

# Hook-swinging giants and other fantastic themes in Jiwere-Baxoje folktales\*

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**Abstract:** This paper will examine fantastic themes within a corpus of traditional Jiwere-Baxoje narratives collected in the late 19th and 20th centuries, by linguists and folklorists such as James Owen Dorsey, Alanson Skinner, Gordon Marsh, and William Whitman. The first step will be developing an inventory of the many different beings, some of whom can be seen as magical in the positive sense, while others are truly terrifying. Next, the link between narratives and material culture is demonstrated through specific examples of historic and pre-contact artifacts. I will search for similar themes in other Siouan-speaking peoples' narratives, especially in Hochunk and Dhegiha traditions, then briefly consider how the Jiwere-Baxoje elements relate to the North American Motif Index within Stith [Thompson's](#) *Tales of the North American Indians* (1966).

**Keywords:** Baxoje-Jiwere, folklore, motif index, rock art

## 1. Introduction

By picking this topic, let me confess that I was a child who was scared of the dark—of monsters, and other things that might go bump in the night! Thus, I was always fascinated by folktales from around the world, full of marvelous and terrible creatures. These beings are part of the oral traditions of the Siouan and Caddoan peoples also. Because as a scholar, I am most familiar with the Jiwere-speaking groups, the Otoe-Missouria and Ioway tribes, they will be the main focus for this paper.

Because of time constraints, this preliminary inventory will omit positive supernatural beings, in part because, while they are very powerful, they generally tend to be benevolent to humans, so they do not fit with more ambiguous or downright frightening beings. Likewise, the general category of ghosts is excluded for time's sake.

## 2. Strange humans and parts of humans that are dangerous

### 2.1. Scalping survivor

Because scalping was not always fatal, there is the potential for someone to survive the trauma and heal. In the Ioway-Otoe-Missouria language (IOM) this person was known as a *ruwéthereje*

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\*Thanks especially to Lance Foster, Northern Ioway artist and THPO, for permission to reproduce his original art.

(Archaic) ‘scalped man (who survived)’. The individual was believed to be malevolent because of what he had been through. He had to live alone in remote areas (because of the disfigurement), and had the special ability to talk with animals, as well as to exert ill powers (GoodTracks 2008).<sup>1</sup>

For example, in Alanson Skinner’s collection recorded during the early 20th century, Ioway tale #12 “The Scalped Man” *Luwhê Therêdje*, a culture hero meets the survivor, who promises help against the horned underwater panthers if he will retrieve his scalp from the villagers across the river who still have it. (Whenever the village chief’s son claims a headache, he is allowed to wear the Survivor’s scalp for relief from pain!) So, our Hero flays the chief’s son, using the skin covering to impersonate him, and thereby he is able to succeed in his quest to help Survivor. The Hero was instructed to wet the scalp and ‘throw it’ on Survivor’s head. It works—Survivor’s head is restored (Skinner 1925:475).

## 2.2. (Decapitated) heads<sup>2</sup>

Please note that the only version of this motif collected by Skinner is in English, and there is no character name for “Rolling Heads” given.<sup>3</sup> They take the name or kinship term of their namesake in life, or simply are called ‘the rolling head/skull’. Presumably the Baxoje original would have included a variant of one of these terms: *wanaxi pa* ‘spirit head’, *pa wahu* ‘head bone’.<sup>4</sup>

In the IOM corpus, the body part is freshly separated from the rest of its whole, while the Omaha had a version in which it was a skull. In both instances, the head retains the ability to talk, hunt and kill game. Often it requests that a female relative carry it hidden under her belted skirt. While initially it may be helpful, the humans fear its power, and eventually try to escape from it. In anger, the skull pursues the human(s) by rolling very quickly, tracking them, and killing the humans in the end. The comparative folklore index includes this element as a common one in Native North America. Thompson Motif R261 *Pursuit by rolling head Note # 238a* occurs in the Omaha tale mentioned above, while a related preceding type-story entitled “The Rolling Head” differs slightly. In it, a wife caught committing adultery with a snake is decapitated, with versions found among the Assiniboine, Sioux [sic], and the Osage (Thompson 1966:343).

We can see numerous instances of Mississippian art depicting a warrior holding a decapitated skull, possibly performing a war dance, as in Figure 1. Between the narratives and the art, it appears that the taking of trophy heads was highly desired in Mississippian warfare. The Presbyterian missionary Rev. Hamilton also witnessed the display of an Omaha man’s head upon a pole outside the lodge of an Ioway chief, during the years at the Highland Mission in the late 1840s and 1850s.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Although Good Tracks does not cite Skinner in this particular entry, he clearly modernized Skinner’s orthography and used the story to infer the negative traits.

<sup>2</sup>A common theme is that the dead can be resurrected if all parts of the body are put back together, so saving different pieces, even bones, is a necessity for rebirth, whether for humans or game animals. Cf. Beaver’s granddaughter sacrificing herself for the girl, who ravenously bit into the meat, violating the taboo on disrespecting the bones of game animals (Skinner 1926; Tale #11). Even the scalp is needed for resurrection, as in the story of Red Horn’s Sons, who bring him and the other village men back to life after defeating the giants (Radin 1948).

<sup>3</sup>For example, Skinner (1925) has “The Scalped Man” pp. 475-477; “Ishjinki and the Shell Spitter” pp. 493-494; Kerchival has an Omaha variant of a rolling skull (1893).

<sup>4</sup>Note that *pahi* (Dorsey n.d.) may possibly have meant a scalp instead.

<sup>5</sup>Hamilton was so offended at this practice that he stole the head to bury it in a hidden spot so it could not be re-mounted on its post. The Chief threatened him for this unthinkable disrespect, especially for loss of the teeth

Figure 1: Man Holding Human Head<sup>6</sup>

### 3. Fantastical creatures of mythical times

#### 3.1. Sharp Elbows/Double-Face

Certain beings appear primarily in the stories of mythic time, when the early culture heroes vanquished them so that human beings could survive into ‘modern’ times. One of the most interesting (and fierce) of these kinds of beings are known as “Sharp Elbows” to the IOM peoples, because these human-like creatures have long bony protuberances coming out of their elbows; in other cultures they are described as “Double-Faces” because they also have a second face, on the back of their skull, enabling them to watch every direction. They have special abilities also, such as the capability of making fire without any tools. They appear among humans sometimes and they are always dangerous. Contemporary Ioway artist and archeologist Lance Foster included a Sharp Elbows in the drawing below, the dominant male figure on the left. (The person on the right is Grizzly Woman, another widespread transformation motif in Native North America.) Skinner (1926:232) transcribed this lexeme as *Itopahi* or *I'topai<sup>n</sup>yê*; the second form likely represents the Baxoje diminutive morpheme *i<sup>n</sup>ñe/yi<sup>n</sup>ñe*, but it can be used for descent or naming, not always in a literal sense of size.

For instance, it was a “Sharp Elbows” who visited the Hero Twins’ mother while their father was away hunting (Marsh n.d.; Skinner 1925:427). She had been warned not to look at him, but at the end, finally peeked through the house cracks. Her failure to obey the tabu gave him the right to kill her with his awful sharp elbow-bones. The following is an excerpt from “The Twins” which gives his name, or really, the name of his kind of creature. It also is a classic example of the folktale motif *Looking Tabu Motif C300 (Note #217)* (Thompson 1966:338).

