

The Panoti and some other fantastic forms of macrotia

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Abstract. *The Panoti and some other fantastic ear malformations. "He had the form of a human being... His ears were as long as clusters of dates or elephant ears, and they covered his shoulders"* ("The thousand and one nights", Sinbad the sailor, 546th night, circa IXth century AD)

*De ses oreilles vous dirai vérité:
L'une bien tenoit setier mesuré.
Quant le souprent tempeste ne oré,
Molt en a tost son chief acoveté.
Plus ne doute aige vaillant I ros pelé,
Non s'il plovoit tot I mois a plenté.
L'autre a devant com escu atorné
Devant son vis pent outre son baudré,
Puis ne crient il nul quarrel empené,
Ni brant d'acier ne espil noielé.*

"De ses oreilles je vais vous dire la vérité:
L'une mesurait bien un setier
Quand il est surpris par le vent ou la tempête,
Il a tôt fait d'en couvrir sa tête.
Il ne redoute pas l'eau le moins du monde,
Même s'il pleuvait un mois entier abondamment.
L'autre oreille, il s'en sert devant lui comme d'un bouclier
Et elle pend devant son visage jusqu'à son baudrier
Grâce à elle, il ne craint nulle flèche emplumée,
Ni lame d'acier, ni épieu ciselé"

"About his ears, I shall tell you all the truth:
They have the capacity of about 300 liters.
When he is surprised by wind or tempest,
He can immediately cover his head.
He does not frighten the water at all, Even if it rained enormously during one full month.
The other ear, he uses as a shield.
It is hanging in front of his face up to his baldric.
Thanks to his ears, he does not fear any feathered arrow, steel lame, or chiselled spear"

(The ears of Isabras in "La Bataille Loquifer", or "Geste de Rainouard", from the "Geste de Guillaume d'Orange", XIIIth cent.

In queste isole vicino intereso dire, che si trouavano huomini con le orecchie tanto grandi, che si coprivuano le braccia con quelle. Questi populi sono Caphri.

"In that neighbouring isle, I heard someone saying that there were men whose ears were so big that they were able to cover their arms with them. That people are the Caphri" (1).

(Pigafetta, concerning the arrival of Magellan in the Philippines, date unspecified, but the work was first published in Italian in 1800 as "Primo Viaggio interno al Globo terracqueo").

I. Introduction

In 1996, the life-size statue of a Celtic warrior with giant ears was discovered at Glauberg in Germany, thirty kilometers from Frankfurt. This exceptional discovery will serve to introduce this paper concerning the Panoti and

the iconography of some other macrotrias and fantastic ear malformations (Figure 1).

II. The three forms of Macrotria

a. The objective type is rare in current clinical practice. In man, it concerns mostly the posterior and

superior part of the auricle: the scapha, between the helix and the anthelix. Total macrotria, however, is usual among apes (Figure 2).

Surgical correction for the objective type of macrotria is possible and consists of a triangular resection, on which two small resections are added. As we know

(1) There was also another version by the same Pigafetta: "There are people living near that island who have holes in their ears so large that they can pass their arms through them. These people are Capri, that is to say heathens".

that malformations of the auricle are caused most often by an arrest of the embryonic development, we understand that microtia is more frequent than macrotia.

This was confirmed by Converse: “It is unusual to encounter auricles so large as to require operative corrections” (Converse, reconstructive plastic surgery, Saunders, Philadelphia and London, 1964, the head and neck, volume III, p 1082).

b. The caricature forms are well illustrated, for instance, by a series of terra cotta from the Louvre museum (Greek antiquities, Sully wing, first floor, section 38). There we can see a pugilist (with bands around his forearms and hands) whose giant ears are in fact othematomas, cauliflower ears. In the domain of caricature, there is confusion between real macrotia, prominent ears, or othematomas.

c. The Panoti and some other fantastic forms of Macrotia (the most part of this paper).

III. The earliest mention of individuals with giant ears

The earliest written mention of individuals with giant ears is found in the Mahabharata (maha = big; Bharat = India), the famous Sanskrit epic of India originating around the Xth century BC. In Sanskrit language, their name is Karnapravarana, which means “those who cover themselves with their ears”.

