

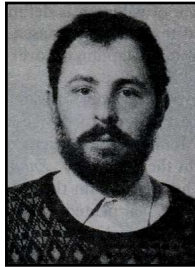


“Almasti,” Mystery Hominid of the Caucasus by Matt Salusbury

Aside: The following is an excerpt from an article about Grigory Panchenko and almasti. He spoke at the Centre for Fortean Zoology’s Weird Weekend conference in August 2007. The full article is at this link:

<http://mattsalusbury.blogspot.com/2007/09/almasti-mystery-hominid-of-caucasus.html>

Speaker Grigory Panchenko [seen here, 1990s] was on next, the first Weird Weekend speaker from outside the English-speaking world.



Mr. Panchenko works as a recruiter of Russian science personnel in Hanover, although his background is genetics. Science in his native Ukraine, he says, “is dead.” In his spare time he is the president of a Ukrainian cryptozoological organisation. His talk was advertised as “The Russian Snowman,” but the Russian snowman he is hunting is, in fact, neither Russian, nor a snowman. It lives in the Caucasus, mostly in Georgia, and is known locally as “almasti.”

Unlike the “almas” hairy man reported in Mongolia, or the apparently similar “aubasti” reported in Central Asia, which are supposed to be like yetis, the almasti mystery humanoid that Mr. Panchenko is pursuing is “more advanced.... Like *Home Erectus*, of the genus *Homo*, but not *Homo Sapiens*.” It uses tools and makes basic clothes, like belts, out of natural materials, and has been known to steal clothes off washing lines or from rubbish dumps, and to wear them. Mr. Panchenko described reports of almasti wearing a pair of trousers, holding the waist with one hand and stuffing potatoes it was digging up down the waist with the other hand, using the trousers as a sort of sack to carry off potatoes. He even heard of an almasti seen around for

several years that was wearing a discarded military hat.

Unlike the vast forests of the Pacific Northwestern USA, that are supposed to hide bigfoot, or the empty snowfields of the Himalayas, allegedly home to the yeti, the almasti are “forced to live next to humans” in the Caucasus mountain chain that stretches between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea for 1200 km, an area populated by modern humans for a very long time. “How can it (the almasti) eat in such an unusual environment?” asks Mr. Panchenko. It occupies the “same niche as a bear, it’s omnivorous; plants are the leading part of its food.” Almastis often “borrow food from human neighbours.” As well as neatly digging out potatoes, they eat nuts, almonds, horse manure (for its vitamins) and sometimes steal newborn foals and cows. They sometimes milk cows or mares into their mouths, although there are fewer horses that are left to graze freely in the region now. Frogs, lizards, toads, rats, hares, salt left out by shepherds for sheep to lick, and eggs stolen from chicken coops are also part of the almasti diet. Apart from foals and calves, it doesn’t seem to hunt much.

The almasti don’t seem to need much food to stay alive either. A pilfered loaf of bread will last an adult almasti three days, and it drinks rarely and little. It can live off cornfields for two or three days at a time. The almasti are “much more mobile than chimpanzees” and “wander seasonally”—they disappear from some territories for the winter months, reappearing around harvest time. They are “mainly evening, night creatures” and Mr. Panchenko says that “if you saw an almasti yesterday, you won’t see them for a year.” It hides from humans and moves “slowly, not in a hurry” The almasti seem to smell human scents, and then stay away from it. “You hear them a lot, females and juveniles avoid you a lot... Forceful adult males sometimes throw stones if you approach them.” The almasti is “very shy despite its great strength” and sometimes “treats humans friendly.” The almasti

makes a noise like a male chimpanzee, and it also whistles. Mr. Panchenko has heard its screams and whistles four times on three expeditions, and says that, when afraid, the almasti has a high-pitched scream that “sounds like a woman who saw a mouse.” Several witnesses have “heard them murmuring.”

Mr. Panchenko and his team have found almasti remains, mostly in caves, including a shin bone and “a very large, very strange collar bone,” and he has talked to locals who told him they found a “very strange skull with *picanthropus* characteristics.” The shin bone is currently at the University of Paris for DNA analysis. Some locals have promised him they will give him some alleged almasti teeth for investigation, but Mr. Panchenko feels these may turn out to be bear’s teeth. He’s come within 10 feet of a teenage almasti, who didn’t know he was there, but says his camera was out of batteries at the time. He first started hearing about the almasti on his military service in 1986, when he met Georgians who had seen it.

