

**This presentation by Eugene W. Baade was prepared for the opening of Christopher Murphy's Sasquatch Revealed exhibition at the Lacey City Museum, Lacey, Washington, May 31, 2019.**

# WHEN ART IMITATES LIFE

*The Wild Man from Medieval Europe to Modern New York*



Wild men assail a Moorish castle in northwestern Africa. Tapestry segment - Germany, ca 1440 (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)



The art of antiquity in Europe is vast beyond belief. In it a creature consistently referred to as the “wild man” (translated as) is “*represented in every medium - panel painting, manuscript illumination, sculpture, stained glass, glass vessels, metalwork, enamels, leatherwork, textiles, tapestries, printed books, graphics, bronzes, and ceramics ...*” (from 1980 catalogue, Metropolitan Museum of Art, NYC). This presentation will show a selection of such appearances in several of these kinds of media. At times we will refer to the North American sasquatch.



*“Wild couple supporting the arms of Grafschaft [county] Kyburg.”*  
Enameled & silver-stained glass.  
Attributed to Lukas Zeiner.  
Switzerland, ca 1500. (Victoria and Albert Museum, London)



Musician's badge with the arms of Bern supported by a wild man. Bern, ca 1500. (Bernisches Historisches Museum, Bern)

**Summary:** Oscar Wilde argued that life imitates art more than art imitates life. In the case of the “wild man” of Medieval Europe, however, centuries of art depicting them may suggest that art does imitate life, that wild men (and women, and children) really existed and were represented not because they were exotic imaginary fictions, but because they were real.

{Russian researcher Dmitri Bayanov has written extensively on the many references to the wild man from Biblical times into medieval times and beyond. Furthermore, he and his associates have conducted extensive research on wild hominoids in the countries of the former Soviet Union.}

More recently, ethno - anthropologists and others have, with regard to reports of similar hominoids by first peoples, immigrants, and their descendents in North America, opined that myths and psychologically embedded fears and customs are the reasons for these reports and thus do not represent anything real. Another explanation sometimes suggested is that archetypal templates or “patterns” of wild men images have been embedded in our brains from ancient memories and stories, and are projected onto otherwise easily explainable shapes or animals that we see. For example, our brain might persuade us to believe that a vague outline along a forest line is a Bigfoot when it is merely a stump or a common animal - or just a shadow.

I will suggest that these medieval figures (depicted artistically as type and certainly not as individual portraits) represented real bipedal hominoids (but not *homo sapiens*) who were usually hairy (but not always) and usually large, even giant, in size (but not always). And, as we know, evidence of humanlike hairy giants is by no means only an old European or Asian phenomenon. In North America, even without a “type specimen,” the evidence is abundant.

**Please note:** in this presentation I will not assert that the medieval European wild man is exactly the same kind of hominoid as the sasquatch. We are learning from modern anthropological discoveries that there were a variety of hominids in various parts of the world in prehistoric times, some of them existing and perhaps interbreeding at the same time. It is reasonable, therefore, to think that non-*homo sapiens* hominid, or hominoid, bipedal primates being seen today and in the last 2-3 millenia are not all the same, but a variety.



Cropped/enlarged from frame 352 (alt: 354) of the Patterson-Gimlin film, a female sasquatch filmed by Roger Patterson Oct. 20, 1967. (Credit: Sasquatch Canada)



# A PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

Your presenter:

