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## The Footprints of Dragons

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Almost all our early ancestors believed the earth was inhabited, especially in unknown regions, by dragons. Where did they get such an idea? Did it stem from a universal human imagination? An inherited need or instinct? An inherited subconscious memory of dinosaurs? All these suggestions have been made, and taken seriously by groups of people. I believe dragons are the reflection, sometimes embellished through retelling but mostly historical, of actual physical encounters of human beings with dinosaurs.

Francis Schaeffer, philosopher-theologian, has written, "I am not at all convinced it has been proven that the dinosaurs became extinct prior to the advent of man. I believe there is much evidence, ancient and modern, to indicate that dinosaurs and humankind existed on earth contemporaneously, and that human beings, while they probably lived in different regions than dinosaurs for the most part, did on many occasions encounter the sometimes huge and fearsome creatures. The memories of these encounters were so vivid and deep that they were passed down in a multitude of cultures as legends, painted on cave walls, represented in pottery, and written of in literature.

### **Etymology of "dragon"**

The word "dragon," according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1966), is derived from the Old French, which in turn was derived from the Latin *dracon* (serpent), which in turn was derived from the Greek *Spakov* (serpent), from the Greek aorist verb, *Spakelv* (to see clearly). It is related to many other ancient words related to sight, such as Sanskrit *darc* (see), Avestic *darstis* (sight), Old Irish *derc* (eye), Old English *torht*, Old Saxon *torht* and Old High German *zoraht*, all meaning clear, or bright. The roots of the word can be traced, then, back to most early Indo-European tongues. This may indicate that it is possible the immediate ancestor of the word was a part of the original hypothetical Indo-

European tongue which may have been a part of the vocabulary of Japheth's descendants, soon after the Flood and the dispersion from Babel.

*The Oxford English Dictionary* points out that Spakelv is derived from the Greek stem Spak meaning strong. The connection with dragons is obvious. According to the OED, the word was first used in English about 1220 A.D. It was used in English versions of the Bible from 1340 on.

### **Ubiquitous dragons**

A modern book, *The Greatest Monsters in the World*, (1975), contains a chapter called "Dragons Everywhere." This title is accurate, because ancient belief in dragons appears to have been nearly universal, as far as we can determine from prehistoric art, legend, and the world's most ancient writings.

### **Dragons in Ancient Art**

In art, dragons are a motif used in ancient pottery. The motif appears as bowl decorations in China as late as 202 A.D.

In Anne Ross's book, *Pagan Celtic Britain*, is a picture of a pot motif from the ancient Urnfield culture which blossomed in Europe prior to 500 B.C. The Bali portray a dragon in their animal mask of Barong, a good spirit which is central in their ritual dramatic presentations.

Perhaps the earliest evidence, however, is found in a prehistoric cave at La Baume, Latrone, France. Discovered in 1940 by Siegfried Giedion, some scientists have dated the cave at 20,000 years ago (I do not accept such ancient dates). Peter Costello writes, "dominating the whole scene is a serpent over three metres in length." As Costello notes, this picture of a dragon-like creature "appeared at the very dawn of art," whatever its exact date.

At Lydney Park on the banks of Severn in Gloucestershire, England, a mosaic floor of Romano-Celtic origin has been excavated. It appears to be a temple associated with the river cult of Nodens, "the cloud maker." Prominent in the mosaic are sea monsters that may well be considered dragons.

### **Dragons in Ancient Literature**

In literature, dragons are certainly a virtually universal ancient motif. Dragons are found in the early literature of the English, Irish, Danish, Norse, Scandinavians, Germans, Greeks, Romans, Egyptians and Babylonians. Among the American Indians, legends of dragons flourished among the Crees, Algonquins, Onondagas, Ojibways, Hurons, Chinooks, Shoshones, and Alaskan Eskimos.