Mr. Panchenko’s team has heard over 2,000 stories of almasti sightings, but the animals are rare. Even in the thinly-populated Caucasus Mountains there is “one almasti to 100 or 1,000 people.”

Post-Soviet Georgia has many abandoned collective farms, and encounters with almasti often happen in these, and other abandoned building in the Caucasus, as almasti shelter in them. There’s a report of a farmer who left his horse alone in a big stable, and next morning he found that his horse had moved to the other side of the stable, and a great pile of hay near where the horse had stood had been beaten down. Some people in remote communities have come home and found that jewelry and other items have been picked up and put back again, apparently by almasti.

Young almasti look “almost like human children.” Around the late 1990s, there were only reports of older almasti, and there were fears that the species was

nearing extinction, but this threat appears to have been averted, with reports starting up again of “children and teenage” almasti. A recent German expedition by Marojan Kaufman [Marie-Jeanne Koffmann] heard almasti stories, which they realized were about almasti children seen earlier who had now grown up, and heard reports of new almasti children having being born.

The almasti also share the Caucasus with three cryptid reptiles, much to the fascination of the CFZ’s [Centre for Fortean Zoology] reptile specialist Richard Freeman, who is a former chief keeper for reptiles at Twycross Zoo. There’s a giant 30 foot-long Caucasian snake like a boa constrictor that mostly lives near water. With disastrous Soviet agricultural policies in Central Asia, this may be dying out. Mr. Panchenko feels this creature may have given rise to Central Asian lake monster stories. There are also stories of a crocodile-like monitor lizard—smaller than a Komodo dragon—and a hairy snake with hairy scales.

Mr. Panchenko emphasized that, even though an adult male almasti could be as tall as a “medium-sized bigfoot,” it was “more progressive” than such yeti-like animals, and had “burials without rituals—like chimpanzees with grass and stone,” although it often died alone, leaving its bones in caves. He’s convinced that the yeti-like almas in Mongolia also exist, with a population of about 200, but equally convinced that “in our lifetime they will all be gone.”

END

The following is an update on Panchenko provided by Dmitri Bayanov:

German Kurtov, who took part in our group’s September outing in the northern Komi Republic took a video of Giogory Panchenko as seen in the following still frame.

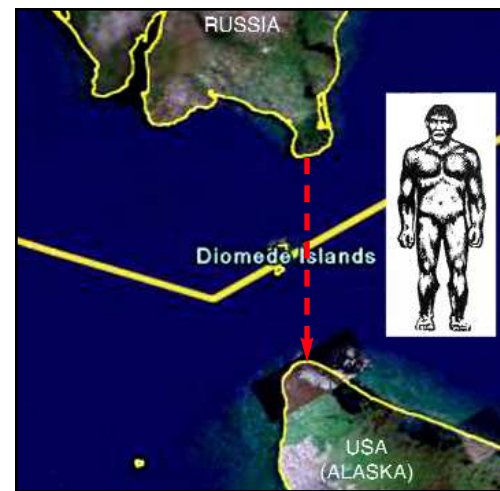


He is second from the right with other researchers talking to Anatoly Popov (right), a local man who described his father’s observation of a hominid, 2 m, 40 cm high, in January 1962. Popov himself has seen tracks. Panchenko saw an almasty in 1991 (see *In the Footsteps of the Russian Snowman*, p. 58) .

Panchenko is an erudite biologist and zoologist. He has always performed field-work in the south; this was his first trip to the north. The following is a short biography on him from Wikipedia, although not up-to-date:

Gregory Konstantinovich Panchenko is a biologist from the east Ukrainian metropolis Kharkov, where he studied at the Kharkov state university. Like many others he started his field work as a student in Dr. Marie-Jeanne Koffmann’s team. According to her, he has participated in her expeditions in the Caucasus since 1984. But according to the journalist Matt Salusbury, Panchenko first heard about Almasty during his military service in 1986 from Georgians who had seen it. He earned Koffmann’s confidence and became one of her closest young co-workers. His name first became known in the west through the publications of Dmitri Bayanov and Koffmann in 1992. According to them, he had in the Caucasus a night-time encounter with a creature, which is thought to have been an Almasty, near the village of Sarmakovo in Kabardino-Balkaria, in 1991.