- (1) a. LN4  
*čhí-da mįnq wáwaθyče nqhé-ske*  
 the.house-at (she)sits (she)sews it.is-if  
 ‘If one is sitting in the house sewing’

which were to have been put inside a rattle (Hamilton n.d.).

<sup>6</sup>Original image from Engraved Shell Gorget, Castilian Springs Mound, Sumner County, Tennessee (Prentice 1986:245). Drawing after Dockstader (1960): Plate 64; originally published by Douglas & D’Harnoncourt (1941:66).

Figure 2: Baxoje Mythic Characters by Lance Foster (2012)



(Do not reproduce without permission of the artist.)

b. LN5

*wą?šige naqwanąče jí ašku.*  
 person fierce (he)arrives it.seems  
 a fierce person arrives, it seems'

c. LN9

*ihťó?-phàhĩ<sup>7</sup> wiga-ñe khe. Adáskuñi ho...*  
**Elbow-Sharp** they.call-PL.INDEF-DECL(MASC) look-not (INJUNCTION)  
 'Sharp-Elbows they call them. Do NOT look at him!' (author's free translation)

These Fierce Creatures are mentioned by name three more times, when the Twins arrive at their village, and trick the dangerous beings into fighting amongst themselves, and thereby killing each other, while the Hero Twins are safely hidden. The boys then cut off all of the creatures' bony elbow points to give to their father to use as awls, 'to repair his moccasins' (Marsh: LN 203, 223, 227). Father is pleased for their avenging his wife/their mother, but he now is more frightened of the Twins than ever. He had sent them on this mission, perhaps hoping they would be killed, but it was culturally appropriate that they should attempt to take revenge on their mother's killer (and his people).

Tale #11 of Skinner's collection is titled "The Janus-Faced Man" (1925:472-475); he is the mystery suitor for four sisters. Their parents are so scared that they hide all the girls in a large grave, then cut their own hair, and blacken their faces. Thus 'in mourning', they inform the unwelcome suitor of the tragic illness that took all their daughters. He weeps at their grave! But they foolishly giggle at his sorrow, giving away the lie. After they go to sleep, he digs them out, throws them in his canoe, and then wakes them up. Each must answer a test question of

<sup>7</sup>It must be the lenis/unaspirated dental stop in *ihťo* 'elbow', because Marsh (n.d.) wrote it as /d/ later in LN 223 of this story.

what relation she will be to him. The first three focus on him as suitor, so each says ‘Husband’, whereupon he throws her out to drown. Cleverly, the youngest says ‘sister’ and is spared. Unfortunately, he steals a baby water panther for her to play with while he is away from their home. This action brings the wrath of the entire horned underwater panther village on him, eventually causing a terrible flood. His fortified canoe is capsized by the angry water panthers and he dies. But the girl throws the baby horned panther back in the water, and is saved as the flood recedes. (In this story, there is no specific mention of his elbows.)<sup>8</sup>

Another case of the unusual being is found in Lakota. Double Face *Anúng Ité* is listed as a proper noun in the *New Lakota Dictionary* (Ullrich 2008:862). Thompson (1966:364) has this motif with ‘sharp elbowed women’ (G341) as a subset of Ogres and Cannibals. In the comparative Notes section, #181, the motif summary is “Women with sharp elbows kill victims. At last they are deceived into stabbing one another”; he included the Dakota (Riggs 1893:140) and Assiniboine (Lowie 1910:183) as the only Siouan groups for this category (Thompson 1966:327).

Figure 3: Janus Figure Pipe Bowl with horse<sup>9</sup>

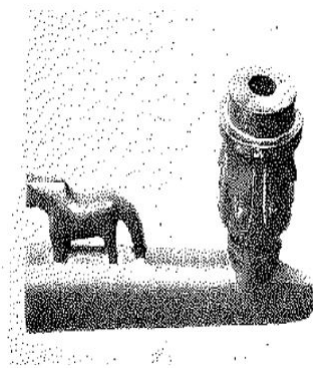


Figure 3 is a sacred clan pipe of the ‘Double-Faced Man’, whose head forms the Pipe Bowl of the Black Bear clan/gentes, with a horse also carved on the pipe (Skinner 1926:232). In their origin story, he is the Old Man who was heard hammering the pipe, then suddenly he disappeared. When the four Bear brothers came to the place where they had seen him, they found a pipe, and realized that the Old Man had turned himself into this pipe. In this instance, the Double-Face had made something very sacred, for the clan to use in keeping peace among their members (Skinner 1926:218-221).

Beyond this historic artifact, we also see evidence of these Sharp Elbows in the rock art of eastern Missouri dated A.D. 1010, more than eight centuries earlier (Figure 4 below). In the initial publication, Diaz-Granados et al. (2001) did not address the prominent elbow protuberance, focusing instead on the ‘pelt’ on the arm, and the bison-hand as evidence of possible shamanism. I became quite excited to have identified this obvious example of the “Sharp Elbow” creature within the Mississippian time and geographic sphere of influence. Notably, the just-released monograph devoted exclusively to Picture Cave itself has remedied that oversight, with clear

<sup>8</sup>But it does not relate to Thompson tale Motif D733 *Loathly Bridegroom*, Note #188, where an ugly suitor becomes handsome. That one is another story of the poor orphan who is rejected by the 2nd sister, who regrets it after he is immersed in the river and emerges beautiful of face and richly dressed...

<sup>9</sup>Black Bear Gens, Iowa (Skinner 1926:304, Plate XXI).

recognition of this mythic being's identity (Diaz-Granados & Duncan 2015:182-182). I can at least attest to having discovered the identity independently, if not originally. However, I think that the second Ioway story could also explain the animal on the forearm. It has the rounded head and side 'bars'/fins and potentially long tail plus diminutive size, it could well be the stolen baby of the horned underwater panthers. It is quite tantalizing to note that the cave site where this image appears is very close in time and space to Cahokia, the premier Mississippian Ceremonial Center (Diaz-Granados et al. 2001). "Sharp Elbows" indeed! (See Figure 15, for similar rectangles at the side of the Horned Underwater Panther drawing near the entry of Picture cave.)

Figure 4: Arm with bison hand and pelt<sup>10</sup>



Figure 5: My proposed "Sharp Elbow/ Double-Face"<sup>11</sup>



I propose that another "shaman" figure at that site in fact also depicts "Sharp Elbows", reproduced in Figure 5 above. There are odd projections from the elbow area, but even more telling is the very oddly shaped head. It does not portray any ordinary human at all. It appears to have two profiles, with one face turned over the right shoulder, mouth open in a song or prayer, and the other face also in profile. This ear-front pose would clearly and instantly distinguish the Double-Faced being from an ordinary human.<sup>12</sup>

### 3.2. Giants plus cannibals/ogres and ogresses

The next category of fantastic beings were mainly present in mythic times, but thankfully most were either killed off by Heroes to protect ordinary humans or vanquished to a distant home vaguely described as in the North but not a part of Earth, because there is some barrier separating them.