One of the most famous Danish dragon tales is from "Sigurd of the Volsungs" and concerns "*The Slaying of Fafnir*." Sigurd, the hero of the epic, is afraid of Fafnir the dragon because his tracks seem great. This surely would have been true of the large dinosaurs, whether the footprints themselves, or the sound of their approach were being considered. Sigurd hides in a pit, and when the dragon crawls to the water, he strikes up into its heart. Again, if a man were to slay a large dinosaur, this would be an intelligent way to do it, for one would be out of the way of the creature's powerful tail and sharp, meat-rending teeth. Probably the head, neck and heart were the only truly vulnerable areas on the huge body. Most dinosaurs were basically water creatures. Therefore, everything in this scene is totally realistic, and makes good dinosaur-hunting strategy.

Sigurd is afraid he will drown in the dragon's blood, which may be another indication as to the size of the creature. If the dragon had fallen over the mouth of the pit, Sigurd's drowning in its blood would have been a distinct possibility.

As the dragon approaches, it blows poison before it. The dragon talks to Sigurd. In the talking we undoubtedly have some embellishment, but this is not surprising in an early folk tale that was passed down for uncounted generations. Sigurd's friend, Regin, cuts out the dragon's heart, and asks Sigurd to roast it and serve it to him. When Regin touches the dragon's blood to his tongue, he understands the speech of birds. Here again we probably have an embellishment, perhaps associating dragons in a symbolic way with wisdom, a frequent association in early literature.

Both the dragon in this early Danish epic and the dragon in the Old English epic, *Beowulf*, guard a treasure. We can only speculate as to the origin of this idea. It's possible that a dinosaur did in fact make off with some loot, or it's possible that the abode of dinosaurs was so unapproachable that ancient peoples imagined their dens to be loaded with treasures. Did the two dragons come from the same early legend? We do not know.

The unnamed dragon in *Beowulf* also vomits flames. It is fifty feet long, as measured after its death. As with Fafnir, "earth dwellers much dread him." He is a night creature, associated with evil, and described as "smooth" and "hateful."

### **Dragons in Legend and Folklore**

Greek heroes who are supposed to have slain dragons are Hercules, Apollo, and Perseus. Indeed, the World Book Encyclopedia (1973) says "every country had them in its mythology." In Norse mythology, a Great Ash Tree, Yggdrasil, which was thought to support the whole universe, had three immense roots. One extended into the region of death, Niflheim and the dragon Nidhogg perpetually gnawed at the root of the tree. This precarious situation, which seems to place the whole universe at Nidhogg's mercy, perhaps shows the conscious or subconscious deeply rooted fear of the proto-Norse for dinosaurs, those terrible lizards. If the fearsome creatures were threatening the ancestors of the Norse peoples, one can easily see how such a myth could have developed.

The Egyptians wrote of the dragon Apophis, enemy of the sun god Re. The Babylonians recorded their belief in the monster Tiamat. The Norse people wrote of Lindwurm, guardian of the treasure of Rheingold, who was killed by the hero Siegfried. The Chinese wrote of dragons in their ancient book, I Ching, associating the creatures with power, fertility, and well being. They also used dragons in early art, ancient pottery, folk pageantry and dances as a motif. The Aztecs' plumed serpent may have represented a hybrid in their thought between a dragon and another creature. The pottery of ancient Nazca culture of Peru shows a cannibal monster much like a dragon.

In British Columbia, Lake Sashwap is believed to be home to the dragon Ta Zam-A, and Lake Cowichan to Tshingquaw. In Ontario, Lake Meminisha is the reputed home of a fish-like serpent feared by the Cree Indians. Angoub is the legendary Huron dragon, Hiachuckaluck the dragon believed in by the Chinooks of British Columbia.

Dragons are so widely accepted a part of Irish folklore that Robert Lloyd Praeger, naturalist, says they are "an accepted part of Irish zoology." Dr. P.W. Joyce, historian, in his book on Irish place-names, says, "legends of aquatic monsters are very ancient among the Irish people" and shows that many Irish place names resulted from a belief in these dragons.

### *Interpretations*

Many theories have been set forth proposing to explain the virtually universal belief in dragons among ancient peoples. Some have seen dragons as a product of the human imagination, resulting from fear of the unknown. It has been pointed out that as late as 1600 A.D., maps were decorated about the borders of unknown regions with drawings of dragon-like monsters. Yet it is hard to imagine how such widely separated people groups all imagined virtually the same thing, if that imagined entity had no basis in reality or in their experience.