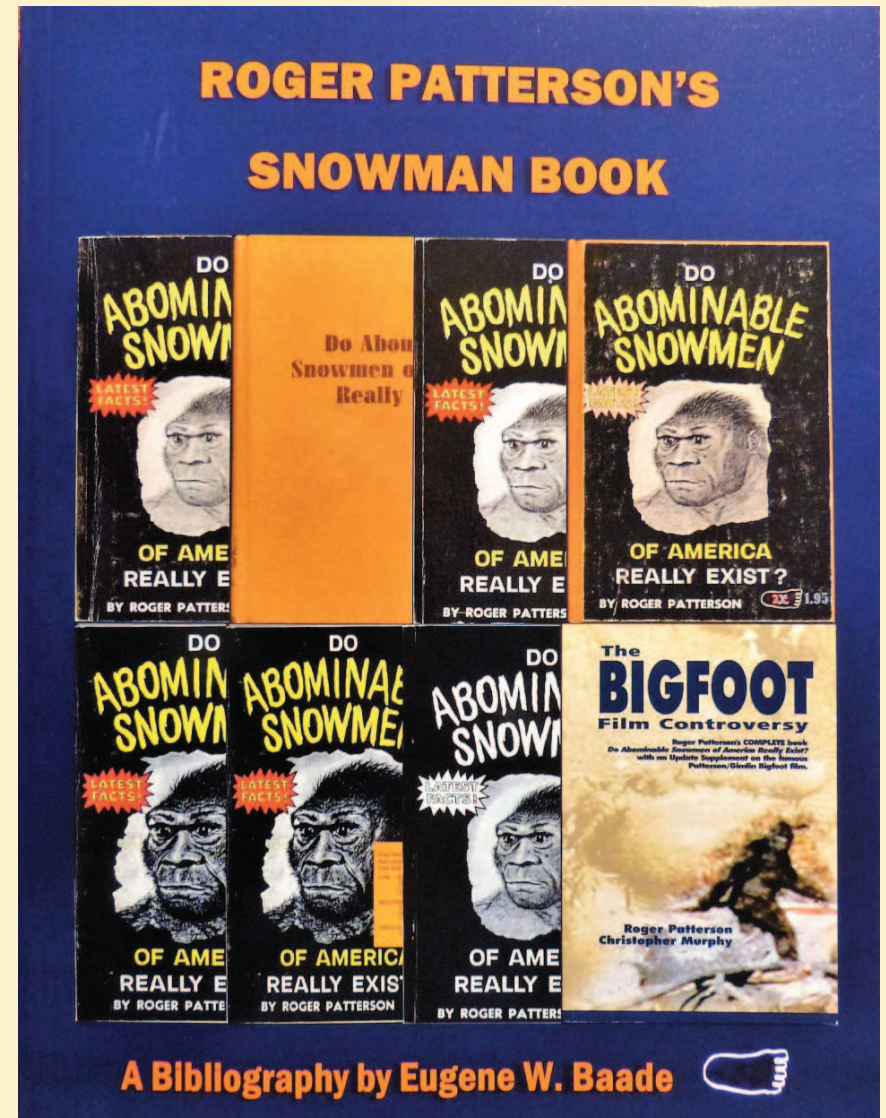
- Student of the sasquatch/Bigfoot phenomena for over 50 years.
- Graduate of Okla. St. Univ., Concordia Theological Seminary, and Valparaiso University, with studies at Okla. City Univ. and the Univ. of British Columbia.
- Lutheran clergyman for 48 years.
- Antiquarian bookseller specializing in the Old West.



Presenter's photo. 19" sasquatch track, one of 28 tracks in single trackway, northern Wisconsin, 1980. (Except when otherwise noted, all photos in this presentation were taken by the presenter.)

- And author of Roger Patterson's Snowman Book: A Bibliography ...

... of Patterson's groundbreaking 1966 book, Do Abominable Snowmen of America Really Exist?

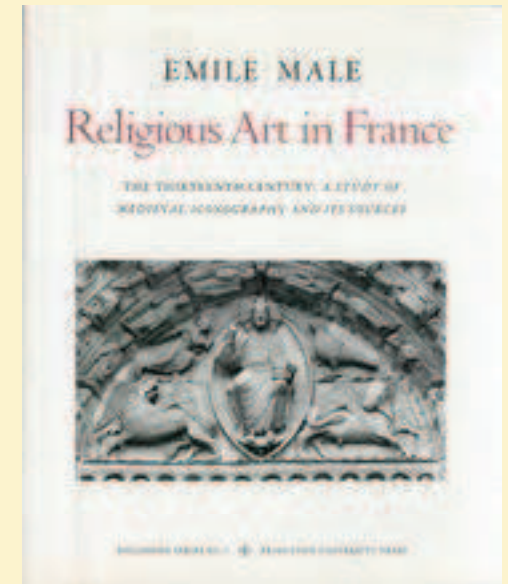
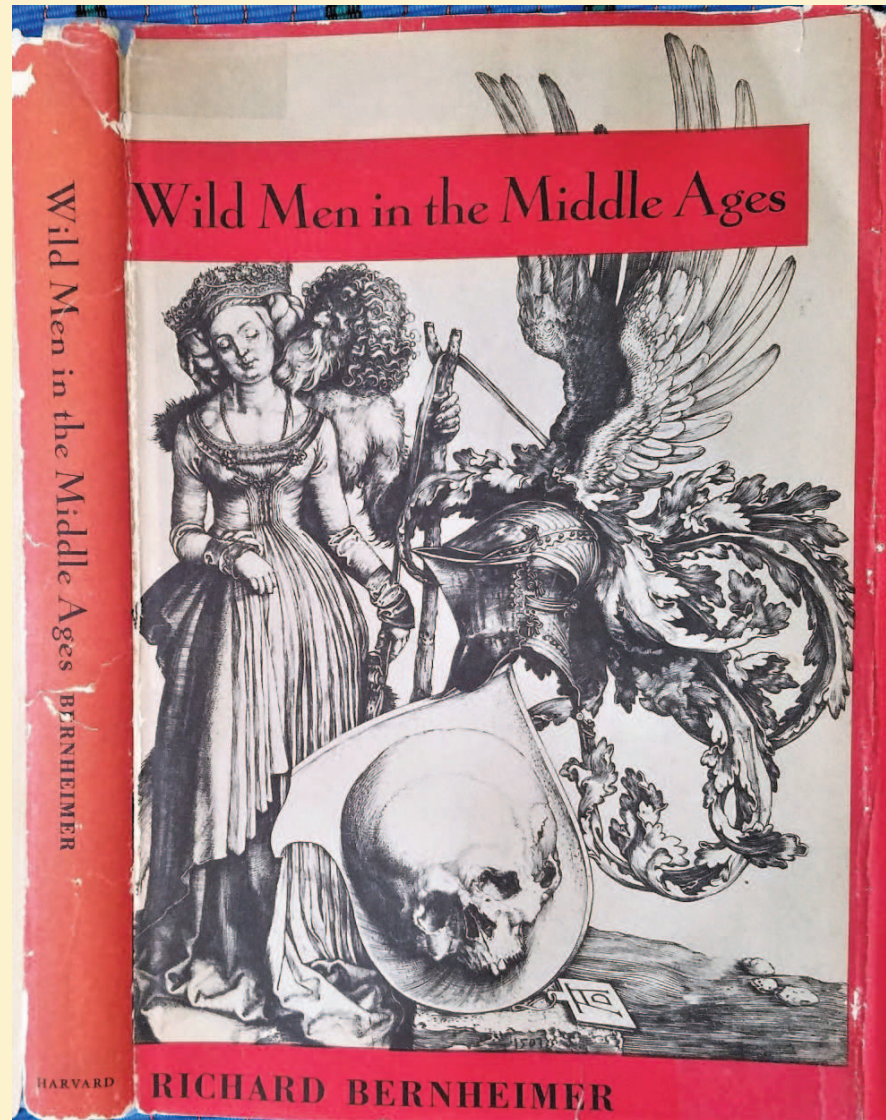




