

The Wasgo or Sisiutl: A Cryptozoological Sea-Animal of the Pacific Northwest Coast of the Americas

MICHAEL D. SWORDS

Western Michigan University, Department of General Studies, Kalamazoo, MI 49008

Abstract—Various lines of soft evidence converge upon the tentative conclusion that an unclassified sea-animal of significant size is living, or at least recently lived, in the ocean waters of British Columbia. This animal has had several names within the various Amerindian cultures of that area, and has had a history among them for many centuries. The animal species may be identical or similar to other reported or historically pictured creatures worldwide.

Introduction

Most people easily assume that the oceans of our planet have many discoveries still hidden from us, and that many of these will be biological. Few scientists would deny the potential for the discovery of species even of very large size, or great antiquity. The coelacanth is, of course, the favorite example, but the truly giant octopus and giant squid seem two species from which we may have received tissue samples or body parts, making them "almost acceptable" even to conservative minds. We have yet to answer the mystery of the famous Japanese fishing boat catch off New Zealand, and we have a world-full of "sea-serpent" reports (Heuvelmans, 1969; Mackal, 1986; Welfare & Fairley, 1980).

This article documents pursuit of one possible sea-going crypto-beast, called by the Amerinds of the Pacific Northwest, Sisiutl, Wasgo, Sea-Wolf, and Haietlik. It is a "candidate for reality" at least equal to the more famous cryptozoological cousins (Sasquatch, Abominable Snowman, Nessy, Mokele Mbembe, Champ, Opopogo, etc.) due to the variety of pieces of soft evidence pointing to it, and the easy potential of the sea to spawn, nurture, and hide such spectacular forms.

Pacific Northwest Cultures

The native peoples of the Pacific Northwest coast are a major focus of this study in the sense that it is their culture which may best contain the experience and remembrance of this cryptozoological animal. References to what may be a nonclassified "water-beast" occur in many groups in and around the British Columbia coast (see map in Fig. 1). The peoples tend to organize

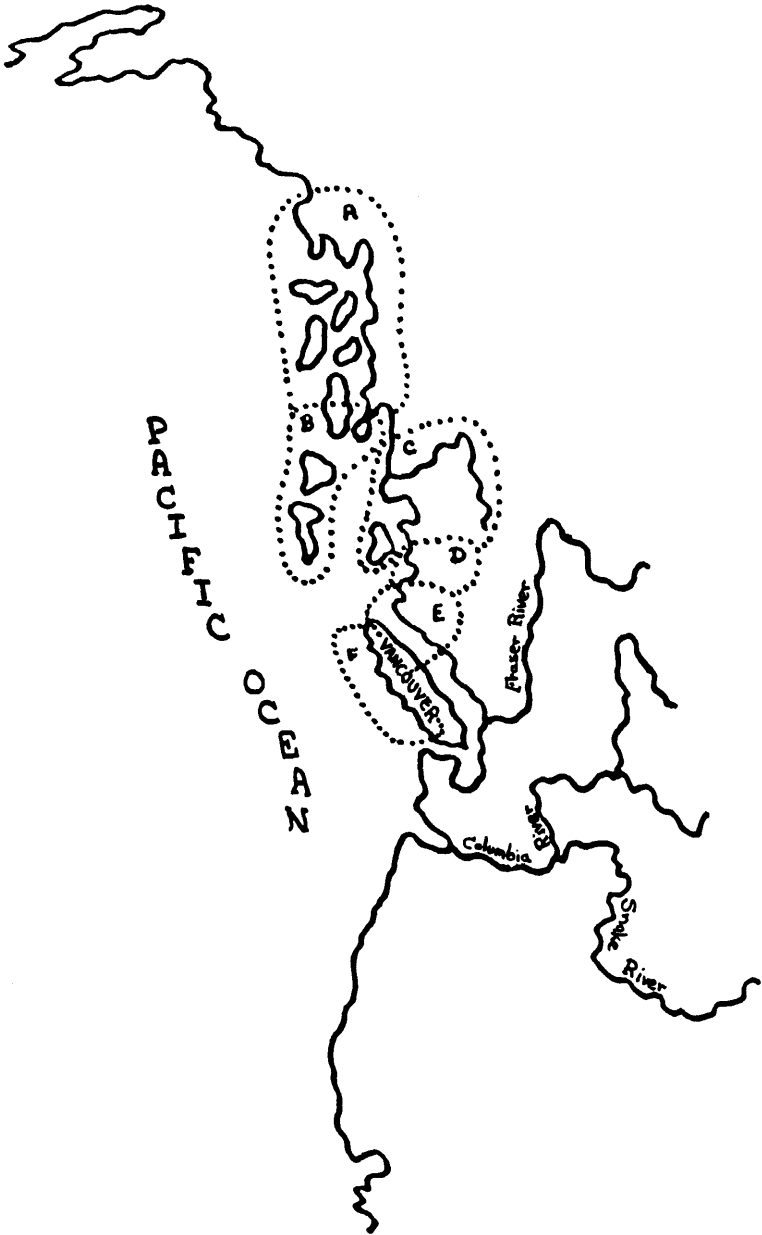


Fig. 1. Locations of Pacific Northwest Coast Indian nations with folklore pertaining to Sisiutl-Wasgo. A = Tlingit, B = Haida, C = Tsimshian, D = Kwakiutl, E = Bella Coola, F = Nootka.

their societies in similar ways, broken into what we "Western culture" historians might call clans. Each clan is designated by a "crest," a primary totem-animal which symbolically speaks to the origin of the clan and the special

privileges and powers that the animal signifies. There are many possible totem-animals used in crests. The principle animals used in crests are easily recognizable—the Raven, Eagle, and Wolf. Other common family crests feature other well-known forms—"Blackfish" (killer whale), Beaver, Frog, Salmon, Bear, Seal, Shark, Hawk, even the Octopus, along with others. The rights to use the crest figures are passed on through inheritance and mamage, and signify the rights to certain "spirit powers." These crest figures, allegedly, sometimes arise from "significant encounters" with such an animal (Boas, 1976; Drucker, 1965; Olson, 1955).