In my undergraduate study of literature, one frequent interpretation of archetypes in literature was that people had a universal need to believe in these things, that the human subconscious understood at some deep level the same set of symbols, perhaps gained through their common (supposed) evolutionary ancestry. The most frequent modern interpretation given to myths and archetypes is that they are subconsciously symbolic. One wonders, however, why it is only humankind that has left this constant, ancient record of dealings with dragons, and how such a memory could have lived through millions of years of evolution and changes into entirely different kinds of animals.

For these reasons, even many secular authors have come almost, but not quite, to the conclusion that early people encountered dinosaurs, and passed down the memory of these encounters in tales of dragons. Peter Costello, who researched Lake Monster legends and alleged sightings in considerable depth, wrote, "...as we go through the early accounts of Irish lake monsters we shall find that there is often only a superficial covering of fancy...real animals are clearly behind some of the stories."

*The World Book Encyclopedia* (1973) notes "the dragons of legend are strangely like actual creatures that have lived in the past. They are much like the giant reptiles which inhabited the earth long before man is supposed to have appeared on earth."

The writer's use of the phrase "is supposed to have appeared" shows that he recognized the problem. Man was not supposed to have appeared until much later, but it surely seems that man did in fact see dinosaurs, drawing pictures and writing about what he saw. How could he have written about something that lay buried deep within the earth, having died out millions of years earlier?

Peter Costello presents the same problem. "The plesiosaur theory," he writes, "which appeared early on, still has many supporters....but again the difficulties, whether it could have survived for sixty million years undetected...are very great."

Daniel Cohen, author of *The Greatest Monsters in the World*, also says that there is a "sensational possibility" that the dragon legend originated with the dinosaurs, observing that:

no creatures that ever lived looked more like dragons than dinosaurs...there is a problem with this theory. The problem is time. As far as we know, all the dinosaurs died out over 70 million years ago. That long ago, there were no people on earth. So who could remember the dinosaurs?

Cohen says that "some early discoverers of dinosaur bones called them 'dragon bones'." But apparently because the time and evolutionary development problems are so great in the minds of those who have accepted this model of origins, Cohen boldly asserts that "scientists today no longer identify dinosaurs with dragons."

The obvious conclusion is that except for their devotion to evolutionary theory, identification of dinosaurs with dragons would be the logical interpretation of the evidence.

Only two years after the publication of *Greatest Monsters*, however, Carl Sagan, a renowned astronomer and popularizer of the atheistic evolutionary interpretation of science, published *The Dragons of Eden*, which in spite of the time and evolutionary development problems asks, "Could there have been man-like creatures who actually encountered Tyrannosaurus Rex?" Sagan asserts, "One way or another, there were dragons in Eden." Outspokenly an evolutionist, Sagan's book is subtitled, "Speculations on the Evolution of Human Intelligence." He does not, of course, view Eden in the classical Christian or Biblical sense of the word. By "Eden," he means an emerging humanity's dawning awareness of their existence. And he doesn't say human beings encountered Rex, but "man-like creatures." But this is still quite a step in the thinking of those tied to their evolutionary time scale.

### **Dragons in the Bible**

For the Bible-believing creationist, of course, no time or evolutionary problems exist, and the facts of ancient literature and prehistoric art square very nicely with the Scriptural

account. According to Genesis 1:21-23, water animals were created on the fifth day; according to Genesis 1:24-25, land animals, as well as man and woman, were created on the sixth day. Thus, according to the Bible all animals were created at approximately the same time. There were no long ages when man was not present and when dinosaurs ruled the earth. The *Authorized Version* utilizes the word "dragon" sixteen times, all in the Old Testament, rendering two Hebrew words which mean "sea or land monster."

