

# Portrait of our future descendant in human race

Theories abound on the future of people; how will we evolve?

By Alexandra Antselevich

Since homo sapiens first began to inhabit Belarusian lands they haven't changed significantly in appearance. Nevertheless, our ancestors, who lived here in the 11th-12th centuries, were shorter than contemporary Belarusians; even in the 1920s, the average Belarusian woman was just 1.6m high.

In the early 20th century, a true bogatyr (giant), standing over 2m tall, resided in the Vitebsk Region. A monument is soon to be unveiled to him as the region's tallest man. "The skeleton of this man was studied by Prof. Piotr Lobko," explains doctor of medical sciences, Prof. Lidia Tegako, who heads the Anthropology and Ecology Department at the National Academy of Sciences' History Institute. "The tallest man in the Vitebsk Region suffered from acromegaly — endocrine system problems."

Industrially developed countries began seeing people 'grow' in height even before WWII (in Belarus from the mid-20th century). The peak of such acceleration became evident in the 1980s. Compared to the post-war generation, we are 12cm taller, on average. Anthropologists note that the 'growth spurt' which used to occur at the age of 6-7 and then at 12-13, is happening at least one year earlier (age 4-5 and then again at 10).

## Contemporary children give head start to Einstein

"We can't assume that today's children aged 3, 5 or 10 are more intelligent than our great grandparents," notes Dr. Tegako. "Evolution takes thousands of years. Today's children's brains are anatomically the same as ever. However, researchers note that more people on Earth are receiving formal education now."

## Why is this?

"While our grandmothers were playing with dolls, contemporary children use educational toys, 'speaking' books and computers from the earliest of days. As a result, most begin speaking at the age of two; Einstein said his first word at four and it wasn't thought unusual at the time. No one saw any arrested development in the fact."

Through history, the human brain has gradually



increased in size, while becoming more efficient. We are now called 'homo sapiens sapiens' by anthropologists.

## Humans of the future will need wigs and false teeth!

Forecasts regarding the appearance of our descendants are disappointing. Some anatomists and anthropologists predict a weaker creature without ribs, teeth or hair: a fragile humanoid with a huge head — as in films about alien life forms.

Dr. Tegako tells us, "Researcher Alexey Bystrov believes that future humans won't have ribs (being of no use); even now, anatomists note that, worldwide, quite healthy babies are being born without some of their ribs." Of course, the human organism is adaptable, so tends to reject that which isn't needed. As we conduct less major physical activ-

ity, our ability to perform arduous tasks will gradually recede (and will be passed on in our DNA). Walking to and from our computer or TV set hardly requires great physical strength.

"We are seeing skeletal gracilisation," adds Dr. Tegako. "Changes are ap-

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parent in each generation, with bones becoming thinner. Overcrowding of teeth is a common result of the jaw becoming thinner; ever more children are having to wear braces to correct overlapping teeth." In fact, we may eventually lose our teeth altogether, since we

## Promotion of national traditions helps to retain identity

eat so much processed food; our ancestors had to grind more fibrous vegetables and crops, while meat was a rare delicacy. Today's food hardly requires chewing. Meanwhile, it tends to be full of preserving agents, sugar and acids. We add micro-elements (such as calcium and

## Women driving forward progress

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nature doesn't preserve anything 'just for beauty'; our hair has long lost its original purpose in keeping us warm, so it's hardly surprising that not only anthropologists but hairdressers worldwide have noted the worsening condition of human hair.

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searchers think that the future is one of tall women and shorter, physically weaker men," notes Dr. Tegako. Truly, we seem to be living in the 'Age of Aquarius': the era of women. Commonly, more females are born than males in animal populations. In fact, female reptiles can reproduce without men. The reverse remains true in human populations — where more boys are born than girls. This seems to be the trend in fighting nations such as the former Yugoslavia (throughout history). More boys are also born in Belarus (5-7 percent more than girls). Of course, after the Great Patriotic War, around 40 percent of Belarusian women remained unmarried or were widows. Today's deficit of men is connected with their higher mortality compared to women."

## 'Gene of blue eyes' remains in villages

Anthropologists are convinced that humanity's race composition is changing; while European countries experience a demographic crisis, Asian and African states are adopting measures to encourage reduced birth rates. Soon, most people on the Earth are likely to be mixed-race, commonly part Asian or Afro-Caribbean. Will immigration also influence the appearance of Belarusians?

"I don't think that our European features will disappear in the nearest centuries," asserts Dr. Tegako. "Belarusians have mixed with those from other nations throughout history. For instance, in the 13th century, Duke Vitovt invited the Tatars to his lands. Their descendants still live in Lida, Kletsk and Ivey — and in Orda village in the Kletsk District. However, we don't have the narrow eye shape of the Central Asian peoples."

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"We shouldn't confuse 'race' with 'nation,'" explains Ms. Tegako. "Race refers to biological features. Belarusians may change their appearance but their preservation of historical memories and traditions will enable them to retain their national identity."