

**Claudius Ferrand**

# **Fables and Legends from Japan**

**Translator and editor: Nicolae Sfetcu**

*MultiMedia Publishing*



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BOOK PREVIEW

## Urashima Tarō and the Ocean Goddess

There was once, in the land of Tango, a village named Mizuno Ye. In this village there lived a fisherman named Urashima Tarō. He was a good man, sensitive and good at heart who, in his life, had never desired to hurt anyone.

Tarō was returning one evening from fishing. The taking was abundant, he came home happy and joyful. On the river, he saw a band of little boys who seemed to take pleasure in tormenting a small turtle, found on the sand.

Tarō did not like to make suffer the animals. He felt sorry for the turtle. He was approaching children, and trying to give his voice imperiously:

- What evil has he done to you, he said, this innocent creature to torment this way? Don't you know that the gods punish children who abuse animals?

- Mingle what making you look only, replied insolently oldest of the troop. This turtle belongs to no one. We are free to kill her if it makes us happy. You have nothing to do with it.

The fisherman understood that no reasoning will hold on those hearts without mercy. He changed tactics and a milder tone:

- Come on, do not get angry as well, my children! I did not intend to scold you. I wanted to offer you a deal. Do you want to sell me this turtle? I give you twenty cents. This will he go?

Twenty cents! It was a fortune for these brats. They accept without hesitation; Tarō therefore gives them two little white pieces; they immediately run to the village to buy

cakes. Left alone with the turtle, he is aware of having snatched from certain death, the brave fisherman lifts in the hands, and said, caressing her:

- Poor little animal! The proverb give you ten thousand years of existence, while it gives a thousand for the stork. What would become of you without me? I believe that your ten thousand years would have been considerably shortened! Because they were going to kill you, those rascals! ... Come on, I'll give you freedom. But in the future, be careful, especially never falls more into the hands of children.

That said, he filed the turtle on the sand, and let her go. Then, enjoying full satisfaction that always provides a good deed done, he returned to his home whistling. That evening, the soup seemed better, and his sleep was lighter ...

The next morning, Tarō, got up early, from fishing as usual. Here he goes wide mounted on his little boat. He will throw his net. Suddenly he sees a strange water splashing.

- Mr Urashima! makes a voice behind him.

The fisherman may well ask, at this early hour, call it by its name. He looks around, but sees no one. Believing he was wrong, he has to start his new fishing.

- Mr Urashima! repeated the same voice.

Tarō turns again. What is not his surprise to see, just from the boat, the little turtle, the turtle which the day before he saved the life!

- Oh! So it was you who called me?

- Yes, that's me, Mr. Urashima. I came to say hello and thank you for the service you have rendered me last night.

- That's very kind of you. Let's see! what can I offer you? If you smoked, I would spend my pipe to you willingly. But you must not smoke, you!

- No, I do not smoke, Mr Urashima. But if that is not too indiscreet, I would accept with pleasure a cup of sake.

- Sake? So you drink sake! It is very fortunate! I have a small bottle right here. It is not top quality, but it is not bad nonetheless. Here you go!

And the fisherman, filling a cup, pass the turtle who swallowed a gulp. Then the conversation, interrupted for a moment, continues thus:

- As do you want a second cup?

- No, thank you, Mr. Urashima. One is enough for me ... By the way, have you ever visited the palace of Otohime, the goddess of the ocean?

- No, not yet.

- I just intend to take you there today.

- How? You want me there? But it must be far away, this palace! First, I can not swim like you. How do you want me to follow?

- Oh! it is not necessary to know how to swim well, Mr. Urashima. You will not even have to swim at all. You are going to get on my back; I'll take you myself.

- Get on your back ... But you do not mean it, my little turtle. Even if you'd ten times larger, it would be impossible for a man like me to get on your back, and keep it safe!

- Ah! Mr. Urashima, you think I'm too small? That's ... Wait a second. You'll see.

And now the little turtle began to grow ... to grow ... It becomes as big as the boat of the fisherman. The latter, struck with this miracle, does not hesitate. He climbs on the back of the animal, settles at ease. And the tortoise went to the palace of Otohime, the goddess of the ocean.

After a few hours, Tarō see in the distance a huge monument:

- What is this monument? he asked the turtle.

- This is the gate of the palace, she replies.

And as they approach the gate seems to grow and be tinged with brilliant colors.

They finally arrive. The turtle lays its rider on sand, each grain a pearl. The fisherman can see the gate was solid gold, inlaid with precious stones. Two huge dragons guard the entrance. They have a horse body, a head and lion's claws, wings of an eagle and a serpent's tail. Their appearance is terrible; however, is a meek look they set the new arrival.

The only turtle had entered the porch. She took out soon, along with a multitude of fish. There were of all sizes and of all types. Each species contained in the ocean was represented. They all wore the livery of the goddess, azure color and silver stripes. They walked in front of the fisherman and the bowed to the ground, with all brands of sympathy and respect.

The brave Tarō did not understand all these things; but knowing full well that did him no harm, he allowed himself to do. He was stripped of its fishing costume and clothed in a

beautiful silk dress. It was tied him with velvet slippers feet; then a lovely page, taking him by the hand and brought him into the palace.