During the VIth century BC the Greek sailor, named Scylax of Caryanda, had contacts with the Indian Brahmins. That way, Panoti were introduced into the Greek culture. Scylax left for an expedition to explore India upon request of his master Darios the



Figure 1
Excavating the statue

First, king of Persia who wanted to conquer India. Scylax left from eastern Afghanistan, navigated along the Kabul River, reached the source of the Indus River and followed it to the sea. Then he circumnavigated the Arabic peninsula and ended his voyage, through the Red Sea, in Egypt near Suez.

IV. The name “Panoti”

In Greek language, Panoti or “all ear people” were called Πανωτοι (quoted by Gaffiot), from πας, πασα, παν “all” and ως, ωτος “ear” thus “All Ears”. In Latin Panoti (Panotii) was first attested by Pomponius Mela, (“*de chorographia*”, liber III, caput 6; Ist century AD):

... et *Panotos*, quibus magna aures, et ad ambiendum corpus omne patulae, nudis alioquin pro veste sint, praeterquam quod fabulis traditur; auctores etiam, quos sequi non pigeat, invenio. “... according to the fable and even

to authors who are not dishonest, I found that (in those islands) **Panoti** are living, whose long and wide ears envelop their whole body and serve as a coat”.

Among many other authors who quoted “Panoti” later, we find for example Isidorus from Sevilla: *Panotios... PAN enim Graeco sermone omne, OTA aures dicuntur.*



Figure 2
Normal total macrotia of a young chimpanzee
Note the human aspect of his forehead

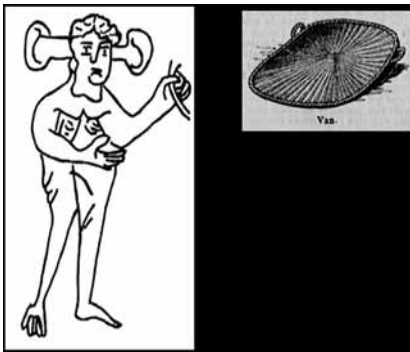


Figure 3

Ôtoliknes (Cotton Tiberius A), from Lecouteux.

(“*Etymologiae*”, liber XI, caput III, de *Portensis*; VIIIth century AD)

V. Throughout history, the Panoti received different names

They were reported by different authors, at different times, and at different places.

1. **Karnapravarana**
- Mahabharata (see above)
2. **Ôtoliknes** (οὖς “ear” and λίκνον “basket”)
- Scylax of Caryanda, VIth century BC
3. **Enôtokoitai** (οὖς “ear” and κοιτη “bed”)
- Scylax of Caryanda, VIth century BC
- Megasthenes, IIIrd century BC (“*Indika*”), quoted by Strabon (Ist century BC). Strabon criticized the work of Megasthenes but doing so, he distributed Megasthenes’ thoughts: “Equally absurd is the account of the Enôtokoitai... who had ears reaching down to their feet, so that they could sleep in them...”.
- Nonnos from Panopolis, Vth century AD in his *Dionysiaca*
- Solinus (IIIrd century AD) used Enôtocetae (Latin transposition of Greek Enôtokoitai)

4. **Pandae** (a people of India on this side of the Ganges River)
- Ctesias from Cnidus, Vth century BC, “*Indika*”, a work summarized in IXth century AD by Photius: “Their ears are so long that their arms are covered with them as far as the elbow, and also their backs, and one touches the other”
- Plinius (Ist century AD)
- Solinus (IIIrd century AD)
5. **Ouatoeis** (ουας from οὖς, “ear”)
- Callimaques from Cyrene, IIIrd century BC, Alexandrian poet
6. **Fanesii / Phanesii**, a linguistic corruption from Panoti
- Plinius the Naturalist: “*Fanesiorum aliae in quibus nuda alioquin corpora praegrandes ipsorum aures tota integant.*”
There are other (islands) in which the natives have very large ears covering the whole of their bodies, which are left otherwise naked” (“*Historia naturalis*”, Ist century AD)
- Solinus, Latin historian and grammarian: (“*Polyhistor sive De mirabilibus mundi*”, IIIrd century AD)



Figure 4

Panoti (Cotton Tiberius B) from Lecouteux.