Cryptozoological interest is readily stirred when one notices, embedded almost casually amid the lists of crest animals, a name with no meaning to modern zoology. The Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago has a plaque which points this out, and seems to "summon" questions. It is entitled "Northwest Coast Crest Designs," and pictures ten of the commonest designs. They are: Hawk, Killer Whale, Dogfish Shark, Raven, Frog, Beaver, Bear, Eagle, Seal, and "Sea-Wolf." The description of this latter mystery is: "Like a wolf, with long muzzle, and narrow, pointed teeth, but with curled tail, flippers, and fins. Often shown with whales between ears, in mouth, or in curl of tail."

This sort of enigma should be the sign post for a small quest, and so one was made into the stories and artifacts of the relevant peoples. It turns out, as many readers know, that the Pacific Northwest Coast Amerindians have some of the richest legends and artistry ever produced on our planet. It is a feast of the spirit and the imagination. There are wonderful magical stories of heroism, tricksters, and monsters. In fact, there are so many "monster stories" of wildly different kinds that one begins to feel that maybe there is no use in sifting through the sands of Kwakiutl or Haida imagination to find a bit of cryptozoological gold. And, we have recently been warned not to do so.

Meurger (1988) looks at the tradition of lake serpents in this region and others with the eye of a folklorist and an anthropologist. He says:

It is inevitable that these Indian monsters—which do not have the nerve to present themselves as naked as an academic's discourse before the pale-face scientist—provoke hilarity at times, and the desire to cut down, at any cost, the great tree of indigenous beliefs. Alas! those who believe in separating 'facts' from 'superstitions' in order to find an unknown zoological creature under the tree's foliage, risk reducing the tree trunk to the dimensions of a tooth pick before they have finished. But the myth does not allow itself to be so easily done away with. For this reason, we reject the cultivated bush of the positivistic public garden, preferring to study the sequoia of the native culture. This is the choice of ecologists.

Such spirited condemnation almost makes one want to give up on cryptozoology entirely. But, with respect, let us look twice at Meurger's warning and at the "Sea-Wolf." No one with any spiritual sensitivity would think that they had somehow reduced the meaning, the richness, of a cultural legend merely by discovering a real animal upon which some small part of the legend was based. We have known ravens for centuries. Surely the raven-

trickster of the myth tales is in no way diminished by the fact of the bird's reality. And deliberate nonpursuit of the possible seems a violation of the spirit of many of these exact tales. Finally, the real animal is a wonder, at least as full of richness and meaning as any human story; there would be nothing cheapened by knowing it.

Concerning the "Sea-Wolf" itself it is true that the legends of the Haida, Kwakiutl, Nootkan, etc., are filled with "monsters." The "Sea-Wolf," however, still stands out in this author's opinion. It is often used as a totem-figure, and this is rarely, if ever, true of most of the other "unknowns" (a second exception is the "thunderbird"). It is widely pictured in artifacts, and in a relatively consistent way, given the artistic styles of the peoples. It seems to correspond to rock art drawings still viewable in these and nearby areas. And it has alleged witnesses today.

Kwakiutl and Haida artifacts abound in "Natural History" museums due to their beauty of design. One of the commonest and most striking types of artifact (canoes and canoe-like poles) consistently picture the "Sisiutl," "Sea-Wolf," or "Was-go" (see Fig. 2). The great "serpent" heads dominate both ends of the canoes, leading some to refer to it as "double-headed" (thereby, obviously mythical), but other representations, and stories, make it obvious that the canoe design is the natural expression of the canoe having Sisiutl "power" or protection, regardless of which way it is going.

What are the consistent features of the crypto-animal as represented? According to the artifacts, it is:



Fig. 2. Two examples of Kwakiutl representations of the Sisiutl-Sea-Wolf. Drawn by author from artifacts in the Chicago Field Museum of Natural History.

1. elongated;
2. sea-going;
3. horned or crested on head;
4. snout-nosed, and with large eyes;
5. mouth prominent with sharp teeth, comparable to that of a crocodile;
6. noticeable tongue;
7. possibly finned;
8. flippered, only on the forward end possibly;
9. large and powerful, perhaps more so than the killer-whale; and
10. long tailed for swimming.

The crude combination of these features (author's version) can be seen in Figure 3.

The tribal tales do not add a lot to the picture above, but some bits and pieces are interesting to note. In the classic tale of the son with the nagging mother-in-law, the badgered son kills a lake monster, the *Wasgo*, and impersonates it. The details of possible cryptozoological interest are: the *Wasgo* is aquatic, extremely powerful (mightier than the killer whale), carnivorous (lured into a trap by trout bait), toothed, tailed, and finned. The animal may have had only forelegs.

Shortly the water of the lake began to churn, and the head and finned forelegs of the Sea-Wolf, which some call the *Wasgo*, appeared near the surface. As the huge beast rose through the open trap, snapping at the bait, the waiting hunter yanked on the line, dislodging the alderwood pole, and the split cedar snapped shut on the monster, breaking its back. In spite of this injury, the Sea-Wolf snarled and pawed and thrashed.