<sup>10</sup>From Picture Cave, Eastern Missouri, dated ca. A.D. 1010 (Diaz-Granados et al. 2001).

<sup>11</sup>From Diaz-Granados et al. (2001). Note the protrusions on each elbow, plus the split profile, with the creature's right face speaking/singing.

<sup>12</sup>Diaz-Granados & Duncan (2015:180-187) put forward an feminine interpretation of this figure (First Woman), which is quite intriguing and ethnographically accurate, but I am not persuaded by the image itself. Note also that the actual photograph given in their Figure 14.1 is more difficult to interpret than the schematic drawing published earlier, which also makes my interpretation less clear.

I found two different stories with the curious detail of giants who swing sharp hooks to slice or grab onto humans as if they were prey—hence the original title of this paper. The following excerpts are from a Marsh text by the name “The Giants”. In some cases the stories are named for the supernatural Antagonist rather than for the Human/Heroic Character. Marsh (n.d.) collected the tale in 1936 from Mrs. Robert Small, an Otoe-Missouria woman married to an Ioway man, living in the Perkins, Oklahoma area.

(2) Excerpts from Marsh’s (n.d.) “The Giants”

a. LN49

*walúške-xače ...*

**Giant-(is)big**

‘A large giant...’

b. LN57

*wahík’o gla-xqčijęe uhatá-glq-ŋ(a)-ašku.*

**hook** very-(is)big (he)hang.it.up-his.own-it.is.said

‘he hung up his huge hook, they say.’

c. *wahík’o glúđe-nq giwįxe. mįn(a)-ašku,*

**hook** (he)take.it-and (he)swing.it (he)sit-it.is.said

‘That hook, he took it and swung it while seated, they say’

Right then, the crippled giant threw the sharp hook at the south side of the lodge where the men on the warpath were lying, but the hero was only pretending to sleep. He had quietly picked up a long pole, and used it to deflect the hook to the north side, where the other giant-brothers slept. So it was the giants who were cut up and killed instead, and the warriors escaped safely. Skinner (1925:465-467) also had Tale #9 *Ma<sup>n</sup>to Íkíruhe*, Married To Grizzly Bear, featuring a similar incident, where it is the chief’s son who rescues the war party.

Additional mentions of giants appear in “The Wanderer” tale from the Marsh collection:

(3) Excerpts from Marsh’s (n.d.) “The Wanderer”

a. LN81

*...walúške [ʔunclear mark] xqč(a)-ašku.*

**giant is.big**-it.seems

‘There was a big Giant, it seems’ [my free translation]

b. LN90

*walúške <géhąęe><sup>13</sup>*

**giant** <another/different one>

‘(Another) giant...’

c. LN91

*şųkheņį gla-tógle-nq wq-şik’uče-é-ašku.<sup>14</sup>*

dog his.own-with.him-and **man-hunter**-he.say-it.seems

‘was hunted people with his dog, they say.’

‘There was another giant together with his dog and he was a Man-hunter, it seems.’  
or ‘he was hunting men’ [my free translation]

Note that giants were associated with equally big and dangerous dogs, not surprisingly. Aside from hunting and eating humans, the over-sized beings were in other ways much like human society. They also lived in similar-style longhouses, took scalps, played stickball and chunky, and used ceremonies to care for their sacred war bundles!

Then, because the Giants' village is on both sides of the river the hero must pass through, he must wait until dark. He ties bundles of reeds on each side of his canoe as advised by the Wanderer. Despite the darkness, they have torches, and spot him. They shout, inviting him to stop and come eat with them. Of course he does not stop! Then they throw hooks at him, snagging the reed bundles and pulling them to shore. In the dark, they fight over the bundles, allowing him to get safely past. The same routine must be repeated on the hero's return trip. Again, the giants fail, and the family goes home safely.

One notable characteristic of giants was that they loved to compete in contests such as races, games of stickball or chunky, battles of wit or assigning an impossible task. They would wager lives on the outcome. Giants appear in several additional stories in IOM traditions, as well as other Siouan groups. One episode of the Hero Twins includes a victory over a village of giants. Two different items of material culture may be related to that particular story. The first is another historic pipe bowl that features a large head of a man facing toward the smoker. The head is more than twice as large as the heads of two identical males seated opposite one another. See Figure 6.

Figure 6: Giant and Two Seated Males Pipe Bowl<sup>15</sup>



The second item is another Missouri rock art feature, reproduced in Figure 7 below. It is such a complex figure that it is difficult to determine exactly what is happening. However, it seems clear that the large figure lying on the ground is more than double the size of the rest of the anthropomorphs in the drawing, so it is safe to say he is a giant. Also, because of his position, and the actions of the men around him, it looks as if he has been injured or killed by two or three of those human figures, who are raising 'maces' or war clubs in their hands (Diaz-Granados et al. 2001, color emphasis added to giant figure).

<sup>13</sup>The <> denotes something not in the original telling that was added during translation for clarification of the story line.

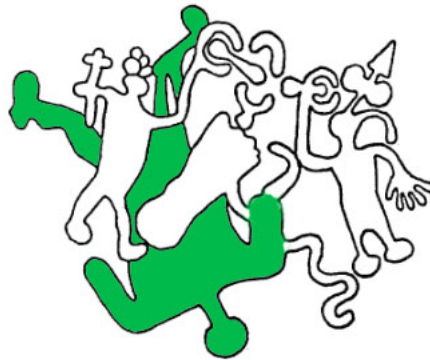
<sup>14</sup>Marsh used a dash here, probably to represent a syllable boundary. I think it should have been a glottal stop, as most compound words will contract *wəŋe* 'person' to a single syllable with the glottal marking a morpheme boundary, as noted in Whitman (1947), really written by Marsh (c.f. Schwartz 2014 "Who Wrote Whitman's Grammar?" SCLC 2014 in Madison, WI).

<sup>15</sup>Ioway Collection, National Museum of the American Indian: Washinton, DC. Photo by author, June 2017.



The authors of the original study interpret the smaller human figure to the right as possibly representing the culture hero known to the Hochunk (Winnebago) as Red Horn, based on the bi-lobed arrow hair ornament and the large long lock of hair or ‘horn’ for which he is known. The Ioway called him ‘He-Who-Wears-Human-Heads-As-Earrings’, an even more distinctive trait which was quite marvelous and charming to onlookers (Skinner 1926:456-458).

Figure 7: Sketch of Petroglyph<sup>16</sup>



Giants can also be rather disgusting and crude, as well as dangerous. In Tale #6, “*Wa<sup>n</sup>kx!-istowi*, The Man With The Human Head Earrings”, everyone who came to the world-wide race was upset, because “the giants with mucus hanging from their nose always won!” (Skinner 1925:457). The general term used in the tales for a giant are *walúške* ‘giant’ IOM, also written as *warúšge*. Maximillian gave *warúshka* (GoodTracks 2008). In Hochunk there are two distinct lexemes: *hit’enuke* (*wasé*) ‘giants (large people who lived in caves of Minnesota)’ (Miner n.d.) and *wqgrúcge* ‘maneater, ancient giant’ (Miner n.d.).