7. **Caphri**, meaning “heathens”
- Pigafetta, «Navigation et descouvrement de la Indie supérieure faicte par moy Anthoigne Pigaphete Vincentin chevalier de Rhodes» (see quotation page 1)
8. **Satmalos**, according to the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* of Robert Estienne (1531), probably a linguistic corruption too,
- found in an incunabulum from Pomponius Mela (Royal Belgian Library)
9. **Ôtomegali** (οὖς “ear” and μέγας “big”)
- Hofman Johan Jacob (1635-1705): “*Lexicon universale*” (1677)
10. **Choji**
- Japan
11. **Dogai**
- Melanesia
12. **Jen**
- China
13. **Nie-eul-Kouo**
- China
14. **Gog and Magog** (people of North-East of Asia)
- The word was first used by prophet Ezekiel concerning the enemy of the people of God (VII-VIth century BC).
Later, this name was adapted to the people of the Fareast: the Goths (Gog) and the Mongols (Magog).
- The Koran (VIIth century AD): “Their ears are so long that they trail on the ground”.
- Firdusi: “Châh-Namèh” in Persian language: “The book of the Kings” (Xth century).
15. **Auryalyns** (maybe connected with Latin *auritus*, “who has long ears”?)
- “*Roman d’Alexandre*” (1080).
The poem tells us about the conquests of Alexander the Great and the fabulous animals and people of India.

16. Comains

In “*Huon de Bordeaux*” (XIIIth century), an anonymous author calls them *Comains* (maybe from Latin *coma*, Greek *κωμη*, “the hair” of man?). Indeed they are as hairy and wild as boar:

plus sont velu que viautre ne sanglier; de leur orelles sont tout acoveté

“Ils sont plus velus que la toison d’un sanglier; ils sont entièrement recouverts de leurs oreilles”

“They are more hairy than a wild boar; their whole body is covered with their ears”

VI. Iconography of the Panoti

For centuries, the fortune of the Panoti was considerable and they enjoyed a very varied iconography in many countries. Here are some examples:

1 The English Panoti (XIth cent.).

■ In an English manuscript concerning “the Marvels of the East” (London, British Library, Cotton (2) Tiberius (3) A), we see an *Ôtoliknos* according to Scylax of Caryanda. His ears are as big as winnowing baskets (French *van*) used to shake off the grains from the straw (Figure 3).

■ In another English manuscript concerning “the Marvels of the East” (London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius B), we see a Panotus (4) who has ears so long that he has to carry them in his hands so as not to fall over them (Figure 4):

“... They have large heads and ears like fans. They spread one ear beneath them at night, and they wrap themselves with the other. Their ears are very light... And if they see or perceive anyone in those lands, they take their ears in their hands and go far and flee, so swiftly one might think they flew” (“The Marvels of the East”).

2 The French Panoti of Vezelay (beginning of the XIIth century) (Figure 5).

It is the most famous image of the Panoti. They are represented on the central tympanum of the narthex of La Madeleine basilica in Vezelay. We see a family with the father, the mother and their child who has folded his auricles on him. According to the medieval concept of the world, monstrous people like the Panoti live at the border of the world. So the sculptor placed them in the right corner of the tympanum, far away from Christ who is praying the evangel



Figure 5
Panoti of Vezelay

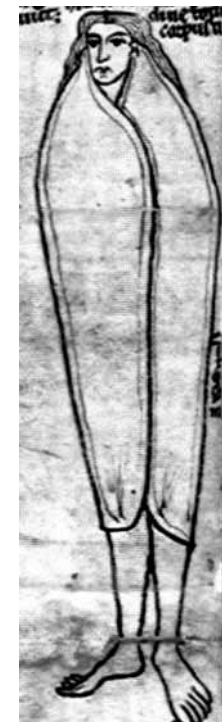


Figure 6
Panotus of Arnstein

in the centre. Maybe, some humour inspired this layout, because statues furthest from Christ have fortunately the biggest ears...

3 The German Panoti of Arnstein (end of XIIth cent.) (Figure 6)

He is represented by an illustration of a Bible version composed by a monk for the Premonstratensian abbey of Arnstein, to the North of Würzburg.

4 The German Panoti of Ebstorf, 25 km to the South of Lunebourg (before the middle of XIIIth century) (Figure 7).

They are depicted as follows: “*hic sunt Panothi tante magnitudinis aurium, ut his omne corpus suum contegant*” “here are the

(2) Robert Bruce Cotton (1571-1631) collected Greek manuscripts that became a part of the British Museum.

(3) According to the classification of the manuscripts in Cotton’s library, they were placed in 14 presses, surmounted by busts of the twelve Caesars and two Imperial Ladies.

(4) Panoti: the name was only attested on the plural form in Latin *Panoti* or *Panotii*. In French we find *Panote* or *Panotéen*.