Later in the tale the *Wasgo* is credited with "claws and fins and jaws and tail" and with "wide black eyes." (Reid & Bringham, 1984).

Another "historical tale" proceeds thus:

Going on a hunting expedition in a canoe, his man suddenly saw a frightful monster near the shore shaped like an alligator. The Indians knew all about it and described it as a long creature with huge mouth and teeth; in every other respect like a serpent. They called it Haietlik and said it was very scarce. They offered twenty sea-otter skins for a specimen for if they should have but the least piece of this animal in their boat they were sure to kill a whale, which among them is deemed one of the greatest honors. Indeed, a piece of this magic animal insures success at all times and on all occasions.

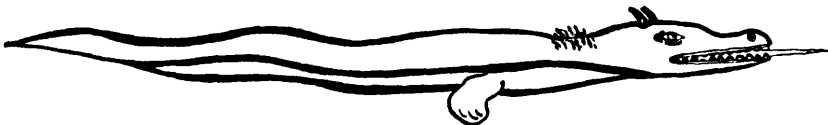


Fig. 3. Speculative conception of the Sisiutl-Wasgo based upon author's interpretation of the relevant artifacts and folklore.

A quite correlative description of the Sisiutl-Wasgo, and its empowering function painted on the Haida canoes, one would think. And, note the realism in this tale: people paying for an actual, albeit rare, animal (Hill & Hill, 1974).

Another hint of the rarity of the animal is in the Tsimshian legend of a hero fleeing from a pursuing clan of bear-men. He succeeds by turning his canoe into the fast-swimming Was-monster. When asked by the recording anthropologist what he meant by that, the "informant-storyteller" said: "The canoe was like the mouth of a crocodile. This animal existed at the time of the former people, but not now" (Boas, 1912). An unusual artifact, obviously the head of a crocodilian of some sort, appears in the Chicago Museum of Natural History under a Nootkan provenance, showing that these peoples did know of crocodilians, and knew that the Wasgo-Sisiutl *was not* this animal (Fig. 4).

This Sisiutl-Wasgo "monster," in many ways, reads more like a real (natural) than an imagined animal. In fact, the Kwakiutl people, who have a densely populated mythology of supernatural sea-monsters, specifically say that the Sisiutl is "of the earth," and not one of the myth creatures which live in the kingdom beneath the sea (Hawthorn, 1979). Other realisms, such as the woman's name which referred to the well-known sea-monster of Cousins Inlet near Ocean Falls (Olson, 1955), or the carved face of the sea-monster in honor of the Sisiutl of the Johnstone Strait near Port Neville (Boas, 1934), or the Barclay Sound sea monster from West Vancouver, so large that a full-sized canoe could fit between its claws (Hall, Blackman, & Rickard, 1981): these bits of concreteness fit the hypothesis of an actual animal. And, right up on the coast into Alaska, the Eskimos speak of the dangerous, carnivorous sea-serpent "Tirichik" or "Mauraa" (Hall, 1975), the "nikaseenithulooyee," something like an alligator, but gone from the Tanaina area in these times (Vaudorn, 1981), or the "pal-rai-yuk," drawn as with the Haida on the side of the Umiak canoes for fortune and protection. It is a crocodile-headed creature with long tongue and short horns. Carnivorous and dangerous, it lives in the waters, and was common in old times when the climate was much warmer. It has fine, thick fur (although the commentator thought that this feature may have been an addition). The analysis of the myths seemed to indicate to the commentator that the crocodilian characteristics were "very

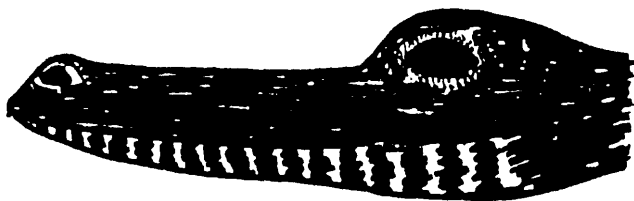


Fig. 4. Drawing by author of Nootkan Mask held in collection of the Chicago Field Museum of Natural History. Dominant coloration is pea-soup green.

remarkable" and predated contacts with modern whites. The "problem" with this tale, cryptozoologically speaking, is that "pal-rai-yuk" has an impossible physical feature: six legs. These are very odd legs: long in back, short in front, and rudimentary in the middle—more grist for the mystery mill (Nelson, 1983). For two versions of the Eskimo canoe-serpent, see Figure 5.

Despite the anatomical peculiarities of pal-rai-yuk, it is the opinion of this author that there is ample reason for cryptozoological interest here. Among a collection of small ivories at Chicago's Field Museum of Natural History is one of Tlingit provenance labeled "sea monster." Indeed, it seems a good candidate for our quarry, and it lies alongside several other artifacts, easily identified, attesting to the realistic craft skills of the people. It is pictured as aquatic, elongated, toothed, tongued, snouted, short-homed, big-eyed, fore-flipped—in fact, a perfectly good Sisiutl-Wasgo in a more zoologically credible artistic rendering than most of the wonderfully exotic artifacts of the area. As an amusing, perhaps meaningless, aside, the creature is arched, head