In the *New Lakota Dictionary*, there is an entry as follows: *Iyá* ‘Eater’: “Proper noun, the giant eater” (on page 869, lists it as ‘giant/big’); “character from Lakota myths **who ate people**” (Ullrich 2008:868, emphasis added).

Ogress Cannibals also were part of the tradition; for example, not long after White Plume (*Wagre Kagre*) outwitted that Male Giant on the hunting trip—Lo and behold, he sees a village where *Nashin Waxógre* had eaten all the adults, so the only people left were children. Giants like to have a contest first, in which they defeat their victims, before getting around to eating people.

*Nashin Waxógre* chose her victims by battle of art! They were told to make a likeness of an Underneath Horned Panther! If the Ogress’ piece was best, then she’d kill them and eat them up.<sup>17</sup> So, White Plume took the children’s sad little clay figure, and made it into a living “**SHINING Water Panther!**” (emphasis added) (Skinner 1925:460-461).

Their size is *not* specified, but there also was a powerful cannibal couple with power over weather in “Blood Clot Boy”: *Ina’singê’katche’ruka* ‘Wind Controller’ (Woman-little Wind-rules?) and *Wansh’tadj’ruka* ‘Old Man Wind Chief’ (Man-Wind-rules?) (Skinner 1926:254).

<sup>16</sup>From boulder at the Maddox Cave site, Missouri. Reproduced from Diaz-Granados et al. (2001:??).

<sup>17</sup>In the Ioway story “White Plume” *Wagre Kagre*, the hero must travel with a giant, who jokes this moon will ‘crackle your clothes’; the Hero secretly switches Giant’s moccasins/clothes with his own as a pillow. Giant later snatches bundle and throws it on the fire. Giant discovers his mistake when trying to dress in White Plume’s clothing. Walking barefoot through deep snow, Giant dies from exposure Skinner (1925:460). Thompson (1966) has a motif for this plot twist; however, I will skip it for sake of time.

Cannibalistic Giants very commonly feature in tales around the world.<sup>18</sup> Think “Jack and the Beanstalk” for a familiar English version. “Fee, Fie, Fo, Fum, I smell the blood of an Englishman. Be he live or be he dead, I’ll grind his bones to make my bread!”

## 4. More fantastic creatures: dwarfs and little people<sup>19</sup>

Under the Miscellaneous category, ‘Additional motifs... Dwarfs/Thompson motif F495, [Thompson \(1966\)](#) included a Crow story collected by [Lowie \(1918:165,169,171\)](#) *Comparative Note #287a* ([Thompson 1966:356,364](#)). The question is, were there more than one type within this category? I believe there are at least two distinct kinds of ‘Little People’ in the IOM tradition, and likely for all the Mississippi Valley Siouan peoples.

### 4.1. Pointy-headed little ones who want to kill humans

For the Ioway, they were called “**Big Ears and Pointed Heads**” IOM *hunpóthroxje* (old [GoodTracks 2008](#))<sup>20</sup> or “Long Flat-heads” *Hompathrotci* ([Skinner 1926:253](#)).<sup>21</sup> For the Otoe (and Missouri), [Whitman \(1938\)](#) listed *humpathroxje*, *ho<sup>n</sup>pathroji*, *hompathroji* ‘spirits with long heads that are sharp at the top, that live in the buttes of the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers.’<sup>22</sup> This form has the tentative derivation of *hu/hō* ‘?’ plus *pha* ‘head’ plus *θroje* ‘pointy?’. [GoodTracks](#) has *pothroxje* as an ‘old’ form (2008).

In one source the ‘pointy heads’ were mistakenly called giants, but it had exactly the same geographical area for their home, plus fondness for foot races with lives staked on the outcome/gambling; see the Ioway *Wanathuje* story ([Skinner 1926:253](#)). Therefore, I consider these to be a single creature type.

The Pointy-Headed ones are also found within the Dhegiha peoples’ tradition. The Ponca called them *Ma<sup>n</sup>dha<sup>n</sup>uha<sup>n</sup>dhe ega<sup>n</sup>* ‘like beautifully made arrowheads’; a Ponca story describes them as elves or dwarves that are dreaded, because they lead one away at night, leaving victim lost till daylight came (Howard’s *The Ponca Tribe* in Cumberland & Rankin 2008:????). Among

<sup>18</sup>If one really wanted to speculate, we could link the idea of giants with an ancient folk memory of *Homo erectus*, since our modern *Homo sapiens* ancestors traveled out of Africa then encountered these human predecessors all over Asia and parts of Europe. *Homo erectus* were heavier in skeletal framework and probably stronger, considering the size of the muscle attachment marks on the bones. There is even some evidence of cannibalism (see Peking Man-Zhoukoudien site).

<sup>19</sup>*Homo floresiensis* were essentially Little People also; the current location for extant finds have been limited to Indonesian islands such as Flores (type site for species name), but The Hobbit lived as recently as 18,000 years ago, so ancestral memories passed on for generations are not impossibly far-fetched. Their faces would have differed from ours, but no pointed heads.

<sup>20</sup>In the New World, ‘cone-heads’ are found in an ancient population of South America. The famous specimens appear in physical anthropology labs and pseudoscience TV shows. The skulls were intentionally deformed by wrapping infants’ heads, not from a heritable genetic trait. The flattened foreheads of Mesoamericans are well known ethnographically, plus the sharpened canines of Aztecs would create terror in anyone who saw them. There would have been at least indirect contact between border regions and eastern North America. As maize spread north, why not rumors of monstrous cannibalistic men as well?

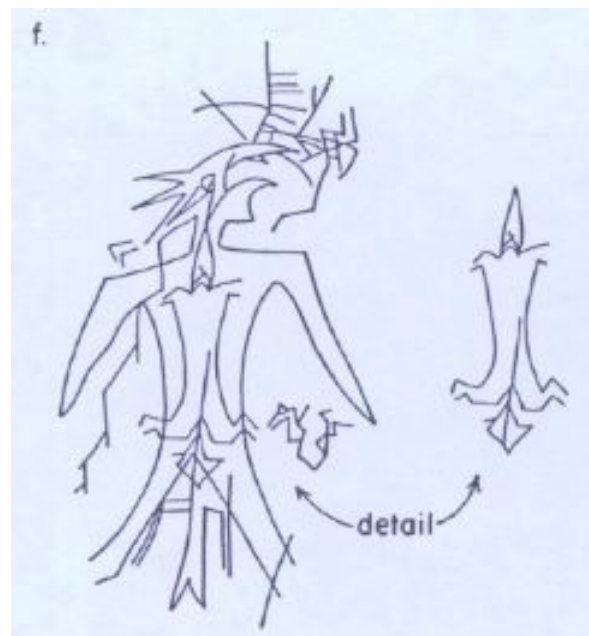
<sup>21</sup>See Motif N2, N2.1 *Lives wagered* *Comparative Note #277*, possibly found in Crow ([Lowie 1918:200](#)) and Wichita ([Dorsey 1904:194](#)) in [Thompson \(1966:354\)](#).

