



Upper Perené Arawak Narratives of History, Landscape, and Ritual

By Elena Mihas

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Published through the Recovering Languages and Literacies of the Americas initiative, supported by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

The rich storytelling traditions of the Alto Perené Arawaks of eastern Peru are showcased in this bilingual collection of traditional narratives, ethnographic accounts, women's autobiographical stories, songs, chants, and ritual speeches. The Alto Perené speakers are located in the colonization frontier at the foot of the eastern Andes and the western fringe of the Amazonian jungle. Unfortunately, their language has a slim chance of surviving because only about three hundred fluent speakers remain. This volume collects and preserves the power and vitality of Alto Perené oral and linguistic traditions, as told by thirty members of the Native community.

Upper Perené Arawak Narratives of History, Landscape, and Ritual covers a range of themes in the Alto Perené oral tradition, through genres such as myths, folk tales, autobiographical accounts, and ethnographic texts about customs and rituals, as well as songs, chants, and oratory. Transcribed and translated by Elena Mihas, a specialist in Northern Kampa language varieties, and grounded in the actual performances of Alto Perené speakers, this collection makes these stories available in English for the first time. Each original text in Alto Perené is accompanied by an English translation, and each theme is introduced with an essay providing biographical, cultural, and linguistic information. This collection of oral literature is masterful and authoritative as well as entertaining and provocative, testifying to the power of Alto Perené storytelling.

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Review

“Books like this are a feast for linguists and anthropologists alike, and are all too rare. . . . The storytelling alone provides a unique insight into a world that will be unfamiliar to most English speakers. . . . Its integrated approach to culture and language . . . gives the reader a true appreciation of the mental universe inhabited by these speakers of a threatened, but defiant, language of Peru.”—Christopher Moseley, *Ogmios*, newsletter of the Foundation for Endangered Languages

(Christopher Moseley *Ogmios*, newsletter of the Foundation for Endangered Languages 2015-10-22)

"This book would be a valuable text for courses on South American ethnohistory, indigenous societies of South America, and courses on South American mythology, language, and culture."—Janis Nuckolls, *American Anthropologist*

(Janis Nuckolls *American Anthropologist*)

“A sophisticated and interesting discourse-centered approach to culture that can serve as a model for integrating linguistic and sociocultural anthropology, this collection demonstrates how much cultural variability exists within and among the various indigenous communities of the Upper Amazon region.”—Jonathan Hill, author of *Made-from-Bone: Trickster Myths, Music, and History in an Amazonian Community*

(Jonathan Hill 2014-02-28)

About the Author

Elena Mihas is a postdoctoral associate in anthropological linguistics at James Cook University in Australia.

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