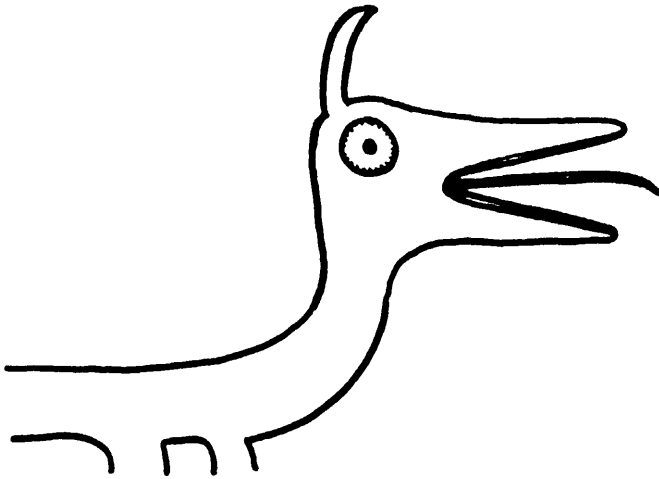


Fig. 5. Two versions of the Eskimo Umiak (canoe)guidingsea-serpent:top version from a canoe from Nunivak Island (Field Museum), and bottom, redrawn after representations in Nelson (1983).

and tail rearing, in a similar manner to Hans Egede's sea serpent of 1734 in the Atlantic arctic (see Fig. 6).

A final, certainly related, portion of evidence from our native Amerindian populations comes in the form of petroglyphs, judged by many to be quite old. Some of the rock carvings have been specifically labeled as referring to Sisiutls, Wasgos, or Haietliks by tribal descendents of the people who made them. Sometimes, as in the Kuleet Bay "rain god," they are referred to other stories. Sometimes, no one remembers what the rocks are telling us. The petroglyphs certainly do not all look the same (see Fig. 7 for a "rogue's gallery" of some of them). But they do seem to refer to an elongated, aquatic animal with some projection on the head, and a swimming tail. The glyphs support what the people say: that the animals have been in these areas for a very long time. The real question, it seems is: Are they still? (Cain, 1950; Hill & Hill, 1974; Meade, 1971).

Modern Interest

As the existence of the International Society of Cryptozoology attests, there has been much 20th century interest in the general concept of "sea serpents." In the literature, Bernard Heuvelmans' *In the Wake of the Sea-Serpents* (1968) is, of course, the definitive work, but other writers have contributed substantially (e.g., Dinsdale, 1966; C. Gould, 1989; R. Gould, 1930; Mackal, 1980; Mangiacopra, 1975–1982). Two "lake monsters" books, in particular, by Costello (1974) and Meurger (1988), have broached the subject of the present study, in part. But the most significant work scientifically has been the data (case) gathering research of LeBlond and Sibert (1973). Drs. LeBlond and Sibert of the University of British Columbia's Institute of Oceanography made a "direct eyewitness" survey of people who had felt they had observed an unusual ocean-going animal. The survey was mostly via mail with a few personal interviews. Altogether, they collected 23 eyewitness accounts.

The sightings were spread out along the northern Pacific coast from Oregon to Alaska with an understandable, undoubtedly population-related,

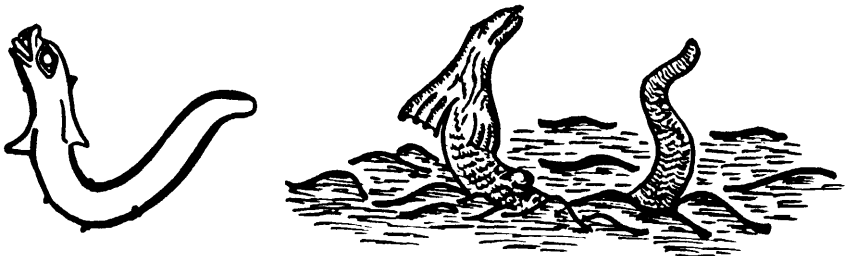


Fig. 6. Comparison of the Chicago Field Museum of Natural History's Tlingit "Sea-Monster" with Hans Egede's rearing sea-serpent of 1734. (redrawn by author).

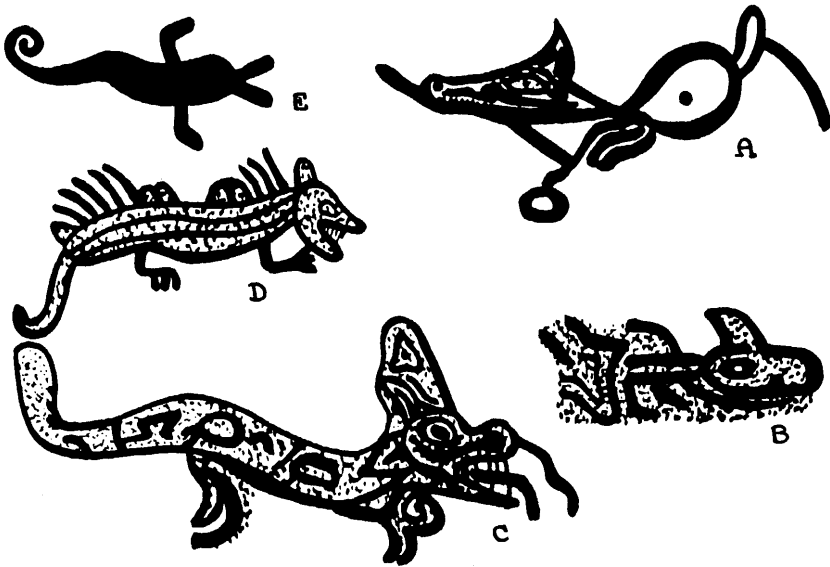


Fig. 7. Pacific Northwest petroglyphs sampling of sea-monsters: A = Kulleet Bay Rain God; B = Dogfish Bay, Vancouver; C = Nanaimo River; D = Nanaimo River; and E = McLaughlin's Canyon, Washington.

concentration around the southern tip of Vancouver Island. The relevant sightings (27) from Heuvelmans' collection were similarly plotted and compared. LeBlond and Sibert try mightily to make classificatory sense out of the disparate descriptions. The task proves almost impossible, the characters described being too sparse, too vague per case, or simply not correlating well between cases.