<sup>22</sup>See also Cliff Ogre motif G321, Note 163: Crow ([Thompson 1966:322,364](#)); “A monster kicks her victims over a cliff, where they are eaten by her brood”.

the Kaw, I found no reference to an unusually shaped head, but note its size as being large in proportion to the human-like beings' small stature. Note this entry in the Kaw Lexicon: *Míaloshka* 'Hairy One/Monster with Big Head... Mythical people, water beings, or little people'. This lexeme was cross-referenced with an entry called 'the solitary dwellers' (Cumberland & Rankin 2012:128).

There is at least one illustration that I propose represents the small, pointy-headed anthropomorphs. It is an engraving from a small catlinite artifact called the New Albin tablet (see Figure 8 below). While not directly amenable to dating, since it was discovered at an Oneota site in Iowa, it should be roughly contemporaneous with Mississippian culture (A.D. 900-1300) or later, on up to A.D. 1700. The object on the Birdman's back is a pointy-headed small human-like figure. On the right, Robert Bray's sketch of the figure was isolated for clarity. The drawing is reproduced from Benn (1989). My interpretation differs from most archeologists, who have typically described the figure on the back as a sacred bundle, based in part upon various ethnographic accounts of war bundles being carried on the back of the leader of the war party. The image might represent a sacred hawk bundle, but no explanation is made of the sharp pointy head. A study of ethnological specimens found the preserved heads in bundles to be smaller than the species of hawk while living, but not uniquely angular (Ubelaker & Wedel 1975). Bray's sketch shows an object bearing only slight resemblance to photographs of actual Ioway sacred bundles. Both are vaguely cylindrical, but most bundles are bulky, and have cordage wrapping the object, not angular side elements suggestive of partial arms and legs. Pelts fashioned into medicine bags from otters, squirrels, and other animals have a closer resemblance, due to the head and limbs being retained in place (See Skinner 1926 appendix for Ioway bundles and medicine bags.)

Figure 8: New Albin Tablet<sup>23</sup>



<sup>23</sup>Image incised on catlinite. Oneota site in Iowa from Benn (1989).

## 4.2. Forest spirits: Little hairy men<sup>24</sup>

This type of creature may possibly have a tail, as well as being somehow associated with owls. Although of diminutive stature, and somewhat odd (they live alone in the forest, hermit-like), they are not to be taken lightly. One notable feature is an invisible column of power that extends above this creature's hollow tree home. Any birds that flew over it would drop dead from touching the 'force field' (my term), and become his prey. One source reported even the Thunderbirds were afraid of his/their power (??WHICH ONE?),<sup>25</sup> but see the following excerpt:

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*Wakqda-noči-iŋe* (first mention of them)

spirit-tree-live.inside-DIM

'Sacred Little Tree-Dweller' [my gloss, c.f. [GoodTracks \(2008\)](#) entry 'elf/fairy']

A 'hidden name' or respect-avoidance term (i.e., euphemism) for this ambiguous set of beings is given in a different story. Name-avoidance occurs in many instances as a sign of respect. Close relatives tend to use family names and kin terms rather than personal names traditionally, which shows both affection and claim of kinship roles with all associated rights and obligations. Elder siblings and parents in particular are to be treated respectfully ([Davidson 1997](#)). Powerful supernatural beings and even dangerous prey animals are likewise respected, with a 'respect name' substituted before a hunt, during a ceremony, etc. This taboo is related to the widespread belief that living things are naturally attracted by the sound of their name (Consider the English idiom based on a similar folk belief "Speak of the devil... (and he shall appear)".<sup>26</sup>

So, in another Ioway story, the title and 'name' referring to the mysterious dwarf is "simply "The Wanderer", *mąyq - watahe* from *mąyq* 'land' plus *watahe* from Directional prefix 'this way' plus *a-* 'on' affixed to *dahe* 'standing position' ([Marsh n.d.](#); "The Wanderer"). Initial *wa-* could also be the 3rd person plural prefix expressing object form, if it refers to those who stand (i.e., live) on the land (as opposed to 'sitting' in the village/house of ordinary humans). The mysterious dwarf befriends the lost Youth, and gifts him with a magic arrow that gets a deer every time it is shot. Skinner had a corresponding tale told in English, likewise titled *Maianwatahe* after the forest dwarf, but he translated it as 'World Man' or 'Everywhere Being'; Ioway youth seeking a vision were urged to pray for hunting power and 'plenty' from him (Skinner 1925:441). [GoodTracks \(2008\)](#) also lists the compound form for 'spirit; tree spirit; elf, fairy' as *wakanda nochiĩne*; *wakqda* 'god/holy.spirit' plus *nočiĩne* from *na* 'wood/tree' plus *uči* 'in-house' plus *iĩne* 'little', literally meaning 'Holy Spirit(s) (that) live-in little trees', based on Marsh.<sup>27</sup>

There is a feminine version for these creatures also. The popular tale 'Created-From-Feet'

<sup>24</sup>In Hochunk I only found two relevant words so far: *suujá* 'be small in stature, stunted, dwarfed person or plant' ([Miner n.d.](#)) [cognate with IOM word for 'baby' *šuwe* ([Davidson 1999](#))] and *hijšék* 'be hairy (fuzzy, shaggy)' ([Miner n.d.](#)). Is it possible that these originally separate beings have been confused/merged over time? Among the Dakotan groups, they kept *Heyoka* separate from Tree-Spirit, according to Howard. For Lakota, [Ullrich](#) glosses *Heyókħa* as 'Thunder dreamer' (2008).

<sup>25</sup>But [Marsh](#)'s version of "The Twins" describes the Thunderers themselves as living inside a tree (n.d.).

<sup>26</sup>The Hochunk Medicine Lodge frequently used hidden language, i.e. 'creeping soldiers' for snake ([Radin 1948](#)). The custom kept sacred knowledge secret even from lower level Dance Society members.

<sup>27</sup>Oddly he also only lists four Thunderers here instead of six.

tale *Thiógrita'mí*<sup>28</sup> (also called 'Splinter Girl') ends with the powerful youngest sister defeating four giant brothers and their Sister, bringing her own brother's heads and bones back to life, then in the end going to the woods to live as *Núnwakanda* 'the Fairy of the Woods' (Skinner 1925:462-464). The form probably is *Nu:wakhqda* (1st syllable stressed, but also heavy, including two vowel mora there) from *nq* 'wood/tree' affixed to *u-* 'Inside' then adding *wakhqda* 'god/spirit'.

Among their northern Mississippi Valley relatives, we find the Dakota spoke of a similar short but powerful being they called 'Dwells in the Woods' or 'Tree Stump Spirit' (Howard 1955; Skinner 1919). Tree-Spirit bundles featured wooden icons that shamans could cause to 'dance' (See Figure 9).

Figure 9: Image of a medicine bundle for the worship of the Tree Stump Spirits<sup>29</sup>



There were also decorated masks representing Tree-Spirits among Dakota people, to wear while doing members' unique ceremonial dance. Even in Howard's day, no one practiced it, because only persons who had dreamed (or had a vision) of the Tree Stump Spirit had the right to do so. Yet a few elders remembered witnessing the ritual, saying it was similar to the *Heyoka* Dance Howard received an actual mask from a Dakota friend, as well as a drawing of such a mask

<sup>28</sup>This is Skinner's transcription. Certainly the final feminine marker should be nasalized. There may be other errors also.

