of those small species which are now known to exist in India, this congruity of ideas, this harmony of representation would be at once violated; it would be as legitimate to talk of a rat or a mouse contending with an elephant, as of any known Indian tortoise to do the same in the case of the fable of Garūda. The fancy would scout the image as incongruous, and the weight even of mythology would not be strong enough to enforce it on the faith of the most superstitious epoch of the human race.

"But the indications of mythological tradition are in every case vague and uncertain, and in the present instance we would not lay undue weight on the tendencies of such as concern the tortoise. We have entered so much at length on them on this occasion, from the important bearing which the point has on a very remarkable matter of early belief entertained by a large portion of the human race. The result at which we have arrived is, that there are fair grounds for entertaining the belief as probable that the *Colossochelys Atlas* may have lived down to an early period of the human epoch and become extinct since:—1st, from the fact that other Chelonian species and

crocodiles, contemporaries of the *Colossochelys* in the Sewalik fauna, have survived; 2nd, from the indications of mythology in regard to a gigantic species of tortoise in India.

“Some of the bones were analysed with great care by Mr. Middleton, and yielded a large proportion of fluorine, the constituents being,—

Phosphate of lime	64·95
Carbonate of lime	22·36
Fluoride of calcium	11·68
Oxide of iron	1·00
A trace of chloride of soda.	—
	99·99

“Other Sewalik fossil bones were at the same time subjected to analysis, such as the *Mastodon elephantoides*, *Camelus sivalensis*, Horse, Ruminants, &c., and the whole of them yielded similar results, with a proportion of fluoride of calcium varying from 9 to 11 per cent. This is much above the usual quantity found in fossil bones; the utmost that has been met with having been in bones of the *Anoplotherium* from the Paris basin, 14 per cent.”



Falconer, Dr. and Cautley, Capt. 1844. "Conclusion of paper on the Colossochelys Atlas." *Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London* 12(05-14), 84-88.

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