Heuvelmans attempted to classify the sea-serpent data in his book by physical type and geographical location. He ended up with nine classifications of which three have very few representations. Reading his tentative descriptions, and reflecting on the tribal concepts of the Sisiutl-Wasgo, the current author rates them as follows (from most numerous world cases to least):

(A) *Long-necked*: It is not impossible, but unlikely, that this category is describing the Sisiutl. The animal does not seem elongated enough, but the main disparity is its alleged small to invisible eyes. However, the animal is described, elsewhere, with a proper head and occasionally two horns. The "dog-like" head could lead to the "Sea-Wolf" image, but the teeth must be more vicious in prominence.

(B) *Mer-horse*: This is the animal that Heuvelmans locates in the British Columbian region. The description, again, partially fits and does not. The large eyes and mouth are plusses, but the prominent mane is not (unless one

credits the tufts of hair placed on some of the Sisiutl poles behind the Sea-Wolf head). There is, again, no discussion of the prominent carnivorous teeth (perhaps, sea-observers do not get close enough to encourage that display). A "maybe"; but no horns.

(C) *Many-humped*: The body of this animal could fit much of the Sisiutl description (long, tailed, single pair of flippers), but the unspectacular head (medium eyes, no horns, no mention of teeth) make evaluation even more guesswork than usual. The projecting fin just behind the head relates especially to many petroglyphs.

(D) *Super-otters*: This animal seems wholly unacceptable as a Sisiutl; no horns, small eyes, not a very ferocious appearance, unless we say that Hans Egede's sea-serpent was type of these (which Heuvelmans does).

(E) *Many-\$inned*: The nickname gives this one away as a poor candidate for Sisiutl.

(F) *Super-eels*: Also, of little chance, due to lack of appendages.

(G) Of the lesser reported classes, the "Marine Saurian" deserves mention: very long crocodilian head with large eyes and menacing teeth; pairs of flippers and a long tail. If small horns or a head crest were mentioned, one would say that this rarely described beast would be the prime candidate.

Paul LeBlond and J. R. Sibert looked at their own new data with Heuvelmans' categories in mind. They also decided that the schema was not helping them much with their animals. They ended up producing a three-part classification as follows:

1. "A creature with large eyes set laterally on a horse or camel-shaped head mounted at the end of a long neck. This animal has short dark brown fur and no mane. . . . This animal strongly resembles Heuvelmans' Mer-horse, but for the absence of the name." My evaluation: better, but again, no horns and no mention of the ferocious teeth.
2. "A similar animal but with much smaller eyes, sometimes described with horns or a mane." My evaluation: horns plus, eyes minus.
3. "A long serpentine animal, showing loops of its body above the water and swimming fast, but with much thrashing. Its head is described as sheep-like and it has a dorsal fin running along its back." My evaluation: pretty vague for the kind of details derivable from artifacts and folklore.

Once again, everything "sort of" fits, and does not. Maybe that is to be expected, given the poor quality of most of the modern witness observation versus the intense (albeit, rarely achieved) familiarity of native Amerindians who had been face-to-face with live animals and carcasses. Naturally, the latter group would be more interested in eyes, teeth, and horns, and better able to feature them in their tales, glyphs, and artifacts. If we could take LeBlond and Sibert's first category, give it their second category's horns, and make a compromise with Heuvelmans' "Marine Saurian's" head, such

might make a very good Sisiutl indeed. Alas, no obliging reporter with an equally obliging Sisiutl has done this for us recently.

A last note on reports before moving on: when LeBlond and Sibert collected their witnesses they were surprised that none of these witnesses had already made "public reports," which were subsequently collected and described by Heuvelmans. I am not. From the perspective of someone who has a little time in another field of anomalies (UFO studies), it is common knowledge there that fewer than 10% of sightings are estimated to ever be reported. These estimations come from both official formal polls and informal lecture hall canvassing. Even among sympathetic people (e.g., those who come to a UFO lecture), the large majority never report their own experience. The relevance of this, for our current topic, is that if Drs. LeBlond and Sibert were able to dredge out a few tens of willing witnesses, there are probably at least a few hundred out there. One way of mobilizing those witnesses (in UFOlogy) has been to give well-advertised lectures on the subject. If the speaker maintains a respectful, open-minded, exploring attitude during the talk, witnesses inevitably come forward. Of course, if the speaker acts in a derisive or demeaning fashion, we can forget that data forever.

What Goeth There?

In *Searching for Hidden Animals*, Mackal (1980) reviews the stories of Canadian Lake monsters, and comes up with almost precisely the same description as one derives from artifacts picturing the Sisiutl-Wasgo. My bracketed interjections occasionally interrupt Dr. Mackal's description as follows:

The animals look most like a log, elongated, serpentine, no thickened body centrally, about 12 meters (40 feet) long, although a range of smaller sizes has been reported and a few larger, up to say 20 meters (70 feet). The head tapers toward the snout and is somewhat flattened top to bottom. Comparison is most often made to the head of a horse, sheep, or alligator. Eyes are definitely reported large enough to be clearly noted. Very occasionally a pair of protuberances referred to as "ears" or "horns" have been noted. Nostrils have not been reported as such [Sisiutl definitely has them], but "blowing" has been observed, although rarely.