<sup>29</sup>Including male and female wooden figures laying on the right side of the bundle wrapper. Reproduced from Howard (1960).

(See Figure 10.) The giver told Howard he could try the Tree Dweller mask on 'for fun' if he liked (Howard 1955).<sup>30</sup>

Figure 10: Tree Dweller Mask of the Teton Dakota<sup>31</sup>



The Dhegiha groups also spoke of these special beings. Among the Kansa they were known as *Mialoshka* 'Hairy One/Monster with Big Head... Mythical people, water beings, or little people...' George Dorsey said they "dwell in solitary place, to which they entice unwary Indians. Their victims become crazy, and live as *minxoge*. Some dwell underground or in the water, sitting close to the bank of the stream." Dorsey also noted the Osage had a "camp near Pawhuska... [associated with the] Legend of the Hairy Man at Hairy Man's Bridge, east side of Indian Camp." (Cumberland & Rankin 2012:128).

## 5. Horned underwater monster/panther

This fearsome creature is a very, very ancient, important, and widespread symbol in the eastern portion of Native North America (Townsend 2005; Benn 1989). There are some differences from group to group on details, but the similarities outweigh the differences. These creatures are a mix of characteristics from many different species, and are primarily associated with rivers and lakes. Some type of horn is present, usually Deer antlers (some Algonkin pictures have bison horns instead). The head is feline (hence the word 'panther'), with smaller, usually rounded ears but large teeth. The body is rather undefined; it may be quite snake-like, e.g. without legs, but it always has a very LONG TAIL. This tail can be used to cause whirlpools.

Horned underwater panthers are very dangerous: they may steal human babies along the shore, and often drown adult humans. Sometimes they are depicted as spotted, and images may have power lines and/or offspring depicted inside (esp. Great Lakes Algonkin; Cf. Figure 13). I include these images because of the strong cultural influence these Algonkins had on the

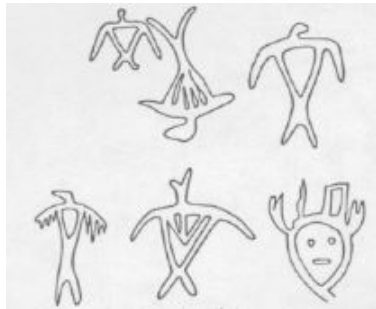
<sup>30</sup>Unlike the *Heyoka* mask he also sent, with warning for Howard (1955) NEVER to wear it, or lightning might strike him!

<sup>31</sup>Reproduced from Howard (1955).

Hochunk, plus the Ioway were very close historically with Sauk and Fox peoples, too, from the late 18th century on. Later the Ioway also associated with the neighboring Potawatomi while in Kansas (from the late 19th century up to today's Northern Ioway Reserve). Skinner (1926:286,340) had a small (five inch) woven bag with a Horned Water Monster motif on one side that I originally planned to include, but unfortunately the old black and white photograph did not scan well enough to see the design.<sup>32</sup>

The rock art of Harvey Rock Shelter in Iowa includes a full-face head sketch of an Underwater Panther alongside many Thunderbirds (See Figure 11.) Archaeologists have placed the IOM ancestors within roughly the same territory they inhabited at contact, associated with the material culture known traditionally in the archeological literature as Oneota (Map 1). Many Dhegiha and other Siouan people would prefer that those scholars used a name which reflected the known cultural continuity with their ancestors and tribal self-names, to prevent the all-too-common disconnect in the past between professional archeology and the native peoples affiliated with a particular region.

Figure 11: Harvey Rock Shelter art<sup>33</sup>



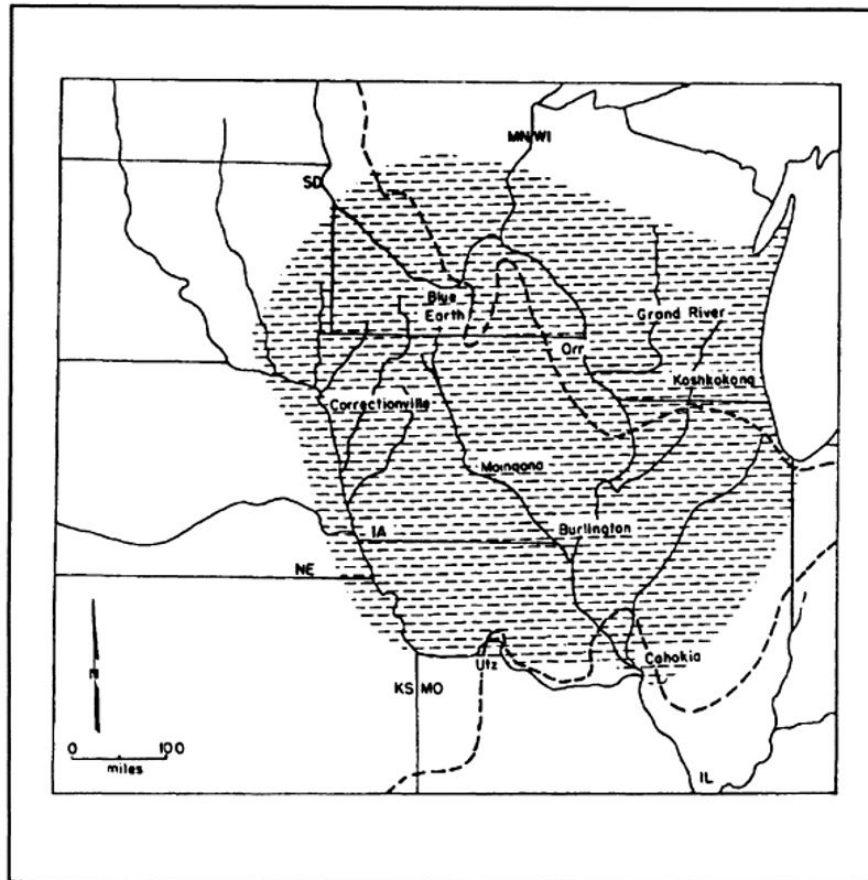
The belief in this creature occurs from the Texas region eastward to Florida, and up to the Great Lakes Region into what is now Canada. As creatures of the water, in that Eastern Woodland worldview, they are associated with the Underworld, caves, and snakes, all of which are dangerous to humans (and yet also associated with fertility, birth/death, and females) (Townsend 2005; Diaz-Granados et al. 2015). They greatly fear the Thunderbirds (also known as Thunder Beings/Thunderers), who prey upon them while they sun themselves on the rocks near the riverbanks/lakeshores. They disappear if any clouds appear, because storm clouds may hide the presence of the Thunderbirds.

There are several stories of Native person witnessing an aerial battle between them, when the Water Monster cries out for help, so the human (male) shoots the Thunderbird, whereupon the narrator generally says that choice was a mistake. A preliminary glance at the literature showed this story among the Ioway, Sauk, and the Great Lakes Algonkin.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup>The original artifact is likely to be in the Milwaukee Public Museum collections, as it is the institution which sponsored Skinner's work, published his monograph, and other artifacts depicted in his illustration plates are known to be there. Catalog #30157 is also given (Skinner 1926:340).