## ONE VIEW:

***“Medieval literature is shot through with the mythology of the wild man.”*** Richard Bernheimer, *Wild Men in the Middle Ages*. (Harvard Univ. Press, 1952)

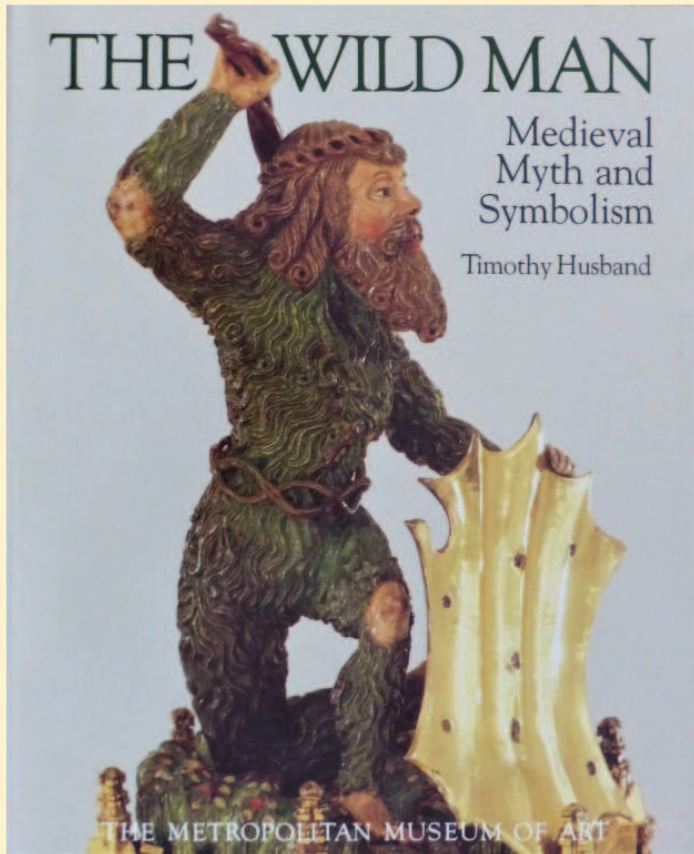
Front panel of dust jacket showing *“Coat-of-arms with skull, woman, and wild man.”* Engraving by Albrecht Dürer, 1503. (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, NYC). From the Met catalogue we shall cite: *“The wild man... guarded and upheld family dynasties, as symbolized by their coats-of-arms... When animated, the wild men dramatize physical protection or precreation”* (here both perhaps?)