The skin is described as dark green to green black or brown to black and dark brown [these colors are prominent in Kwakiutl artifacts of the Sisiutl]. Occasionally, the color is given as gray to blue-black or even a golden brown. Most often the skin is smooth with no scales, although part of the body must possess a few plates, scales, or similar structures observed by close-up viewers and compared to the lateral scutes of sturgeon [one wonders if this feature is a contamination from misinterpreted large lake sturgeon encounters, a notorious source of bogus lake monster reports]. Most of the back is smooth, although a portion is saw-toothed, ragged-edged, or serrated. Sparse hair or hair-bristle structures are reported around the head, and in a few cases, a mane or comb-like structure has been observed at the back of the neck. The food appears to be fish, since a number of people have observed behavior that can best be attributed to an active fish predator.

Almost all of which is a very fitting description of our British Columbian sea-monster. Dr. Mackel says that his conception grows from 200 remarkably repetitive accounts.

At that point in his book, he delivers his hypothesis for the nature of the lake monsters: "a small population of primitive whales," archeoceti, *Basilosaurus cetoides*, or near cousin. Since these "basilosaurus" or "zeuglodons" have supposedly been extinct for several million years, this would be a fine cryptozoological triumph indeed. I, personally, have no objection to the concept that the zeuglodons, or some very similar elongated mammalian carnivores represent an outstanding candidate for Sisiutl-Wasgo (see Fig. 8 for a possible rendition of a zeuglodon). The folklore and artifact evidence cannot prove anything, of course, but is certainly consistent with such a view. Whether or not ocean-going animals of this size can swim (almost) unnoticed deep into Canadian lakes, in order that they may also be the legendary lake monsters, I'll leave for further "on-the-ground" research. Concerning the objections about *Basilosaurus* being extinct, however, one really needs to face up to a hushed truth about our fossil record: it is a horribly fragmentary and inadequate basis on which to be making absolutist declarations. Millions of years in certain locations and whole species never make it into our petrified boneyards for analysis. Some species are known only by *tracks* they have made. How many more left even less? And how many known animals persisted *far* longer than we can measure? The proper comment might be: the zeuglodons, as far as we can guess on the fragments of data we have currently, were extinct several million years ago.

A minor curiosity, for what it is worth: while musing over another interesting, mysterious place, it seems that this author may have run into the Sisiutl unexpectedly. The place was the Plain of Nazca, and the fascinating drawings thereon. Being no Von Danikenite, but interested in this wonder nevertheless, I sought information at the nearby Museum of Ica for what the drawings were all about. The director pointed out Nazca culture pottery

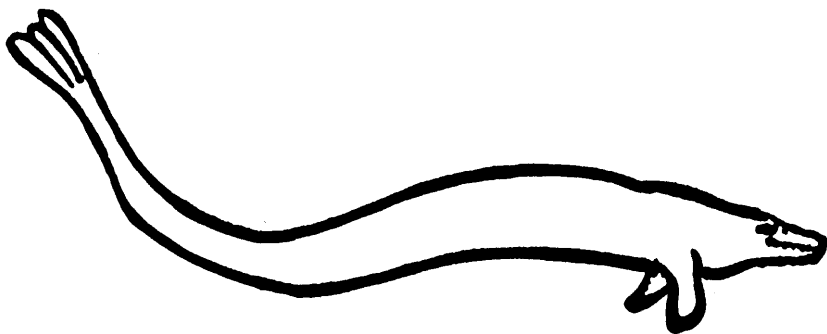


Fig. 8. Author's rendition of a Zeuglodon or Basilosaur.

displaying the common figures of both the pots and the plain. There were the spiders, geese, hummingbirds, and . . . the Sisiutl? There, on the pottery, was the rearing sea-monster with large eyes, sharp teeth, horns, elongated body with swimming tail, and only forelimb paws. And, on the Plain itself, albeit less distinctly, the same animal writ large (Fig. 9). The relevant cultural period for the pottery, and the likely dating for the drawings on the Plain, is c. 200 B.C. to 400 A.D. (Hawkins, 1974). The greatest expert on the Plain felt that the major drawings were known animals which had achieved an astrolo-

