Notes on the etymology of Aublet’s generic names

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On the cover: Couroupita guianensis- couroupitoutoumou for quelques nations sauvages de la Guiane, boulet de canon for the Créoles & les Negres. Photograph by the author.
During the preparation of *Elimologia de los géneros de plantas en Puerto Rico* (Mari Mut, 2016) Aublet's generic names caught my attention due to their relationship with the language of Amerindians and the fact that the etymology of so many remains unknown. There’s a general impression that all these names were based on the native names for the plants (e.g., Théis, 1810; Wittstein, 1856; Quattrocchi, 2000), but the discovery that *Remirea* was probably named after a locality (Mari Mut, 2017a) and Delprete's (2015) suggestion of etymologies for three Rubiacean genera (*Coussarea, Nacibe and Tocoyena*) suggested that a another look at these names could lead to the discovery of additional etymologies.

Jean Baptiste Christophore (or Christian) Fusée Aublet was born in Salon de Provence, France, in early November 1770. He studied pharmacy and botany at Montpellier under François Boissier de Sauvage de Lacroix and botany at the Jardin du Roy under Bernard de Jussieu. From 1752 to 1762 Aublet worked in Mauritius (Ile de France), where he collected plants and participated in the foundation of the island’s main botanical garden. After a short stay in Paris, he accepted the position of “King's botanist and apothecary” in Cayenne, French Guiana. From July 1762 to July 1764, he explored coastal areas, canoed and hiked into the forest, collected thousands of plants and met native tribes. After a year in Haiti, where he also collected plants, Aublet reached Paris in 1765. With help from Jussieu, he spent the next nine years studying his collections and preparing his only botanical publication: *Histoire des plantes de la Guiane Francoise*, published in 1775 in London. Three years later Aublet died in Paris, aged 58. The above profile, fittingly held by a native, is from the frontispiece of his book. More biographical information and an itinerary of Aublet's travels is given by Delprete (2015).

*Histoire des plantes* consists of four tomes or volumes, the first two contain an autobiographical introduction, the plant descriptions (in Latin and French), and ten essays or memories on various topics; the other two contain the plant illustrations. By my count, Aublet proposed 207 new generic names. He adopted the sexual...
system of classification, but openly disregarded Linnaeus’ suggestion to modify or substitute “barbarous names” for names of Greek or Latin origin… the large majority of Aublet’s names, generic and specific, are the native names for the plants or slight alterations.

Aublet commented frequently on the uses given to plants by the natives and has thus been considered a founding father of ethnobotany in the Neotropics (Plotkin et al., 1991, cited in http://sweetgum.nybg.org/science/projects/lp/biblio-details/?irn=169065). He was also a pioneer abolitionist and expressed his views against slavery in *Observations Sur les Nègres Esclaves* (seventh memory of volume 2); for his life-long stand against slavery, Aublet has been called the first secular abolitionist (Cook, 1940; Dover, 1956).

The first two volumes of *Histoire des plantes* were examined looking for information relevant to the etymology of each generic name. Searches were then conducted in the web, in printed and digital literature in my library, and in maps found online. The excellent map reproduced by Delprete (2015), published in 1729 and thus very likely available to Aublet, and another map found on the web are reproduced at the end of this work. The generic names are arranged below in three groups: names for which Aublet provided the etymology, names for which others authors have proposed an etymology or one can be reasonably deducted, and names whose etymology remains unknown.

Group 1. Aublet provided the etymology for the following 111 generic names. Although he never explicitly gave the meaning of any name, these are clearly derived from names for the plant, its fruit, wood or another characteristic; one is named after a locality and one after a person. Seventy-four names originate with the Galibis or mainland Caribs, today frequently called Kali'na because it is how they call themselves. The Galibis lived (and still live) not far inland and were thus frequently encountered by Aublet. Twenty-one names came from the Garipons, a tribe which came to French Guiana from a Portuguese colony near the mouth of the Amazon, in the state of Pará. Two names were provided by the Nouragues and one by the Coussaris, tribes that lived inland from Cayenne. Three
names are of Creole origin. Aublet’s text is in Latin and French, in the former Carib is used as a general term, the tribe’s name appears in the latter.