Based on an ivory ramp, he climbs the seven degrees of a marble staircase and arrives at the wooden door of mahogany, on which emeralds sparkle. It opens itself and Tarō enters the apartment of the goddess. This is a huge room, the coral ceiling being supported by twenty pillars crystal. Many gilt lamps give it a soft and bright light. The walls are marble studded with rubies and various stones.

In the midst of all these wonders, seated on a diamond throne, adorned with her richest ornaments and surrounded by his court, stands Otohime, the goddess of the ocean. It is extraordinarily beautiful, more beautiful than the morning at sunrise. When Tarō saw her, she gazed with her most gracious smile. He wanted to bow down. The goddess did not give him time. Rising from his throne, she walked up to him, majestic and friendly, and affectionately taking her hands:

- You're welcome! she said. I learned that last night you had saved the life of one of the most revered subject of my empire. I wished to express in person my sincere gratitude, and that's why I brought you here.

Tarō did not know what to say. He was silent. Then, at a sign of the goddess, they brought him down on a silk cushion, sewn with gold thread. They brought him a small table in ivory, on which were placed in the gilt plates, all kinds of tasty dishes. Tarō made a meal, as he had never done since he was in the world. When he had finished eating, the goddess took him to see the various parts of his palace.

The fisherman went from surprise to surprise, from glare to glare. But what struck him most, and put the finishing touch to his admiration, it was the garden. There were four huge beds; each representing one of the four seasons of the year.

To the east, it was spring the pit: countless plum and cherry blossoms rose above a grassy green; many nightingales to modulate their delicious romances; larks there built their nests.

To the south lay the audience of the summer: there, apple and pear trees, whose branches bent under the weight of their fruit. Cicadas are filling the air with their cries loud and monotonous. There was considerable heat, tempered by a gentle breeze.

Autumn was represented by the western audience. The ground was covered with yellow leaves and chrysanthemums bouquets. Finally, the audience of the winter was north: it was a huge carpet of snow, ice surrounding a pond ...

Tarō spent seven days in this enchanting palace. Fascinated by all the marvels that were available to her looks, charmed kindness shown him by the goddess, and well-being he felt with her, he had forgotten his village; he no longer thought of his old father, his wife, his children, his boat, his nets.

But one day he remembered it, and sadness took it.

- What should think of my father, he said, such a long absence? How my wife and children need to be worried, and wait for my return! They believe I might be dead, submerged in the ocean background! And my boat, what is she? And my nets? ...

So Tarō decided to leave. He spoke to the goddess. She tried hard to retain him yet, but all instances remained unsuccessful. This light, the beautiful Otohime took him aside in his secret room, pulling the bottom of a chest a little lacquer box, she gave it to him, saying,

- Since at any price you want to leave, Mr. Urashima, I will not detain you. Keep this! Take this box, as a souvenir from me and for your stay here. But promise me that, whatever happens, you never open. Mr. Urashima, mark my words: on the day when, yielding by a sinful curiosity, you open the box, you are a dead man.

Tarō accepted this with much gratitude. He promised that he would never open the box, whatever happens. Then the goddess kissed her on the forehead, she accompanied him to his door, and they separated. The fisherman went up on the back of the turtle, and this brought him back to shore ...

Tarō is back. But like everything changed during his absence! The trees at the entrance of the village are not those he was used to see. The village expanded; there are new homes, houses as he has never seen in his life. What was his astonishment at not finding any of his knowledge! All the faces he meets are completely unknown to him!

Understanding nothing more to this sudden metamorphosis of men and things, Tarō does not know what to think or what to believe. He longs to find his father, his wife and children to learn from their mouths the why of what astonishes. He goes to his home. There, his surprise redoubled. It is this house that he left her there seven days. But it collapses. He approach to take a look inside. He sees no objects that were familiar to him. There are found neither his father nor his wife or his children.

On the mat, an old man sat, arms resting on the edge of the brazier, but the old man is not his father! Tarō will falter under the weight of too much emotion. Yet he still remains.

- Good old man, he asked in a hushed voice, there are seven days I left this village. Everything has changed. This house is mine, and I find you there, you, a stranger. Where are my old father, my wife and my children, I left here?

- Young man, says the old man, believed to be a fool, I know what you mean. Who are you? What's your surname?

- I am Urashima Tarō, the fisherman.

- Urashima Tarō! exclaimed the old man at the height of surprise, but then, you are ... a ghost ... a ghost ... a shadow! ... I have often, in fact, heard of a Urashima Tarō. But a long time ago that it is not of this world. There are seven hundred years Urashima Tarō is dead!

- Seven hundred years! cried the fisherman.

Immediately he turned pale and shaken. The last words of the old man are to him like a flash of light. He understood! He understood that he spent seven hundred years in the palace of the goddess Otohime and these seven hundred years seemed to him seven days ...