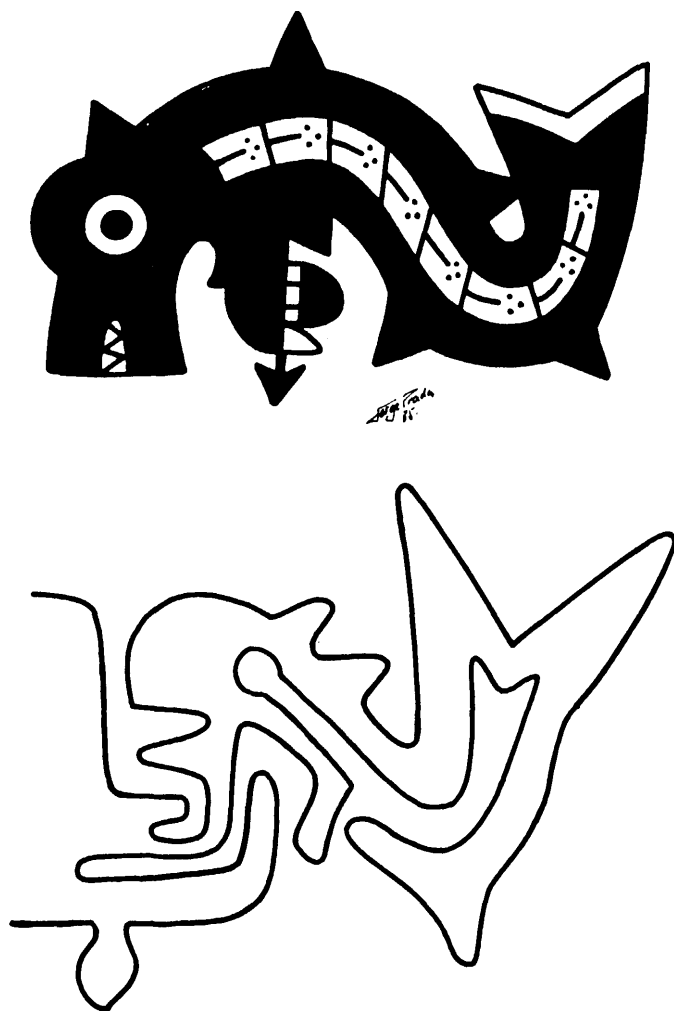


Fig. 9. Comparison of Nazca pottery motif of "Whale-Sea-Monster" (top) with Nazca Plain drawing of the "Whale" by local Ica museum artist (author's collection).

gical-calenderic status with the peoples of the area (Reiche, 1976). The ring-tailed monkey represented both the Big Dipper and the beginnings of the rainy season, for example. Our "Sisiutl" drawing is spoken of thus:

A small figure, the line of its contours continuing inside, as is the case in the fish. . . . But for its ears, the figure could represent a whale. . . . Its direction, as seen from its centre, pointed to the setting sun on December 21st, which is the summer solstice on the Southern hemisphere.

Perhaps it is possible that our southern ancestors also knew of the great "primitive whale" or Sisiutl, and they, fishermen also like the Haida and Kwakiutl, encountered it chasing the migrating shoals at sea. As an amusing aside, as we talked of Nazca, the director and I were stepping around several messy piles of recently excavated bones which had been laid inconveniently on the Museum floor: the bones of zeuglodons.

With that bit of unscientific romance to inspire us, let us take a couple of more ancillary excursions into our subject, and then let the Sisiutl slide once more into the mysterious depths. Back to Mesopotamia briefly, to the beginnings perhaps of the sea-serpent/dragon concept we go. One of if not *the* earliest representation of the great water-serpent (in Mesopotamian legend the goddess Tiamat) appears on an Assyrian cylinder seal held in the British museum (Brookesmith, 1984; Smith, 1919) (Fig. 10). The characteristics of the beast: elongated, aquatic (Tiamat is goddess of the ocean), large eyes, large mouth, horns, and *only forelimbs* like our friends the zeuglodons, and perhaps the Sisiutls. In fact, dragons in lore from the beginning only have two feet and kill with their powerful tails (Benton, 1990). "Dragons" meant "serpents" in ancient times, and in Vergil, small household snakes were called "dracontuli," or little dragons.

Lastly, via a communication from Professor Glanville Price to Dr. LeBlond to myself (1987):

the Picts have a special artistry which expresses itself in symbol-stones. Amid the interesting designs, a common motif is of the "Pictish Beast" [Fig. 11]. This wonder-

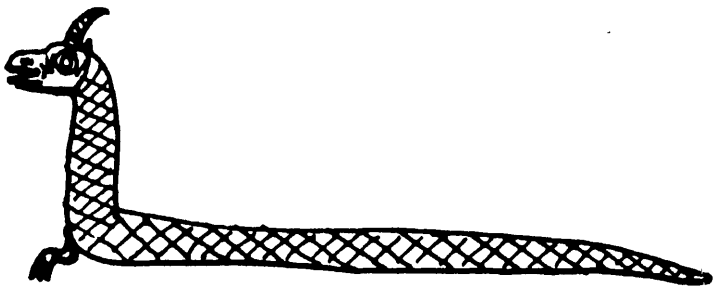


Fig. 10. Drawing of the figure of the Ocean goddess, Tiamat, from an Assyrian cylinder seal, as pictured in Brookesmith (1984).



Fig. 11. Pictish artistic motif of the so-called "Pictish Beast," courtesy of Prof. Glanville Price.

ful creature is sometimes referred to as "swimming" and has the following qualities: elongated, scroll-like "paddles" instead of digitated hands or feet, long neck and head, big mouth, big eyes, a hint of a horn, and perhaps a mane. . . .

Perhaps a relative of our water-dragon Sisiutl friends? Professor Price thinks that the beast is aquatic, and notes that it was the Picts to whom St. Columba was going when "something" rose out of the river Ness, "way back when" at the start of this Quixotic quest.

Mentions could be made of many other reported sea creatures, such as Chessie (the serpentine "monster" of Chesapeake Bay on the Atlantic coast), Champ of Lake Champlain, and Ogoopogo of Lake Okanagan, but in the interest of preserving space in the journal and time in this author's life, I will refer the avid reader to the works of the likes of Messrs. Mangiacopra (1976–1982), Mackal et al. (1980), and to our fine sister journal, *Cryptozoology*, edited by Richard Greenwell. In my estimation, the *details* of possible animal characteristics derivable from the Pacific Northwest Coast resources exceed these Atlantic ocean and lake monster materials, and I have chosen to focus my attention in the more limited geographical area.

