

# Folklore in Hominology

By Dmitri Bayanov

## A NOTE ON FOLKLORE IN HOMINOLOGY

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**ABSTRACT:** Mythology and reality can be closely interconnected, as in the case of hominology, the study of Sasquatch-like creatures. While folklorists tend to dismiss real hominoids, the existence of mythological hominoids is a necessary, though not sufficient, condition of the existence of real hominoids. The factual origin for some hominoid myths should be given consideration.

The relationship between "realists" and "folklorists" in hominology (the study of unknown living hominoids/hominids) has not been easy or productive, and this has induced me to re-examine its background and to try to lay down some basic rules.

There are philosophers who insist that "reality" exists only in the mind of the beholder. I know of no logical argument to counter this assumption, which can be regarded as an extreme case of "folklorism." Presumably, such a philosopher would be consoled by the thought that a drama is only taking place in his head.

On the other hand, we know that an archaeologist, Heinrich Schliemann, who, proceeding from the ornate imagery of the ancient Greeks, confronted the world with the reality of Troy. Schliemann was a realist, and there can be little doubt that if he and other archaeologists had asked and followed the advice of "folklorists" on the reality of Troy, the precious relics would still be lying underground.

This example shows that there can be totally different entities bearing the same name, and our failure to recognize and differentiate such entities leads to a lot of confusion and useless arguments. The name Troy applies, on the one hand, to a figment of an ancient poet's imagination, studied by specialists in literature and mythology, and, on the other hand, to a real historical city, whose study is the business of archaeologists and historians.

Of course, the two entities are interconnected in some way; one was the cause of the other, and for both there can be some overlapping characteristics, but, on the whole, their natures are so different that it would be most unwise to judge the one, say the historical city of Troy, by our knowledge of the other, the mythological Troy.

I believe the same argument applies in hominology, the term we apply in the Soviet Union to the study of Sasquatch-like creatures. There are real hominoids (that is, creatures of biology--we know this from several categories of evidence combined), and there are imaginary ones (those of mythology). Our opponents say that one kind is quite enough (those of mythology), which dispenses with the necessity

for real ones. The existence of mythological hominoids is a necessary, though not sufficient, condition of the existence of real hominoids. We set the argument forth in 1976 as follows:

Folklore and mythology in general are an important source of information for science. But hominologists look for myths about these creatures not only to find a real basis for the myths and to supplement their knowledge of the problem. They also need the myths as such, for they are yet another "litmus test" confirming the historical reality of hominoids. If, in the course of history, people had encounters with "troglodytes," then these most impressive beings could not have escaped the attention of the creators of myths and legends. Of course, the reality of relic hominoids cannot be supported by recourse to folklore alone, but neither can it be refuted by such references, as our opponents have attempted to do. Is the abundant folklore, say, about the wolf or the bear not a consequence of the existence of these animals and man's knowledge of them? Therefore, we say that, if relic hominoids were not reflected in folklore and mythology, then their reality could be called into question. Fortunately, this channel of information is so wide and deep that much work can be done in this sphere: it is necessary to re-examine and re-think a good many anthropomorphic images playing important roles in folklore and demonology [Bayanov and Bourtsev 1976].

The last conclusion of the quote seems to find support in the words of Wayne Suttles:

If there is a real animal, shouldn't there be better descriptions in the ethnographic literature? Not necessarily. Anthropologists do not consciously suppress information, but they sometimes do not know what to do with it. There are ethnographies of peoples whom I know to have traditions of Sasquatch-like beings that make no mention of such traditions; I suspect that these omissions occur not because the writers had never heard of the traditions but because they did not know how to categorize them [Suttles 1972].

I wish ethnographers in the U.S.S.R. would make such a scientifically fruitful admission. Why is it difficult for ethnographers to categorize such material? Probably because they have no idea what is real and what is imaginary in it. And the fact that the informants do not know either cannot be of much help to the scientist, who should always attempt to draw a line between fact and fiction.

Hence, ideally, "realists" and "folklorists" in hominology should sit down together and, without violating each other's territory, sort out the mountain of folklore on hominoids. When Suttles says that "a large non-human primate would not really steal women" (Suttles 1972), I am afraid he trespasses on the turf of other kinds of experts. When a nineteenth-century Russian ethnographer said that the large breasts of a female wood-goblin ("forest woman") had been made-up by ignorant peasants to symbolize heavy precipitation, he simply ascribed his own ignorance and fantasy to his informants. What about the image of a "tree-striker" that has the habit of "knocking down dead trees" (Suttles 1972)? Well, if it's a hominoid's way of feeding on larvae, the image has a basis in reality.

In the abstract of a paper (Suttles 1980) presented at the 1978 Manlike Monsters Conference at the University of British Columbia, Suttles asked: "If the Sasquatch is a real animal, why should there be several Indian images, some rather different from the usual non-Indian image?" I think it is the folklorist who is to ponder this question. To ask it of the realist would be like asking Schliemann to

account for every flight of Homer's fancy.

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