*Aberemoa* Annonaceae- from *aberemou*, Galibi name for *A. guianensis*.

*Ablania* Elaeocarpaceae- from *goulougou-ablani*, Galibi name for *A. guianensis*.

*Abuta* Menispermaceae- from *aboutoua* or *abutua*, Garipon name for *A. amara*.

*Acioa* Chrysobalanaceae- from *acion*, Galibi name for *A. guianensis*.

*Aiouea* Lauraceae- from *aiouvé*. Galibi name for *A. guianensis*.

*Amaioua* Rubiaceae- Garipon name for *A. guianensis*.

*Amanoa* Phyllanthaceae- from *amanou*, Galibi name for *A. guianensis*.

*Ambelania* Apocynaceae- from *ambelani*, one of the two Galibi names for *A. acida*, the other being *paraveris*.

*Apalatoa* Fabaceae- from *apalatoua*, Galibi name for *A. spicata*.

*Arouna* Fabaceae- Galibi name for *A. guianensis*.

*Bagassa* Moraceae- Galibi name for *B. guianensis*.

*Bocoa* Fabaceae- from *bois boco*, name given to the tree by the inhabitants of Caux.

*Caraipa* Calophyllaceae- from *caraipé*, Garipon name for *C. angustifolia*.

*Carapa* Meliaceae- Galibi name for *C. guianensis*. The Garipons called it *y-andiroba*, being andiroba the common name for the tree and its wood.

*Carapichea* Rubiaceae- from *carapiche*, Garipon name for *C. guianensis*.

*Catinga* Myrtaceae- from *iva-catinga*, Garipon name for *C. moschata*.

*Conami* Phyllanthaceae- from *conami para*, one of the Creole names for *C. brasiliensis* in Brazil (near Pará), the other being *amazone*. This plant is from Brazil, so the specimens must have been given to Aublet or were present in France.

*Conceveiba* Euphorbiaceae- from *conceveibo*, Galibi name for *C. guianensis*. 
**Conohoria** Violaceae- from *conohorié*, Galibi name for *C. flavescens*.

**Coublandia** Fabaceae- for a locality named Descoublandiere, which belonged to Claude Gabriel d’Escoubland de la Rougerie, French military officer and landowner near whose property the plant was found. See [http://laguyane.free.fr/villes/Les%20origines%20des%20villes.htm](http://laguyane.free.fr/villes/Les%20origines%20des%20villes.htm). Lotte Burkardt kindly provided Descoubland’s complete name.

**Couepia** Chrysobalanaceae- from *couepi*, Galibi name for *C. guianensis*.

**Couma** Apocynaceae- Galibi name for *C. guianensis*.

**Coumarouna** Fabaceae- from *coumarou*, Galibi and Garipon name for *C. odorata*.

**Coupouli** Rubiaceae- from *coupouï-rana*, Garipon name for *C. aquatica*.

**Couratari** Lecythidaceae- name given to the tree by *les Negres*, who also call it *balata blanc* and sometimes *maou*. *Couratari* is probably of native origin.

**Courimari** Elaeocarpaceae- Nourague name for *C. guianensis*.

**Couroupita** Lecythidaceae- from *couroupitoutourou*, name given to the tree by quelques nations sauvages de la Guiane.

**Coussapoa** Urticaceae- from *coussapoui*, Galibi name for *C. latifolia*.

**Coutoubea** Gentianaceae- Galibi name for *C. spicata* and *C. ramosa*.

**Deguelia** Fabaceae- from *assa-ha pagara undeguélé*, Galibi name for *D. scandens*.

**Enourea** Sapindaceae- from *eymara enourou*, Galibi name for *E. capreolata*.

**Eperua** Fabaceae- from *eperu*, Galibi name for the fruit of *E. falcata*; the name for the tree is *vovapa-tabaca*. *Eperu* means saber (a type of sword), possibly referring to the shape of the pod and reflecting contact with europeans.

**Evea** Rubiaceae- from *evé*, Galibi name for *E. guianensis*.

**Ferolia** Moraceae- for *bois de férole*, Creole name for the tree’s wood, derived from the name of an old governor of Cayenne who was the first to introduce it to
commerce. Lotte Burkhardt (pers. comm.) has identified him as Pierre-Eléonore de La Ville de Férolles.