## ANOTHER VIEW:

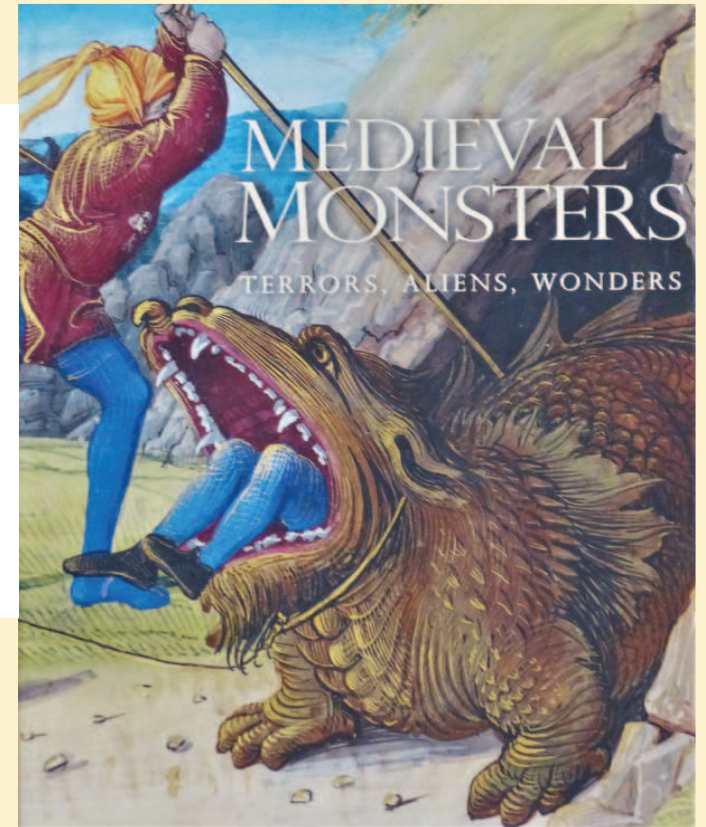
***“Medieval sculptors did not ‘invent’ the figures they created, but rather copied what they saw.”*** - Emile Mâle, *Religious Art in France*. (Princeton Univ. Press, 1984)

# A TALE OF TWO EXHIBITS



The Cloisters, Met Mus of Art, NYC, 1980

IN THE BIG...