<sup>33</sup>This art features the face of a horned underwater panther (bottom right) amidst Thunderbirds (Benn 1989:247).

<sup>34</sup>A fascinating extended account of a youth who was tricked into a Faustian deal by an Underwater Panther was written in the Meskwaki syllabary Dahlstrom (2003).

Map 1: Oneota area of American Midwest<sup>35</sup>

At this point, we should point out that ‘jaguar’ is actually a better translation than the most prevalent word ‘panther’, since jaguars were once in much of the wooded lower 48 states, and they do like to spend time in the water, where they hunt alligators and fish regularly (Daggett & Henning 1974). Jaguars are also known to attack humans without fear. They are significantly larger than the cougar, and last but definitely not least, their coat is golden or orange with black spots. Note the descriptions as ‘glistening/shining’ for the Horned Water Panthers, the inclusion of spots on the coat, even the famous Missouri jaguar gorget (Wood 1961). While archaeologists have often called it the *piasa*, the Cherokee called this mysterious creature *Unktemi* (Townsend 2005)/*Unktena* (Hudson 1976:131-168 in Benn 1989). A researcher working with another southeastern nation had the rather fascinating case where their Choctaw speaker chose a leopard picture to convey their idea of the animal, because of the golden-orange color and the black spots, while the same speaker would not accept a cougar photo (Daggett & Henning 1974).

To testify to the long time depth of this symbolic opposition of Sky World vs. Underwater World, there is a battle similar to the one described in that brief but widespread narrative, actually depicted on an engraved shell gorget that predates the Mississippian era (Figure 12). The original label conservatively describes it as Feline and Hawk.

<sup>35</sup>Reproduced from (Benn 1989). Note the position of Cahokia, lower edge of cross-hatching region delineated.



Figure 12: Ancient roots of cosmological battle between Upper and Lower Worlds<sup>36</sup>



The conceptual link between these two ancient enemies is so strong, their motifs were often paired on opposite sides of woven bags. See Figure 13 for an example from a Great Lakes Algonkin group (the Anishanabe). The other side of the bag was covered with Thunderbirds (not shown).

Figure 13: Nettle fiber twined woven bag with images of horned Underwater Panthers<sup>37</sup>



<sup>36</sup>Engraved shell gorget ca. A.D. 300-700, from Texas (Townsend 2005). The line behind the 'Feline'/Water Panther may be the tail, and the 'headdress' actually represents the antlers/horns of the monster. But it could also be feathers or a cedar branch, all prominent elements in native North American cultures.

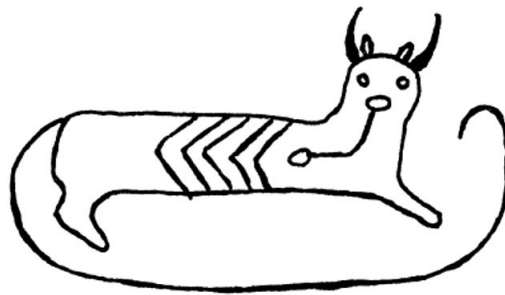
<sup>37</sup>This bag features 'ribs' and 'infants' inside the Panthers in the upper row (reproduced from Whitford 1991).

### 5.1. Names for this fantastic creature

The Baxoje-Jiwere language has the following variants: *ishchéki*, *ishjéki* ‘monster, water monster, horned water monster’ (GoodTracks 2008); *Ixtcêxhe*, *Ixtci!xi*, ‘Horned Water Panther’ (Skinner 1926:253, 1915:741). The IOM’s closest linguistic relatives, the Hochunk, did not seem to have an identical term, but two related lexemes include *waakcéxi* ‘Water Spirit (clan)’ (Helmbrecht & Lehmann 2010:416)<sup>38</sup> and *heecy* ‘to be horned’ [final syllable stressed] (Miner n.d.). The northernmost of the Mississippi Valley relations, the Dakota, use a word very similar to the Cherokee word (Iroquoian): *Unktehi* ‘mythological Horned Water Panther’ (Skinner 1919:174).

There are some similarities with general feline terms across the Siouan language family.<sup>39</sup> Especially noteworthy is the following term and its gloss from Biloxi: *ta<sup>n</sup>to<sup>n</sup>* (archaic) ‘wild cat’; *Țtqtō* ‘Ancient of Panthers’ (Rankin et al. 2015, authors’ source listed as (Dorsey & Swanton 1912:272b)). See Figures 14 and 15 for variation in depicting the beings. The first image features the heart line (from mouth to heart) and ‘ribs’, plus legs. Presenting the creature with rounded eyes that gaze directly out from the frontal view of the face is a common way to portray this creature, as opposed to the falcon/birdman/Thunderbird beings, who are always in profile, with beak/nose emphasized.

Figure 14: Sketch of the Underwater Panther (Howard 1960:221)



Ethnographer James Howard drew this sketch based on the image he saw burned upon a Potawatomi drum reserved for the special ritual honoring the Underwater Panther, which he witnessed during the 1950s in Mayetta, Kansas (Howard 1960:221); the Potawatomi man who conducted the ritual remarked that the Wisconsin Winnebago also had a ceremony for the Underwater Panther, and he had visited them by invitation to compare each rite (Howard 1960:223). The Kansas Potawatomi are another Great Lakes Algonkin group, who have lived near the Ioway Reserve since the late 19th century.

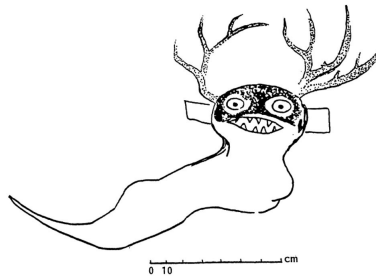
Figure 15 demonstrates the more vague, legless body form for the same creature that can be seen in the prehistoric Missouri rock art tradition. This rendition is a reminder that the Horned Underwater Monster also is linked in ancient times with the Great Serpent, part of Mississippian (and other North American) cosmology in which a Great Snake is part of the foundation of the world, and husband to the Grand-mother of All/Mother Who Never Dies (Prentice 1986). These

<sup>38</sup>Possibly cognate to IOM *wakqda* ‘god/spirit’ or alternatively, to *wq̄ne* ‘man’ + *čexi* ‘cruel, mean’?

<sup>39</sup>Ioway: *udwq̄jñe* ‘little cat, house cat’ [Lightfoot/Greer notes]; Hoocak: *wiicqwasijcserèc* ‘cougar’ (Miner n.d.) (primary stress/2nd syllable); *wicqwaq̄* ‘big cat’ variations for ‘wildcat, lynx, cougar, tiger, jaguar’ (last syllable stress) (Helmbrecht & Lehmann 2010:416); Lakota: *igmúthaŋka* ‘cougar, panther’ (Ullrich 2008:971); *igmúhota* ‘lynx’ (Ullrich 2008:944); Ofo: *atcánta*, *Țtathqta* ‘wild cat’ (Rankin et al. 2015, Wild cat [2]).

religious beliefs continued into historic times as documented in the 19th century by ethnographers and linguists. For example, the Osage had a Rite of Reincarnation for the Dead which invokes the 'Great Snake' who said "Even though the little ones pass into the realms of spirits, they shall, by clinging to me and using my strength, recover consciousness" (La Flesche 1975:368) quoted in Diaz-Granados et al. (2001:488).