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What Greigory Panchenko describes as the almasti (or almasty) is essentially the same as what people in Alaska call the “woodsman.” The width of the Bering Strait (distance to Russia), seen here, is about 51 miles. We know that about 20,000 years ago Russia and the USA (Alaska) were joined by what we call a “land bridge.” It became the “transmigration route” for all land-creatures from what is now Russia and all of Asia.

I believe it is a foregone conclusion that almasti over time followed animals and became established in Alaska. They also spread south and east and are sometimes seen in remote areas—generally confused with sasquatch.

In early times (prior to about 1925) almasti were called “wild men.” In this case they were confused with what definitely were “wild humans” (men who sort of “went back to nature.” Nevertheless, these “wild men” were not covered in hair. They just had long head hair and whiskers (moustache and beard). There are accounts in North America of hair-covered men being captured, observed or jailed for a while and then released. I will guess that some (many?) were shot. They would have been considered Natives in early hostilities with Native people. —00—

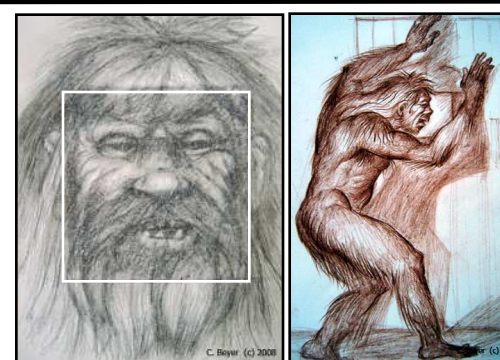
In researching the almasty, I found the drawings and caption seen here, which illustrated an article

Two drawings from Mukhamed Shomakhov regarding his own observation near the city Tyrnyauz. Left: The inner border shows the part of the head, just as he saw it in the small window. He drew the rest of the head based on descriptions from

other local witnesses. Right: The situation at the hut from the artist’s imagination. The anatomy is based on descriptions from other eye witnesses.

I am reminded of some drawings by Harvey Pratt, and here again the sasquatch in the P/G film appears to be quite different.

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In medieval times, gargoyles (frightening sculptures) were used extensively in architecture. Their main purpose was to scare off evil spirits. Somewhere along the line the, “wild man,” a hair-covered hominoid, was used for the same purpose. The “wild man” was a frightening figure, so it had the necessary qualifications.

Ordinary gargoyles, of course, were simply creatures of the imagination. The “wild man,” however, was from literature with many accounts of encounters. Naturally, its inclusion with gargoyles served to push it into the world of myth.

As superstition slowly gave way to common sense, use of gargoyles diminished. Nevertheless, they were still used

up to the last century; generally just an ugly face/head here and there.

As the sasquatch is the only entity in Native lore that comes from actual sightings of the homin, so the “wild man” is in gargoyle lore. For sure, sasquatch would have been used if it were known in Europe in early times.

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This superior painting of a hairy hominoid has the caption:

A Wildman (Wodewose) from the Genealogy of the Infante Dom Fernando of Portugal, Lisbon and Bruges, Antonio de Holanda and Simon Bening, 1530-4, Add MS 12531 f. 1.

What is immediately noticed is that the knees and elbow seen are not hair-covered; naturally hair has difficulties in these spots, as does clothing.

From what I can gather, the wording on the shield means “Salvation” (SALVS) and “Life” (VITE). This is a little odd considering the other symbology in the work.

We see a sort of cape made out of a lion; note the head on the left and large paws on the right. Its skin has been cleaned and tanned leaving the tail, which hangs down to the ground on the left side. The message here is likely that the hominoid has great courage. “The Demi-God Hercules is often depicted wearing a lion skin after killing the Lamean Lion in one of his Ten Labours,” (Mat Salusbury).

Also, we see that the hominoid is holding a mace, which is chained to his wrist. The mace implies “defense,” so my interpretation of the entire work is “Defender/Promoter of Salvation and Life.” The chain likely means total dedication to this cause.

The hominoid’s hat is made out of leaves; many hominoid depictions show a hat of this type (leaves, twigs, vines, and so forth). It implies that the hominoid is very close to nature.

On this last point, hominoids were at both ends of the scale as to its social place on the planet. In some circles it was considered a natural being close to nature and free of sin. In others it was a disciple of the devil—evil in all aspects.