Panoti whose ears are so big as to cover their whole body”.

The author of the map was probably Gervase of Tilbury, an English teacher of canon law who was in the service of the Guelphs as provost in the Benedictine abbey in Ebstorf. During World War II, the map became a casualty of bombing but two facsimiles of the XIXth century remained. On that map, the East lies on the top. So the Panoti live on an island in the current North East.

5 The Panoti of Bartholomaeus Anglicus (middle of the XIIIth century).

Bartholomew was a Franciscan monk who was the author of one of the first encyclopaedias of the Middle Age called “*De proprietatibus rerum*”. The ears are like wings.

6 The English Panoti on the Hereford map (end of the XIIIth century) (Figures 8,9).

They are depicted as “*Phanesii membranibus aurium suarum teguntur*” “Phanesii who are covered with the membranes of their ears”.

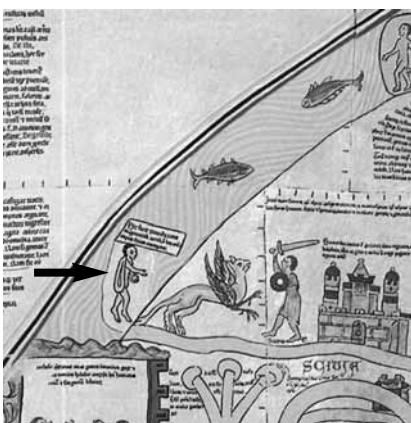


Figure 7

Ebstorf map. On this type of map, the orientation is different from ours. The East is above and the North is on the left. On the left, a Panotus stands in an isle of the peripheral Ocean. The city of Samarkand is represented by a castle.

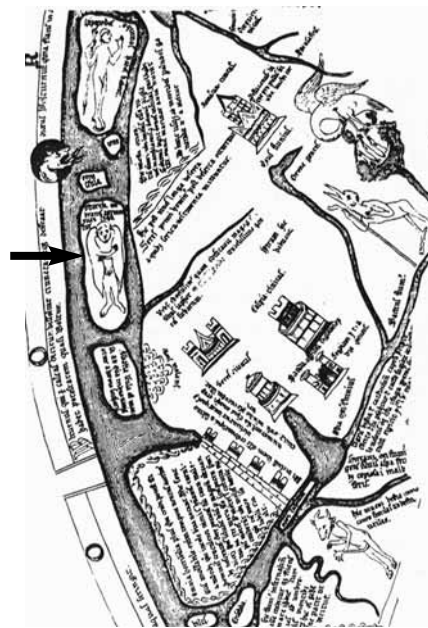


Figure 8

Panotus on the Hereford map (figure 8, left side of the map) and his enlargement (figure 9).



Figure 9

This map is the largest map of its kind (prepared calfskin or “velum”) that survived up until now. It has been preserved in the Hereford Cathedral (England) for almost 700 years. The East is at the top of the map. There is only a vague representation of the Baltic Sea where a Panotus is figured.

way station in Liège will be called “Jean de Mandeville” because he was also a (legendary but famous) traveller. Anyway a street of Liège bears his name.

8 The German Panoti of Schott (XVIIth century).

In 1667, thus very late after the great discoveries, Gasparus

7 The Belgian Panoti of Jean de Mandeville (XIVth century) (Figure10).

The Spanish edition presented here dates from 1540 (XVIth century).

The book was named “*Le livre des Merveilles du Monde*”: “... and in another isle be folk that have great ears and long, that hang down to their knee” (caput XXII). The author is yet elusive today. Maybe the book is the work of a physician from Liege who bore different names like “Jean de Bourgogne”, “Jean à la Barbe” or “John of Mandeville”. Some people today hope that the TGV rail-



Figure 10

Panotus of Jean de Mandeville



Figure 11
A case of cutis laxa



Figure 12
A Japanese form of Panoti



Figure 13
Blades of guy

Schottus, a German Jesuit, published in Würzburg his “*Physica curiosa sive mirabilia naturae et artis libris*” where we find a “*Homo Fanesius auritus*”.

