

Pterosaurs Considered As Dragons Were Dragons Pterosaurs?

By John Barclay-Morton

“Quoting Wang Fu (Eastern Han Dynasty), Luo Yuan (Southern Song Dynasty, 1127-1279 AD) has said:

“Wang Fu says...dragons actually have...nine likenesses. The nine likenesses are: horns of a stag, head of a camel, eyes of a demon, neck of a snake, belly of a clam, scales of a fish, talons of an eagle, paws of a tiger, and ears of an ox.” The product of a special spiritual culture, the dragon combines features from many different animals, including the body of a snake, and elements of fish, birds, and mammals. One of the auspicious animals of ancient China, the dragon’s exalted status has had a significant influence on the daily lives and culture of the Chinese for the past 5,000 years.”

(Text courtesy US Embassy in Taiwan)



Heralding from the Northwest Coast of North America, this ancient First Nations artifact clearly depicts what can only be described as a ‘toothed bird’ — a residual species of pterosaur! From the other side of the Pacific Ocean, a traditional Chinese description of dragons is known — one which aligns surprisingly well with what is now known of pterosaurs, and what can be observed from this artifact. Could it be that the stories from which myths of dragons arose, were based originally upon encounters with residual species of pterosaurs?

Consider the evidence, and you decide!

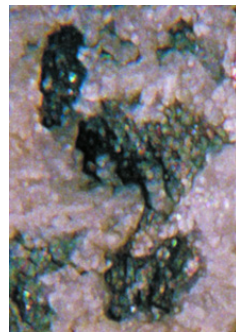
As an example of an ancient form of image writing, this artifact dates back to a time far before phonetic forms of writing had been developed. It seems probable that this form of image writing lies at the root of the glyphic forms of writing still in common use throughout Asia; and if this is the case, then it might be expected that some historical contexts could be shared between one side of the Pacific Ocean and the other. In any event, each would be closer to the other than either would be to the phonetic languages of European origin; and this linguistic reality presents a distinct obstacle when trying to relate two graphemic forms of writing to each other through the intermediary of a phonetic form of writing. Translations such as “horns of a stag” seem counter-intuitive when no such structures are found upon the heads of pterosaurs; yet much is lost here in translation. For practitioners of traditional

Chinese medicine, deer horns are valued for enhancing virility — because these horns are considered to embody the ability of a deer to leap high. Any structures on the head of a pterodactyl (and these are well documented) might be likened to the horns of a deer simply because they would be seen as empowering the pterosaur’s leap into flight.

世俗画龙之状，马首蛇尾。又有三停九似之说 九似者，角似鹿，头似驼，眼似鬼，项似蛇，腹似蜃，鳞似鱼，爪似鹰，掌似虎，耳似牛。

Horns of a stag — 角似鹿

Horns like those of a deer do not appear in the fossil record of pterosaurs, but the earliest example of a symbol for “horn”, found in Chinese ‘Oracle Bone’ writing, does indeed bear this resemblance:



Head of a camel — 头似驼



Seen from the side, the head of some pterosaur species might be likened in shape to that of a camel, as seen in the outline shape of this stone — and of the shadow it casts.

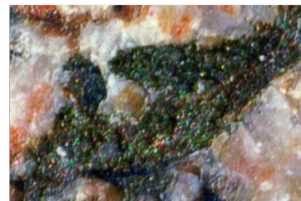
Eyes of a demon 眼似鬼

The idea of an ‘evil spirit’ in Chinese culture can also carry the sense of “to play tricks, to cause mischief”. Indeed, the wingtips of this



pterosaur depicts a person looking at this very stone, while a pterosaur looks over their shoulder. This presents what must be the oldest written instance of a joke in the world:

“There’s one right behind you!”



Neck of a snake — 项似蛇

There is a strong resemblance between the neck of a pterosaur and the body of a snake. Many Chinese images of dragons portray them as large serpents, but pterosaurs appeared very different in shape.

Belly of a clam — 腹似蜃

In Chinese culture, “belly” can also carry the connotation of “inner being” or “intention”. In addition, the idea of ‘large shellfish’ is associated with funerals — two ideas that, taken together, would strongly suggest the kind of danger that a pterosaur would pose. In the modern era, it was discovered that the abdomens of pterosaurs displayed bands of reinforcing fibers that stretched into their wings. This would give their stomachs an appearance which would have been similar to the concentric growth rings of a clam’s shell. The fossil known as “Dark Wing”, shows this clearly.



Scales of a fish — 鳞似鱼

Scales would not be out of place for any saurian species. The image of this pterosaur seems to suggest that perhaps their teeth were in fact modified scales, which would flake away to remain perpetually sharp. “Dragons’ Teeth” are mentioned widely in world mythologies.

Talons of an eagle — 爪似鹰

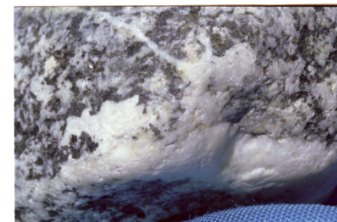
Pterosaurs had very pronounced claws at the bend in their wings, and some images show them picking up large rocks and throwing these over their heads. As pterosaurs evolved over time to lose their tails, which stabilized them in flight, their intelligence grew to compensate for stabilizing their flight.



The symbol used for ‘paws’ refers more directly to the palm of the hand, or the sole of the foot. It also conveys a sense of ‘to grasp’. The sole of this pterosaur’s foot is shown to be broad like a tiger’s rather than narrow like a bird’s.

Paws of a tiger — 掌似虎

The symbol used for ‘paws’ refers more directly to the palm of the hand, or the sole of the foot. It also conveys a sense of ‘to grasp’.



Ears of an ox — 耳似牛

No ears appear in these depiction of pterosaurs. Probably, this analogy refers to the sensitivity of their hearing — and their intelligence. Oxen are often said by herders to understand some words in human languages — a sobering thought if true of pterosaurs!