

Rich inheritance of our ancestors passed through ages

What was, is and will be man?

By Olga Semenova

Scientists speculate that, in future, we may evolve a beak instead of teeth, or that our eyes will grow as large as saucers. Of course, the media love to report sensational announcements: the discovery of a vampire's tomb or the burial place of a giant race. The remains of elves are yet to be found but perhaps we'll soon be told. It's difficult to know what to believe.

Of course, robots were once considered pure fantasy. At the Institute of History, part of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus, researchers work to unravel fact from fiction. Prof. Lidia Tegako, who heads the Institute's Department of Anthropology, is a Doctor of Medical Sciences studying ancient man's appearance. She tells us, "Anthropologists, as a rule, believe in evolution, though there are other theories. For example, some assert that mankind arrived here from another planet. Such theories are classed within creationism (from Latin creatio — creator). Anthropology and other natural sciences support evolutionary theory, having data confirming the gradual development of man and all life on Earth. Certainly, ancient people did not look as we do today. Evolutionary



Lidia Tegako studies impressions of hands and fingers made by our ancestors

development shows that we come from primates, with whom we bear similarities."

Race of giants

On the Internet, you can find a photo showing archaeologists working on a huge skull. The caption reads that traces of a unique race of giants have been found — though to have once inhabited the Earth. Ms. Tegako explains, "Questions concerning sensations should be

addressed to your colleagues I'm afraid. Some time ago, I read an amusing article about man's evolution, based on studying louse DNA. I won't comment on similar insinuations, or on other unscientific 'stuff and nonsense'. I will say that there's no confirmed data regarding the existence of half-races, amphibians, flying people, elves or gnomes! There are anomalies regarding the development of particular individuals or groups

(for example, bushmen in Australia are small in height) but nothing more. Generally speaking, gigantism and dwarfism are 'flukes'."

Belarusian Gulliver

Belarus was once home to the tallest person on Earth, Fiodor Andreevich Makhnov, whose height was 285cm. Born on June 6th, 1878, to a peasant family on a homestead in the Vitebsk Province, not far from the vil-

lage of Kostyuki, he reached 2.5m as a teenager and soon became known worldwide as the 'Belarusian Gulliver'. He worked in a circus for some time, travelling all over the globe under this nickname, before returning home and settling down with his wife, Yefrosinia.

His former home, in Gorbachi, is called the 'Giant's homestead' and, in fact, his wife stood at 215cm. As you might expect, their five chil-

dren were also reasonably tall! Fiodor died on August 28th, 1912, aged 34, and is buried in a churchyard just outside Gorbachi.

No change through the centuries

As for the appearance of modern Belarusians, we look as our great-grandfathers did: just a little taller. Ms. Tegako notes, "According to reconstructions of 18-19th century Belarusians, there's really no change. The 'Slavic type' has its own characteristics, with Russians differing from Belarusians in having wider faces and higher cheekbones."

Belarusian anthropologists have also been studying standards of physical development, which are defined every 5-10 years. Lidia explains, "We're seeing leptosomisation, whereby the skeletal system gradually becomes weaker, with narrower shoulders and less muscularity."

Such criteria can be measured objectively. It's true that our environment brings evolutionary change over long periods of time but our offspring aren't likely to notice any difference in their lifetime, or that of their great-great-grandchildren. There's no danger of beaks or tentacles any time soon! As Stanley Kubrick said, survey the world with eyes wide open.



Minsk bookshops always thronged with customers

By Lyudmila Boiko

What and how do Belarusians read? We look at the top-selling books in paper and e-book format

Belarus boasts 3.5-4 new

editions published annually per capita: one of the highest numbers worldwide. During 2012, the Year of Books, 11,344 editions were published, with a total circulation over 33 million copies. However, are we reading pa-

Paper pages or e-book reader?

per editions or are e-books taking over? Does the trend differ for different genres?

For those who doubt that modern Belarusians love reading, they should simply travel on public transport. These days, you may be more likely to see people using a tablet or 'reader' than a paperback but, clearly, reading remains as popular as ever.

The Subscription Editions bookshop tells us, "People are buying traditionally bound books in smaller numbers and fiction is less popular than handbooks and guidebooks but we do notice people coming in to browse, so that they can download books in electronic form later."

Books are viewed as an expensive luxury: the per-

fect gift. Of course, it's much cheaper to download them online, and the benefits of obvious: a 'reader' is lighter to carry, compact and can carry a huge number of editions (limited only by the size of your memory card). You can carry a whole library in one pocket! Their suitability for holidays and the daily commute is clear.

However, fans of traditional page-turning can be hard to convert. They love the smell and feel of the pages, finding the tactile experience more comforting. Naturally, a growing number are 'converted' to e-books with each passing year but traditional hardback illustrated editions continue to lead the list of best-sellers.

It's a personal choice and there's no reason why we shouldn't enjoy e-books and paper editions equally. Encyclopaedias are just as wonderful a gift in hardback form as ever. Our desire to read lives on, encouraging us to learn new facts and to improve our understanding of the world. This is at the heart of reading.

The MT's reference:

Top-7 best-selling foreign editions:

On Facebook with My Son by Janusz Wiśniewski (Poland); *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald (USA); *Stephen Hawking's Universe: A Brief History of Time. Black Holes and Baby Universes. The Theory of Everything* by Stephen Hawking (UK); *Fifty Shades of Grey* by E. L. James (UK); *Tales of the Old Vilnius* by Max Frei (pseudonym of a Russian writer); *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury (USA).

Top-7 best-selling Belarusian editions:

I Do Not Play by Rules by Natalia Batrakova; *Christ Landed in Grodno* by Vladimir Kotkevich; *Stork's Kiss* by Tamara Lisitskaya; *Faithful Enemies* by Olga Gromyko; *Lyrical Poetry and Prose* by Adam Globus; *Hour of the Border* by Anton Donchev; *The Gentry Man Zavalnya* by Jan Barshchevsky.