VII. Are there rational explanations for some fantastic ear malformations?

1. Some skin diseases could be the true cause of fantastic ear malformations. Cutis laxa, or Dermatochalasia (Figure 11), is a congenital disorder characterized by deficient elastic fibres of the skin, which may hang in folds (“chalasis”, loosening). Even children may resemble old men. Certain Japanese forms of Panoti (Choji) could be explained by this (Figure 12).
2. Another explanation could be based on culturally determined dress code. Today for instance, a tribe in Papua, an isle to the North of Australia, wears blades of bamboo on their head and shoulders, descending to the waist, used as a coat during the day and as a cover during the night, just like the Panoti!

(TFI Documentary 6th of January 1996)

Look at the shape of guy blades: like a comma (Figure 13). Now the guy was a sacred plant among the Celts. The design of a double blade of guy represented a Celtic deity. See the warrior of Glauberg (Figure 14) mentioned also above in Figure 1 (in reality a deity?).

3. Another headdress existed among the Scythians who lived in the cold countries of Asia and Northern Europe. They protected their ears with

earflaps (Figure 15) that might have been mistaken for giant ears by travellers. We see on a globe of XVIth century two Asian Panoti with enormous pending auricles (Figure 16).

4. Some animals have giant ears, the elephant for example. During Antiquity, the Greeks sometimes discovered the skull of an elephant (Figure 17). They did not know that animal. They attributed that skull to the head of a giant monster, particularly to a Cyclops because the median aperture of the nasal fossae was interpreted as a unique orbit



Figure 14
The warrior of Glauberg



Figure 15
Scythian warrior

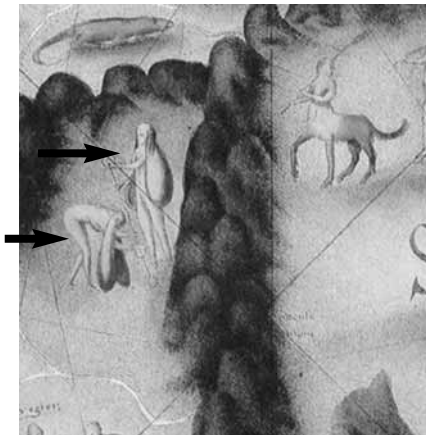


Figure 16
Two Asian Panoti (on the left)

(Figure 18). Sluperius ⁽⁵⁾ published it in Antwerp in 1572, with the following remarks:
De Poliphème & de Ciclopien
Tout mention Poetes anciens:
On dit encore que ce lignage
dure
Avec un oeil selon ceste figure.⁽⁵⁾

5. According to us, some teratological monsters like agnathia-microstomia-synotia (Figure 19) were maybe assimilated to



Figure 17
Skull of an elephant



Figure 18
Cyclops of Jacob Sluperius

human mutants with auricles up to their shoulders (Licetti, Figure 20). These monsters were also a reminiscence of the “blemmies” of Ctesias from Cnidus, whose heads were in



Figure 19
Human Cyclops with agnathia, microstomia and synotia with low positioned auricles (from Willemot).

the thorax (Figure 20).

However, Licetti was also able to reproduce another monster type Janus (Figure 21), with two heads, the one with normal auricles and the second head

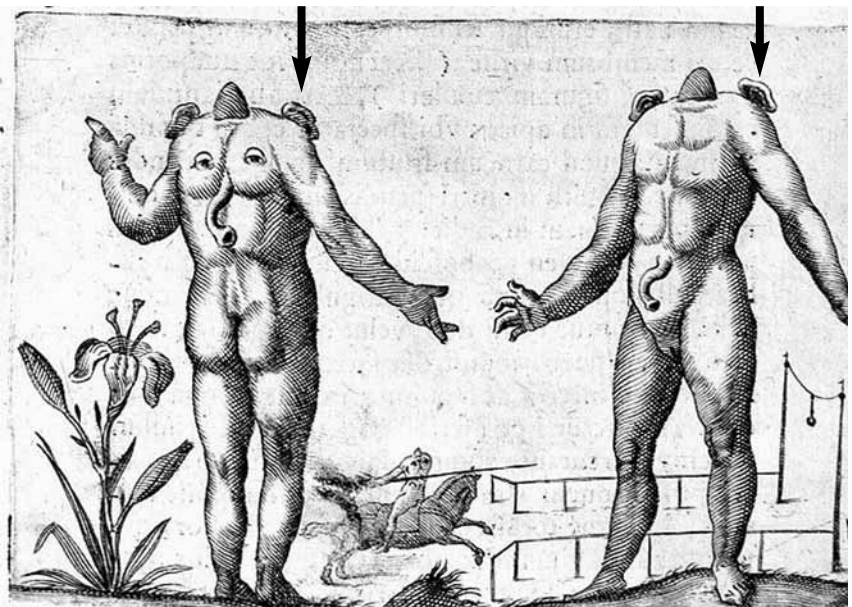


Figure 20
Monster with the head in the thorax and the auricles on the shoulders (Licetti)

(5) Jacobus Sluperius was a Neolatin poet (1532-1602) who published “Poemata” in Antwerp.

