

Did Dragons Walk Among Us? (Do They Still?) Part 1

Virtually every culture on earth has an oral tradition of encounters with large, strange beasts?creatures different from those we know. Were they dragons? Why don't we still have dragons among us? Or do we? Will we ever know for sure?

Part 1

What are dragons?

From the fossil record, we have a sizeable body of knowledge about huge animals that are no longer represented in the animal kingdom. Though these creatures varied greatly in terms of size, shape, diet, habitat, mode of motility, and probably every other characteristic, we collectively call all such anciently extinct species "dinosaurs."

As to what ended their presence on earth, we have only speculation, with people of differing opinions being equally adamant about their points of view. Standard evolutionary theory favors the explanation that a devastating meteorite hit the earth about 65 million years ago, causing extended darkness from dust and debris thrown into the atmosphere, thus snuffing out many life forms.

The creationist perspective, however, tends toward a much more recent time frame for the collective demise of the large ancient animals. How recent is a subject of debate, even among those who share the same basic Biblical philosophy, with "old-earth" creationists occupying something of a middle ground between the evolutionists and the "new-earth" creationists, who date the earth at somewhere around 10,000 years. These two groups agree that the death of the dinosaurs was caused by the Genesis Flood and/or the global geological and climatic changes that transpired thereafter.

Those who would like to believe that dragons really lived (and who wouldn't?) might seriously consider a possible link between dinosaurs, the Loch Ness monster, and a great flood (or the Great Flood).

Dragons around the world

Both Old and New Testaments talk about monsters?the books of Job, Psalms, Isaiah, and Revelation. Dragons appear in the Babylonian creation story; Nebuchadnezzar built the city of Babylon with carvings of dragons all over the walls, and put a dragon on his seal. Ancient Egyptians used images of dragons to protect their palaces. Both ancient Greeks and Romans had dragon mythologies, as do China and Japan, Mesopotamia and India.

Europe has an especially rich tradition of dragons. The Vikings carved dragons on their ships. Celtic kings in Britain were called "dragons." Pendragon means "chief dragon," or head of all chiefs among the ancient Britons. Scotland and France have dragon connections. Wales has the dragon as its national symbol. Britain alone has nearly 200 sites identified with dragon lore.

As a land comprised of islands, Great Britain has an obvious appeal to creatures that thrive in or near water, which may explain its particularly strong association with dragons?an association that makes sense in the Flood scenario. Several local festivals of ancient origin continue to re-enact the killing of the resident dragon. All over England are places named for dragon slayings. Dragon Hill is where St. George, patron saint of England, is said to have killed a dragon. Legend says that grass has never since grown where the dragon's blood was spilled.

North America has its share of dragons. Mexican history has Quetzalcoatl?part serpent and part beautiful bird?the god of wind, wisdom, and life. The Algonquin Indians of North America worshipped a dragon named Piasa; the Apache tribe had one called Chiricahua.

According to dragon lore, many and varied types of dragons once graced the earth. Some have two legs, some have four, some none. Some have wings. Some breathe fire, some have poisonous stingers on their tails. Some have body parts of another animal or of a human. Some have scales; some have smooth, leathery skin. They come in all colors and a range of sizes. Oral history is important here, as features like color and skin texture cannot be determined from fossil examination. These descriptions could be superimposed upon those of dinosaurs without

taxing the imagination.

Interestingly, while Western dragons are portrayed as man-eating and evil, Eastern dragons are considered good, kind, and intelligent.

How does Nessie fit in?

Much as the traditional land-based dragon, the swimming monster also enjoys a worldwide reputation. Of these, the Loch Ness monster is arguably the most famous.

Reports of Loch Ness monster sightings pretty much agree on what Nessie looks like. She (I'm going to call it "she" for simplicity's sake) is a large animal, 20-60 feet long, with a thick, rounded back and a muscular-looking tail. She has a small head with large eyes and a long neck, a little thicker than an elephant's trunk, forming a number of arches. She has elephant-like skin and two very short forelegs or flippers. Her body may have a fin as well, and is grayish-black. She is reportedly a fast swimmer.

Nessie has been spotted periodically for over 1400 years. The first recorded sighting was by St. Columba in 565 AD.

Loch Lochy, Loch Lomond, and Loch Shiel all have been sites of possible monster presence. Ireland has a lake beast they call Plasts; Wales has one called Afanc. Britain's deepest body of fresh water, Lake Morar, over 1,000 feet deep, has Morag.

Sweden has the Great Lake Monster. Russia has several lakes with long-necked creatures. A lake in Japan now claims a lake monster, as does Lake Van, a saltwater lake in southeastern Turkey.

Lake Okanagan in British Columbia is home to Ogoopogo. In the United States, Lake Champlain has Champ, Wallowa Lake in Oregon has Wally, and California-Nevada's Lake Tahoe has had a number of sightings of strange water creatures.

What Nessie et al. might be

Most arguments against Nessie being any known species of creature begin with an assumption of the evolutionary scenario. It has been suggested that Nessie might be a member of the supposedly extinct group Archaeoceti, a suborder of Cetacea, the order including whales, porpoises, and dolphins.

It is not uncommon for animals believed to have gone extinct to turn up alive and well. One example is the coelacanth, a fish of the order Crossopterygii, the order that includes a fish thought to have been the ancestor of land vertebrates. The discovery of a live coelacanth necessitated a rearrangement of the "family tree."

In addition, the animal species we have do not always fall into neat groupings. The platypus and the spiny anteater (both mammals) lay eggs. Bats (also mammals) fly. The lungfish and the mudskipper (both fish) walk, and the walking perch can live for a day without water because of a supplemental respiratory chamber that enables the fish to use air. Some snakes lay eggs, others give birth to live young, yet all are reptiles. Indeed, the basic problem with taxonomy (the classification of organisms in an ordered system) is that it presupposes a correlation between the various levels of classification and the geological time periods at which they differentiated from one another.

Nessie could be an aquatic animal like a hippo or crocodile that breathes with just her nostrils above the waterline, or an amphibian with gills, or any other unique creature.

While many descriptions of Nessie are similar, differing photographs taken of her might suggest different species of lake creatures. The presence of more than one species is not unlikely.

To be continued?.

Short note about the author

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