**Goupia** Goupiaceae- from *goupi*, Galibi name for *G. glabra*.

**Hevea** Euphorbiaceae- from *hévé*, name given to the tree by the inhabitants of Esmeraldas province northwest of Quito. The Maïnas of Ecuador call it *caoutchouc* and the Garipons call it *siringa*.

**Heymassoli** Ximeniaceae- Galibi name for *H. spinosa*.

**Houmiri** Humiriaceae- Garipon name for *H. balsamifera*. The accepted spelling for this name is *Humiria*.

**Icacorea** Primulaceae- from *icacore-catinga*, Garipon name for *I. guianensis*.

**Ivira** Malvaceae- Garipon name for *I. pruriens*.

**Licaria** Lauraceae- from *licari kanali*, Galibi name for *L. guianensis*.

**Mabea** Euphorbiaceae- from *piriri mabé*, Galibi name for *M. piriri*.

**Macahanea** Celastraceae- from *macaca-hana*, Garipon name for *M. guianensis*.

**Macoucoua** Aquifoliaceae- from *macoucou*, Galibi name for *M. guianensis*.

**Manabea** Lamiaceae- from *manabo*, Galibi name for *M. laevis*.

**Managa** Celastraceae- Galibi name for *M. guianensis*.

**Mapouria** Rubiaceae- from *mepouri-crabi*, Galibi name for *M. guianensis*.

**Maripa** Convolvulaceae- Galibi name for *M. scandens*. The same name was also used for a species of palm.

**Matayba** Sapindaceae- from *matabaiba*, Galibi name for a variety of *M. guianensis*; names for the other variety are *touaou* and *atouaou*.

**Minquartia** Olacaceae- from *minquar*, Creole name for *M. guianensis*.
**Montira** Loganiaceae- for M. de Monti, counsellor at the Superior Council of Cayenne, who helped the author during his investigations. The plant used to describe the genus was found in his cotton field. See also Théis (1810: 310).

**Moronobea** Clusiaceae- from *moronobo*, one of the Galibi names for *M. coccinea*, the other being *coronobo*.

**Mourera** Podostemaceae- from *mourerou*, Galibi name for *M. fluviatilis*.

**Mouriri** Melastomataceae- from *mouririchira*, Galibi name for *M. guianensis*.

**Mouroucoa** Convolvulaceae- from *mouroucou-yarana*, Garipon name for *M. violacea*.

**Moutabea** Polygalaceae- from *aimoutabou* (also spelled *aymoutabou*), Galibi name for *M. guianensis*.

**Moutouchi** Fabaceae- from *moutouchi*; Galibi, Garipon and Creole name for *M. suberosa*.

**Napimoga** Salicaceae- from *napimogal*, Galibi name for *N. guianensis*.

**Nonatelia** Rubiaceae- from *nonoateli*, Galibi name for *N. officinalis*.

**Ouratea** Ochnaceae- from *oura-ara*, Galibi name for *O. guianensis*.

**Ourouparia** Rubiaceae- from *y-ourou-pari* (also spelled *yourou-pari*), Garipon name for *O. guianensis*.

**Outea** Fabaceae- from *ioutay*, Garipon name for *O. guianensis*.

**Pacouria** Apocynaceae- from *pacouri-rana*, Garipon name for *P. guianensis*.

**Paloue** Fabaceae- Galibi name for *P. guianensis*.

**Paralea** Ebenaceae- from *parala*, Galibi name for *P. guianensis*.

**Parinari** Chrysobalanaceae- Garipon name for *P. montana*.

**Patima** Rubiaceae- from *patima-rana*, Carib name for *P. guianensis*. The native tribe was not specified.

**Paypayrola** Violaceae- Galibi name for *P. guianensis*. 
**Pekea** Caryocaraceae- Galibi and Nourague name for *P. butirosa*.

**Pirigara** Lecythidaceae- from *pirigamepé*, Galibi name for *P. tetrapetala* and *P. hexapetala*, the first species is also called *caripa*.