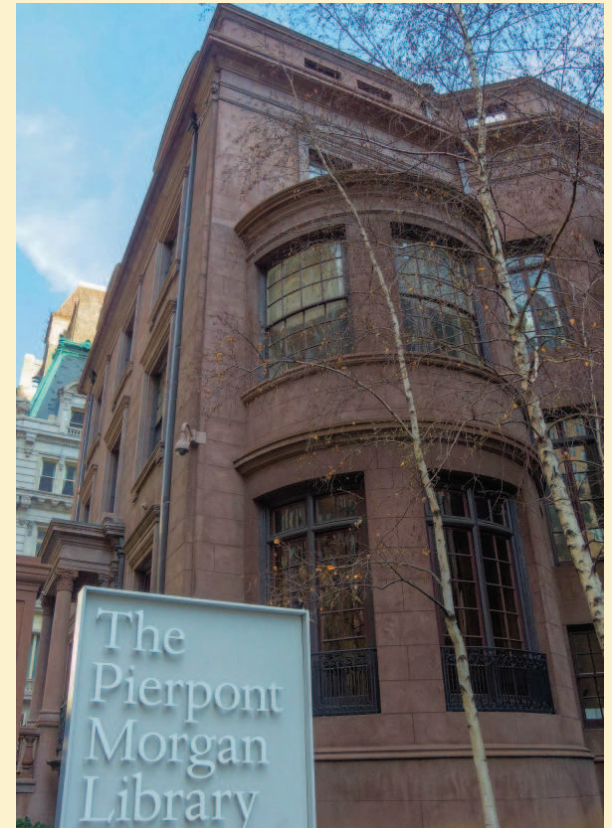
The Morgan Library, NYC, 2018



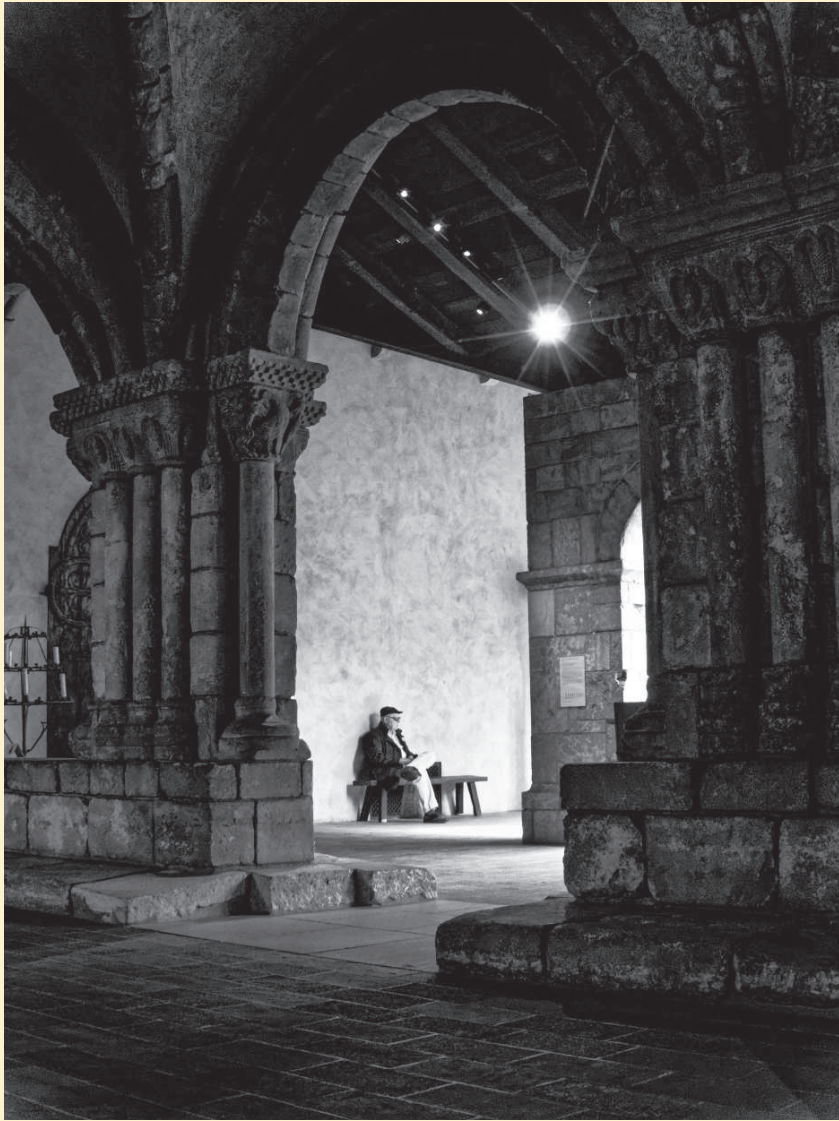
**The Cloisters, upper Manhattan**



**The J. Pierpont Morgan Library,  
midtown Manhattan**







**Sampling of interior spaces and sacred art - The Cloisters**







One corner of the main room of the Morgan Library

The Morgan collection is the home of not one, but *three* Gutenberg Bibles!



Several illuminated manuscripts on display



The Morgan Library exhibit divided up Medieval “monsters” into three categories: Terrors, Aliens, and Wonders. Below is an example of each.



“*St. Martha Taming the Tarasque,*” from *Hours of Henry*, France, 1500. (The Morgan Library, NYC) [The *Tarasque* is a fearsome legendary dragon-like mythological hybrid from Provence, in southern France, tamed in a story about Saint Martha.]



Siren, from *Abuses of the World*, France, ca 1510. (The Morgan Library, NYC)



“*The Annunciation.*” *Master of Edward*, Netherland, ca 1500. (The Morgan Library, NYC)

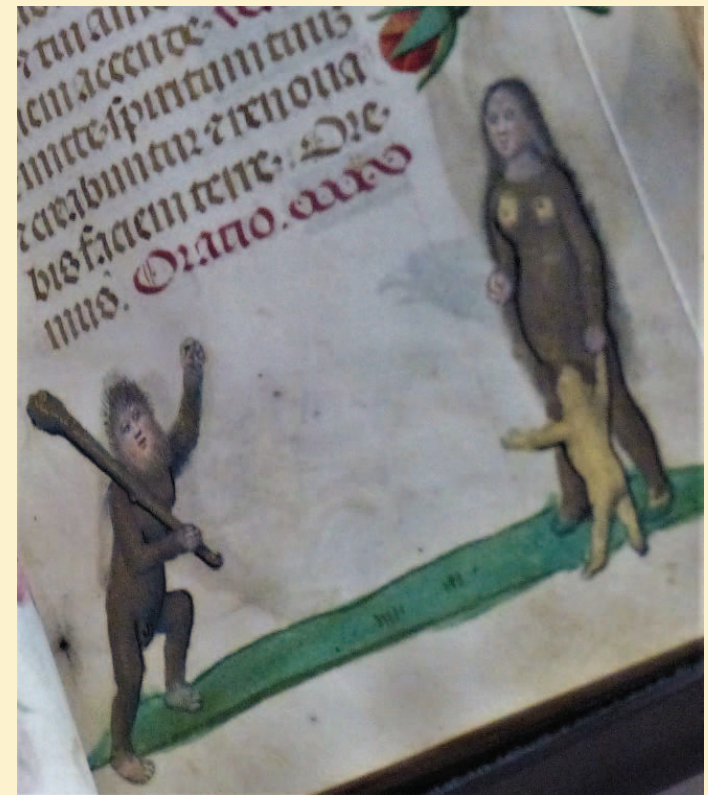


# WILD AND FURRY!

Just outside and separate from the main exhibit was a manuscript case designated, *"In A Furry Mirror."* It appeared that the curators were unsure as to how to locate wild people in the exhibit. They did not seem to fit into the categories of Wonders, Aliens, and Terrors. The case and catalogue stated: *"Lacking civilization and Christianity, wild people were thought to be free of the decadence and sin of 'modern' life. In today's world, hairy, humanoid cryptozoological figures such as Bigfoot (aka Sasquatch) occupy a similar conceptual space."*