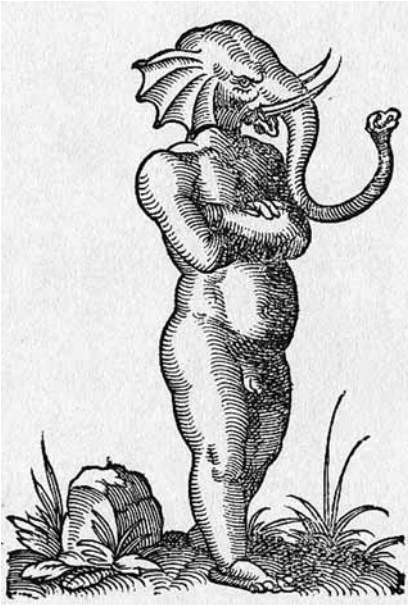


Figure 22
The Elephant man (Rüff)

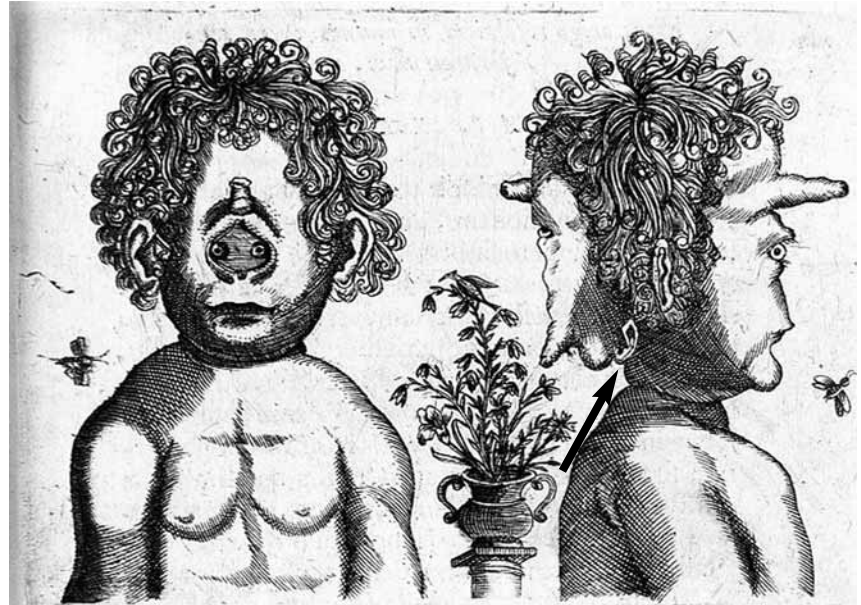


Figure 21
Janus type monster, whose posterior head has typically low positioned auricles (Licetti)

with low positioned outer ears like the teratological case presented in Figure 19. So, Licetti's work presented some authentic teratological particularities mixed with fantastic types.

In the teratological domain, a climax was reached with the elephant man of surgeon Jacob Ruff's work "*De conceptu et generationis hominis, de matrice et ejus partibus, nec non de conditione infantis in utero*" (Frankfurt on Main, 1587).

This character seems to be inspired by the Indian God Ganesh which leads us back to the Mahabharata mentioned before.

VIII. These rational explanations are interesting but not fully satisfactory.

1. We are persuaded that ignorance, fear, seduction of the stranger (note the connexion with the epithet "strange"), and

the need to know, opened the way for imaginative solutions. On the borders of the world is the laboratory of creation and its incomplete creatures half man and half-animal, a laboratory with its experiences and its failures.

2. Another idea influenced by religion was the existence of far-away regions (India, Scythia) where damned people live and paid their faults by being subject to monstrosities.



Figure 23
Panoti of Schedel (1493)

3. There were also false scientific explanations like a climatic factor: the temperate climate is the only one that is convenient for the normal man, if the climate is too warm (India) or too cold (Scythia), it is responsible for human malformations.