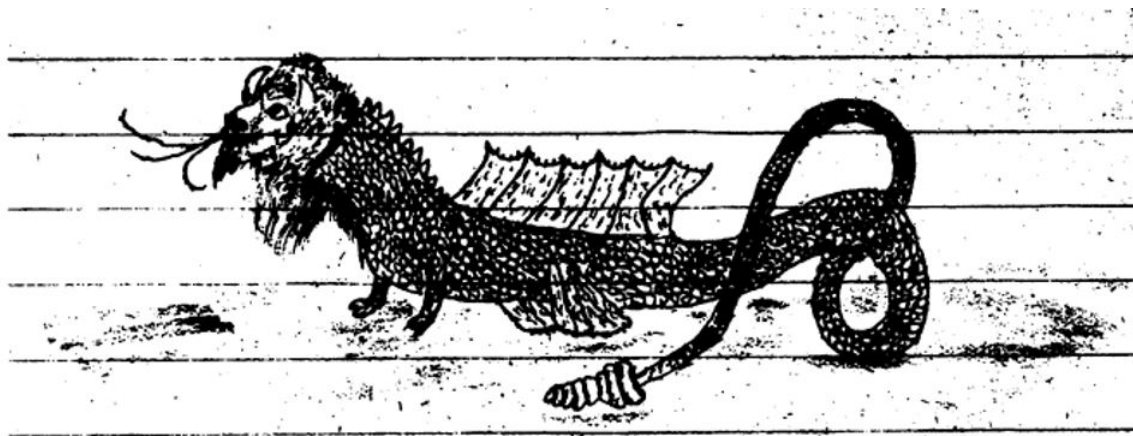
Figure 15: Underwater monster<sup>40</sup>



It may be unrelated, but it is interesting that the Kansa (Kaw) had a mythical flying snake *wéts'a tazhi lishka* whose power was so great, just looking at it meant the person must die. Their traditions also included an Old Woman who used to hold supernatural communication with them (Cumberland & Rankin 2012:214).

Finally, for an alternate depiction of the horns, Figure 16 is an historic drawing by a Meskwaki person as an illustration of a negative vision experience by 'The boy who did not fast' (Dahlstrom 2003). Note that the horns and head/neck hair are like a bison in this version, while the body is extremely elongated, and the face quite feline, complete with whiskers. It also features a kind of dorsal fin, a LONG serpentine tail, and is drawn partially facing the viewer.

Figure 16: Evil underwater being<sup>41</sup>



As mentioned earlier, one key point to remember is that the Mississippian site of Cahokia is quite close to the rock art sites in eastern Missouri of the same time period, and had clear

<sup>40</sup>From Picture Cave, Missouri, ca. A.D. 1010 (Duncan & Diaz-Granados 2000).

<sup>41</sup>From a birchbark scroll in Meskwaki syllabary (Dahlstrom 2003).

influences on the Oneota peoples at its northern and western edges (Duncan & Diaz-Granados 2000; Benn 1989). The bird men figures, copper, use of catlinite for tablets and pipes, 'mace' weapons and unique war clubs, shell gorgets, and hawks all are linked to that Mississippian influence.

Map 2: Location of major Mississippian sites ca. 900-1400<sup>42</sup>



## 5.2. “Wolf’s Cry” and the Horned Water Panthers

We can get a feel for the rather cruel nature of these beings through another Ioway tale, which features their enmity for humans, and their alliance with many other animals. In “Wolf’s Cry” (*Haxuga*), Wolf’s Cry had a brother who went to fetch water, but never came back. He discovers that the Horned Water Panthers drowned his brother and all the animals feasted on his body. They took the brother’s skin, stretched it like an animal hide, hardened it, and used it as their door cover for their underwater lodge!

Naturally, he has to get revenge, but it is not so simple. First, he catches the Chief and His Wife sunning themselves on the river bank, as he transformed himself into an old stump. He shoots them, but they are merely wounded, managing to disappear back beneath water. Later, he sees Beaver chopping wood for the fire needed in doctoring the couple.

The Underwater Panther Village will have a curing ceremony for the wounded Chief and his wife, so many different animals come and go, helping them prepare. They also plan to kill

<sup>42</sup>Reproduced from Townsend (2005).

Wolf's Cry. Eventually, he gets his chance to fulfill his original duty of vengeance. He meets Buzzard who was about to conduct a doctoring ceremony. So, Wolf's Cry kills Buzzard, skins him, and wears the skin as his disguise to safely enter the Underwater Monsters' Lodge.

As the "doctor" controlling the curing ritual, he is able to force everyone else out but the royal couple, then stabs them to death with a sharp heated pole. He snatches his poor Brother's skin from the door frame, and escapes. Wolf's Cry revives his brother by placing all his remains together, and shooting four magic arrows up into the air, shouting "Watch out!" The brother turns himself into an eagle to escape from earth, while Haxuga went up to the heavens, where he can help his people. Ever since that time, people use food as incense to reach Haxuga during the Medicine Dance ritual, and get assistance from beyond (Skinner 1925:468-472).

Themes found in this Ioway tale collected by Skinner includes the Sham Doctor Motif K1955, Note 271a, "*Hero masks as doctor and kills enemies*"; relevant tribes with tales containing this motif are Omaha, Assiniboine, Dakota, and also Pawnee (Thompson 1966:353).

## 6. Conclusion

The folktales that a people tell over and over from each generation to the next may preserve ancient beliefs going back many centuries, even a thousand years or more, as we have evidence from rock art in Missouri that has been successfully dated at A.D. 1010, and even earlier for the shell gorget depicting jaguar and hawk (Townsend 2005).<sup>43</sup> Some narrative elements concern actual ethnographic practices such as the taking of scalps and trophy heads, whose physical presence in everyday village life appear in haunting tales as Scalping Survivor and Rolling Heads, who can take revenge upon the living for their damaged unhappy states. That set of cultural practices and beliefs also included the supernatural world, populated with amazing creatures that awe the listener, and inspired artists and artisans who created images on rock, shell, wood and fiber of "Sharp Elbows", Giants, Pointy-headed Little People, Tree-Dwelling Spirits, and perhaps most fantastic of all, the Horned Underwater Panthers.

This is merely a preliminary attempt to inventory the IOM peoples' 'scary' beings in folklore, and to interpret and recognize items of material culture that pertain to those categories. No doubt there is much more research linking language, folklore, and material culture representing the shared native worldview from the Mississippi Valley Siouan tribes with their Eastern Woodland and Prairie-Plains neighbors which has been omitted here. Certainly, there are many more stories left to tell.

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<sup>43</sup>The famous Missouri jaguar gorget, discovered in a proto-historic burial, is believed to have been an heirloom passed down for many generations, as its iconographic style is significantly older than the rest of the mounds' artifacts; some archeologists initially saw it as a Mesoamerican trade item because of the jaguar motif, but particularly for the feathered 'words' coming out of its mouth (Wood 1961; Daggett & Henning 1974).

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