*"Wild Men Holding Escutcheon..."*  
France, 1500. (The Morgan Library, NYC)



Wild Man, Woman, and Child, from Book of Hours. Belgium, 1490. (The Morgan Library, NYC)





***“Presentation of the Virgin Mary at the Temple by her parents.”*** A miniature introducing the Fifteen Gradual Psalms (note fifteen steps in the image). Flanking the scene are two wild men pulling at vines. A “Book of Hours” illustrated by Fastolf Master, 1440 - 50. England. (The Morgan Library, NYC)





***“Alexander and the Great, Wild Men and Women,” from German Textual Miscellany. Augsburg, 1450 - 60. “The scene... derives from a popular ... story recounting the travels of Alexander the Great... Naked, shy, and apparently hairless [presenter: they look hairy to me!], these wild folk represent an idealized, prelapsarian [time before the Fall of man] way of life. Their rejection of civilization, indicated by their lack of clothing, was understood as a retreat from the dangers and temptations of society.” (exhibit catalogue). (The Morgan Library, NYC)***

**Just how the wild man was viewed, regardless of whether he was a myth or a reality, was complex and changed over time.** {It was perhaps differentiated according to location. Images in this presentation display the various ways the wild man was regarded. This presentation is topically, rather than chronologically, designed. The latter would have value, but we have chosen a topical approach.}

Early on, the wild man was regarded as the embodiment of evil and paganism, or as just not a very desirable role model. A 2015 BBC press release about a rare discovery in Suffolk, England, of a 14th century spoon handle in the shape of a wild man quoted Prof. Ron Hutton of the University of Bristol who, himself, quoted a source from 9th century Spain describing the wild man as *“barbaric, chaotic, and unrestrained.”* Prof. Hutton further said of the handle, *“This might have been given to someone as a present to remind them of how not to behave... He [the wild man] was a bogey[man] in a world obsessed with religious and social order, an awful warning of the consequences of a lack of either.”* {Hutton’s proposed interpretation appears to have been based on his own understanding of the wild man, and not on the actual rendering of the wild man on the spoon.}

If some depictions of the wild man were intended to serve as a warning to keep people who were tempted by or attracted to the wild man from going “wild” socially or psychologically, or becoming impostate religiously speaking, what about views of today’s sasquatch? Reversing the believed behavior-altering effect of the wild man in the professor’s interpretation, we might ask, *“Does fascination with Bigfoot today serve, for some, not as a negative, but a positive presence - a warning or correction against a world gone awry socially, politically, economically, environmentally, and perhaps even scientifically?”* After all, sasquatch as keeper of the earth and agent of warning against environmental irresponsibility is a popular view among some who “believe” in sasquatch. {Additionally, some people interested in sasquatch are uneasy with science, scientific order, and factuality being the SOLE basis for our decision-making when it excludes the humanities. They might be asking, *“Should we be more like the scientist, or the sasquatch?”* This question should by no means endorse an anti-scientific, head-in-the-sand view, but be an invitation to involve humanism, ethics, and faith in scientific development and decision-making.} **Does the sasquatch, or the idea of sasquatch, draw us to these things even if the “chaotic” wild man didn’t?**



**Suffolk spoon handle, 14th century. (photograph from internet)**





Cannibalistic giant (in India!). Manuscript illumination from the *Marvels of the East*, 11th C. (The British Library, London)

Early on, the wild man was depicted as cannibalistic. That regard did not entirely disappear over time. Here we present both an 11th century image and an early 16th century image. While the latter is described not as a wild man, but as a cannibal or werewolf, the Met catalogue says, *“Several features link the werewolf and the wild man. The wild man was thought by many to abduct children, sometimes to adopt or exchange his own child for a human one, at others for the purpose of cannibalism.”*

It is no secret that many North American tribal names for the sasquatch, or Bigfoot, are translated as “cannibal.” It is also true that dozens of indigenous cultures in North America have stories of the abduction of their women and children by hairy giants. In some areas that fear is still alive.

A number of tribal names for the creature also translate to “devil.”



Cannibal or werewolf. Single-leaf woodcut by Lucas Cranach the Elder, Germany, 1510-15. (Metropolitan Museum of Art, NYC)



A major theme represented in the art of the medieval wild man was the competition between pure and honorable knights representing church, virginity, marriage, and civilization on the one hand, and impure, lustful, lecherous wild men on the other hand. Complicating this appears to be a change in the opinion of the wild man as being a condemned creature to one which was innocent of sin. Serious, if not widespread, debate over both of these interpretations suggest that the wild man was not viewed as a myth (although some stories certainly had mythological elements), but as a real competitor and creature of interest, in the flesh.