Conclusion

An adventurous trek through folklore, artifacts, petroglyphs, and anecdotal sightings proves nothing, of course. But it remains intriguing how so many lines of soft evidence can point in the same general direction. There is no "best" evidence here. It is all a feeling for the realness of the described animal versus the unnaturalness of many of the other beings inhabiting the same cultural heritages. And it is a feeling about something feasible, some-

thing which would not dramatically violate any current deep-rooted scientific wisdom: a large ocean-going animal of carnivorous intent, which has interacted with fishermen populations along the coasts of our continents for centuries; always rare, always spectacular, it achieved mythic proportions before being pushed or frightened away by the more powerful technologies of modern man. Perhaps it is still there, as reporters occasionally maintain, or perhaps it finally has gone extinct through the pressures we have placed upon it. Either way, or never at all, there seem to be enough reasons to maintain a curious attitude about our Sisiutl, and even cast an open-minded eye upon the sea in hopes of seeing something wonderful.

References

- Benton, J. R. (1990). Antique antecedents of medieval monsters. Presented at *25th International Congress on Medieval Studies*, May 10–13, Kalamazoo, MI.
- Boas, F. (1912). *Tsimshian texts*. Leyden: E. J. Brill.
- Boas, F. (1934). *Geographical names of the Kwakiutl Indians*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Boas, F. (1976). *Kwakiutl culture*. Millwood, NY: Kraus.
- Brookesmith, P. (1984). *Legends of the Lost*. London: Orbis.
- Cain, H. T. (1950). *Petroglyphs of Central Washington*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press.
- Costello, P. (1974). In *Search of Lake Monsters*. New York: Berkley.
- Dinsdale, T. (1966). *The Leviathans*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Drucker, P. (1965). *Cultures of the North Pacific Coast*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Gould, C. (1989). *Mythical monsters*. New York: Crescent.
- Gould, R. (1934). *The Loch Ness monster and others*. London: Geoffrey Bles.
- Hall, E. T. (1975). *The Eskimo storyteller*. Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee.
- Hawkins, G. (1974). Prehistoric Desert Markings in Peru. In P. H. Oehser (ed.), *National Geographic Society Research Reports* (pp. 117–144), 1967 Projects. Washington, DC: National Geographic Society.
- Hawthorn, A. (1979). *Kwakiutl Art*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington.
- Heuvelmans, B. (1969). *In the Wake of the Sea Serpents*. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Hill, B., & Hill, R. (1974). *Indian petroglyphs of the Pacific Northwest*. Saanichton, British Columbia: Hancock House.
- LeBlond, P., & Sibert, J. (1973). *Observations of large unidentified marine animals in British Columbia and adjacent waters, manuscript report no. 28*. Vancouver: Institute of Oceanography, University of British Columbia.
- Mackal, R. (1980). *Searching for hidden animals*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Mackal, R. (1986). Biochemical analysis of preserved *Octopus giganteus* tissue. *Cryptozoology*, 5, 55–62.
- Mangiocopa, G. (1976–77). The great unknowns of the 19th Century, part 1: *Sea and Shore, Winter 1976–77*: 201–205, 228; part 2: *Sea and Shore, Spring 1977*: 17–24, 58; part 3: *Sea and Shore, Summer 1977*: 95–102, 104; part 4: *Sea and Shore, Fall 1977*: 175–178.
- Mangiocopa, G. (1978). Lake Champlain: America's Loch Ness, part 1. *Sea and Shore, Spring 1978*: 21–26; part 2: *Sea and Shore, Summer 1978*: 89–92.
- Mangiocopa, G. (1980). The great unknowns of the 20th Century, part 1: *Sea and Shore, Spring 1980*: 13–20; part 2: *Sea and Shore, Summer 1980*: 123–127, part 3: *Sea and Shore, Fall 1980*: 193–196; part 4: *Sea and Shore, Winter 1980*: 259–261.
- Mangiocopa, G. (1982). Sharlie: a preliminary report of possible large animals in the Payette Lakes of Idaho. *Sea and Shore*, 12(1): 43–46.

- Mangiacoira, G. (1982). The two monsters of Flathead Lake, Montana. *Sea and Shore*, 12(2): 93-96, 114.
- Mangiacoira, G. (1982). Canada's La Bete du Lac: The beast of Lake Pohenegamook. *Sea and Shore*, 12(3): 138-140, 181.
- Meade, E. (1971). *Indian rock carvings of the Pacific Northwest*. Sidney, British Columbia: Gray's Publishing.
- Meurger, M. (1988). *Lake monster traditions*. London: Fortean Tomes.
- Nelson, E. (1983). *The Eskimos about the Bering Strait*. Washington DC: Smithsonian.
- Olson, R. (1955). *Notes on the Bella Bella Kwakiuitl*. *Anthropological Records*. Berkeley, CA: University of California.
- Price, G. (1987). Personal communication.
- Reiche, M. (1976). *Mystery on the desert*. Stuttgart: Heinrich Fink.
- Reid, B., & Bringhurst, R. (1984). *The raven steals the light*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington.
- Smith, G. E. (1919). *The evolution of the dragon*. Manchester, UK: University Press.
- Vaudorn, G. (1981). *Tanaina tales from Alaska*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma.
- Welfare, S., & Fairley, J. (1980). *Arthur C. Clarke's mysterious world*. New York: A and W Publishers.