**Pitumba** Salicaceae- from *pitumba-rana*, Garipon name for *P. guianensis*.

**Poraqueiba** Metteniusaceae- Galibi name for *P. guianensis*.

**Posoqueria** Rubiaceae- from *aymara-posoqueri*, Galibi name for *P. longiflora*.

**Pourouma** Urticaceae- Galibi name for *P. guianensis*.

**Pouteria** Sapotaceae- from *pouroma-pouteri*, Galibi name for *P. guianensis*.

**Qualea** Vochysiaceae- from *qualé*, Galibi name for *Q. caerulea*.

**Quapoya** Clusiaceae- from *quapoy*, Galibi name for *Q. scandens*.

**Quebitea** Piperaceae- from *daquejoabite*, name for this plant whose juice is used against snake bites. The native tribe was not specified.

**Quiina** Ochnaceae- from *guiina-rana* or *quiina-rana*, Garipon name for *Q. guianensis*.

**Ropourea** Ebenaceae- from *aroupourou*, Coussari name for *R. guianensis*.

**Rouhamon** Loganiaceae- from *rouhahamon*, Galibi name for *R. guianensis*.

**Sabicea** Rubiaceae- from *sabisabi*, Galibi name for *S. aspera*.

**Sagonea** Hydroleaceae- from *sagoun-sagou*, Galibi name for *S. palustris*.

**Saouari** Caryocaraceae- name given to *S. glabra* by the people of the country and the inhabitants of Cayenne.

**Simarouba** Simaroubaceae- Galibi name for *S. amara*.

**Simira** Rubiaceae- Galibi name for *S. tinctoria*.

**Singana** Fabaceae- from *singan singa*, Nourague name for *S. guianensis*. 
**Tachia** Gentianaceae- from *tachi*, Galibi name for ant nests, because hollow stems and branches of the plant are occupied by ants.

**Tachibota** Chrysobalanaceae- from *umbetachibote*, Galibi name for *T. guianensis*.

**Tachigali** Fabaceae- Galibi name for *T. paniculata*.

**Tanibouca** Combretaceae- Garipon name for *T. guianensis*, called *tonibouca* by the Galibis.

**Tapirira** Anacardiaceae- from *tapiriri*, Galibi name for *T. guianensis*.

**Tapogomea** Rubiaceae- from *tapogomo*, Galibi name for *T. tomentosa*.

**Taralea** Fabaceae- from *tarala*, Galibi name for *T. oppositifolia*.

**Tariri** Simaroubaceae- Galibi name for *T. guianensis*.

**Thoia** Gnetaceae- Galibi name for *T. urens*.

**Tococa** Melastomataceae- from *tococo*, Galibi name for *T. guianensis*.

**Tontelea** Celastraceae- from *ravoua-tontelle*, Galibi name for *T. scandens*.

**Touchiroa** Fabaceae- from *moutouchiraou*, Galibi name for *T. aromatica*.

**Toulicia** Sapindaceae- from *toulici*, Galibi name for *T. guianensis*.

**Toumatea** Fabaceae- from *tounou*, Galibi name for *T. guianensis*.

**Touroulia** Ochnaceae- Galibi name for *T. guianensis*.

**Tovomita** Clusiaceae- from *votomite*, Galibi name for *T. guianensis*.

**Virola** Myristicaceae- one of the Galibi names for *V. sebifera*, the other being *dayapa*.

**Vochy** Vochysiaceae- Galibi name for *V. guianensis*. Validly spelled *Vochysia*.

**Votomita** Melastomataceae- from *votomit*, Galibi name for *V. guianensis*.

**Vouacapoua** Fabaceae- Galibi name for *V. americana*, also spelled *voicapou*.
**Vouapa** Fabaceae- Galibi name for *V. bifolia*. It is also the Galibi name for *Pariva grandiflora* and *P. tomentosa*.

**Vouarana** Sapindaceae- Carib name for *V. guinanensis*. The native tribe was not specified.

**Voyara** Capparaceae- from *vouyara-ovayara-iouwa-ayssou*, Garipon name for *V. montana*.

**Voyria** Gentianaceae- Garipon name for *V. rosea*.

Group 2. Below are 25 names for which etymologies have been suggested and 7 names for which one is suggested herein.