*“Enyas rescuing the maiden from a wild man.”* Painted ceiling. Spain, 1350 - 75.  
(Alhambra, Hall of Justice, Granada)





***“Wild man (Desire), with image of Venus, leading Leriano.” Woodcut from *Cárcel de Amor*, an allegorical story by Nicolas Núñez. Spain, 1496. (The British Library, London)***

***From the catalogue: “A large hairy wild man with vines entwined around his waist holds a shield in one hand and cradles a statuette of a naked woman encircled by a flaming mandorla in his other arm. He leads a forlorn-looking youth, whose hands are bound behind his back, from a dense woods. In this image, “the wild man is elevated from a symbol of mere sexuality into a rare, allegorical one of unfulfilled sensual desire... In his usual context the wild man is capable of almost all principal medieval attitudes towards women except the courtly one of restrained adulation and respect. He is thus a natural opponent of the knight, who represents the discipline and civility the wild man lacks.”***

Later in the medieval period, wild people became symbolic of primal innocence unstained by the Fall of Man described in the Book of Genesis. The wild man in his more benign aspect was variously described in art as a gatherer, a hunter, a keeper of the forest, even a farmer and family man!

Many people today like to refer to the sasquatch as the “Forest Giants” or “Forest People.” First peoples’ names for the sasquatch commonly mean “wild man of the woods” or “wild woman of the woods.”

Regarding gathering and hunting, sasquatch are frequently described as opportunists and are reported to raid orchards, gardens, granaries, and even garbage bins. Hunters and fishermen have sometimes had their kills and catches taken by them. Both “researchers” and First Peoples have sometimes made it a practice to leave gifts of food for them, whether wild-caught or store bought. Reports of sasquatch hunting and fishing prowess and capabilities are not uncommon.

Information gathered from some remote villages in the Caucasus and published by Marie-Jeanne Koffman, Dmitri Bayanov, Igor Burtsev, and others report the rare presence (at least in decades past) of the occasional Almasty - or *leshy* - (the non *homo sapiens* hairy bipedal hominoid of the Caucasus) and hominoids with different names having been very slightly domesticated on small farms and in rural homes and perhaps placed into some forms of servitude.



*Wild folk working the land.* Tapestry. Switzerland, ca 1480. (Österreichisches Museum für angewandte Kunst, Vienna). However unlikely this scenario, there may be at least a grain of original truth to it.

Wild women were pictured as good mothers of their children, and also able riders of horses or stags.

Frequently, the wild man was a combatant, whether against human military opponents or his own giant rivals.

The next frames will reveal several of these roles.



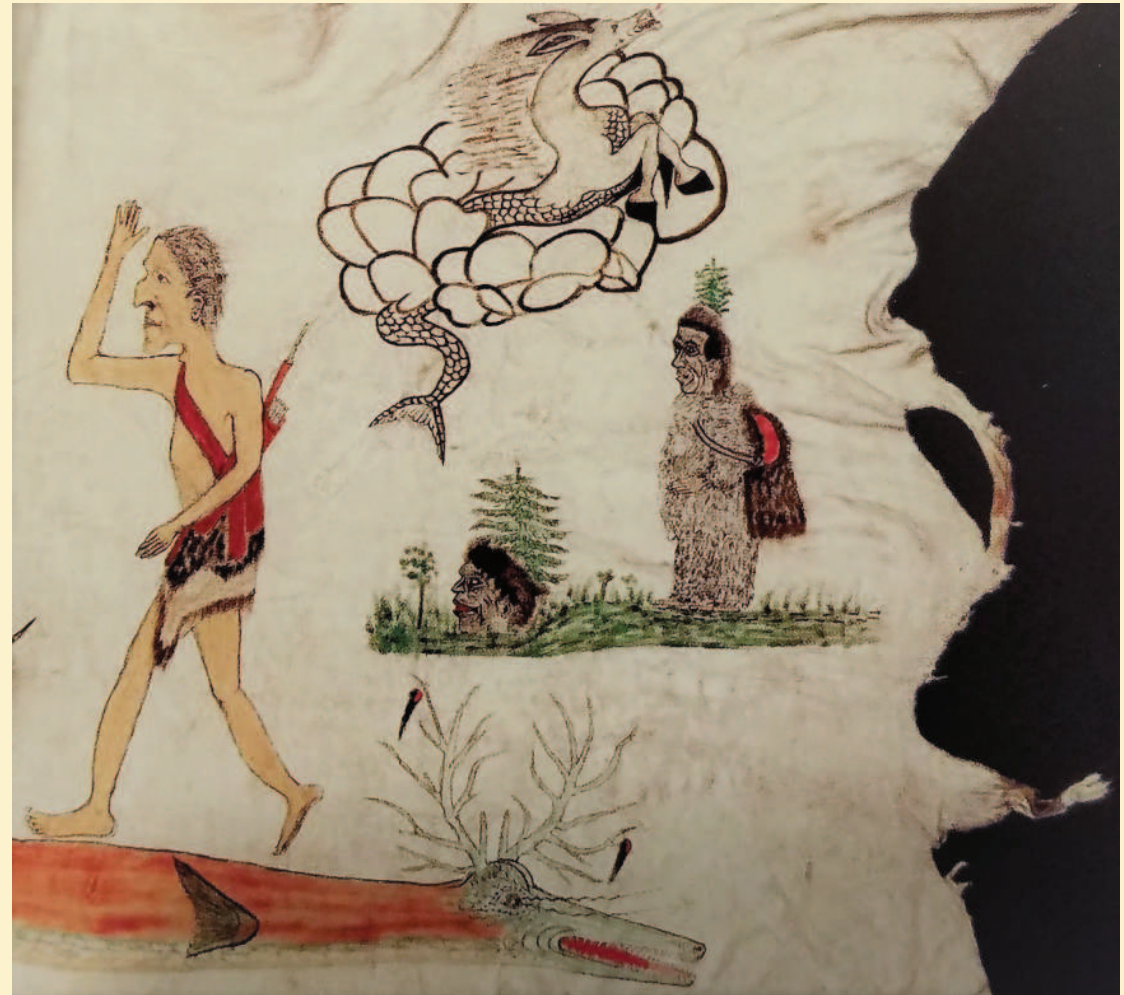
*“Wild man in combat with knight (The combat of Valentine and Namelos).”*  
Black ink drawing by Hans Burgkmair, ca 1503. Germany.  
(National Gallery of Art, Wash. D. C.)