Unfortunately, the Roman Church chose the latter, so it appears we needed to rid the world of this supposed menace.

The current question is, are almost any and related (different named) hominoids in Europe and beyond the remnants of the hominoid depicted? Did some of them manage to survive and live in the wilderness and fringes of rural society?

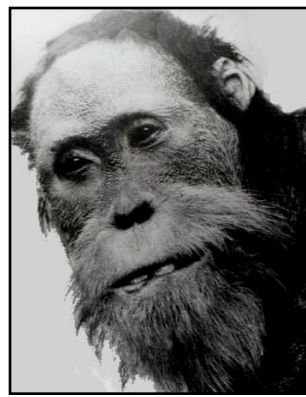
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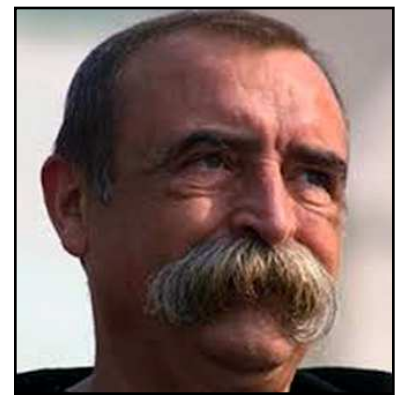
CHIMPANZEE



GORILLA



ORANGUTAN



One little oddity between the primary great apes and modern humans is that the former cannot grow a bushy moustache (males or females). This is because there are no hair follicles in what we call their muzzle (i.e., area between the nose and upper lip). Note that I used an image of a very old chimp to illustrate that age is not a factor in this species or in the gorilla and orangutan as far as I could see.

Remarkably, only two of the fourteen relict hominoid sculptures created by the Smithsonian Institution have a moustache

(See BP#81). They are the *Heidelbergensis* and *Neanderthalensis*, who are among the three most recent relict hominoids. The third, *Homo luzonensis* (the latest) does not have a sculpture yet.

This issue is likely very elementary and of no importance in anthropology—a “so what” situation. The fossils of relict hominoids would not indicate facial hair, so obviously the artists who created the sculptures were told by scientists what not to include.

The only reasonable image we have of a sasquatch is the female in the P/G

film. She obviously has hair in the area discussed, but it’s just that, not whiskers.

General artistic depictions of sasquatch show males as having just light moustache whiskers (that evidently grow so long and stop) or nothing noticeable. This tends to emphasize the great ape side of its nature. A prominent bushy moustache emphasizes the human side. The witness drawing of an almasty on page 2 might indicate more “humanness” than sasquatch.

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I was pleased to receive the following report on the Bee County, Texas, event. Things are evidently moving along very nicely in that state.

The Beeville, Texas Bigfoot Forum was a tremendous success. The city provided a municipal meeting hall as well as the audio and video equipment required for presentations, and set up display tables

and chairs. Many thanks are deserved to Michelle Trevino who is the Main Street Manager for the City of Beeville, and Baldemar Galvan who coordinates research in Bee County. While several people spoke, main speakers were Gabriel Guerrero who conducts research mainly in counties south of Bee County, and John Morley of Texas Hominid Research, ably assisted by Rick Tullos.

John's presentation included the playing of sasquatch hollers and other vocals recorded at night on digital audio recorders. Folks were amazed at the fullness and timbre of the vocals, and the response by coyotes as they chimed in on the sasquatch initiated calls. John also introduced the attendees to sasquatch language sounds recorded in north central Texas. He addressed the anatomy of the throat and mouth necessary for the production of a phonetically articulated language. This was followed by a discussion of the anatomical characteristics by which science identifies and distinguishes between human and nonhuman primates. The attendees had many questions throughout his presentation, which was attended by

some 140 people including the Mayor of Beeville, and many surrounding land owners.

The newspaper followed up on Monday with an article which recapped the forum's events. During that week many folks called the Beeville County coordinator and researcher Baldemar Galvan to ask when another such event would be scheduled.

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Many thanks to the Lacey Museum!

My sasquatch revealed exhibit at the Lacey Museum, Washington State, ended on September 28, 2019. It was certainly a great event. The displays and general coordination were superior. The publicity was the best I have seen with now nine museum exhibits. Attendance was very high.

My thanks are extended to the Lacey Museum staff and to the City of Lacey for hosting my exhibit.

Christopher L. Murphy