A deep sadness invades his soul. He left this village inhospitable, which is no longer his, and where he has no one. Thoughtfully, he went to strike. Instinctively, his eyes looking to see the turtle, for now he would like to return to the palace ... but the turtle was gone, probably forever ...

Tarō sits on the sand, and pours hot tears. Suddenly, his eyes are on the box, the mysterious box that Otohime gave him initially, and that in his confusion, he had not thought of.

- What's in that box ... The goddess said, handing me the day when, by a guilty curiosity, you open the box, you are a dead man ... A goddess can not lie ... and yet, who knows? ? ... Maybe is it to test me she told me that! ... Maybe this box does contain my happiness ... And after all, what matter if I die at this time ? ... I am alone in the world without parents, without friends, without knowledge, without fortune? ... Yes, better to die a hundred times, than such a miserable existence! ...

So think Tarō. Then, with a nervous movement, he half opened the box. He pulls out a thick cloud, that envelope him from the feet to the head. Suddenly, his hair turn white as snow, his forehead wrinkled, members will dry and falls dead on the beach.

The next day, fishermen discovered on the shore the body of a man who had lived seven hundred years ...

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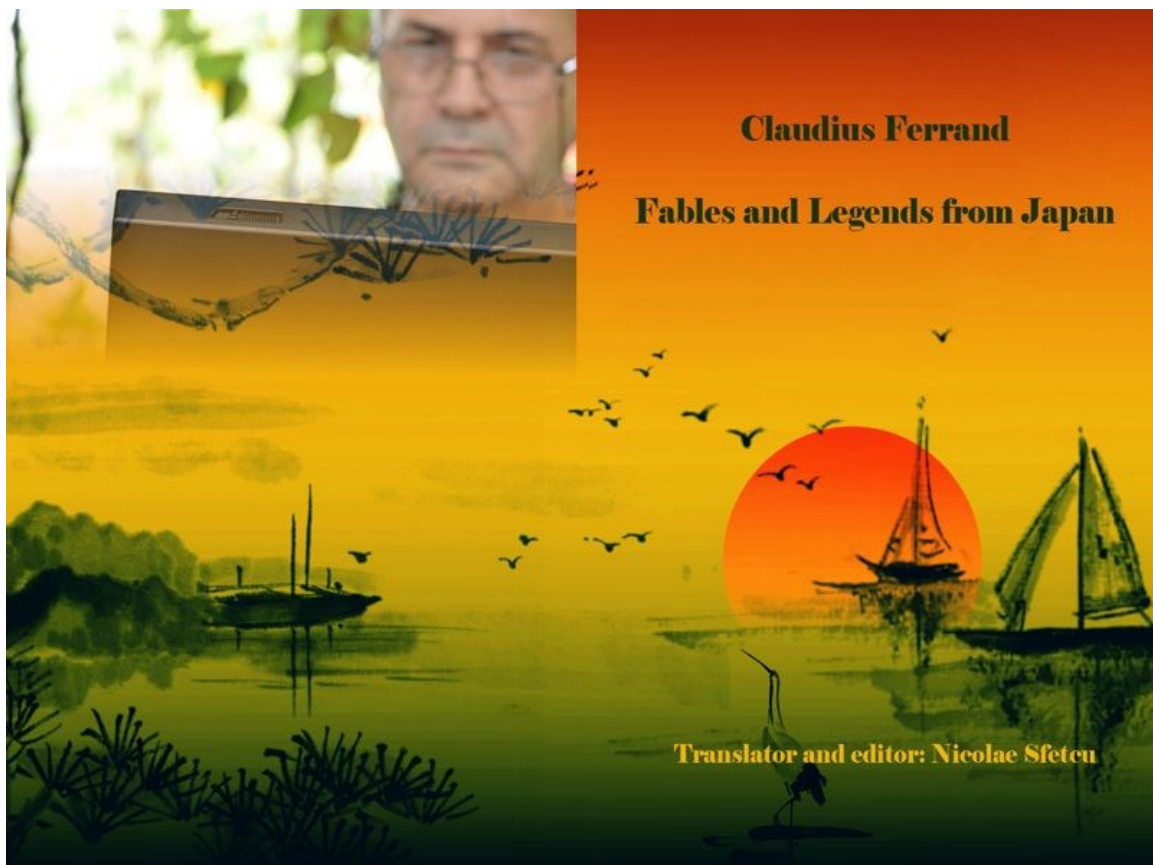
The eight young goats

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## Book



by Claudius Ferrand, Translator and editor: Nicolae Sfetcu

The book includes a collection of Japanese legends and fables collected by the missionary Claudius Ferrand in Japan.

Japanese mythology (*Nihon shinwa*) is the set of legends and myths of Japan.



The main Japanese myths, as generally accepted nowadays have Shinto origin, based on the *Kojiki* and other complementary works. The *Kojiki* is the oldest collection of myths, legends and history of Japan. The *Shintōshū* explains the genesis of deities from a Buddhist approach. The *Tsutae Hotsuma* and the *Nihonshoki*, meanwhile, contain relatively different versions of this mythology.

MultiMedia Publishing: <https://www.telework.ro/en/e-books/fables-and-legends-from-japan/>

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