Regarding warlike activity, some First Nations and American Indian accounts and stories recount combat against hairy giants in former times. But, occasionally, they may have been allies against common enemies.



A Cheyenne peace chief once shared with me that the Kiowa sasquatch-type beings a long time ago followed the Kiowas out of the mountains and onto the plains, and sometimes fought at their sides. {This information is, of course, sketchy, but is intriguing nevertheless.} Afterwards, in 2015, I visited the Metropolitan Museum of Art's exhibition, *"The Plains Indians: Artists of Earth and Sky."* In that exhibit was a 1904 buffalo robe designed by Silver Horn, an Oklahoma Kiowa, commissioned for display at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition of the same year. On the robe are depicted several Kiowa *"mythic beings."* (catalogue description). The large figure is *"Saynday, a trickster who won't follow any rules and is always causing trouble."* But, what caught my eye was, on the right side of the robe, *"Sapoul, a cannibal ogre who lives in the mountains and has a cedar tree growing on his head."* The robe actually shows two Sapoul figures. The name given to the robe is *"The Kiowa Pantheon."* Native tanned leather, pigment. (National Museum of Natural History, Washington, D. C.). Note the empty basket on the back of the Sapoul.







Digging deeper into the presence of Sapoul in Kiowa stories, I found the two intriguing “ritual figures” pictured here. They were also done by Silver Horn, and are associated with the Sun Dance ceremony.

The information on the pages with the drawings describes what they depict: “Saynday getting captured by Sapoul, ca 1884 - 1897.”

But the trickster found a way to escape, by grabbing onto a tree!

Colored drawing (medium uncertain) on paper. National Anthropological Archives. (National Museum of Natural History, Washington, D. C.)

Multiple themes and descriptions are suggested, such as abundant hairiness, with the exception of the face. (Both medieval wild man depictions and North American sasquatch reports usually describe limited or non-existent facial hair, except for occasional beards.)

The principal themes are abduction and cannibalism. Will Saynday be a piquant dinner for Sapoul?

With these themes a bridge is built between medieval thought and artistic expression, and North American First Peoples’ thought and artistic expression.

While we have found no artistic rendering of baskets used for abduction in medieval art, in Pacific Northwest indigenous stories the presence of a basket on the back of the wild woman in which to place kidnapped children is common.







Returning to the medieval theme of combat: “*Alexander in combat with wild men and beasts.*” Manuscript illumination from *Le livre et la vraye histoire du bon roy Alixandre* (*The book and the true story of the good king, Alexander*). Early 15th C. (The British Library, London). From the Met catalogue: “*The Alexander legends relate the history of the conqueror’s military achievements with liberal additions of related adventures...*” Here, “*Alexander and his men encounter a group of wild boars... accompanied by both wild men and women who had six hands each.*”





***“Alexander ordering wild men thrown into fire.”*** Manuscript illumination from *Le livre et la vraye histoire du bon roy Alixandre* (*The book and the true story of the good king, Alexander*). Early 15th C. (The British Library, London)



**Left page:** *“Victory of a knight over a wild man.”*  
Four sides of a casket. Wood. Rhineland, 14th century. (Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, Hamburg)

**Right page:** *“Victory of a wild man over a knight.”*  
Four sides of a casket. Rhineland, 14th century. (Kunstgewerbe Museum, Cologne)