**Aniba** Lauraceae- Quattrocchi (1: 144) indicates from the Tupi-Guarani *anhuyba* for a species of sassafras. See also [http://www.botanicus.org/primeocr/mbgserv14/botanicus3/b12002070/31753002771258/31753002771258_0216.txt](http://www.botanicus.org/primeocr/mbgserv14/botanicus3/b12002070/31753002771258/31753002771258_0216.txt)

**Apeiba** Malvaceae- Quattrocchi (1: 69) indicates from a native name in Guiana, *apé* “bark”. Aublet (1: 539) describes the tree’s bark and mentions that it is suited to make rope.

**Baillieria** Asteraceae- perhaps for Johann Ritter von Baillou (1654-1758), a French-Dutch-Italian naturalist known in France as Jean Chevallier de Baillou and Jean Baillieul. Another possibility is a resident of French Guiana, as in *Bertiera* and *Montira*, but no one with a similar name is mentioned in the text. Suggested herein.

**Bertiera** Rubiaceae- probably for Madame Bertier or the Bertier family, which helped the author during his stay in French Guiana; Madame Bertier is mentioned on volume 1 (p. 447, 560) as owner of an estate or plantation (*habitation*) near which plants were collected, M. Bertier is mentioned on Vol. 2 (Suppl.): 32. Source: Tableau du règne végétal 2: 573. 1799 (spelled *Berthiera*). See also Delprete (2015: 599).

**Calinea** Dilleniaceae- possibly dedicated to the Kali’na (Galina in French), name used by the Caribs to refer to themselves. Suggested herein.
**Cassipourea** Rhizophoraceae- possibly after the Cassipour river in Brazil, near the border with French Guiana, or for a tribe of that name living in Brazil and French Guiana. Suggested herein.

**Crenea** Lythraceae- Quattrocchi (1: 637) indicates from Greek *krene* (well, spring, fountain, source) because the genus loves salt water.

**Coussarea** Rubiaceae- probably for the Kusari (Coussari) tribe of French Guiana and Brazil, or perhaps after a small forest deer of that name. Source: Delprete (2015: 602).

**Galipea** Rutaceae- possibly for the Garipon, a tribe that arrived in French Guiana from Brazil. Source: Wittstein (1856: 379). Although Aublet uses Garipons elsewhere, under this name he uses Galipons.

**Icica** Burseraceae- Wittstein (p. 471) states that the word denotes "resin" and indicates the resin richness of the plant. Aublet gives *arouaou* as the Carib name for the plant, adding that the negroes call it *encens* (incense, possibly referring to the burning of resin as incense).

**Licania** Chrysobalanaceae- Théis (p. 267) suggests that this is an anagram of the Carib name *caligni* (Aublet 1: 119, 120).

**Mahurea** Calophyllaceae- possibly after the Mahoury river, territory or mountains, located west of Cayenne and which Aublet likely explored (see Fig. 2). Suggested herein.

**Matourea** Plantaginaceae- possibly after an area called Matoury, today a commune located south of Cayenne, an area which Aublet likely explored. Suggested herein.

**Mayaca** Mayacaceae- probably for the Galibi chief Maiac, Capitaine Maiac (Vol. 2 (Suppl.): 105) who helped Aublet understand Galibi society. On page 106 he is called Le Capitaine Mayac. Suggested herein.

**Nacibea** Rubiaceae- probably for the locality of Nancibo, a village near Nancibo Creek, and not far from the town of Roura… or to Saut Nacibo, of the Sinnamary River, now inundated by the Petit-Saur Dam. Source: Delprete (2015: 608).
**Norantea**  Marcgraviaceae- possibly and anagram of *conoro-antegri*, the Carib name for the tree. Source: Théis (1810: 325).

**Ocotea**  Lauraceae- Quattrocchi (3: 1853) suggests that it is a latinization *ajou-hou-ha*, the Garipon name for *O. guianensis* (Vol. 2: 781, 783).

**Palicourea**  Rubiaceae- probably for the Palikur (Palicour) tribe of French Guiana and Brazil. Source: Quattrocchi 3: 1937. See also Delprete (2015: 611). The map provided by Delprete shows a wide area in Brazil labelled Palicour and below *ammis des Francois*. The Palikur still live in Brazil and French Guiana.