All these psychological and pseudo-scientific reasons were sufficiently mighty to maintain the existence of the Panoti, even more than one century after the great geographical discoveries (cf. above the Panotus of Schott). Today the same story continues with the Martians. Yesterday it concerned the Moon-dwellers...

IX. Conclusion

1. Macrotria owes more to the imagination of man than to a clinical reality.
2. We presented the different names and the iconography of various forms of Panoti or "All Ear people", from the XIth to the XVIIth century.



Figure 24
Panoti probably from Central Europe
(date unspecified)



Figure 25
Panoti of Münster (1544)

3. Some rational explanations are proposed. But there are also psychological reasons.
4. Finally, how have so much ignorance and fear been able to coexist with so much imagination and art? The misery and greatness of man lie there.

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 Figure 25. See Figure 20.

References of works and authors not explained in the text

The works are printed in italics, names are underlined

Callimachus of Cyrene: (North Africa, 305 BC-240 BC) Greek poet and scholar of the Alexandrian School.
Ctesias from Cnidus: (now Resadiye, Turkey, 400 BC) Greek physician and historian of Persia and India.
Estienne Robert I: (1503-1559) French scholar-printer.
Ezekiel: (early VIth century BC) prophet-priest of ancient Israel. He was deported to Babylon.
Firdusi or Ferdowsi: (935 near Tus, Iran – 1020/26 Tus) poet, author of the "Shah-nameh" ("Book of Kings"), the Persian national epic.
Geste de Rainouard: a French poem sang by the trouvères of XIIIth century, concerning a giant named Rainouard, a companion of Guillaume "au court nes" or Guillaume d'Orange.
Hofmann Johan-Jacob: (Basel, 1635-1706) wrote a humanist encyclopaedia "Lexicon universale".
Huon de Bordeaux: (XIIIth century), a cycle from a picaresque song written in 1260-1268.
Isidore of Seville: Saint; circa 560 Spain – 636 Seville; theologian and encyclopaedist
Koran or Qur'an: holy book of Islam, revealed to the prophet Muhammad and collected in book form after his death (632 AD).
Licetti Fortunio: (1577 Rapallo – 1657 Genova) teacher of philosophy and medicine, "Concerning the causes, the nature and the differences between monsters" (1634).

Mahabharata: or “Great Epic of the Bharata Dynasty”, one of the two major epics of India. It evolved during the period circa 400 BC (some said Xth century BC) – AD 200.

Marvels of the East: a work entitled “Marvels of the East” survive in several Latin manuscripts and one bilingual Latin/English work, collecting together many oddities.

Megasthenes: (350-290 BC), ancient Greek historian and diplomat, sent on embassies to the Indian king.

Mela Pomponius: (Tingentera, Roman Spain – 43 AD), author of the only ancient treatise on geography in Classical Latin.

Münster Sebastian: (1489 Ingelheim – 1552 Bâle) teacher of theology, Hebrew, geography, astronomy and mathematics; “Cosmographia universalis” (1544).

Nonnos from Panopolis: (Egypt, Vth century AD), most notable Greek epic poet of the Roman period.

Photius: (820 Constantinople – 891 Bordi, Armenia), patriarch of Constantinople, leading figure of the IXth century Byzantine renaissance.

Pigafetta Antonio: (Vincenza 1491-1534), knight of Rhodes, Italian traveller who sailed with Magellan and gave the fullest account of his voyage round the world.

Plinius the Elder or the Naturalist: (AD 23 Como, Italy – 79 near Mt. Vesuvius), Roman encyclopaedist.

Roman d’Alexandre: (1080) a collective work namely by Lambert le Tort and

Alexandre de Bernay, written in lines of 12 syllables (from there the name “*alexandrin*”).

Schedel Hartmann: (Nuremberg 1440-1495?) physician, “*Liber cronicarum cum figuris et imaginibus ab inicio mundi*” (1493).

Scylax of Caryanda or Caria: (VIth century BC) ancient Greek explorer, the first Western observer to give an account on India.

Solinus Gaius, Julius (IIIrd century AD), Latin geographer.

Strabo: (64 BC, Amasya, Turkey – after AD 23) Greek geographer and historian. (He was squint-eyed, hence his name).

Thousand and One Nights: composite work consisting of popular stories: first VIIIth century Arabic translations of a Persian tale and others later (IXth, Xth, XIIth, XVIth century).

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