But perhaps even more graphic are some Biblical references which use other names for the creatures but which clearly describe dinosaurs. In Job 40:15ff, for example, Behemoth is described: "Is strength is in his loins, and his force is in the navel of his belly" (40:16). Behemoth was a huge creature, and reading of it, one schooled in early literature can scarcely help but think of Fafnir, the dragon of early Danish fame. Behemoth, we read, moved his tail like a cedar. A tail as huge and powerful as a cedar tree? What animal can that possibly describe but a dinosaur? "His bones are as strong pieces of brass; his bones are like bars of iron" we read (40:18), perhaps recalling Sigurd, trembling because of the strength of the dragon Fafnir. When the author of Job writes "he that made him can make his sword to approach unto him," can the writer mean that only God is normally able to bring about the death of such a powerful creature? Again, I mentally envision Sigurd hiding in the pit, waiting for just the right moment to strike at one of the few places the dragon was vulnerable. Behemoth is a water creature, for "he lieth under the shady trees, in the covert of the reed, and fens...the willows of the brook compass him about" (40:22). This creature has a huge thirst, for "he drinketh up a river" (40:23). What animal other than a dinosaur can be described like this?

In the next chapter of Job, we read of another great creature, Leviathan. As with Behemoth, the record tells of God describing these creatures, and implies that Job was familiar with them. God is reminding Job of the great difficulty in catching a creature like Leviathan. God had created Leviathan, for He declares, "whatsoever is under the whole heaven is mine" (41:11). Leviathan has terrible teeth and scales or a strong, protective covering, typical of many dinosaurs. Do you see Sigurd trembling before Fafnir when you read, "When he (Leviathan) raiseth himself up, the mighty are afraid" (41:25)? Job is usually considered to be one of the oldest of the Bible books, possibly written when ice covered large parts of Europe and North America shortly after the Great Flood. Many Bible scholars feel that some dinosaurs may have survived the Flood, being water creatures, but that due to severe climactic changes, they died out within a few generations after the Flood. If these small-brained creatures were experiencing hardships to which they were unaccustomed and ill-adapted, one can easily understand why a tradition of monstrous, fearsome dragons is recorded in virtually all early western cultures, which would have developed during or shortly following the time of Job.

The Bible presents this time in history as a time of dispersion (Gen 10,11). People groups were moving out away from Ararat, where their fathers had landed after the Flood, out away from Babel, where they had congregated. They were venturing into the new lands that were to become their homes. The whole earth was unknown to them. At the same time, great climatic changes may have caused the dinosaurs to have been uncharacteristically hostile.

It is true that eastern traditions have not viewed the dragon as fearsome and evil, as have western cultures. We can only speculate as to the reason, but it is possible that the eastward migrating people groups simply did not have the gruesome encounters that their western contemporaries must have experienced. If so, these eastern peoples may have told their children stories of dinosaurs as they were handed down from before the Flood, when life was ideally adapted to their existence, food was plentiful, and perhaps animals and humans did not kill one another for food (Gen. 9:3).

### **CONCLUSION**

I propose that early humanity did encounter dragons, or dinosaurs. This means that humanity did not evolve millions of years after the dinosaurs became extinct, but that the two co-existed. Each piece of evidence by itself may perhaps be explained away, as those who accept evolutionary concepts are prone to do. But the evolutionary model of history which separates humanity and dinosaurs by millions of years leaves too many unanswered questions. How could a people draw pictures of dinosaurs on ancient cave walls, if none were around to serve as models? How is it that so many ancient cultures wrote about dinosaurs (dragons), if they were unknown to early humanity? How do the early literary accounts of dragons end up being so realistic, down to the smallest details?

The evidence for the co-existence of humanity with dinosaurs is overwhelming. I have often heard it said that if evidence can be adduced from a number of different disciplines, it is strong indication to the veracity of a hypothesis. I have shown evidence from archaeology, prehistoric art, ancient literature, legend and mythology, and the Bible. This evidence leads me to the conclusion that human beings shortly after the dispersal from Babel did indeed encounter dinosaurs in the early earth, and that they drew them, wrote of them and passed on tales of them to their children. The dragons of ancient art and literature, I conclude, were in fact dinosaurs.