**Pariana**  Poaceae- according to Clifford and Bostock (2007: 220) -ana indicates a connection and the name honors the Paris, an Amerindian tribe living in Amazonia. A tribe called Paria lives in Venezuela.

**Perebea**  Moraceae- possibly an anagram of *vévé éperou*, one of the Galibi names for the tree, the other being *abéré mou*. Suggested herein.

**Potalia**  Gentianaceae- from Greek *poton* (drink, drinking water), because the leaves and green stems are used to prepare a very bitter and regurgitative herbal tea. Source: Quattrocchi (3: 2155). The drink is mentioned by Aublet (1: 396) without reference to the generic name.

**Rapanea**  Primulaceae- Quattrocchi (4: 2269) indicates that it derives from *rapana*, a common name used in tropical America.

**Raputia**  Rutaceae- Théis (p. 395) indicates after the Orapu forest in Guiana, where the bush was found.

**Remirea**  Cyperaceae- probably for the parish (*paroisse*) of Remire, then a small village near the seashore close to Cayenne (see Fig. 2). Source: Mari Mutt (2017a: 90). The only species of the genus, *R. maritima*, is cosmopolitan on sandy beaches.

**Rinorea**  Violaceae- Quattrocchi (4: 2320) indicates as a possibility from the Greek *rhinos* (nose) and *oros* (hill), or referring to the anthers.

**Rourea**  Connaraceae- possibly for the parish or town of Roura (Aroura), located on the Oyak River, where the plant was found. Source: Mari Mut (2017b: 97).
**Simaba** Simaroubaceae- Quattrocchi (4: 2484) states that it is the native name in Guiana for *S. multiflora* A. Juss. 1825, but the species is represented only by figures in Jussieu’s plate 27 and Aublet provided no indication of the name source.

**Talisia** Sapindaceae- Quattrocchi (4: 2627) indicates that it is a native name in Guiana, although Aublet gives *toulichi* as the Carib name; he also suggests from the Greek *thaleo* (to grow green, flourish).

**Tocoyena** Rubiaceae- probably for the Tokoyene (Tocoyen, Tocoienne) tribe of French Guiana. Source: Delprete (2015: 621). In the map provided by Delprete, the Tocoienne are also in Brazil.

**Trigonia** Trigonieae- from Greek *tri* (three) and *gonia* (angle), referring to the three-angled fruit (capsule). Source: Théis (1810: 465).

**Vantanea** Humiriaceae- Théis (p. 478) indicates from *iouantan*, the Nourague name for the plant (1: 572, 573).

**Xiphidium** Haemodoraceae- probably from Greek *xiphos* (sword) and *-ideum* (similar) or *-idium* (small), referring to the shape of the leaves. Source: Théis (1810: 489). See also Wittstein (1856: 941).

Group. 3. No etymology has been proposed for the following 64 names, other than saying they are the Guianan names for the plants or the names used by Aublet for the plants. Detailed maps of Cayenne and other areas explored by Aublet could yield insight on the etymology of some of these names, as could perhaps do someone familiar with the language of the Kali’na- for a dictionary see Courtz (2008).

**Acouroa** Fabaceae, **Aruba** Simaroubaceae, **Bacopa** Plantaginaceae, **Banara** Salicaceae, **Bassovia** Solanaceae, **Cabomba** Cabombaceae, **Cacoucia** Combretaceae, **Ciponima** Symplocaceae, **Cipura** Iridaceae, **Conobea** Plantaginaceae, **Coutarea** Rubiaceae, **Faramea** Rubiaceae, **Guapira** Nyctaginaceae, **Iroucana** Salicaceae, **Macoubea** Apocynaceae, **Malanea** Rubiaceae, **Mapania** Cyperaceae, **Maprounea** Euphorbiaceae, **Maquira** Moraceae, **Matelea** Apocynaceae, **Mayepea** Oleaceae, **Mayna** Achariaceae, **Meborea** Phyllanthaceae, **Moquilea** Chrysobalanaceae, **Orelia** Apocynaceae,
**References**


Fig. 1. Map of French Guiana, from Delprete (2015). For more detail, enlarge the pdf file or see the map in the pdf of Delprete’s article (link in the References).
Map. 2. Section of East Cayenne. ap found on the Internet, date and source unavailable. Remire parish (see Remirea) in yellow.